



WHY THE IMBH COURSE?

MAN is neither mere intellect, nor the gross animal body, nor the heart or soul alone. A proper and harmonious combination of all the three is required for the making of the whole man and constitutes the true economics of education. Harijan : Dec. 19, 1938.

The course outline of the IMBH course comprises a few episodes from the life of Gandhi, selected for their appropriateness in illustrating the beauty and strength of an integrated life. It is obvious from Gandhiji's statement quoted above that living an integrated life was the core of Gandhiji's spiritual discipline. Gandhi realized that 'godliness' involves integration of all aspects of a person's being, as opposed to a compartmentalized or un-integrated life in which we are at war with ourselves.

The all-important issue here is the purpose of education. To Gandhiji it is "the making of the whole man". Integrating Body, Mind and Heart becomes an imperative only from this perspective. If our educational goal is to only to enhance employability and material success in life, then the same course could seem a superfluous encumbrance.

Given Gandhi's unwavering pursuit of Truth and his exaltation of Truth to the status of the divine, it is inevitable that the integration of the Body, Mind and Soul was the hallmark of his life. "Integration" is the path to wholeness or completeness. Truth is a function of the whole.

What is partial falls short of the scope and stature of Truth. Those who lack integration can neither seek nor adhere to Truth, despite their intentions. Conversely, the quest for Truth, if Gandhiji's life is any indication, brings about the integration of Body, Mind and Soul.

Put simply, the Body is the medium through which Mind and Soul express themselves. You may have the most sublime ideas. But unless you express or share those ideas with others through the spoken or written word, they remain unborn. Speaking and writing involve integration of Body and Mind. At the higher levels the Soul too is involved. You may have the noblest of sentiments. But the light of the Soul needs to be expressed through the Body, say, as actions of compassion or principled responses to the world around. Ideals are nothing if they are not embodied through action, which involves integration of all dimensions of one's being. We express ourselves through integration. The goodness and greatness of our expressions depend on the extent of our integration as human beings.

Integration is the secret of human growth and development. In an under-developed state, we lack harmony and integration among the three dimensions of our being. The failures in the early years of his life that Gandhiji confesses to, attest this. Failures result from inadequate integration. When the Mind and Body are not tempered by the power of the Soul, instincts and impulses get the better of us. In such a state we do what we should not be doing (Gandhiji smoking and pilfering, being examples) and fail to do what we should be doing. Lack of integration makes us vulnerable and we succumb to the feeblest of pressures. Peer-pressure is a case in point. Often not much 'pressure' has to be applied to make a person succumb. Those who are on the way to being integrated are, in comparison, less vulnerable and more steadfast.

Another mark of an integrated person, according to Gandhi, is the spirit of service. Surely, this insight is of utmost significance for all times; especially for our times. In stark contrast to Gandhi, the educated individuals today disdain to serve! Such people are not grown up enough to know that this allergy to, and awkwardness about, service stems from a poor integration of their being. Those who are integrated in their Body, Mind and Soul find joy and fulfillment in service. As Gandhi says in his Autobiography, few pleasures and possessions can compare with the joy afforded by service rendered voluntarily and joyfully.

Integration holds the key to fulfillment in life. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved by a person who lacks integration and, therefore, lacks integrity too. If the Body, Mind and Soul pull in different directions, the result can only be paralysis! Arguably, far too many of the beneficiaries of education today are in this state of response-paralysis. This is the reason why life at the present time is riddled with boredom, depression and unfulfilment. The problem is not that people do not achieve or acquire much. The real problem is that they are not integrated human beings. According to Gandhiji, those who lack integration are incapable of 'contentment'. Life is unbearable without contentment. Contentment has little to do with the quantity of one's possessions. It is a matter of the quality of one's being, resulting from the integration of its various aspects.

Integration is also the secret of endurance. No one acquainted with the outlines of Gandhi's life has to be persuaded that he endured and overcame the most difficult ordeals because of his 'character and soul force'. This force stems from the logic and dynamic of integration. Integration activates latent energies and qualities. It is like two atoms of Hydrogen and one atom of Oxygen combining (we can say, 'integrating') to form a molecule of water.

Integration activates 'emergent properties'; that is, properties and potencies that were not available or evident till then. The concept of "charisma" is akin to this. There are two types of 'charisma'—personal and institutional. We are living at a time when personal charisma is at its lowest and institutional charisma is all that we are left with. People derive their power and personal worth from institutions or structures. The more they lack integration as persons the more they have to depend on institutions. Here again, there are two possibilities. The person concerned may relate to institutions and structures within the model of integration. (That is, he/she may get identified with the institution.) But that option is open only to those who are oriented to integration. Lacking this, they will become mere parasites. What they will have, then, is not 'institutional charisma' but institutional power and perks. (The latter includes, among other things, the opportunity and right to indulge in corruption; corruption being a sign of un-integration.)

The hallmark of an educated and wholesomely developed human being is the integration of his/her Body, Mind and Soul. But thereby hangs a tail!

It is not fashionable to talk of Soul in this age of strident secularism. The last thing we are free to have, it seems, is Soul. So we are a Body-Mind combine. But even in this truncated model there is still a problem. To be a Body-Mind "combine" you have to live the paradigm of integration! If you don't, you can only be a Body-Mind Mixture! There will be, in that event, no point of coherence in you. So, we become Jekyll (Body) and Hyde (Mind). We are a Body in some contexts and a Mind in others. That is why education, if you like, has come to be what it is. No place for the Body (leave alone the Soul!) in the learning process. Only the disembodied Mind is involved. Is it any wonder that the spirit of service evaporates under the heat of such an enterprise? From here we proceed to the next cardinal mistake. We think we can redeem education by increasing the course contents! No we can't. What is needed is a reorientation of education. Nothing less will do. Gandhi lays supreme emphasis on promoting the spirit of service through education. If the spirit of service, fortified by the spirit of caring, is not developed in a human being, he/she will become a parasite or a thief.

I would refer those who are embarrassed about the spiritual core of education to poet Kabir. "Before me stand," says Kabir, "Guru and God/ Who shall I first pay obeisance to?/ I will fall, first, at the feet of my Guru/ For it is he who has turned me to God." Herein lies the secret of the respect that a teacher does or does not command. This is not a matter of religiosity. It is a matter of the Spirit that transcends all religious agendas and establishments. Finally, it will be a great pity if the IMBH course is taught by those who do not have a passionate conviction about its relevance or are not excited about its scope, which, I understand, is the case in some colleges. This is regrettable. Instead, the best of teachers should handle this course! Institutions that take the meaning and purpose of education seriously will do nothing less!

Rev. Dr. Valson Thampu
PRINCIPAL