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MY TURN

A Cure for Schools

Hindu values can turn our classrooms around!

Anil Shrivastava "Musafir"

The recent Colorado killing of 13 high-school students by two deranged students has made our parents and leaders scramble for an answer. The answer is obvious. Parents and schools don't spend quality time with the youngsters. Child rearing is delegated to schools, which in turn only care about handing diplomas to their clients. Though extreme, it was not an isolated incident, reports on campus life are very disturbing. Besides binge drinking, hash-bash, unclothed outings and other acts of incivility, students act disrespectfully towards their teachers. Newsweek columnist George F. Will recently wrote: "The Chronicle of Higher Education reports rising anxiety in the professoriate about declining decorum in classrooms. Students' incivilities include coming to classes late, leaving early, eating, conversing, reading newspapers, talking on cell phones, sleeping, watching portable television and verbal abuse of teachers." Students treat teachers as paid employees.

This dishonorable behavior is embedded in our youngsters'

lack of religious training. The solution is to practice the Hindu dictate that the disciple should treat a guru (teacher) with utmost humility. Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya said, "Though the lore of Vedas takes up its dwelling on your tongue; though you become emperor of the universe; yet you must ponder these verses in guru's praise and apply guru's teaching to your mind." Swami Vivekananda said, "Every being, in the end, is destined to attain perfection....The shaping of our destinies needs help from outside....We are sometimes deluded that reading books helps us spiritually, but it's not true. The soul can only receive impulses from another soul. That person is called guru."

Many of us lament that today's teachers are not the same. They don't lead a perfect life, though they may be experts in their fields. The image of a teacher to be sinless and free from worldly motives is utopia. A teacher is like a father to his disciples. A good father may not be absolutely virtuous. The Hindu religion doesn't try to hide the fragility of teachers, perhaps deliberately so that one can differentiate between his mortal existence and his knowledge. Even Dronacharya was unfair to Eklavya in asking the latter to cut his thumb so that his favorite pupil Arjuna could go unchallenged. Kabirdas expressed this sentiment in one of his poems, "Learn from the teacher's wisdom, don't worry about his other traits."

I am not an expert in making a teacher a paragon, however, my religion clearly tells me what is expected of me as a disciple. Parents, religious establishments and educational institutions are responsible to build the value system in our youngsters that will ultimately blossom into inherent respect for teachers. It begins at home. Parents today look at

educational institutions as factories churning out human beings into marketable commodities. They are overwhelmingly concerned about their children's SAT scores and other attributes which can score points for their children in terms of earning potential. It's time parents change such attitudes and consider schools as places for learning and character building. It's their duty to instill in their children's minds respect for teachers and to work closely with schools to shape the character of our future citizens. Open discussions on the subject between children and parents will help.

Hindu institutions should teach respect for teachers using scriptural examples in their heritage classes. Educational institutions should look beyond academic qualification and hire teachers who will be moral leaders and mentors. Schools should organize special activities where teachers and pupils alike participate in volunteer work and social service. Let the skeptics among us remember that even in today's society there is a guru (mentor) behind every exceptional person, and every guru has a prodigy (virtuous disciple).

Anil Shrivastava "Musafir," 52, co-founder and managing editor of The ThinkClub lives in Michigan. thinkclub@aol.com