

LEARNING IS A LIFELONG PROCESS**SATISH KUMAR**

My first and foremost teacher was my mother, even though she never considered herself to be my teacher, in fact she was not even literate; she could neither read or write and yet I consider her to be my best teacher. Her teaching was as much by example as with words. She loved cooking, she valued gardening, she took care of animals, she enjoyed singing, she was a great story teller, she regularly meditated and she took great pleasure in walking in nature. All those activities have left a deep impression on my soul as well as on my mind.

What I learned from my mother is that knowledge is not a fixed commodity, knowledge is a lived experience. When we become rigid, fixed and dogmatic we stop learning. The life unfolds, ideas evolve, information flows, art and imagination emerge, doors of perception open, concepts move and, in each and every moment of our lives, we discover or encounter fresh insights which can never be pre-planned or predetermined. The nature of knowledge is dynamic, learning is an adventure into the unknown. Learning is a process, a pilgrimage, a journey, a continuous quest. Learning is to live with ambiguity, with uncertainty. Learning is not about exam results, or achieving a degree, or finding a job. Learning to live and to be has its own intrinsic value. True learning is not about an outcome, or a goal or a destination. Learning is in the every moment, in the here and now.

Through participation in the process of the universe we learn that each one of us is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Everything, including ourselves, is made up of the same elements; I am made of the earth, air, fire and water. So is everything else. I am an embodiment of imagination, intelligence, creativity and consciousness. So is everything else. Everything is interconnected; we are all related.

Learning is about expanding our consciousness and coming out of isolation, separation, out of narrow identity and petty ego. We need to learn to participate in the miracle of life and in the mystery of ever changing and ever emerging reality, we need to learn to participate in the collective dance of Shiva. Learning is about opening our eyes, the eye of the mind and loving the world with our big generous hearts then we will know the mind of god.

When we observe the cosmos thus, we become the cosmos. Learning is not a lonely journey, not a self-centred pursuit of knowledge. It is a shared pilgrimage which leads to self knowledge and self realisation. Paradoxically from self realisation we learn that the 'self' is an integral part of the 'other'. There is no self without the other and there is no other without the self. The intimate self and the ultimate cosmos are an integral part of each other; the total reality is one. There is no fragmentation, no separation, no dualism. This eternal and infinite reality manifests in millions and trillions of forms, in different colours, different smells different tastes. This existential unity is in the ever dynamic dance of diversity.

There is no contradiction between the inner unity and outer diversity; unity and diversity complement each other. Out of unity emerges diversity so that we can participate and sing together the song of the universe; one verse, one poem, the greatest epic of ever unfolding mystery. We learn to celebrate this complex yet most simple, most wonderful and most beautiful life.

We learn from our teachers and from books but we also learn from nature. Nature is the greatest teacher. The Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore started a school and held his classes under the trees. He used to say to his pupils, "You have two teachers, myself as your human teacher and these trees as your nature teacher."

My mother used to say, "The Buddha was enlightened while sitting under a tree. The forest with their rivers, hills and animals are the greatest libraries in the world!"

As we learn from nature and from a teacher we also learn from our own experience and practice. "Learning by doing and making is the best way of learning", said Mahatma Gandhi, "an ounce of practice is more valuable than a ton of theory"; while making we participate in the process of life.

Learning together, in a group and embarking on a journey of collective exploration is the most effective way of discovering the truth comprehensively. A group of eight people together can see, explain and describe the reality from eight different points of view. There are many ways of knowing. Therefore many people together participating and sharing their information and insights makes the learning a rich and enjoyable experience.



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