

VALUES EDUCATION FOR A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

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Everyone likes to live a meaningful and a purposeful life, a life that gives a person both exterior and interior satisfaction. Nonetheless, such kind of life will be a mere dream unless there are means of achieving what the person expects. Hence, a person might ask questions like, “how should I live” and “how can I find out how to live?” from himself. In order to find out the answers for the above questions, he has to look for principles that would guide him towards his goal. Those are called values. In other words, in order to live a good and moral life a person should first know the difference between “noble and base” and what is to be defended and what is to be loved and what true courage and self-discipline is.”¹

Psychologist Brian Hall defines a value with these words. “A value is something chosen from alternatives and is acted upon and enhance creative integration and development of human personality.”²

Unlike morals and virtues, it is difficult to define exactly what a value is. Because a value for one person may not be a value for another; a value for one society may not be so important for another society. But the basic truth is there are no good and bad values. If something is bad, in the proper sense, then it is not a value. A value must always lead a person towards a morally good and virtuous life. For instance, stealing could be a habit of a person. But we cannot take it as a value practised by that person. But honesty becomes a value because it shows the goodness of a person and adds some dignity to his life. Importance of value can differ from culture to culture as well. However, as there are no bad values, but values are always morally good the concept of value is something universal.

Purpose of this essay is not to discuss what values are; instead, to discuss the importance of values in the life of a person, especially in the field of education and in family life. This will be looked at both theoretical and practical levels. In doing so, I try to present my own perspectives rather than solely depending on what I gathered from books and papers and interviewing some individuals. However, before making my own perspectives and conclusions, interviews were one with persons of various categories of people to know what they really think of the reasons the destruction of values in our society. They include: parents and teachers of both government and private schools, young men and women and students school students and students of a state university. I also gathered some information from series of articles published in the National Catholic Weekly, Gnanartha Pradeepaya about the inmates of Miduma Rehabilitation Institute. Information gathered from them can be summarized under the following headings:

Some views regarding the loss of values among students and young people:

- Poverty

¹ BUETON, Harold, *The Catholic School: Its Roots Identity and Future*, Crossroads, New York, 1988, p. 112.

² HALL, Brian, *Value Clarification as Learning Process*, New York, Paulist Press, 1973, p. 50. Quoted by Rodel Aligan, *Faith, Violence, and Values*, St. Thomas University Press, p. 179.

- Injustice and Inequality prevail in the Society
- Lack of time for parents to be with their children
- Day-care centres and pre-schools
- Working mothers
- Favouritism shown by parents to some sibliings
- Rivalries among siblings
- Addiction to smart phones and television
- Tuition classes
- Lack of proper guidance
- Both Consumerism
- Competition in the modern society
- Peer groups
- Beauty centres and fashions
- Addiction to drugs

Results of loss of values among students and youth

- Aggression
- Violent behaviour
- Loss of respect for parents and elders
- Depression
- Committing suicide or suicidal feelings
- Addiction to drugs
- Low esteem of life
- Inferiority complex
- Antisocial behaviour
- Difficulty of building relationships with others
- Loneliness
- Feelings of rejection

Three sources that play a vital role in forming values in a person

- God
- Neighbour
- Self

Agents of imparting values

- Family
- School
- State

However, in this essay only the impact of family and the school imparting values will be discussed in detail.

God (Religion), Neighbour, and Self

Religion plays a prominent role of the life of a person. Speaking about religion, Yinger asserts, “It is interesting and a bit puzzling that in this day of disenchantment and attacks on the establishments (whether governmental, educational, or religious) and of presume secularization the study of religion is flourishing.”³ Whether a person practises a religion or member of a particular religion or not there are no persons who are without some religious sentiments in their mind. Even parents’ interest on imparting values on their children often depends on the religious and moral life of the parents.

When someone faces some problem or undergo some suffering, the first person to whom they turn to is God or any other divine being. They either plead God to help them or ask the question why does God send them all those problems or sicknesses. In some people even their faith depend on what they experience by practising religion.

In a multi-religious country like Sri Lanka, imparting values is easier than where religion is not given prominent place in the society. But there are also occasions where religion itself becomes a hindrance to imparting values in the proper way. If any religion tries to propagate that its values are the best and life would be meaningful only following those values, then members of that religion may look at other religions with indifference or as lower. This kind of attitude instead of imparting values can create even religious rivalries in the society.

Neighbour

What was implied by neighbour did not mean only the person next door. But it could be the whole human society including all its institutions. Breakdown of values started mainly with the insurrection in 1971. With that, dignity one had towards his fellowmen and women began to lose for a great extent while this process accelerated in 1980s came to a climax with the ethnic war. New economic system and free market gave way to a consumer and selfish society. Tuition classes vastly contributed for the breakdown of discipline in the educational system in the country. All these, in a way, had a lot of impact on our traditional value system and moral life of people.

Self

Self becomes a source of value formation due to one’s way of behaving in the Society. In formation of values, a person’s peer groups, fellow students, and eve teachers also can play an

³ YINGER, J. Milton, *The Scientific Study of Religions*, Macmillan Publishing Company Co., Inc. New York, 1970, p. vii.

important role. Similarly, gender also can have effects on the life of a person. Treatment of parents towards male and female children could differ. Social engagements and discipline expects from male and female children can have effects on developing values in them.

Culture is another factor forming values in a person. At times, what was expected from male and female children is different from culture to culture.

Family as a major agent of imparting values

Family is the smallest but the most important unit of the society. Different types of family system are found in the world. From which nuclear family system is the most popular, numerous, and accepted system of family in many societies.

A nuclear family is consisted of two married adult parents and one or more children. Members of a nuclear family belongs only to two generations: They are parents and children. Today validity of even this family system is questioned by some. Surely, nuclear family also has both positive and negative aspects. A child live in a nuclear family experiences the love and concern of its parents and the loving companionship of its other siblings. However, some point out that in a nuclear family a person has to sacrifice his/her privacy to a certain extent. Members of the family have to share whatever they have and have to observe some rules and regulations. However, all those reasons have some validity depending on what one expects by being in a family. In spite of all those so called and imaginary limitations, there is no other place a person can find true happiness and tranquility than in the family.

A child receives its earliest and most persistent influence from its family especially from its parents. For most part, later life of a person is determined on what the person received in his/her early life. Whether it is done purposely or unknowingly, in every society family provides the basic human needs of a child. To a greater extent, social and cultural values also transmitted to a child through the family. Role of the family cannot be taken lightly because the strength or destruction of the society depend on the strength or destruction of the family.

Previously, members of the family spent greater part of their time at home. While working wives were rare, only a few husbands spent the night away from home. Today, situation has changed rapidly. Presently in many families, both husband and wife go out for work. Besides two are employed in different places, they also engage completely different type of work. Husband and wife leave home in two different times, return also at two different times. Work schedule of husband and wife leave no time to think of their children, at times they themselves do have time to share their sentiments. Little children have to spend most of the time of the day either with their grandparents or with a near relative. Sometimes, under the care of an outsider who is employed for that work. When the parents are back at home in the evening, children like to cling to their parents and experience their love but parents are too tired to give what the children want. Many men prefer to take little rest after returning home from work more than spend time with their children.

Day-care centres and Pre-schools

Day-care centres were quite rare in Sri Lanka a few years ago. So also, were the Pre-schools. Nonetheless, they have been a necessity today as many women are employed and away from home during the day. Attending a Pre-school has become almost compulsory. Day-care centres admit children who are three years and above. There are a few day-care centres which admit children who are even only two years old.

Many children who spent the day under the care of a grandparent or under a care taker now comes under an outsider who has no any psychological or blood ties with the child. That is also with the company of many other children. Care takers may look after the children of the centre as best as they could and hand them over to their parents in the evening. Even though the child is cared well by care takers, they can never fulfill the psychological needs of the child and the love they expect from the mother. This situation continues until the child completes its pre-school at the age of five. Being away from the company of the mother in the early life of a child will affect psychological and moral growth of it for great extent. Some traits like aggression, violence, and even loneliness and depression may not appear at that age such symptoms can appear in later life. During my interviews with some students and youth, some said, although they were at home, there had been days that they were not able to talk even one word with their parents. About three out of five who are in school and youths confessed that they disobey their parents and grandparents. Some had gone to the extent even to hammer their parents and grandparents. Disrespect shown by children and youth for their parents and elders also could be a result of what the children experienced in their early age.

School, Teacher, and Value Formation

From age of six to the end of teenage, most of the time of a student is spent in the school or with his/her fellow students and peer groups. Thus, the students is exposed to a larger community than his/her family. Hence, the school plays an important and a vital role in the life of a student.

Though school is a major institution that shapes and forms the life of a student, many speak of breakdown of values in schools and in the whole of education system. We also hear the occasional aggressive behaviour of students especially in some schools in urban areas and in popular schools in the city. Gradual change of behaviour is visible even in village schools. It is very strange to observe that students who are still in primary classes obey their teachers and listen to their advice and protect furniture and other school materials they use, mar them when they come senior school. Some students who study in upper classes and enter the university vandalize furniture and other materials they themselves use. This is a sure sign that the students had not been properly instructed or not given proper values when they are in lower classes. This also could be some emptiness remain in the minds of the students from their early age. Surely, arrogance, violence, or any other such symptom cannot develop in a person within a day or two, but they can be symptoms growing over the years due to some unpleasant experience.

Education is not simply learning some subjects in the class, passing exams, and getting qualified to do a good job. First of all, the purpose of education is mainly to create a good and moral person. Vision and Mission statements exhibited in schools also testify to this fact. However, the success of the Vision of the school depends on the values imparted by the school on its students. Certainly, values imparted or promulgated by the administrator or administrators of a school have a lot of repercussions on the behaviour of its students. Values done or values formation is more important than value teach. Today what is mostly done in schools is teaching values rather than presenting them into practice. We must remember that the object of teaching is the person, not the value.

Role of the Teacher

Behaviour and attitudes of a teacher or of teachers also have a lot of impact on the life of the student. A teacher may be an excellent teacher and may have a great knowledge of the subject he/she teaches. But his/her conduct may not be suitable for one who leads others. Damage done by such a person could be more than his/her contribution to the school and to the lives of the students. There are administrators of school who are well capable of building up the physical structure of the school but forget about its student body for whom the school exist. When the students realize that the administrator or the teachers deprive them of their sacred rights and needs they will build up some bitter feelings in their hearts which will come out in different ways when they enter the larger society in the future. If they could not realize their rights as a student, it may come out as feelings of hatred towards the society. If the teacher did not help the students to build up tier personality, their talents, and capabilities, then those students build up some sort of depression of feelings of inferiority complex.

An institution is a place where values are incarnated. In that sense. School is a manifestation of values of the “educated person”. A school is instituted for that purpose. We cannot forget that education is for man and man is not for education. Hence, all other values must be subordinated for this value called “man”. As an educational institute, if it limit its ministry only to produce good and excellent academic personnel, then it violate its true purpose of existing. If an educational institution makes its priority earning money, then that institution might not give admission to a student because he/she is poor. Or a student may be sacked from the school because he/she cannot pay his/her monthly tuition fees. In such a case, what was rejected is not the admission or attending the classes but the person. That student may develop a kind of hatred towards the whole educational system or even the whole unjust society. This can be applied even to any other institution. For instance, a technical institution can be a place where they produce/train “workers for production” instead of producing men who are workers.

Teaching values as a part of the course of study also has its limitations and disadvantages. Students might take value studies only as another subject of their curriculum and forget what they studied once they leave the school. There is another problem, that is, some might even tend to think that putting into practice the values they studied might hinder the success of their life in the world. For instance, a student may accept that honesty is a noble value that should be appraised;

but stealing is bad. Nonetheless, in reality, a student notices that those who steal during an exam draw better marks and pass the exam. Student may further experience that those who steal during an exam not only obtain better results but also face interviews with success and get high-paying jobs than those who were honest. This makes the student think that while studying values is good but practising them is a disadvantage in the secular sense.

Religion and Value Education in the School

There are students who are unable to distinguish the difference between religious formation and value formation. For them, religious, moral, and value formation are only different approaches of one and the same thing. While a Catholic student might think value formation is another way of indoctrinating Catholic religion, students of other religions also view the same regarding values and moral formation given to them.

Today for many students, religion is a thing of the past. Or at least, they can manage their life without religion. A good number of teachers, whether they be in private or government schools, not much religious oriented. More students are found in tuition classes and roaming in cities on Sundays and Poya days than in Churches and Temples. Because of the misconception of value and importance of religion, some presume that religion is something that rewards only in the next life and not much relevant for day to day affairs. They want immediate results and immediate satisfaction from whatever they do, not later. This is what modern consumer society and modern communication media put into the mind of today's youth. Hence, many had begun to think that if someone want to succeed in the world, the best way is to fashion oneself according to the way of the world. In this sense, many young students do not see the utility of religion in their education for the success in the world.

Pattern of value formation must be changed

In our present education system, study of religion has been given only very little attention. Study of religion in the school has been reduced only to two periods per week. In religion book of higher grades at times a chapter or a few pages have been allotted to know something about religions other than one's own. Often some notes on moral and value education are also included in the same book. Because of that, students justly conclude that value education is surely part of religious education. Another problem in value education is imparting values in the minds of students each religion present only specific values found in that religion, not the values present by other religions or values in general.

In a multi-religious or multi-cultural society like Sri Lanka, no one is able to live completely separated from the other. Influence of each religion is felt on everyone living in the society. Similarly, no religion can claim that particular value belongs to that religion only. Values in a way are universal, not belong to any one group or to one religion. If something is considered a value, then anyone must be able to follow it.

For instance, we speak of Gospel values. But these values are values given to everyone not for a specific group called Christians. Hence, we can call them human values as well. Mentioned below are some of the values found in the Gospels:

Love	Childlikeness	Wholeheartedness
Neighbourliness	Sympathy	Responsibility
Compassion	Truthfulness	Forgiveness
Gentleness	Self-denial	Service
Justice	Peace	Loving kindness
Reverence for God, human beings, and creation		
Openness to the needs of others		

Are all those values mentioned above found only in the Gospels? Are they not found in other religions as well or in the human society in general? Then is it necessary to teach them as Gospel values when we teach them to students? Hence, when a book on values is given to students, it is always better to give it as a common book of values rather than giving separate books or lessons on values according to students' religious affiliation. This will help even to create a unified society and respect religions other than one's own.

Future of Values Education

Modern society and its ways of living are changing rapidly. With that, man's vision of life and his thinking pattern also can undergo lots of changes. Man has knowingly or unknowingly allowed robots and other technical inventions to control his life. Gradually, modern man keeping faith in artificial intelligence solving his problems rather than relying on his own power and intellect. While new technological findings make man's life easy, new social and communication media has a lot of effects on his life.

As a result, new trends in life and influence of communication media, marriage and family life are also undergoing lots of changes while many youths refuse to enter into marriages, temporary living together and same sex marriages have also become very common. In this new context, what is the solution we can present to preserve the design given by God to the human being and to his creation? One and immediate solution could be to give priority to the human being, to the "person" not for anything that has been invented for his well-being. Secondly, as long as human beings are born as a result of the union between a man and a woman, and not as a result of artificial method like cloning, human nature would not change. If human nature has not changed from the earliest time up to now, and if it will not change even in the future according to time and new findings of man, then man needs rules and regulations, customs and habits, morals, virtues, and values to keep integrity of man and to create a well-disciplined society.

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