

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Man, as we know, has made immense progress in one aspect of his life, while in another he has made no progress at all. Perhaps he has regressed. Education is the main cause for this progress as well as for this stagnation or regression.

As in all other activities of man, there is no perfection in the field of education also. It is in the aspect where education has progressed that mankind has progressed. On the other hand, man has failed where education has not progressed. It is the duty and the responsibility of University education to investigate as impartially as possible both these aspects and remedy their defects.

It is not possible to divide man into two distinct compartments as physical and spiritual. The man who does not have sufficient food to eat or a suitable house to live in, has no time to think of spiritual matters. So is the man who has all physical comforts but is tormented in mind with his problems. Both suffer, each with his own set of problems. The aim of education should be to bring about a society of human beings who are happy physically as well as psychologically. The University is the institution that is capable of bringing into

being such a happy society. But unfortunately no university in any country in the world today seems to be performing this task satisfactorily.

The University is the highest educational institution in a country. The cleverest students in a country are the students in a University. Moreover, those who will occupy all the responsible positions in a country in the near future are the present university students. As such, it is essential that university education should not be fragmentary but should be aimed at developing all aspects of human life. It is because of this present incompleteness of university education that there are people of very high academic qualifications, who are deceitful, cruel or of unworthy character. It is unfortunate that university education is limited to advancement of knowledge and has neglected the development of character. True education will simultaneously bring about both advancement of knowledge and advancement of character.

In the Pali language there is the word 'sikkhā' (Sanskrit Sikshā) which deserves special mention here. This word has two meanings. One is "learning"; the other is "discipline". This is very similar to the English word "discipline" which also means both learning and orderliness.

Learning itself is discipline. To understand how this happens, one has to understand how learning takes place and how discipline comes into being.

The ordinary meaning of "learning" is "advancement of knowledge". In this sense, the first step in learning is acceptance. In accepting, there is no understanding. A child picks up words from his environment. The word is registered in his brain. Such words become the foundation for the future learning of an entire language. Later, he hears a new word or he reads a new word in a

book. He learns the meaning of that new word by interpreting it in terms of words that he already knows and which he has stored up in his memory. This is also how we use a dictionary. In learning a foreign language, too, one does not get a new understanding. He only acquires the ability to use two words for the same object. What one means by saying that a person has learned fifty languages, is that he can now say the same thing in fifty different ways. Earlier he could name a certain animal only by using the word "cat". Now he says the same thing in fifty different forms. He has acquired only words. In this process he has neither acquired any new understanding nor has it brought about in him any virtue. This is true not only in learning a language. It is equally true in the learning of any art or science. What he actually does is to bring in and store in his memory by way of words or symbols various external things. With such learning one can become at verbal level an educated person or a well-read person or a specialist. Not that such learning is useless. It has many essential uses in that aspect of life which is generally termed physical. Such learning may also bring about an external polish and an externally good demeanour but it will not bring about in a person human qualities such as kindness and compassion. Such an educated man, possessing no love or compassion, can employ his knowledge for the destruction of mankind. This is the disaster that unbalanced education has brought about in the world today.

The other meaning, namely, "discipline" of the Pali word "Sikkhā", mentioned earlier, is also often incorrectly understood.

Discipline brought about by fear, is not discipline. Similarly it is not discipline which is the result of incitement or expectation of a reward. That discipline which is the result of a belief or a practice is also not discipline. All such discipline is temporary and will fade

away when the cause ceases to exist. True discipline is incorruptible. Such discipline comes into being when the ugliness, the harm, of the incorrectness of some behaviour or act is clearly understood.

As mentioned earlier, by education we generally mean the storing up in memory of what we hear, see or read and also the acquiring of the ability to reason out, to examine and to make decisions on what we have thus acquired. Such learning is only acquisition of facts. What is good as well as what is bad can be acquired. Further, as it is stored up in memory, such learning is always old.

There is another kind of learning in which there is no motive of storing up facts. That learning is to look at something afresh and understand it as it is. In that looking there is no pre-judgement. Pre-judgement is a hindrance to the understanding of what is. When a scientist investigates something with his microscope he has no pre-judgement of what he is going to see. Such pre-judgement is a hindrance to the scientist in discovering something totally new.

When we are taking a journey in the dark we do not see what is in front of us. Our journey in life, too, is such a journey. The road may be uneven, there may be thorns and stones, there may be poisonous snakes or there may be harmless creatures. None of that is seen by us who are travelling in the dark. We are aided only by a description given by others. In the description we get from our teachers and from our books we are told what is good and what is bad and what should be done or not done. As we are travelling in the dark, we have no first-hand discernment of what is described. The ups and downs are not seen by us, nor do we know where the poisonous snakes lie hidden. As such, we have to face many a danger in our journey. As we have no clear personal understanding of what is good and bad, the description can lead us astray. This is evident from what is happening in the world today. One often

comes across even among the most educated people, those who lead immoral and degraded lives. In some countries one can see even cruel murderers among the high religious dignitaries. Such education is clearly of no help to mankind.

If, when we travel in the darkness, we have a light with us, this unfortunate situation would not arise.

The light we have in this connection is that learning which instantaneously brings about discipline.

If we perceive even a very small thing as it actually is, it radically changes our attitude to that. If one sees the word 'poison' on the label of a bottle, who will meddle with it? Who, other than the insane, will take dirt from the roadside and smear it on his body? He who has seen the cruelty of taking life, will never kill a sentient being. Similarly he who sees the ugliness of lying and deceiving will never tell a lie or deceive another. He abstains from a thing which should not be done, not because he is afraid, but because he understands clearly that it should not be done. This clarity is the immediate effect of right learning.

The very intense and earnest desire to perceive exactly as they are, what we hear, see and do, brings about attention and with it an inward clarity. In that attention there will be no comparing, doubting, accepting or rejecting. There is only attention and clarity. With that light he discerns what is true and what is false. In that light he conducts himself and that conduct is true discipline. Such a person's life is orderly and innocent.

Peace in the world will come about through such educated and disciplined people. Education in the University should be that which is so beautifully expressed in that Pali word, "Sikkhā" which produces both learning and discipline simultaneously. I earnestly hope and trust that the University of Sri Jayewardenepura will impart to the students that integrated education which is both learning and discipline.