Youth and Ambitions

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(Sri Ramakrishna's parable of the woodcutter exhorts us to go forward. Just as the wood­
cutter following the Sadhu's instruction went forward and discovered a sandalwood forest, a
silver mine, a gold mine, diamonds and precious gems, the youth also must go forward and
realize infinite potentialities. Swami Harshananda, Head of Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad,
analyses the aspirations of the youth and gives practical hints for achieving them.)

The biographies of an overwhelming majority
of us can be penned in just three sentences:
"He was born. He lived. And then, he died!"
But Swami Vivekananda, the man among men,
does not want our lives to fit into this despicable
pattern. Says he in his well-known essay
The East and the West: "When you are born
a man, leave some indelible mark behind you!"
To aspire to leave one’s footprints on the sands
of time is a very legitimate ambition for the youth. We may even go the extent of stating
that it is imperative! The Vedas advocate that
human beings should cherish the desire to live
the full span of life, of one hundred years,
and live it vigorously and happily. One of the
Upanishads, the Isavasya, even recommends
that this full span of life must be spent in socially
useful activity.

So, if our youth entertain desires and ambitions, it is but a natural phenomenon. On the
other hand, if they do not, there is something wrong with them!

But then, there are ambitions and ambitions.
There are small ambitions, and there are the
big ones. Both have their place in life, even
as a tiny bolt and a big shaft have their place
in a huge machine.

Let us see what ambitions an average youth normally nurses in his life, even if they be only
‘average’ ones. One’s own body being the
most tangible part of one’s personality, and an
important means of fulfilling one’s ambitions,
naturally gets the pride of place. He—and
‘he’ includes ‘she’ also—wants, therefore, good
health, strength, energy and stamina. And, of
course, he wants to appear handsome, as
handsome as God-given features and man-made
aids to beauty can permit. And, to be sure,
he wants a good education, an education that
helps him not only to earn a comfortable live­
lihood, but also live a decent life in the society.
And above all, he does want to achieve something
worthwhile in life, especially in his field of work.
Merely cherishing desires for entertaining
ambitions is not enough. One has to discover
the right means of fulfilling them and work
vigorously to achieve them. First comes health
and strength. No doubt, nutritious food,
good drinking water, pure air, physical exercise,
good sleep, rest and relaxation will help achieve it. But no less important is freedom from
worries and tensions, since the mind and the
body are closely interlinked. As is the mind,
so will the body be.

Physical beauty is the second aspect of the
youth’s ambitions. Youth are particularly
self-conscious about their physical appearance.
They want to look smart, handsome and
attractive. And, the entire cosmetics market
is at their ‘service’, ever ready to ‘help’ them,
if only they have enough money to spend.
More often than not, they do spend it, perhaps,
even at the cost of things that would have given
them better health! However, they should note
one thing, that a peaceful face with a pleasant
smile is their best cosmetic. Face being the
index of the mind can never be peaceful or
pleasant unless the mind is at peace or is joyous.
So we see that, even for achieving physical
beauty, it is necessary to keep the mind at peace
and rest.

Then comes the third aspect: a good education.
Though the tendency towards a breadwinning
education or getting a paper-degree as a means
to it has made deep inroads into the field of
education, yet the youth can and do respond
As for obtaining wisdom and imbibing culture as also a value-system, the best means are the holy books and ideal teachers and leaders. A reverent study of these books and the lives of the great ones will make us not only wise but also inspired. A wise man often learns from the faults of fools. So observing the world carefully and introspecting over observed facts will definitely add to the treasury of one's wisdom. Since learning is a continuing process, and a true student never stops learning, life with its vagaries and vicissitudes will teach man more lessons.

And lastly, we come to the desire to achieve something worthwhile in life, especially in the field of work. Obviously, if sufficient attention has been paid to body-building and mind-reforming aspects of one's personality, this task will become much easier. Even then, it has its own techniques and methods. The basis of them all is proper planning and hard work. No doubt, an element of luck or God's grace is also necessary in the ultimate success of one's endeavours. But without them success can never come. God helps him who helps himself!

Proper planning presupposes knowledge, intelligence and competence on the part of the planner. Hard work assumes will-power behind it, a power that ever strives but never yields. Curiously enough, these take us back again to the same source, the mind, and the need for its total development.

Mind, which has been called antahkarana ('the inner instrument') has great power. This power, which is in a latent state in most of us, can be unfolded by purifying the mind. Prayer, meditation on God and Japa or repetition of the divine name cleanse the mind so thoroughly that this power is fully awakened enabling us to achieve great things in life.

So anyone who is cherishing great ambitions in life, especially the youth, should pay the greatest attention to mind-culture.

'If you mind your mind, the mind in turn will mind you!'—is a good maxim that confers maximum benefits in life.