



## THE BEACON LIGHT

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It was the month of July and the year was 1973. I had just completed my Master's degree in Chemistry and was keen to become a Teacher. I was called for a personal interview by the two colleges in Bangalore. One was the A.P.S. College - an established college with a very good reputation at that time. The other was the Vidya Vardhaka Sangha's Junior College for Women, which was to start that year. It had no infrastructure and was virtually run in a thatched roofed structure. The management was totally new to the idea of running a college but had tremendous enthusiasm.

On the first day, I had the interview in the A.P.S. College, which was over in about fifteen minutes. I was selected and was offered the regular scale of pay. I still remember that the total amount I would receive was Rs. 470/- per month. That was a fabulous sum for a beginner. The next day, I had the interview in the Vidya Vardhaka Sangha's Junior College. I was left wondering whether they were interviewing for the lecturer's position or for the post of a senior Scientist in a research establishment. They had a big panel with professors from the Indian Institute of Science and other elderly people. Then there was a demonstration class. Here also I was selected. But I was told that the college being new, it can not offer the regular scale. I was offered a consolidated sum of Rs. 250/- per month. It was almost half of what was offered in the other institution.

The next day, I went to Sri Ramakrishna Math on the Bull Temple Road, Bangalore. It was and it will always be the only destination for me to get clearer insights whenever the mind is muddled up. Swami Adidevanandaji Maharaj was the President of the Math. When I learnt that Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj was also in the Math, I was immensely pleased. I went up to him and offered my pranams and told him about my appointment in two colleges. I wanted to seek his advice about the choice I should make. He smiled and said, “It is better to be a leader of a small organization than a follower of a huge organization.” I got my answer. Then I asked him, “Swamiji, can I join as a lecturer? What should I do to be a good teacher?” He smiled in his inimitable style and instead of answering my question; he asked me three more questions.

1. Do you love your subject?
2. Do you love your profession?
3. Do you think you can love your students at least as much as your own children?

All these three questions are so rich in meaning. In fact, these three questions summarise the entire ethics in teaching. His first question implies that I should not love my subject just because it provides me a means of sustenance, but because I am excited about it. If I am really passionate about my subject, it would certainly manifest in my teaching and would rub off on the students. If I really love my subject, I would find ways and methods to make it attractive. When I teach the subject, the whole body would talk. This was the level of passion that Swamiji was asking for.

The second question is at a higher level. Do I love my profession because it gives me livelihood? Do I love it because it gives me a rare opportunity of moulding young minds? Sometimes, people talk about teachers by choice or teachers by chance. That is meaningless. Life is a tough bargainer and does not give you all that you wanted. May be that one wanted to be an I.A.S officer but could not pass the examination. It does not matter. He tried for I.P.S and could not succeed; he had tried for the bank officer’s post and failed; he tried for other jobs and could not succeed. Finally he took up the teacher profession. Nothing is wrong about it. Once he has reached the position of a teacher, whether by choice or by chance, he has to stand up to the expectations of that responsibility. Having joined this profession, he cannot be callous. A careless car driver puts five lives at risk; a careless bus

driver risks fifty lives; a careless pilot three hundred lives and a careless teacher puts ten thousand careers into risk. He can either motivate an average boy to become a Sir C.V. Raman or he can destroy a potential Sir C.V. Raman to mediocrity. Teaching is perhaps the only profession that interacts with the future all the time. The nation's future is carved out in the confines of a classroom where a creative teacher is a master sculptor. It is in this context that it becomes imperative that a teacher must love his profession. Anyone who has no respect for his own profession cannot have an esteem of himself and can not pass on confidence to the people with whom he interacts. In this background, Swamiji's second question attains importance.

The third question is more poignant. This forms the sum and substance of what can be defined as the essentials of teacherhood. Teacher should be a personification of love. Anyone who cannot love his students at least as much as his own children is a hazard to the profession. Teacher's unconditional love for the student will make him very creative. To satisfy the needs of the student, whom he loves so much, the teacher would discover any number of ways and means to make the content acceptable to the student. Teaching is an act of giving. Once this desire to give is eroded, the person ceases to be a teacher.

These three questions from Swami Ranganathanandji form the bedrock of teacherhood. Every teacher must introspect in the background of these three questions periodically.

In a way Swamiji inducted me into the teaching profession and let me record with confidence that with his motivation, the last thirty odd years that I have been in to teaching, have never been dull and unexciting. I never had a chance of regretting my choice to be a teacher. I never missed an opportunity of seeing Swamiji or hearing him these years and recharge my batteries.

It is a divine design that just two months before he discarded his physical body, I was to meet him and receive his blessings. I was invited to participate and present a paper on Value Education organised by Sri Ramakrishna Institute of Culture at Kolkata. I was thrilled to see Swami Ranganathanandji there in spite of his indifferent health. He arrived on time in his wheel chair and inaugurated the National Seminar. Though his speech was slurred and lacked the power of expression with which he mesmerized the audience before, he did not fail to make an impact about the

intensity of his concern for value education. When I met him personally and offered pranams, he asked me, "When is your lecture?" I told him that I was slated for the next day afternoon. Very briefly he said, "I will be there."

Next day just before the session started I was pleasantly surprised to see Swamiji coming into the hall in his wheel chair. Prof. Kireet Joshi – another outstanding scholar of the land, was presiding over the session. I made a presentation on "The role of parents and teachers in inculcating values". I tried to make it passionate. At the end of the presentation, Swamiji signaled to me. I went and stood next to his wheel chair and bent down to listen to what he wanted to say. He said with a twinkle in his eyes, "You became the Man of the match". Prof. Kireet Joshi sitting next to him immediately added, "No Swamiji, he did not become the man of the match". Swamiji quizzically asked, "Then?" Prof. Joshi said smilingly, "Swamiji, he became the man of the series." Swamiji smiled and said, "Sure, sure. That is true." Then he put his feeble one hand on my shoulders and blessed me. Immediately after that he left the hall. I never realized that it was the last time that I was seeing Swamiji.

I am doubly blessed. Swami Ranganathanandji Maharaj blessed two months before I took up teaching profession and again he blessed me two months before he left this material world.

We all need Masters in our life to guide us and give a direction to our lives. No one can really estimate the change that is brought about by the Master's touch. Whenever I think of Swami Ranganathanandaji, I am reminded of a beautiful poem "Touch of a Master's hand" by Myra Brooks Welch which amply describes the role of such Masters in our lives and also the need of a Master.

### **TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND**