

Teacher as a mentor:

I happened to meet a college mate of mine after a gap of almost two decades. He now works for an industry and I was his instructor in a training program on Human Resource development. In the lunch hour, we were exchanging old anecdotes, enjoying nostalgia as a delicacy. I noticed he was wearing 'Khadi' shirt and trousers. Sensing my questioning gaze, he said, "when I left college, you know, I myself, I want to carry something with me from here... Something significant... something valuable ... and I remembered a teacher. He used to wear Khadi. He has influenced me as a man I wanted to carry him with me... all the time... so I decided.... I will be wearing khadi from tomorrow... I carry a bit of him within me... and I feel the presence of his values be stowed upon me... every day!"

I patted on his shoulders. I exactly knew what he was saying... I too generally wear khadi and the teacher concerned, happens to be my father; very rare at the turn of the century? Yes, but it exists. A bond between a teacher and a pupil.

I consider myself both privileged and lucky to be a teacher's son. However, in addition to imbibing some of the facets of my father, I have a distinct and a separate influence of his style on me as a teacher. He taught me organic chemistry for two years in the college. A sober figure, without a powerful physical presence, when he used to enter the class everybody used to stand with respect that was genuine. Nobody really felt afraid of him, nobody really took him as 'terror' but his tranquil and calm disposition used to cause immediate reverence... He indeed used to mesmerize the class at times... especially when he was playing with those complex (and volatile) equations in organic chemistry. I remember his presence in the class, his genuine enjoyment in teaching, the way his gaze used to touch (and scan) each one of us in the class.

Many years later when I was teaching in a medical collage and in an institute of social sciences, I used to clear the board meticulously. Then I use to pickup a medium sized chalk stick and play with it for a second... as bowlers do with the ball, at the start of their bowling run-up.

One day I suddenly realized... oh, this.... this.... was the exact sequence my father used to follow in his classroom. I had internalized it almost unconsciously... As music maestro, before beginning his recital salutes his 'Guru'.... So, do I.... I wonder, to this day, how I had mastered that 'ritual' before realizing it consciously.... Now I realize, this probably was a very enlightened form of learning. When you learn without knowing, that your are learning then you learn the best....

This to my mind is the centerpiece of the solution for the riddle of being a mentor.

A friend is a 'sympathizer and helper.' A philosopher is a 'wise man'. A guide is an 'advisor', (all dictionary meanings). Mentor 'is AN EXPERIENCED AND TRUSTED ADVISOR'. This dictionary meaning left a taste of incompleteness in my mind.

In my opinion, being a mentor means influencing the core values of a person; so delicately that the influence seems to surface in the conscious processes, as if it was NEW. The first three words mainly aim at conscious processes. The word Mentor transcends the first three words.

When somebody is your mentor, you carry a bit of him with you, within you, so effortlessly, as if that part is with you from you cradle.... Unbelievable? ... Yes, so it was for me until I realized this truth.

Then my conscious search began. I enjoy teaching.... Very much. In fact, the word doctor comes from an original Latin word meaning 'to teach'. Believe me, more than fifty percent of my professional work involves teaching. Every week, I am teaching postgraduate students, community volunteers, adolescents, parents, sports persons, industrial employees, caregivers of patients, patients, teachers, children, students, mental health professionals... this list can be quite long.

I ask myself, what prevented me from restricting myself from sitting in my clinic and treating individual patients. Most of my professional colleagues do this. And there is nothing wrong in it.... Then why? The

answer lies in this phenomenon of my teacher as my mentor. I further ask myself, had he not been your father, then? The answer remains the same.

I start getting some childhood images with a fresh significance... my father preparing for every lecture, inspite of many years of teaching experience.... His efforts to make his teaching reference up-to-date... His reading to keep himself well informed about his subject.... His considerate manner of correcting answer papers.... His careful filling-up of mark-sheets of university examinations.

I see him refusing lucrative offers of individual tuitions. I see him politely declining to take any money for taking revision classes for students from other institutions.

I also see him refusing to use his influence to get my brother's examinations results in advance.

My throat is getting choked while I am writing these words, because I am sensing, 'ALL THIS' has indeed become a part me.... Is there a better way to salute your mentor? Tell me!