



Shri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara
Institute of Management Development

21st Annual Convocation Address

by the Chief Guest

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Thank you for inviting me to witness a rite of passage in the lives of many young persons amongst us today.

I would like to share my thoughts with you about Life, about Learning, and about the role institutions of higher learning must play in shaping our great nation.

You graduates of this great institution are making an important transition, from a period of intense formalized education, into a longer, and less structured, phase of your lives. During your formal education, you were told what you must know. In life, you will discover whether what you know is relevant, and you will realize it is not enough.

You will have to learn much more than you know now, and you will have to learn it without the props of good teachers dedicated to teaching you, without class-rooms designed for learning, and without a curriculum telling you what you must learn. You will be on your own, and yet you will have to learn.

Living and learning are inseparable. When your body stops living, you will cease to learn. Conversely, when your mind stops learning, even if your body is breathing, you will cease to have a human existence.

Humans live; animals live; and bacteria live too. The difference between these forms of life is in their abilities to learn. All the knowledge a bacterium has is codified in its chemistry. It does not develop any new capabilities on its own. Much of the knowledge that animals have is also in their genes. But they do learn other things after they are born and grow up. Thus some dogs and cats become smarter than other dogs and cats, and some monkeys learn to perform many tricks. However, animals' ability to learn is much less than that of human beings.

Human beings are curious about the world around them. They want to understand why the world works the way it does. They also want to shape the world to make it even better. So human beings invent technologies. And they invent new forms of institutions: institutions of democracy, of justice, of governance of their societies. Animals do not have these aspirations and these abilities. Human life is distinguishable from animal life by the continuous quest human beings have to learn about the world and improve it. Therefore, whenever a human being ceases to learn more about the world around her or him, he or she regresses towards a less human life.



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My young friends, there are three reasons why you must learn to learn, and why you must learn all your life.

The first is this. If you want to be employable throughout your life, you will have to learn new skills, and acquire new knowledge, which you could not be given even in the best institution today. The biggest challenge being faced by all countries today, whether they are developing or are developed, is how they will ensure that their young people will have jobs in the future. New technologies are changing the shape of work in all walks of life very rapidly: in manufacturing industries, in service industries, and in the professions too. It is not possible for any government to predict what specific skills and knowledge people will need to remain employable 10 or 20 years in the future.

The only practical solution they have is to ensure that young people become good learners throughout their lives, and that they continue to learn the new skills and acquire new knowledge that will be required as the nature of work in industries, and in the professions, evolves. The specific skills and knowledge given to you today, even in the best vocational program and the best university, will reach its 'sell by' date very soon. You will have to learn something new. Only those who are good at learning to learn will succeed.

The second reason why you must be a good learner is to be a better innovator. Innovators develop new ideas, and new products and services that have not been discovered so far. They can do this because they are curious about the world around them. They wonder why things are as they are, and how they could be made better. They develop new solutions, and sometimes new scientific theories too. Scientists and innovators always question why. They are not satisfied to just do and die.

The third reason why you must be a great learner is to be a better leader. Whereas the dharma of a soldier is to do or die and not to question why, it is the dharma of students and leaders to question why.

Good leaders must be passionately engaged, and must always stretch themselves to the boundaries of their present knowledge, where they are intellectually challenged. A soldier is passionately engaged with the cause, but need not be intellectually challenged by it. On the other hand, great leaders are always stretching themselves to question why. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest leaders the world has known, was a lifelong learner. The title he gave his autobiography, the story of his own life, is "My Experiments with Truth".

Friends, to be fully alive, you must keep learning. And to keep learning, you must keep listening.

Scientists learn about nature by listening to it; by observing it deeply—its changes, its moods, its songs. They are curious about why things in nature are the way they are. And they are



constantly searching for better explanations. They are constantly experimenting with the truths of nature.

Leaders in societies must listen to citizens. And citizens must listen to each other. To each other's hopes and fears, and each other's histories. Then only can we learn who others really are. We must not treat each other like stereotypes. We must not jump to conclusions about others based only on the names they have, the clothes they wear, the food they eat, and their religions and their castes.

Just as there is a real 'Me', a living and feeling human being, behind the screens that others put in front of me, based on my religion, my language and my appearance, there is a 'Me' behind the screens that we put in front of others too. None of us is a piece of cardboard on which labels can be stuck to explain who we are. To know who another really is, you must be willing to listen deeply to that person. Listen not only to **what** the person says. But also be willing to inquire into **why** that person is saying it. We must be curious about how another human being, born with a heart and brain like ours, has come to believe what she or he believes in, which may be different to what we have come to believe.

We must not instinctively jump to the conclusion that the stranger is my enemy. We must believe that the stranger can be my friend. Indeed, we must **make** strangers our friends, so that we can work together to make the world better for everyone.

Mahatma Gandhi said:

"The golden rule of conduct is mutual toleration, seeing that we will never all think alike and we shall always see Truth in fragments and from different angles of vision".

When I listen to those who I have classified as 'them', who I do not consider 'us'; and listen to their truths, and see the world through their eyes, I will become aware of many angles of vision through which truth can be seen. I will become aware of the lenses in my mind through which I unconsciously filter out realities that others see, and which have led me to believe that my view of the world is the only view. Through my lens I may see the world colored as saffron. Another through his lens may see the same world as mostly green. Thus, by listening deeply to others, I can learn about the limitations of my lenses, and I can broaden my vision, and see the beauty of the world in its entire range of rainbow colors.

Let me pause here for a moment. And recollect the four 'L's I have spoken about.

The first L is Life.

The second L is life-long Learning, which is the essence of human life.

The third L is deep listening to nature and to others, which is essential for learning.

The fourth L is the Lenses in my own mind, which are limiting my ability to learn, and which I become aware of when I listen deeply to others, and see the world through their eyes too.



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Mahatma Gandhi is known as the Father of our Nation. His nationalism can never be doubted. Mahatma Gandhi said:

“I do not want my house to be walled in all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”

India is Incredible. It is an incredible nation because it is far more diverse than any other nation in the world. We have 22 officially recognized languages, and many hundreds of dialects. Many races have lived together in India for centuries—Dravidian, Aryan, Mongoloid, and even some Negroid. India is the crucible of many great religions, and it is a melting pot of all the great religions of the world.

We have a choice. We can live in a nation ‘divided by narrow domestic walls’—as Gurudev Tagore feared. Or we can live, as he said, in ‘a heaven of freedom’ in which ‘the clear stream of reason is not lost in the dreary desert sand of dead habits’ of the mind.

There is so much diversity within our own country. We must make the many cultures within our own nation to blow freely across our own land. We must stop seeing each other as stereotypes. We must see each other as fellow human beings. We must see beneath the skins of different colors, and look into eyes of different shapes. There is so much we can learn about each other, and from each other, if only we open our minds, and listen to each other deeply.

There is too much yelling at each other, and about each other, in our media, and especially in social media. There is very little listening. So there is very little understanding of each other, and of the issues that we must understand as responsible citizens.

The Dashavaitalika Sutra (number 6-11) of the great Jain religion says:

“For one’s own sake, or for another’s sake, out of anger or out of fear, never should one speak a lie which is injurious nor make another speak it.”

To live as one great nation, we must learn the art of dialogue, of listening to others respectfully. Debates are conducted like wars. We argue to win. We shout. We attack the other’s position. We demolish his arguments. We even insult, and we hurt.

The Jain religion, and Buddhism too, which are great religions birthed in India, place non-violence to all creatures as the highest of virtues. Mahatma Gandhi insisted that the conflicts between people must be resolved non-violently. Non-violence is India’s special message for the world.

We must avoid violence not only in our actions. We must avoid violence in our speech too, as the Dashavaitalika Sutra asks us to.

The social media seems to make us into warriors. We tweet and troll. We follow those we like. We become locked within on-line communities of people who think like us. We shut out those who think differently. The social media is aflame with wars of words. From within the walls of our intellectually gated communities we send out bombs of insulting tweets to the other side. Who retaliate with insults to us. Where then is the understanding of each other? Where is the dialogue?

Howard Gardner, the great educationist from Harvard University, says:

“Conditions change, people change, and in the absence of continuous dialogue, received wisdom evolves into unreflective orthodoxy. Still we need to steer a course between the peppering over of differences on one hand, and outright hostility to those of contrasting viewpoints on the other.”

He goes on to say:

“With the welter of information and misinformation available on any search engine, how can we possibly determine what is true”.

And he adds:

“If we posited that truth is nothing more than a majority vote on a webpage, we would be relinquishing considered judgment to the whim of the crowd, or to the web-surfers with the most time on their hands”.

Social media is designed to spread viruses. It can spread around words of hate and fear widely and instantly. They drown the quiet voices of reason.

There is a popular, and mistaken view that technology is the solution to the world’s problems of poverty and ignorance. Technology is neutral. It does not care. It can be used by both sides of a conflict. The internet can be used by citizens to protest against their government. And it can be used by governments for surveillance of their citizens. Nuclear technology can be used for generating clean energy. It can also be used to destroy the lives of millions of people.

In 1999, soon after India had tested a nuclear device in Pokhran, I was speaking at a conference in the USA about India: the poverty in our country, our commitment to democracy, and our desire for partnerships with people in other countries. I must have painted an inspiring picture of the quest of a billion people for sustainable prosperity. I got loud applause. Then an American stood up and said, “If you want to remove poverty why are you developing a nuclear bomb?” And he went on to insult my country and said, “We cannot trust ignorant people with something as powerful as a nuclear bomb”.

I immediately replied. “You are the only nation in the world that has used a nuclear bomb to destroy millions of lives, not once but twice. Why should the world trust you?” It was a very dangerous thing for me to say to a crowd of proud Americans in America. But I am a proud Indian who was provoked and could not restrain myself.



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Mahatma Gandhi had said, “Let the winds of all cultures blow through my house, but I will not allow myself to be swept of my feet”. We must stay true to our deepest beliefs.

Friends, I am still trying to learn how to be more tolerant of others’ views. I am learning about myself. I notice that the one thing I am consistently intolerant of is intolerance itself. When I find any person, especially a powerful person, trampling on the dignity of another, and not respecting another’s right to be, then the hot-blood in my North-Western Punjabi veins heats up.

If I criticize the behavior of another’s child, I can be told to mind my own business. But should I not be critical of my own child’s behavior? Is it not my duty to help my child to learn and become better? If I care enough about my child, and love it truly, I must point out to my child my concern about her behavior.

If I truly love my country, it is my duty to speak up when I feel my country is taking a wrong path. If I find intolerance within my own, incredible, and beautifully diverse, country, my love for it and pride in it must make my intolerance of intolerance rise. I must then speak up, as a loyal nationalist. Because, if I truly love my country, I must express my pain, and my aspiration for something better.

Let us be honest. India is good, but we Indians do want India to be much better. We want less poverty, better education, better healthcare, better cities, better infrastructure, better governance. We must work together to make India a better country for everyone—not just for the rich, nor just for a few communities, but for all Indians. We must learn faster so that we can improve ourselves faster and improve the country for everyone.

Friends, I have talked so far about the importance of Learning and Listening to shape our great nation. Allow me to share my views on the role of institutions of education in nation building.

There is big debate raging in our country about the responsibility of universities for the building of our nation. I believe that universities and colleges must play a leadership role in the country’s quest for sustainable prosperity for all Indians. They must teach students to ask good questions, and to learn to learn. Whereas any university teaches students how to marshal data to support an argument, and how to win debates, a great university teaches students to listen well, especially to those they may not instinctively agree with.

The word ‘university’ implies universality. An openness to many points of view.

There is a big movement around the world, coming to India too, to smarten up teaching with digital technology. We must take advantage of technology and we must also know its limitations. Technology will not teach us how to listen and how to learn. It will not teach us respect for others. On the other hand, with the hate and vitriol it can spread through social media and the internet, it may make us distrust others even more.



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We must build our internal strengths to resist infections of hate and anger. We must be able to rise mentally and emotionally above the attacks and counter-attacks that, sadly, the public discourse in social media and the internet is degenerating into.

Friends, I was sent to a boarding school when I was six years old after the Partition of India, by my parents who were refugees from West Punjab. My school was in the hills of Himachal Pradesh. There, over sixty years ago, soon after India's Independence, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, India's philosopher statesman, explained to us young students what was the meaning of India's flag. Dr. Radhakrishnan became India's second President soon after that.

Dr. Radhakrishnan made an unforgettable impression on my young mind. There he stood before us, in his white dhoti and his white turban, and in his calm voice he explained the beauty of our country and what our flag symbolized.

He explained to us:

"Bhagwa or the saffron color denotes renunciation or disinterestedness. Our leaders must be indifferent to material gains and dedicate themselves to their work. The white in the center is light, the path of truth to guide our conduct. The green shows our relation to (the) soil, our relation to the plant life here, on which all other life depends. The "Ashoka Chakra" in the center of the white is the wheel of the law of *dharma*. Truth or *satya*, *dharma* or virtue ought to be the controlling principle of those who work under this flag."

Then he raised his finger, and said:

"The wheel denotes motion. There is death in stagnation. There is life in movement. India should no more resist change, it must move and go forward. The wheel represents the dynamism of a peaceful change."

Friends, a few years ago the President of India appointed me the Chancellor of the new Central University in Himachal Pradesh at Dharamshala. At our first convocation, our Chief Guest was His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He gave us his message of universal peace.

At our second convocation, the Chief Guest was none other than the President of India himself. He said our university must develop better citizens of India, and leaders who will develop our country further.

Every central university has been asked to fly the national flag on its campus on a very high pole. We must know what the flag stands for.

I recall Dr. Radhakrishnan's memorable words. He said:

"The wheel denotes motion. There is death in stagnation. There is life in movement. India should no more resist change, it must move and go forward."



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Friends, we must not retreat into our glorious past, and all the wonderful discoveries we made thousands of years ago. We have to move forward. We have to be honest: we have a long way to go yet to improve the lives of everyone in our country.

The flag is the symbol. The country is the reality. The wheel in the national flag we are now required to fly above our universities and colleges denotes the dynamism of peaceful change. The institution beneath the flag must be, in fact, a dynamic center of peaceful change.

Dynamism in learning comes with questioning, not from passive acceptance of hand-me-down answers. The dharma of students in our colleges and universities must be to question why, not just to do and die—which may be the dharma of a good soldier, not a good student.

To learn, students must learn the art of dialogue. Dialogue requires the capacity to listen deeply to others whose views may appear strange. There cannot be listening when there is yelling and insulting, tweeting and trolling.

Great centers of learning must promote diversity. They must teach the art of dialogue. They must teach students to listen deeply. And they must teach them to keep learning. Great centers of learning must not force students to learn only one view. They must enable students to see the lenses within their own minds, that make them see others as stereotypes, that create biases in their minds, and that shut out different ideas.

Higher learning develops new lenses in one's mind. Higher learning enables one to clean the dust of dead habits of thought on one's lenses. The greater the learning, the wider becomes the angle of lens in the mind. Wide angle lenses encompass many points of view. To build a great nation, we must shed monochromatic lenses through which we see only the saffron view, or only the green view of the reality of India. We must come together in the middle of our flag, where many colors come together to form the white light of truth. And where, in the center of the flag, is also the wheel of eternal change.

Let us raise the national flag, not just on a pole above our institution. Let us also unfurl it in our minds, and let the winds of many cultures, and many points-of-view, blow through the classrooms of our institutions of higher learning. There, let many points of view be expressed without violence. Let them be heard, and not shut down.

I end with my heartfelt gratitude to the leaders of this great institutions for inviting me to humbly share my views about Life and Learning, and also about the role of institutions of higher learning in shaping our nation.

I close with my congratulations to all who are graduating today and who are setting out on their journeys of life beyond the walls of this institution. I pray that you will listen well, and learn well. And that you will help to shape a nation, and a world, that is good for everyone.

