



Swami Bodhananda Saraswati: 'On Excellence'

Excellence is a quality, though it has quantitative correlates. Just as consciousness is correlated to the brain, beauty is in measure and proportion, goodness is in human conduct, truth is in collective action, love is in relationship, and worship is in work. Devoid of any one quality, the other correlates have meager existence. Hence excellence is a dynamic, dialectical process, a constant emergence. Excellence cannot be stored, it can be only enjoyed. Excellence cannot be dictated, it can only be invoked. Excellence is the beauty of a flower, the heartbeat of life, the slither of the snake or the gait of the swan. Excellence sprouts in the soil of mental ease and fearlessness.

A Moses on the march, a Christ on the cross, a Gandhi on his spinning wheel, a Ravi Shankar on his sitar, the Buddha under a banyan tree, a Mother Theresa with her healing touch, an Einstein expounding his equations, a Martin Luther King Jr. delivering his "I Have a Dream" speech, are all inspiring specimens of excellence.

There is a prevalent erroneous notion that excellence, genius and creativity are the preserve of wayward, amoral, licentious people. We find such widespread belief among artists, writers, musicians, sports and entertainment personalities, and even scientists. It is true that flashes of creativity do manifest fortuitously in such people. But, unable to integrate creative energies into their character, such people eventually give in under the weight of their own genius. They fail to see the moral and spiritual ground of creativity and, instead, lead a life of alienation and/or decadence.

The ultimate expression of excellence is a healing experience of wholeness and sacredness. Thus, character, integrity and morality become important ingredients of excellence. According to the *Upanishads* '*pratibhā*,' excellence without '*yoga*' (i.e. discipline), is like a painting without a canvas, a sizzle without substance.

Sambodh Center for Human Excellence is dedicated to the pursuit of Excellence in all its manifestations. The Center is founded on the belief that individual human consciousness is the source of Excellence; and that manifestation of human excellence is when individuals engage in disciplined study, dialogue, reflection, prayer, and self-giving, interactive work. Excellence is thus elevated to the status of God in the Sambodh Center. Here people come together to explore their physical, mental, intellectual, social and spiritual faculties integrally, with the motto: '*Bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya ca*,' 'For the good of all, and for the well-being of all.'

Excellence is the ultimate possibility of human consciousness. Bound as we are in the mind-body

confines, the full possibility and splendor of our being is not comprehended. What is meant to be used as a channel for self-expression has become a chain of self-entanglement. Like the proverbial Gulliver, we are tied down by tiny threads of our own 'Lilliputian delusions' and self-imposed limitations. It takes a deep breath and a mighty roar to break out of the thralldom that we have acquired in states of unconsciousness.

To be excellent is to surpass, to go beyond, the mundane, to reach the mountain top, to live in the city of lights. The powers of the physical body are limited; the pleasures of the mind are fleeting; the accomplishments of the intellect are puny, the rewards of the world are unsatisfying; and the human spirit yearns for something indefinable and yet recognizable when realized. This incessant striving for the unknown, this insatiable love for the stars and beyond, is what characterizes human essence.

The individual, this indivisible "I" and ground of all experience, is unique. Human subjectivity is not the sum of finite objects; on the contrary it is the infinite source of objects. It is this human uniqueness, our consciousness, in which our thoughts and sensations and our worlds exist; that is the wellspring of Excellence—whether spiritual, ethical, social or creative. This source comes to its full flowering in interactive enterprises. We may call it the 'Transcendental Inter-subjective Source.'

The ancient Semitic people called this Source 'Yahweh', 'Allah' or 'God.' The Hindus call it 'Brahman,' and the Buddhists realize it as the 'Buddha.' Psychologists call it the 'unconscious' or 'shadow.' And modern science calls it the 'Quantum Soup,' 'Infinite Information,' or 'Energy Vibrations.' Whereas science is trying to develop objective tools to tap into that Source, spirituality is engaged in developing subjective tools to invoke that unseen power. The brain, the genes and the quark are the pathways that science follows, while spirituality follows the path of meditation, awareness, love, and the ideas and ideals of freedom, beauty, justice and goodness. Both these paths are encountering epistemic and methodological limitations, while the future of humanity is in the interfaces and dialogical interactions of these polar domains.

Therefore, excellence exists in unified efforts, in team work, in loving relationships, in networking, in facing challenges together, in sacrificing for others. United we excel; divided we are exterminated. To excel is to exist. The dialogue that take place between religions, between science and religion, between races and belief systems, as well as the inflow of ethics into business practices, are significant signs of our march towards excellence.

