



Personality Traits of a Successful Teacher



The following is an extract from the facilitator's inputs during the workshop series: 'Developing the Powers of Concentration and Meditation'. This series of 5 workshops provided a basic and advanced level training to a group of teachers from mainstream schools in methods of concentration and meditation to practice in their own lives and in their classroom with the students.

In this particular extract the facilitator introduces and explains the passage from The Mother, on the personality traits of a successful teacher.

1. Complete self-control

“Complete self-control not only to the extent of not showing any anger but remaining absolutely quiet and undisturbed under all circumstances.”

The first and the most important trait of the teacher is complete self-control. In fact The Mother went on to say, “Never scold a child, never lose your temper”, because you display a terrible lack of control and the child knows it. And in a way you lose the self-respect that you have. Therefore, the most important (if you had to take just one thing from all these – take the first) – don't lose your temper, don't get angry, don't get irritated. And if you can begin to do that, that itself is such a sadhana. You will be able to master every other movement. It'll come spontaneously. This is the starting point.

By remaining absolutely quiet and undisturbed under all circumstances... can you imagine what an example you would set for your students if you could do that? They don't see such examples in society today – their parents, people around them – and that's why when they grow up, they become violent themselves. Where is the example? Where is the role model? And the respect that you would gain from being an example is something infinite.

I know a teacher in Pondicherry who The Mother brought up herself. She said one thing to me: “You know, the only thing I have never done in my life is lose my cool, ever got angry, impatient, disturbed.” I just thought to myself, “My God, I wish I could do that.” But you know it gave me an insight, because I used to watch her dealing with the students. She used to teach higher-class students and lower class



1. Complete self-control not only to the extent of not showing any anger, but remaining absolutely quiet and undisturbed under all circumstances.

- The Mother

students. And I asked her, “But why?” She said, “That is the only thing The Mother told me to do.” At the age of 16 or 17 she became a teacher and when she came to The Mother and said, “Mother, how should I be a true teacher? What is it that I have to do?” Mother said, ‘Just remember one thing – “don’t ever lose your temper”.’ And somehow she has mastered it and has never done it. I asked her, “Are you sure you have never done this?” She said, “No.” She said, “It went straight in my heart and it was the only thing that The Mother asked me to do.” And I said, “Can you control them? Don’t your students take off?”... because, why do we actually get angry? It is out of fear of losing control. While actually, exactly the opposite of it is true. And this is a living example. So, when I saw her, I got this faith that if she can do it, well so can I. So began the attempt and the practice, which doesn’t mean that once you resolve to do it, you will be successful, let me tell you... many, many, many failures. Many times one is unable, but at least there was a movement to exceed one’s ordinary vital personality. That is a big step forward. It is a certain discipline that you set for yourself. So, that is the first point.

2. Urge for Progress

Second point is simple, most teachers because of the power they wield and the kind of power that they have over students, because their students look up to them as demigods, especially younger students and children... till quite a fair age... so, there is a lot you can do. You can act authoritatively, you can act unfairly, you can be biased. And the child or your child or the student will have to accept it. Therefore, to understand that even though you have this great influence and power – never to lose the sense of the relativity of your importance. Always to remember that you are not omnipotent, you are not very important, that your importance is relative. It is not absolute, it is only there in that particular situation. So: “In the matter of

self-confidence, must also have the sense of relativity of his importance. Above all must have the knowledge that the teacher [herself or] himself must always progress if he wants his students to progress, must not remain satisfied either with what he is or with what he knows.”

So, therefore, a very clear principle, the second one – if you want your students to progress, you must progress yourself. The day you find yourself stagnating in class, the day you become mechanical in your teaching – because it’s very easy, as somebody said, after five years of teaching one becomes a donkey. This is basically an idiomatic saying that there is so much of repetition, stagnation, the same thing, the same subject – day in and day out, year in and year out. How do you create and sustain your own interest as a teacher in your subject? You have to be extremely creative, inventive. And that desire and thirst of progress has to be fuelled, no? So, here if you want your students to progress, you have to progress. Simple.

If you do not progress, if you are not interested in your subject, 99% of your students will not be interested, or will do it mechanically because they have to pass exams, their tests, because of fear. Nothing will be retained after they give that mid-term or final exam paper. Which is why if you notice, we ourselves, when we came into the teaching profession... and I know it must be true for all of you, because it was true for myself... I learnt everything actually for the first time. When I had to teach science, I actually understood science. When I had to teach Mathematics I began to understand what these funny theorems, which were told to me, meant. And you know that it is because when we were students and when we should have been learning those things they were not taught. Because either the teacher herself was not interested or hadn’t



2. In the matter of self-confidence, must also have a sense of the relativity of his importance.

Above all, must have the knowledge that the teacher himself must always progress if he wants his students to progress, must not remain satisfied either with what he is or with what he knows.

- The Mother





found ways of communicating with the students. So, that is why the same fate is going to befall your students. If they don't have the opportunity to become teachers they will never learn these subjects. Rest assured they will just remember reading and writing skills, how to multiply, add, subtract and some vague notions about science. And just about figure out what simple geography and history are. Later in life they will have to look up encyclopedias, look up the map of the world – find out where Asia, Africa is. Even though in their exams they may score 90%, it is all rote learning in the short term memory of the child, which will be completely wiped out a year hence. But there are certain things that a student or a child will never forget, he will never have to re-learn how to cycle or to play basketball or to play table tennis, once he has learnt it. Or to sing or dramatics or any of the more experiential subjects, where he's had to use more than just the one sense of hearing. Because that is what he is doing in most of our classes – passively hearing, that's it. There is no application, there is no utilisation, there is no assimilation and there is no learning by doing. There is little experimentation. So, yes, if you have a very good chemistry teacher because there are science experiments – something maybe retained. But anything which doesn't involve more than two senses – finished! Mathematics, because you have to practise some sums, basic addition, multiplication, division... will be learnt; the rest forgotten because not practised enough, not seen or if practised, practised in isolation... nowhere! You understand? Out of a classroom, one can't relate what one has studied to life, can't relate it to what is happening to one the rest of the waking hours. Therefore, after a short term spell – forgotten! So, this is the problem. Therefore, in true teaching there are three stages of learning.¹

3. Impartiality

The third point: "Must not have any sense of essential superiority over his students nor preference or attachment whatsoever for one or another." Now, this is very difficult. We all may say, "No! no! we are completely unbiased, we don't have any favourites. We don't like stu-

dents who do well, in fact, the better the student does the less we like him." That's not true! We tend to immediately classify our students as dull, brilliant and so on. And

we tend to pay more attention if a bright student asks us a question than if a dull one does. And we have very clear preferences in our marking of papers. If a student who normally scores 95% or 80% suddenly does badly, you tend to be more lenient with your marks and wonder, "Oh what's happened today? How come she hasn't done so well?" You see, to really be completely unbiased, to have no attachment whatsoever for one or the other, no preference, is very important.

Why is it important? It is more important to understand, because those who you give preference to – you are spoiling them, you are spoiling their own growth... because you are inculcating the ego in them. They immediately feel the sense of self-importance. They can feel that they are in some way superior to the other students. So, by your doing this... you are negating, you are cutting off the branch on which the student is sitting. He doesn't progress further, becomes self-satisfied, becomes arrogant, becomes egoistic – shows a sense of superiority. Sometimes even stops learning or does not explore and exploit his full potential because he thinks that you are satisfied with what he is.

For the other students obviously who are not in the special light of your eyes – they feel very much, notice very much that certain students are given extra importance, preference, you are more preferential towards them. And that stops them from really feeling that you care and that you really want to help them. Gives them this feeling of inferiority and also closes them to you. Especially if you have strong likes and dislikes. So try as far as possible to understand why one should not have biases, one should not have preferences or attachments for one or the other. That is why you have to be a yogi, to be a true teacher.



3. Must not have any sense of essential superiority over his students nor preference or attachment whatsoever for one or another.

- The Mother

¹ Information, Assimilation, Utilisation.

After you read this, you will say, “Listen, one will have to do sadhana for this?” It is difficult to practise these points completely. But at least let’s set these up as ideals so that we can work towards them gradually. There is something for us to go to school, some progress for us to make. We have now mastered our subjects, that’s fine, but now we must master the art and science of pedagogy.

4. Understanding and Compassion

Fourth point: “Must know that all are equal spiritually and instead of mere tolerance must have a global comprehension or understanding.” This is to do with the fact, especially in our Indian system, that we feel that after all each one has his own dharma, his own soul. Each student has come here for her own development, which her soul has brought her to. When one relates with students one must understand what differentiates one student from the other – why one student has more interest in mathematics and the other one does not or one in literature and the other does not. It’s something to do, not so much with the deficiency of the student but with the innate dharma or capacity of the soul of the student. To understand that each will grow at his own pace – each soul has come for its own work. And that is why the Indian philosophy is such a great one because it doesn’t look at your outside so much, it looks at your insides. So, if you have a particular nature and a particular propensity, I as a facilitator, should give you complete freedom and say that, “Yes, you are working according to your line, your dharma, your soul type.” While another person may have a completely opposite soul type or dharma. This is it – ‘one must know that all are equal spiritually’. Therefore, all have the Atman, all have their swadharma. They have their own destiny, their own spiritual destiny, their own spiritual type, their own spiritual path, and therefore are equal in your eyes. And, ‘instead of mere tolerance must have a global comprehension or understanding’ of the psychological type of the student sitting in front of you. What is his dharma? What is his psychol-

ogy? What is his propensity? Then only can you help him to achieve it, when you know what he is looking for.

And do not treat them like empty tablets as Rousseau says...

that when a child is born he is born like an empty slate and education fills everything into him. That is the opposite view to the Indian philosophy and yoga which says that the child is born with a soul and has everything contained within him. And the teacher’s task is to draw it forth. So this is the philosophy our interaction and teaching must be based on.

5. Freedom

Fifth: “The business of both parent and teacher is to enable and help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material.” These lines summarise the total development that needs to take place in a child of her intellectual, moral, aesthetic, practical capacities. Not to be pressurised... already deciding my son will become an engineer, my daughter will become a scientist. Pushing children to do certain professions – all that is completely against the free organic growth of the child. Instead,



4. Must know that all are equal spiritually and instead of mere tolerance must have a global comprehension or understanding.

- The Mother





5. *"The business of both parent and teacher is to enable and help the child to educate himself, to develop his own intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical capacities and to grow freely as an organic being, not to be kneaded and pressured into form like an inert plastic material."*

- Sri Aurobindo

the true role of the parent or the teacher is to find out what is the child's innate capacity, what is he, his innate genius, his innate potential and try and encourage that. Then, he will become into a living being, not like an inert tool, not like a cog in the wheel.

That is why there is so much mediocrity in society today, because half the people you meet today didn't want to take up the professions they are in. "I wanted to become a mathematician." "I didn't want to become an engineer, I wanted to go into advertising. My father forced me to do IIT and he's put me into engineering. Because he says you get better jobs there..." The boy is totally frustrated. And he is mediocre, he will never rise. Those who have risen in life, if you ask them, somewhere either their parents or they themselves have had the courage to boldly strike out and say, "No! I want to do this because this is my natural inclination, this is what I am interested in doing."

You know you can't change anything overnight. It's the whole system, yes. I understand that we are all a part, we all have been victims of it, so to speak. We all have been a part of it ourselves. And a lot of learning has taken place as one grows up. The only thing one can do – if you have your own faith and conviction of what is right and what is wrong, and what true education is – is to slowly, by your influence, your own example, effectuate a change. It may be that you will only be effecting the change around the students who come into contact with you. You may not be able to do more than that, but that in itself is a first step. The only way is not to think that, "Okay, because everyone is like that, so now it's too difficult, so I won't even attempt." That's not how change takes place. Change takes place irrespective of what everybody is. "I know, I am conscious and therefore

I will be this." So that those who come into contact with me gain this... and can then spread it. That's how a pebble, when it is put into water, creates ripples. Ripples... if a lot of pebbles are put into the water, will create a whole ripple effect. Slowly, society will change, slowly the system will change. So, do not think of big things, just think of yourself, that is the starting point for change.

You see your own role models, if I ask you, "Find your favourite teacher. Who was the teacher you liked the most, when you were a student? What qualities did that person have? What personality did that person have? Why did you like him or her? You'll see, you have imbibed a lot from her. So, you do make a difference even if you have seven students or one hundred students. It's what you are that matters.

The last point to stress is the quality of trust and impersonal love, self-offering and devotion in work. These are important because trust begets trust. Trusting your students helps them to trust themselves and trust in their own potential. What you say to a child or to a student is so important. If you encourage a child, and say, "Of course, you can do this and of course you can master this." Instead of saying, "You will never be able to do this, it's beyond you. Forget it, you are too dumb." These kind of negative statements immediately make the child feel as though he can't do it. Once the child thinks that he can't do it, he won't. You've just blocked it, you know. I had a terrible mathematics teacher, who would tell me this every single day, I would enter the classroom she would start off. "And you Ameeta, you will not be able to understand this." My mind used to go completely blank after that. I never understood it. Only later I realised on reading *The Mother*, "My goodness! this was the power of suggestion." This teacher had put such a negative thought suggestion into my mind which had blocked all conceptual understanding of mathematics. This is what a teacher can do, you know. On the other hand there were other teachers who said, "Yes, of course, you can do this, of course you can do that." And then one went far beyond the syllabus, far beyond what the teacher was teaching, one went into research, into things that students of a higher... college level



would do. Where lay the difference? So, this is the importance of trust and positive suggestion. What you say to a student is already three-fourths of what he is going to be able to do. At least don't be negative. If you have nothing nice to say, The Mother says, "Keep quiet." You know, just keep quiet. So, at least that way you don't harm. You may have nothing nice to say. Sometimes yes you come across something and say, "Oh my god!"... just keep quiet. Deal with it when you feel you have the energy to... okay!

👤 **Ameeta Mehra**



There was a man whose farm was located on the banks of a flood-swollen river. As the water rose, a neighbour drove up in a Jeep, urging him to leave before the farm was flooded.

"Oh, no," said the man confidently, "God will save me."

The water rose higher, and the man was forced to move into the second story of the farmhouse. A police boat soon came, and the officers called for the man to hurry and get into their boat.

"Oh, no, that won't be necessary," the man insisted. "God will save me."

Finally the house was completely engulfed in water, and a Coast Guard helicopter swooped in to rescue the man, now perched on the roof. Again he refused. Just then, a huge wave of water swept over the house, and the man drowned.

When he got to heaven, he stormed at the Lord, asking WHY God had let him die when his faith had been so strong.

"What do you mean?" asked the heavenly Father. "I sent a Jeep, a boat, and a helicopter ... and you wouldn't budge!"