

Daily Meditation Transcript 08/27/2021

Disobedience as a Virtue: The Dark Side to Obedience

Good morning.

In today's essay we're talking about the dark side to obedience and the importance of good listening. And I do want to speak to an essay that I ran a day or two ago, because there were some responses which I think missed the point.

I criticized our culture for succumbing to the pseudo-value of individualism, and of selfishness that derives from that, and not teaching a value system of the common good.

Now, because I'm talking culture, of course I'm talking education. And someone responded and said yes, but it is also a matter of family failure, and I agree of course. And also religion failure, if you will, to the extent that people are still participating in religion, and I agree with that, and of course it's a failure in the media, and it's baked into our economic system that we look out for ourselves.

But I do think some people took it personally. Several teachers responded and said that they didn't like it because they felt themselves being criticized. But the truth is that education is a funnel through which we pass all our workers, practically all of our workers. And I raise the question now as I have for 45 years, because I've been a teacher for 45 years and longer: What are the values in our education?

Now some people said well, I work in a school that has good values -- great! I'm not talking about your school, then don't take it so personally; I'm not talking about you either.

It's kind of like when the word "patriarchy" is used, some men jump up in the air and scream and say "But I'm a good husband, I'm a good father, and I care for my family (and all the rest), and I'm faithful," and all that.

Well, fine, we're not talking about you! -- Except to the extent that we unknowingly or knowingly have ingested and are living the values of patriarchy, you see?

That's the thing: in other words, we have to stretch in America to think structurally and not just personally. And not to have such thin skin that if someone comes along criticizing our profession we scream bloody murder! I mean, I think education needs serious criticism today, and I've been in it for 50 years, so I'm not talking about the other; I'm talking about my experience too!

In fact this is why I designed the alternative educational models I've done over the years, because I was not satisfied with the value systems of modern academia. And this is not to say there are not good people as teachers or indeed as administrators and so forth.

But I'm saying the system itself -- you have to step back and ask, is it in tune with the needs of our time, and the values of our time? Because something very foundational is melting away in front of our eyes. It includes our democracy, and it includes our inborn natural organic quest for justice and balance, and indeed for compassion. That these are qualities we have within us as human beings. When we become wounded, or when systems wound us, these values go down the drain...or this is what we're observing today.

It's not just an American problem. We're seeing this rise of authoritarianism, and with it selfishness, and I would say institutionalized selfishness, as fascism. It's the violent control of our institutions, not based on justice and compassion and caring, but based on power and strength and power-over. Not power-with, compassion... com-passion... but power-over.

So I do think people can be thin-skinned, and this to me is part of the problem: that we've been taught to think too personally and not in terms of structure, in terms of form, you see. The form of education drives values out -- that's exactly what Einstein says.

I wasn't talking about an individual teacher, or maybe an individual school, that's doing things well. I'm talking about a system that puts all its eggs in the basket of rationalism and ignores the intuition -- what Einstein called intuition, what I would call the mystical brain, Einstein also call it deep feeling -- from which we derive values.

So I really have to take issue with those who overreacted, because we have to begin our thinking in a more structural way. Because that's how big the collapse is. And this what I'd call this unleashing of selfishness.

And then people said, "Well, you can't criticize everyone for not getting vaccines because some people have problems, etc., etc." Yes, that's right, and it's a very small minority. I'm talking about that big majority that is running two of the largest states in America today, forbidding mask wearing at schools and so forth. That ideology is seeping into our system of politics. And of course it's affecting education, because kids are dying in school!

And when I criticize education, I'm not talking so much about primary grades. I'm talking about the adult education that, as Einstein observed, ignores values. So all of this is really another statement that I've written about in my book, *The A.W.E. Project: Reinventing Education, Reinventing the Human*, which is about bringing values into education itself.

How can we do that in a sectarian and a pluralistic culture? Well, I lay that out here in this book. But also I'm talking about my book on *The Reinvention of Work*: the work we do as educators, as teachers, as administrators, as citizens electing or running for office - for example, school boards and so forth - and of course as citizens electing politicians who will have significant impact on education, as we're seeing in states like Florida and Texas today.

This is what we're talking about, reinventing work! So, because a certain percent, maybe 10 percent of our teachers, have a value system, maybe more - great! That doesn't solve the problem in itself, though: the problem is structural.

Because as I point out in my A.W.E. book on reinventing education, we're moving between the modern era, which indeed defined education almost exclusively as the rational, we're moving into a post-modern era. And education, the forms of education, have not caught up with it.

And I know this because I have worked consciously for over 45 years to reinvent the form of education. And the forms we invented worked, they really worked! Including when I brought it to a public school system, teenagers, inner city, and laid out these 10 values that we can agree on. Because they're outside the world of religion, we can agree upon them in a pluralistic and secular school system.

We need more of that. And I know when I shared these values, I remember once with a crowd, and afterwards a woman came up and she said, "I'm a teacher. And I'm a real good teacher. And I'm quitting. And I'm quitting. And I'm not the only one quitting - most of the good teachers in our area are quitting" (and this was back in the days of Bush). Because, she said, "I cannot commit to doing education, creating education, as just a matter of test giving, and not a matter of bringing out just what you're talking about," she said, "bringing out the wisdom within our our young people."

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.