

MindTree

A Prayer to the Teacher

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It is a great occasion for the 2005 batch of graduating teachers. It is also a great day for the faculty and administration to have given the world another set of people whose impact is going to be disproportionately large.

I am honored to be here with all of you to share your joy, your hopes. As teachers, on behalf of all the lives you will touch, I have a few things to ask of you. It is going to be a long and somewhat unusual list – so I seek your indulgence. Here goes my list:

First, I pray to you that you teach me the value of inclusion.

The people who write my textbooks and the ones who prescribe the syllabi will not tell you, how important inclusion is for me to do well in life. Without the sense of inclusion, I will not know that boundaries are meant to be pushed – not to be lived in.

Take for example the fact that I clean my house but empty my garbage on the road. That is because, the road is not “included” in what I deem to be my own.

I feed my own child but do not enquire if the maid has eaten today. Her hunger is not included in my hunger.

I take my child to the movie but do not ask him to call the neighbor's child. That child's seclusion is outside my zone of parenting. So, Teacher – teach me inclusion.

I pray to you to teach me to communicate.

The more I am caught in the rat race of the common entrance tests and cut throat competition - everyone will tell me that my survival depends on my power to impress and in that urge, the more I impress, the less I will communicate. Teach me to speak and be able to write such that I am able to convey what I feel.

Teach me to communicate with the simplicity of a child and the nakedness of a flower.

Teach me to communicate with those who cannot speak nor hear.

Teach me to communicate with people less gifted, less privileged than I am.

Teach me to communicate with those who have come before me and those who will follow.

Teach me to communicate with things animate and inanimate.

I pray to you to teach me to understand the nature of things.

O' Teacher, teach me "sense making" in an increasingly senseless world. Teach me not just what is good or what is bad. I may not always be lucky to be in situations that will simply be either black or white.

In a world in which Gods will have feet of clay and Godmen will be more men and less God, teach me how to make sense of things such that I am able to see the larger picture; I am able to understand things around me without the intermediation of soothsayers and spiritual Gurus. Teach me such that I am able to, and willing to, receive inputs from everywhere and wisdom from some.

But in moments of crisis, teach me such that I am able to come to my own conclusions.

As you teach me to deal with moments of crisis – teach me how to come out of them without residual toxicity.

For there will be moments in life when I will see the failing of those I have admired. I will see cracks in the walls of those who had taught me the meaning of strength and solidity. In those difficult moments, I should know that sometimes situations make people who they are. Teach me such that cynicism does not impair my power to behold the beautiful nature of creation of which the human nature is also a part.

I pray to you to make me learn. More than that, Teacher, teach me how I can learn to learn.

As you prepare me for the wide world in which I need to fend for myself and for others, one-time learning will not be good enough. I will have to have the ability to learn newer and more difficult things. Some of it I will need to learn in increasingly lesser time. In all this, what will become critical is the process of learning itself, more than just what I am able to learn. Help me to learn newer ways to learn. And that will make learning a joy for me.

As you teach me to learn how to learn, I pray to you to teach me to learn from unusual sources.

Teach me how I can learn from small people. As people come and touch my lives, as they do small things for me, teach me how I can learn from them - things that no

classroom will ever teach.

Teach me to learn sense of duty from the driver of the school van who must rise before I do.

Teach me to learn compassion from the Sisters of Charity in whose fragile arms, even death can sleep like a baby.

Teach me to learn contentment from the traffic policeman who is paid to inhale carbon monoxide for the 76,800 hours of his life that he has to stand in the middle of the road.

Teach me to learn to work unsupervised like the ant and the bee who do not need anyone to breathe down their neck so they add value each new day as they wake up to work.

As I learn to learn from unusual sources, I pray that you teach me to appreciate the interconnected nature of things.

Teach me, not just about the way the waves rise but what causes them to engulf. Teach me to appreciate that the trees I fell, the small creatures I kill with indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides on the ground, the urban decay I cause with my consumptive ways – all catch up with awesome imbalances in the natural state of things that cause death and destruction and can one day, engulf me and whatever else I am trying to leave behind.

Each time I see a scavenging bird on my city's skyline, Teacher, tell me why the singing birds are going away. And tell me how I can see them again, perched on my window sill.

I pray to you to teach me not just the ability to answer, but also the power to question.

It is because everyone is telling me to do as told. Before I know, I am becoming enslaved in a social, economic and political state in which progress is held hostage because we do not ask questions. Only if we ask the questions, we can get the answers. If we get the answers, we can explore how to establish a higher order of things. If we ask the questions, we will also learn to be accountable. We will be more willing to accept that when we ask the questions, we can be questioned too. In that mutuality, truth will emerge and balance itself.

As you teach me the ability to ask questions, I also pray to you to teach me the ability to say, "I do not know".

In all humility, I must admit Teacher, that not always will I have all the answers. When I do not have the answer, teach me to say, "I do not know". I know it takes courage, and self-confidence to say that I do not know. So often I see people around me keep silent when admission of ignorance could have opened them to new relationships and new knowledge. Teach me the power to say "I do not know" even if it causes me momentary disgrace. Because Teacher, when I develop the self-confidence to say that I do not know, I will be comfortable in being who I am. That will make me more real in an increasingly make-believe world.

Just as you teach me to say, "I do not know", I pray to you to teach me to actively seek help.

Higher my achievements and greater my position of power, the more helpless I will become; the less I will know about the state of things. In those moments of my helplessness, my ego will come in my way of seeking help. My workplace will make me falsely believe that seeking help is a sign of weakness.

Teach me to seek help from small people, Teacher. Teach me that the flower needs help from the bee to pollinate; water needs help from air to raise itself to the sky.

O' Teacher, please teach me such that I understand that even the Lord of this Universe can do with a little help from me. Hence, I have no shame in seeking help from others.

I pray to you to teach me humility so that I am able to receive.

Our minds become mountains of ego as we know more things and become more successful. Mountains cannot hold water as the clouds rain on them. The mind has to be a valley and not a mountain, so that it can become a reservoir of life. More I become good at things Teacher, teach me to make my mind a valley and not a mountain. Make me meek and humble and ordinary so that I empty myself and gain the power to receive.

As I learn the power of humility, teach me about how all things that sustain life on earth, come free.

Teacher, I will live in an increasingly commercial world. I will be judged on how much "value" I can create by buying and selling things. My personal success will be determined by my ability to consume. I will not be able to always question the ways of the world, but do tell me how all things that truly support life, come without a consideration for money.

The cow does not get paid for the milk she gives us.

The earth does not ask for money for the crops we get.

The sea does not come to get royalties on the catch of the day.

The sun, the air, the river and the clouds do not get paid for their services.

I pray to you to teach me the power of silence – teach me also to raise my voice to protect the truth.

In a world where every moment is going to be full of noise, teach me to be quiet. Teach me to appreciate the sound of silence. For, in silence I can contemplate the power within.

Teach me to make my point without having to raise my voice.

And teach me to raise my voice Teacher when my silence can hurt another life.

Finally, I pray to you to teach me to develop a world view of things.

Teach me to appreciate that poverty, disease and hunger have no nationality. For hundreds of years, I have lived in a world with narrow domestic walls. In that world patriotism was founded on religious bigotry, racial intolerance and man's remarkably short view of time. It was bounded by barbed wires and smoking guns. In the future that I want to create, I want you to teach me the power of loving another fellow human being.

Teach me to appreciate diversity and dialogue.

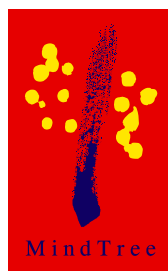
Teach me tolerance and teach me to remove the word "foreign" and "foreigner" from

my vocabulary.

This is my world, Teacher. In this world, I do not want to be a foreigner to anyone and I do not want to treat anyone like a foreigner.

With these thoughts, allow me to conclude my convocation address. May this day remain with you forever and may your path be illuminated with the power of a thousand Suns. Thank You and Good Luck.

This article is based on a speech made as part of the convocation address at the International Academy for Creative Teaching, Bangalore, on January 6, 2005.



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