INDIAN ETHOS

Our World Unified for Peace

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Prof. Salunkhe, Shaileshji Haribhakti, Shainaji, Ms. Kia Scherr, Ms. Dolly Thakore, Mr. Sarosh Bana, Mr. Kuldeep Singh and fellow learners.

First of all, heartiest congratulations, to the students of the 'We School', and Ms. Kia Scherr, for engaging their mental space, on an issue that is very critical today - that of world peace. What happened on 26/11/2008 was traumatic, most unfortunate and I have no words to capture the sentiments. It's heartening to see that you have an eminent panel, who will lead the discussions on "Our World Unified for Peace". They will drive home the need, to think about the universality of mankind, the need to brush aside all prejudices. Caste, creed, religion, must not matter. The oneness of mankind, the brotherhood of mankind, is all that should matter. I am honoured to formally release your Research Report titled "Our World Unified for Peace". I look forward to reading it.

I am always delighted to be in a learning environment. I believe, learning never stops. The day you stop learning is the day, that you are almost dead. Learning provides the energy, the enthusiasm and the excitement in life. For to learn is to grow. To learn is to evolve.

That said, it is my firm belief, that only if you are at peace with yourself, can you look at larger issues.

Inner peace is imperative. So what I want to speak to you about is on my learnings, in this journey of life, on the road to inner peace. And I am sure, many of you will find some takes.

Let me begin with a narrative. In 2010, Prof. Clayton M. Christensen, the Kim B. Clark, Professor of Business Administration, at the Harvard Business School, quizzed his students, as they were graduating. He asked and I quote - "How can I be sure, I'll stay out of jail? The question may sound light-hearted, but it is not. Two of the 32 people, in my Rhodes Scholar class, spent time in jail. Jeff Skilling of Enron fame, was a classmate of mine at HBS. These were good guys - but something in their lives sent them in the wrong direction". Unquote.

Prof. Christensen was obviously stressing, on the importance of being uncompromising in your values, all through, come what may, if you wish to lead a life of dignity and integrity. And want to be at peace with yourself. You have the freedom to make choices. You must take the responsibility, for the choices you make. You can choose to lead your lives in a good way, that's the right, or in a chaotic way by wrong choices. The knowledge and execution tools, that you gain through your learning processes, become worthwhile, only when

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set in the framework of values, and its significance to society.

So the first point, that I wish to make is that, regardless of the circumstances, be firm and hold on to your values. The most important lesson that I have learnt in life is to never forsake your roots and values. I remember what my son Kumar Mangalam said to our 120,000 colleagues and I quote - "It is important to stick to principles and values in life -no matter what. Idealism is the domain of the youth. You need to have that tinge of idealism that is premised on a set of personal values like integrity and respect. The list does not have to be long - even one such value will do but the conviction has to be rock-solid. In tough times, your principles serve as a light house and give you the moral compass to stay the right course. In sticking to your values, you may lose the battle, but be assured that you will win the war! Achievements built on the quick sands of opportunism never last - so many failed individuals and corporations stand testimony to it. Achievements built on values always last longer and are able to weather storms of corrosion". Unquote.

So be values led. Make it your life-force.

My second great take has been to think and believe that 'Nothing is Impossible'. This is a belief, we must all nurture in our hearts. Build a moat around yourself, a moat of unbridled faith, passion and commitment, to make the seemingly impossible, possible. That's like a dream come true.

We have seen this happen, before our very eyes. For instance - the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, the man on the moon, the birth of a civilization more than 5,000 years ago, morphing into the world's single largest democracy, that is India, and the end of the apartheid. And who could have ever dreamt, that a black kid, raised by a single mother, grows up to be, the President of the most powerful country in the world. So believe that, nothing is impossible, if you work with a single minded focus.

Kumar Mangalam, always says and I quote "the quality of your future, is entirely dependent on the quality of your imagination". And ofcourse he walks the talk. He has a track record of doing, audacious things and taking the Group to a growth trajectory, that has been simply amazing. From 2 billion dollars, when he took over in 1995, to 40 billion dollars today. From operations in 8 countries to 36 countries today. From 8 nationalities to 42 nationalities and from less than 1 per cent, women in the Management Cadre to 12 per cent today - proving that nothing is impossible.

I have learnt from him the power of perseverance and the constant striving for perfection. His meticulous attention to detail, his vision, his integrity, his equanimity and fortitude in the midst of the most challenging environment, his philosophical attitude and above all his nobility these inherent characteristics of his, never cease to amaze me. Kumar Mangalam believes, that your attitude determines the altitude. And there is great meaning to be gleaned, from such a philosophy.

The third lesson that I have learnt is, that in life at every step, courage is extremely

critical. Courage can help one, face all obstacles. The opposite of courage is fear, and being risk averse. In life, you have to take risks. We have to conquer, the fear of the unknown. And this I learnt from my husband, Adityaji, my greatest guru. I recall his words and I quote - "Hope is the only thing stronger than fear". Unquote.

Let me drive home this point with an example. Way back in the 1960s, when globalization, was not even a word in the corporate lexicon, he set his sights, beyond the shores of India. Over the next three decades, he made significant, on-the-ground investments, across the South East Asian region, earning immense respect for both himself and our country. It was sheer courage and clairvoyance on his part.

Speaking of him, I must say that, he was a true **karmayogi.** There was a uniqueness to Adityaji. Beyond dynamism. Beyond vision. So much of compassion. He had a lot of positive energy, the passion and the edge, to do something for the underprivileged, besides his companies' stakeholders. It wasn't cheque book philanthropy. I deeply admired these traits. And that then, had a resonance in my own life, moulding it in so many ways.

One example is that of our, setting up of the, 'Aditya Birla Centre for Community Initiatives and Rural Development'. Here our vision extends, far beyond the areas in which we operate, to the human development index of our country. We envision - "An India free from poverty. An India of inclusive growth. An India where every person realises his or her optimal potential. An India

where every human being lives a life of dignity. An India that can hold her head high, in the hegemony of nations".

Let me now come to my fourth learning, and that is to always stay positive and be compassionate. Unfortunately, today too many people harp on the negatives, and what is wrong with the world. Such people are toxic. I find that always, teaming up with people, who have a sunny, cheerful disposition, is indeed worthwhile. Because you then see the bright side of life.

Let me also add here, Voltaire, the French intellectual who lived in the age of enlightenment said and I quote him - "Doubt is not a pleasant condition but certainty is absurd" unquote.

Voltaire is alluding to a simple truth. Acceptance is much easier than challenging. I believe, it is important to have a questioning mind, and to keep challenging yourself.

Moving on to compassion. Compassion gives us a great inner strength. It is spirituality of the highest order, for it leads to positivity and contentment. It is the negation of the feeling of hatred, revenge and criticism of fellow sentients. It is the unconditional acceptance of oneself and others also. It is in that unique sense of caring, which binds people, into a single human family. In sum, the principle of वसुधेव कुदुंबकम. And when you are compassionate, forgiving comes naturally too. All of you will recollect the saying "To err is human, to forgive is divine".

So my fifth learning pertains to the importance of forgiveness. This is a bridge that all of us, have walked on at some point in life. All of us have felt, that what has happened has not

been fair and that you have been victimized or taken advantage of. And the most natural response is to hit back or keep nurturing a grouse. Honestly, not a good way to deal with it.

To my mind, forgiveness is a superb mix of tolerance and acceptance. I believe forgiveness is not a onetime action, but it is a way of life that we consciously opt for. It entails self-restraint, self-control, and self-discipline. I am by no means saying that, it is a cake walk. But it is still worthwhile because it helps us move away from hatred and revenge. It helps us remove the clutter of the mind because then you do not keep going back to the incident or the person and think about it, and what should you do to hit back and teach him or her a lesson. When you are free from such thoughts, to a great extent you are at peace and in harmony with your inner self. In sum, forgiveness is about your inner strength.

Let me now move to my sixth lesson, which I value and that is to go, with the flow. That is to live in the moment. Not carrying any baggage of the past that can disturb one's equanimity and peace of mind. It is taking everything in your stride. I always think of life as a see-saw. Ups and downs are a part of it, regardless, of your position. It is God's way, to send messages to us. Basically, we are born to be happy - but midway, God throws a googly. He also gives you the strength and the courage, to brave the adversity. Remember, as Einstein said, "God does not play dice with the world". So it is best to go with the flow and not intellectualize, every event or happening in one's life. We have to be at peace with ourselves, irrespective of what the world offers.

From this stems the next learning - the seventh one - four words that have influenced me very deeply, "This too shall pass", which tell you that everything in life is ephemeral. Nothing lasts forever. In any situation it holds true, gives enormous strength, resilience and hope. So it helps, go through the rough times without despairing and good times without being too overwhelmed.

Moving on to the eighth lesson, it involves **expanding one's mind space**. By this I mean, willing to move out of your comfort zone. Mental dexterity, coupled with far reaching curiosity, gives a lot of strength. We must always keep an open mind. 'Curiosity, is the wick in the candle of learning', as so well said, by the noted 19th century author, William Ward. Likewise, William Samuel Johnson, the American statesman, who was notable for signing the United States Constitution, remarked and I quote him "Curiosity is, in great and generous minds, the first passion and the last". I have learnt that curiosity leads us to new paths. It is also an intellect stimulator. The urge to know is a powerful force, because it means that we should never stop questioning. When we do so, we are automatically learning!

I would now like to share with you, as the ninth lesson, that of an overarching philosophy of life -that of 'live and let live'.

Today, I am about 80 per cent successful, in living this philosophy day in and day out. I believe, that this 'live and let live' principle, embodies the philosophy of tolerance. It helps you recognize, that every individual is distinct, different from you and has the right to his own views and attitude.

And this brings me to my concluding point, the tenth one, that is to think beyond yourself. It is always worthwhile to expand one's vision to transcend ourselves. It is necessary to think beyond one self and include a universe that is far larger of those, with whom we are unfamiliar such as the underprivileged. However much it hurts, we have to reckon with the fact, that we have the largest concentration, of the poor in the world and, the largest number of the hungry as well. Today, more than ever, it is necessary to look into these societal issues. And I hope you all will pay heed to these challenges that we grapple with as a nation.

On doing well, by doing good, I would like to read to you an excerpt from the Dalai Lama, who was the winner of the Nobel prize. And I quote -

"While we exist as human beings, we are like tourists on holiday. If we play havoc and cause disturbance, our visit is meaningless. If during our short stay, we live peacefully, help others and at the very least, refrain from harming or upsetting them, our visit is worthwhile. What is important, is to see, how we can best lead a meaningful everyday life, how we can bring about peace and harmony in our minds, how we can help contribute to society". Unquote.

In the same spirit, let me conclude, with the words of Albert Einstein - "It is high time, the ideal of success should be, replaced with the ideal of service... Only a life lived for others, is a life worthwhile".

Thank you!

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QUOTES

Ideas are easy. Implementation is hard.

Guy Kawasaki, Alltop Co-Founder and Entrepreneur

If you do the things that are easier first, then you can actually make a lot of progress.

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook

The next big thing is the one that makes the last big thing usable.

Blake Ross, Mozilla