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APJ Abdul Kalam: A Motivational Icon for the Youth in India

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Abstract

Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam was a simple, down-to-earth man who believed in marrying the goodness of human spirit with the power of technology for maximizing good for the human race. Abdul Kalam, one of the most remarkable leaders of contemporary India, remained an extremely popular public figure, as long as he remained alive, but even after his demise, he remained a guiding star to many a strayed boats. He had 1.8 million people following him on Facebook and used to receive about 300 emails every day. His active and visible presence on the social media provided a unique opportunity to engage with his readers in a way that has never done before. His books provide insights into the issues which concerns and engage the minds of young Indians. The wide spectrum of issues reflected in these books are like the colours of the rainbow, each one different from the other, but all emanating from one light. Through his books, he wanted to keep alive the lights in the minds and souls of our youth, and inspire them to reach great heights of achievement. Reflecting upon a wide range of themes of abiding human, national and global concerns, Dr. Kalam's inspiring, and magical words engage and captivate the listener's mind and heart. He uses simple words directly from the heart to air out his opinion on wide range of themes, concerning both national and global. It is remarkable that how, APJ Abdul Kalam, the 11th President of India, continues to be such a popular public figure even years demitting office. Much sought, much admired, he is an inspiration for the youth and they usually turn to him for advice, guidance, and solace or just simply to be in touch with him, as long as he remained alive. The mentoring, the directions, the solutions he provides are all based on the wisdom of his experience, as he knows well the trials and tribulations of the hard rocky road of life that he has walked from Rameswaram to the Rashtrapati Bhawan. Reflecting on the challenges of personal growth which each one of us faces in our daily lives to the more complex issues confronting us as a society and as a nation, his books provides a roadmap for living an inspired and purposeful life.

Keywords: Motivation, Guidance, Icon, Complexity of life

Though Kalam has written many popular books like *Indomitable Spirit*, *Ignited Minds*, *Wings of Fire*, *Turning Points*, *Spirit of India*, *Inspiring Thoughts* etc. But his book *Forge Your*

Future (2014) is perhaps unique. Actually Dr Kalam shortlisted 5 titles for this book which were put online for twelve days and people were asked to vote for the title they liked the most. A staggering 41,675 people sent in their votes and the title *Forge Your Future*, got the maximum number of votes. *Forge Your Future* provides an insight into the issues which concerns and engage the minds of the Indians. As Dr Kalam has written in the Introduction to this book, "The wide spectrum of issues reflected in the book are like the colours of the rainbow, but all emanating from one light. And that one light is the illumination of the soul, the honesty, the hope and the curiosity radiating through the minds of our young people. Through this book I want to keep alive and shining bright, the minds and souls of our youth, and inspire them to reach great heights of achievement." (*Forge Your Future*, 11)

In fact, Dr Kalam has very effectively used social media and internet. The youth, through their mails, tries to find the solutions to problems that they are facing in their lives and Kalam says that, "My replies to the questions are based on my personal life-experiences and all that I have learnt from reading books and my interactions with political and spiritual leaders" (12). He further adds that, "Despite the fact that I spent my childhood in Rameswaram, an isolated island in the south of India, I could get educated, find a job and overcome many obstacles to become the President of my country. If I could overcome the hardships and achieve what I have, so can you or anyone else." (12) Dr Kalam spent much of his time communicating with the youth through his speeches, books and travel across the nation and abroad, talking to them and motivating them. He always tell the youth to focus on the solution and not the problem. He always used to say to the youth that their life should be a manifestation of their dreams, "I always call upon the youth to dream lofty dreams and invoke in them a vision of their future. And in achieving yours dreams, you are bound to face difficulties and obstacles, but with determination and discipline you can always overcome them, just as I have been able to do." (13)

The beloved late President often used to quote the following hymn from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

Asto Ma Sadgamaya;
Tamsa Ma Jyotiryagamaya;
Mritiyo Ma Amritam Gamaya.

From ignorance, lead me to truth
From darkness, lead me to light
From death, lead me to immortality.

Just as truth eliminates falsehood, light dissolves darkness, and after death the soul becomes immortal, in the same way, love dissolves hate, joy dissolves sadness and faith dissolves doubt. Kalam said that as a child he was very fortunate to have been taught by caring and inspiring teachers. He further says that when we walk into the presence of people who operate at the highest energy levels, by just being in their energy field, everything that is

diseased or in disharmony, is healed. Dr Kalam gave example and says, "It is not that people such as Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela did not face any problems, hardships or crises in their lives; they did but they faced them with truth, fearlessness and compassion. They too had their fears but they had the courage to face up to their fears. They looked fear in the face and walked straight into it. They did not run away from a bad situation and neither did they blame somebody else." (14) Kalam further adds that we have to learn to identify the negative thoughts inside us and work towards removing such cancerous cells of negativity and defeatist thinking. If individually, each one of us can do this, then collectively, we would be able to overcome many of the problems we face as a society and will see dramatic improvement around us.

Further, Kalam feels that when somebody is preparing for success, his or her self-confidence plays a very decisive role. He gave example and says that, "the confident doctor whose advice we rely on, to the charismatic confidence of an inspiring speaker, self-confident people have qualities that everyone admires." (20) Self-confidence is indeed important in almost every aspect of our lives. If we lack self-confidence then in such a case we find it difficult to become successful, and as we do not achieve success we lose whatever self-confidence we have. In this world of ours, some people are reluctant, nervous and overly apologetic and some speaks clearly and are optimistic. Self-confident people inspire confidence in others. Kalam advises that the good thing is that self-confidence can be learned and built upon. We need to work, and work hard to build our self-confidence. Kalam points out that, "The two main things which contribute to self-confidence are: self-efficacy and self-esteem. We gain a sense of self-efficacy when we see ourselves mastering skills and achieving goals in the skill areas which are important to us. This is the confidence that comes from knowing that if we worked hard to build our expertise in a particular area, we will be able to succeed." (21-22) Kalam is of opinion that goal-setting is probably the most important activity that we can learn in order to improve our self-confidence. We should set a goal in the area we love and should work hard to achieve that goal. This will trigger a lifelong process of achieving success.

Kalam was himself a dreamer and opines that the youth of India must learn to dream. He adds that, "Dreams are not those which you see in your sleep, dreams are those which don't let you sleep. But to make your dreams come true you have to be wide awake." (26) The twenty-first century is the century of technology and innovation, but the amount of time that we have to experience these opportunities is constant. The youth should benefit from the widest range of experiences available to them, as the world has become more expansive. There are two ways in front of the youths to realise their dreams. One, is to increase the amount of time that we have at our disposal. Another, is to increase the amount that we can do and achieve in the available time. Thus, longevity and cognitive augmentation are the two life-goals. Kalam advises the youths that they should live a simple and pious life as it will help them remain healthy even as they grow old. This will make more time available to them

to experience all that they would like to do. Every youth must eat healthy, live healthy and think healthy. Kalam also says that today for youths, the new opportunities are boundless. But in order to annex them they need two other things, faith and determination, "Faith and determination are the two essential wheels needed to roll over the opportunities in life. Without them the real meaning of life can never be realized." (28-29) Determination is the power that sees us through all our frustrations and obstacles. It helps in building our will-power which is the very basis of success. If we have the strength and determination, we can successfully face the challenges of life and in process, may even be able to change the world.

Kalam also stressed on the importance of navigating time, "Time is said to be eternal. It is said that time has neither a beginning nor an end." (32) He further adds, "Time is a free force. It does not wait for anyone. It is commonly said that time and tide wait for no man. Time is money. A minute not usefully spent is an eternal loss. . . .One has to strike the iron when it is hot because time gone by never returns." (33) If one will waste time, it will waste him. Time is key to success. We have no control over it. The only thing that we can do is learn to navigate time to reach our goal or destination. Time is also said to be a wise counsellor. The passage of time allows an individual to grow. This growth provides experience which helps in decision-making. Time reminds us to act, and act wisely. Some people merely keep thinking about how to spend their time while the wise and talented make use of their time fruitfully. It is said that the wisest grieve the most at the loss of time. Those who do not know the importance of time, waste it or rather they spend it doing nothing.

For Kalam, failures and adversity are the best teachers of the youth. He said that, "there is no success without failures. Success is the final destination. Failures are intermittent blockades. If you cross the blockades with courage and conviction, you will overcome the failures and attain success in your life." (37) He said that we should welcome suffering and when it does appears in our lives, we should be aware that, beneath its negative surface, there could be hidden opportunity for growth and deepening. He further adds that, "I can only say that psychological turmoil can be the catalyst for a kind of 'spiritual alchemy', transforming the 'base metal' of suffering into the 'gold' of intense well-being and freedom. In a spiritual sense, turmoil has some sort of an 'awakening' effect, and illustrates the almost infinite capacity of human beings to overcome suffering. That is the reason why some people emerge from difficult times and situations stronger, wiser and more grateful, while other sink into depression, bitterness or resignation." (40-41) He advises the youth to use the difficult situation they are facing, to tap into their spirituality and build upon it, to achieve something meaningful in their life. So long as they have the courage to face up to, and accept negative situations, there is nothing to fear.

Besides, Kalam also points out that that exemplary courage shown by the youth at critical time often resulted in their success. Fear and courage are indeed two sides of the same coin. He adds that, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. A brave person is not one who is afraid of his fear, but who conquers that fear. There is no living

being that is not afraid when it faces danger. True courage is in facing danger when you are afraid. Courage is about doing what you are afraid to do." (44) He further adds that the one who feels no fear is a fool and the one who lets fear rule him is indeed a coward. We must have the courage to act instead of reacting. Kalam says, "Many of us give up on life when we don't get what we have been aspiring for, be it a job, a relationship or anything else. Courage is the ability to be able to cope with the disappointment of not getting what we desire, and yet, move on in life." (44-45) In fact, another attribute of courage is to follow our heart. As passion is what drives our creativity, and makes us do extraordinary things, and allows us to discover and challenge ourselves. Passion is at the heart of courage. In choosing to dare we may momentarily lose our footing but to not dare risk losing our own self. Courage is also to exhibit perseverance in the face of adversity. Kalam said, "When we are feeling afraid or when faced with danger, we should not try to convince ourselves that there is no danger, but rather to spend our time and energy in strengthening ourselves to go on in spite of the danger." (46) In a way, standing up for what is right is also a type of courage. Courageous people stand up for something because they believe it is the right thing to do. Besides, expanding one's horizons and letting go of the familiar is also a courage. Kalam adds, "This world demands the qualities of youth; youth is not defined as a time-span of life but by a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of an appetite for adventure over a life of ease." (49) Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. In fact, courage is also facing suffering with dignity and faith. A person of courage is a person full of faith. A courageous person bears the accidents of life with dignity and grace, making the best of his circumstances. Courage in everybody's heart, in everybody's character. Courage is to dream for a better life even in the most difficult times and to awaken to one's potential even in the most hopeless situation.

Kalam goes on to say that we should develop our spirit and try to make it 'indomitable'. He says, "We need to understand that everything originates from human mind, and the power of the mind originates from our spirit. From our spirit we can derive power not only over our mind, but over almost any idea or thought in the world. I call this power, the Indomitable Spirit." (52-53) The body of Indomitable Spirit stands on two feet; one, of vision for higher goals and two, firm thought. Vision is the ability to perceive something which is not physically visible, but is visible only through mental acuteness and foresight. Firm thought is the second component of indomitable spirit. Kalam said that to achieve any kind of success we first have to succeed in controlling our senses. Having mastered that, and combined with our vision, we can achieve any goal that we choose.

References

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