

The Awakening

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“Sir! Sir! Ahsan used swear words with the teacher and she is crying! Three boys from class 4th rushed to the office to tell me this. One of them said, “Sir when you are not around, he uses bad words for you too.” Following my instruction, the boys went to call Ahsan to my office, the principal’s office. The children left and I sat lost in thought: what could I do with this boy? Should I punish him...but this ‘strategy’ had been tried so often. When we called the parents to the school they were equally fed- up and would say, “Just do something, anything, to fix this animal.”

What can we do? There was just one solution: to get rid of this boy, to expel him from school. Before we did that it seemed appropriate to let his parents know and to talk with all the teachers. I had decided that no matter how much the parents begged and pleaded, Ahsan had to go, because if he didn’t, I would. After all, using abusive language for a teacher is no small matter. And then Ahsan’s entire record was overflowing with similar incidents showing a lack of control: he had bitten other children, caused them head injuries; he would injure children by pushing them or he would cut them with a razor blade.

All these things flashed across my mind, all of a sudden. Just then his class teacher entered my office, wiping her eyes. She told me that when Ahsan’s class-fellows came to inform me, he had run out of class out of fear. Angry, I asked for his diary so I could send a note to his parents. I found out that he hadn’t brought his diary to school that day. I asked for his rough copy and opened it to write a note telling his parents to come.

What happened after I opened the diary changed everything for me and for Ahsan. This one chance incident has changed the direction of Ahsan's life. I asked the teacher if this was truly Ahsan's hand writing. Yes it was, they told me. In the diary was written, "Everyone says bad things about me. Everyone hates me. Now even Mom has started to hate me. What should I do? There is only one solution left now, to end my life.

Ahsan's words struck me like lightning. Where had he run off right now after hearing about my arrival? Had he gone to drown himself in the nearby canal? Was he actually going to take his life? Who will be responsible for his death? Who will answer for this loss of a human life? These questions created turmoil within my soul. I asked the children to look for him in school, and I left the school on a motor bike to look for him. I found him and brought him back to school. I realized that in my teaching practice, there was something very destructive. Although I continue to receive a lot of praise for what I do, I was not so sure that this praise was very well-deserved. It was for the first time that I had seen a child like Ahsan with tender care. This was for the first time that I had changed my attitude towards such a child. In a few days time I had earned Ahsan's full confidence. He now trusted me well enough to know that his secrets were safe with me.

One day Ahsan told me:: Sir when I swear at someone it's almost beyond my control; its not that I enjoy doing it...just that at that moment I don't like you but later on I always feel ashamed .."

With my new mode of thinking, I was now able to unearth valuable information about Ahsan that I hadn't been able to do in the last two years. Ahsan had a brother a year younger to him who was good in his studies and had a positive social attitude. Right from the start the younger brother was appreciated while Ahsan had to face criticism. After

Careful deliberation and research I came to the conclusion that Ahsan was under severe mental and emotional distress due to this discriminatory behaviour. Seeking revenge from society by his deplorable behaviour was his subconscious reaction to such treatment.

After realizing this truth, I softened my approach towards all my students and not just Ahsan. I also made Ahsan's parents aware of the truth of the matter. Ahsan's social attitudes changed everyday; he was now viewed positively at home and at school.

Because of this incident, I saw many facts about teacher attitudes and child psychology; I decided then to start my own school which would be a center of learning to awaken this awareness. Today, by God's Grace, I am running my own school where children's mental and emotional needs are dealt with with sensitivity. There are various plans underway to do more in this regard.

I often think how each one of us teachers has an Ahsan in his class but do we ever take the trouble to read the writing on the pages of their diary or the script that runs in their tender minds?

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