

# BUILDING HOPES ON A MOUNTAIN PEAK

Towards World Peace Through  
Schools Of Tomorrow



# HL CHOPRA

Foreword by HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

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# I. He Only May Chastise Who Loves

Rabindranath Tagore

Once a little boy at the Rajghat Besant School asked J Krishnamurti about his idea of a third World War?

Krishanji's reply was gentle but emphatic, 'We must be concerned not with World War Three, but whether each one of us is contributing to war in our daily life'.

—J Krishnamurti (1895–1986)

## 1. spare and spoil

*Victor*\* gets 'traumatic perforations' in his ear drum from the slap he got for not bringing his Mathematical instrument box; *Kavya*\* collapses after being made to stand in the sun for hours on being late; *Bhanu*\* commits suicide after being humiliated in the class, and *Albert*\* tries to immolate himself in the school washroom because of his teacher's thrashing. Many *Victors*, *Kavyas*, *Bhanus* and *Alberts* are victimised and suffer in our schools. Such a data base covers an encyclopedia in several volumes.

The Parable of *The Old Testament* in the Bible (Matt. xviii. 21–22) acts like a Bible for schools:

Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how often shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Till seven times?'

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\* Names are changed for keeping privacy.

Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.'

Had Jesus been a witness today, he would have prayed, 'Lord, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.'

## 2. history repeats itself

Teachers' cheerful disposition motivates students to make schools joyful places of learning. Unfortunately, children are targeted with various means and tools still considered essential in deeds for offences. Strangely, the adults who have shunned violence in their life hardly think twice before turning violent on kids. Several teachers are a witness to the liberal use of cane and slap besides sarcasm, ridicule, scolding and derogatory remarks.

In one of the East Asian countries, a pupil who called his teacher 'dog' behind his back had to eat 1,000 flies or to accept 100 strokes from his teacher, or 1000 from the class monitor as punishment. He chose the peer mode. Being in pain after getting 200 lashes, he pleaded to be allowed to eat flies but vomited after swallowing three flies. The teacher tried to cram down the remaining ones down his throat. His head teacher exonerated the teacher. (*The Strait Times, Singapore*, October 28, 2000)

A teacher, in another Asian school, used to whip students with a cane wrapped with electrical wires. Discreet cell phone footage of the scarred buttock exposed him on the national television. The teacher was instantly fired thereafter. (*Sunday Express, London*, August 31, 2010)

Rita\*, a nine-year-old girl sustained an injury in one eye that became critical, in a private school in 2010 for not completing her homework. The vision of her second eye also got affected. She was operated upon it eight times for the injury, and later died of *Neuroblastoma*, a malignant tumour that develops from nerve tissue, and spreads to the brain and throat. (*Outlook India*, November 2012)

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\* Names are changed for keeping privacy.

The United Nations urges all countries to make physical violence obsolete in the curriculum. The Right to Education [RTE] Act in India shuts its doors to such treatment. Millions of students meekly accept it as customary. Still, there are many users around us and people wonder if it is time to retaliate.

### 3. young body, old heads

Many have suffered at the hands of their teachers, but they did not let sarcasm become a scar forever. Here is a glimpse of the portrait gallery.

Sir Winston Churchill disliked the Reverend Herbert William Sneyd-Kinnersley, his 'sadist' Headmaster at St George's, Ascot. George Orwell too recalled painfully the Wilkes, his Headmaster, who always tortured him for his unavoidable bed-wetting at night. Surprisingly, Mahatma Gandhi confessed his reservations about his Headmaster, Dorabji Edulji Gimi, who was a strict disciplinarian.

'Your son is addled. We won't let him come to school anymore', wrote Thomas Alva Edison's class teacher to the pupil's mother. Alternately, Albert Einstein was critical of Braun, the History teacher, who expected him to learn facts of the historical battles rather the cause of conflicts.

Khushwant Singh too recalled nostalgically his Headmistress who used to hit the errant boys hard in his school.

They turned their trauma into stardom. Millions more could have stamped themselves on the history pages remarkably if the scenario had been supportive.

### 4. the pioneers

History records Rev. Dr. Richard Busby, the English Anglican priest and the most celebrated schoolmaster of his time, had served as Headmaster of Westminster School, England. He was a ruthless disciplinarian, besides being a classical scholar *par excellence*, and produced distinguished pupils in various fields.

Another former Head, Dr. John Keate of the Eton College, took up birching to restore order for the dwindling discipline. Tony Little who reminisced sadly that he has never come across any corporal punishment in the school in his tenure of 40 years as a schoolmaster in Eton.

Simon Watson also records that his predecessor had bequeathed him a cane or two which he did not use. There is no beating in the school since then. It ended the belief *to spare the rod is to spoil the child*. Revolutionary thinking started coming in the hope of a change. A few other headmasters joined the league, but with little result initially. Thomas Arnold of the Rugby School, treated his senior boys as gentlemen, empowering them to share responsibility for morality and discipline.

In India, Headmaster A E Foot did not permit flogging in the Doon School. There was no 'punishment', but only 'sanctions'. India's former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the school alumnus, informed that masters here did not enforce discipline with birches, but with yellow cards. One's own conscience ruled the discipline.

## 5. unwept and unsung heroes

Punishment Drill (PD) of prefects discreetly or openly in schools makes them powerful: making students bend in the cock-posture; run a few rounds of the playground, or pledging a thousand times to be at their prefects' commands. Only a few are sent to senior authorities for indiscipline. Any conscientious person would wonder at prefects looking after the discipline of others if they have not schooled in discipline themselves.

They also love fagging by making junior boys do errands for them: fetching and serving them refreshments at their expense. They become masters and the youngsters their servants. In the residential schools, prefects lookout for an opportunity to showcase their superiority by punishing the students, *en masse* discreetly, preferably after supper or during late night hours for any lapse.

Recalling my teaching days, once the junior boarders were about to be bullied after supper. An influential prefect with his team

wanted to usurp law in his hands. Seeing through their motives, I opposed it vehemently and frustrated their plans. Students thanked me for it; while the prefects' blood boiled. I was glad to see my school being saved from any embarrassment.

Corporal punishment may teach students their lessons of life, but with irreparable harm. It is reported to cause lifelong damage to children with poor school performance, juvenile delinquency and sexual dysfunction. It also risks them to brain injuries and other disabilities. Their ability to develop positive attitude gets impaired and destroys their trust in their teachers and schools. They become mute sufferers of the bullies' behaviour. As a result, they grow up as angry and revengeful adults. Psychologists correlate it with violent behavior in later years.

A daring step in the history of the child treatment is the supportive letter of golfer Tiger Woods to a high school boy who tried to commit suicide after being bullied for the speech impediment as of Tiger Woods. ([www.mirror.co.uk](http://www.mirror.co.uk) › *Sport* › *Golf* › *Tiger Woods*)

## 6. inspire confidence

Psychologists believe that boys are more exposed to bullying than girls, particularly during the middle school years. Though boys tend to face direct and physical bullying but both sexes also face indirect bullying, including social isolation. The family problems, like frequent conflicts between parents resulting in separation or divorce and lack of attention, may contribute to children becoming bullies. They suffer from physical and psychological distress.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) recommends an Anti-Bullying Committee in each school that should create awareness, and implement bullying prevention programme. An atmosphere of confidence and trust among students needs to be built up, and a platform where they can raise their concerns. Educationist P. Vijayachandran recommends 'Awareness day' every week. Students should be sensitized about human rights, democratic values and gender sensitivity. A counsellor's role and the psychosocial and inter personal skills help in dealing with anger management,

tackling critical situations, and raising the level of empathy towards peers.

Fariha Junaid, a teacher, believed in Abraham Lincoln's words, 'Bullies are the easiest to lick'. She deals with a leader of the bullies in her school, who had thought of controlling his teachers also. Since he was a sweet child triggered by others, she found a leader and a hero in him. She decided to make him love the softer side of his persona and tried to win his confidence to make him realise his potential as he was more confident now. She prefers engaging such children in productive activities and feels that they will never let their supportive mentors down.

Bullying extends its boundaries to teachers as well. In a certain boarding school, the prefects acted as unbridled horses and decided to avenge their own Housemasters. They had planned and hijacked some of them at midnight by sealing them inside their respective houses. Next morning, all the Housemasters were found missing from the morning assembly. The prefects had their last laugh.

The whole world is full of possibilities with no place for negative perceptions.

## 7. skating over thin ice

Several Indian internet-savvy children face getting harassed online. There are numerous cyber-bullying cases where boys and girls are tempted by the online chat and later suffered in some form.

Some students created a *confessions page* on the social network to express their ire against their uncompromising teachers. The big *hate* group went on posting comments against them in negative shades. The mastermind with his accomplices became heroes. This exercise had become more popular with several likely-minded students who also joined the bandwagon.

Fortunately, the mastermind left behind a clue of their contact details that were hunted down. The culprits accepted their fault. Their parents also came to know of their activities. They were given few sessions of counselling. This stopped all the activities going on. It ended in a good catharsis.

In another case, John\* became friendly with a girl through online chat. This process went to the extreme and she proposed him for marriage. She tempted him to bring a good sum of money and gold which he smuggled out from his father's safe. She also promised to do the same and assured him of making arrangements with her family advocate for court marriage. Finally, they met in a restaurant. The girl turned out to be very kind and humble at the outset. She managed to take control of John's money bag quickly and disappeared after sprinkling acid on his face causing permanent disfiguring. He was hospitalised and underwent a long surgical treatment. The police could arrest the miscreant girl who turned out to be a married woman.

In both the real life accounts above, timely action in the first case saved the teachers from further trauma, while John who did not take his family into confidence had to suffer in the second story.

## 8. reforms bring revolution

Once I found myself pitted against Pratham\* in the class. He was boisterous and unruly that day. I haven't forgotten the incident that taught me a lesson, though he doesn't have its single trace in his memory.

I had started my lesson in the class. I implored him to be quiet and attentive. His behaviour remained unchanged. I got angry and turned him out of the class. After the lesson got over, I rushed out of the class room asking him to keep standing there as a punishment. He followed the order. It was break-time. I reached the staff room. The whole scene was visible from there. Principal also witnessed that Pratham's friends had assembled around him who became an object of their applause. He called me, saying, 'Look, you turned him out. You were right since he did not listen to your words. His friends have now crowned him a hero, and you are reduced to be a villain.' I got my lesson: treat the case on the spot, by keeping our emotions under control. Otherwise, this is a sort of abuse.

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\* Names are changed for keeping privacy.

Hooligans and difficult children do not deserve violent methods of treatment. Literature reminds us of the Dickensian time when Oliver's 'asking for more' met with disapproval and flogging. Some fictional schoolmasters are poor role models of the adult behaviour: Wackford Squeers of Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Thwackum and Squire of *Tom Jones*, Edward Murdstone and his sister Jane of *David Copperfield*. Miss Trunchbull, the fictional Headmistress of Crunchem Hall Elementary School, resurrected in the film *Matilda*, was a cruel, harsh and blood thirsty educator. Poetic Justice demands different treatment.

Francis Fanthome felt that physical punishment is not a deterrent for casual or habitual offences as children get used to it as a matter of course. There is a divergence of opinion on the alternate sanctions. Psychology shows that flogging on weekdays and sermons on Sundays is not a perfect technique for developing virtue. Different codes of dealing with children are set in now. Schools with the alternate non-violent solutions, such as counselling, detention, weekend school, temporary withdrawal of privileges, mild admonition and use of student mediators to resolve conflicts peacefully produce positive results.

We come across many characters whose individual rights of freedom are suppressed. The talent in art, music or in other fields is not recognised by the schools. Surprisingly, many of them have shone in distinct fields later.

Hence, they should be treated accordingly.

## 9. beating the blues

The vital bond between school and family is divine. It is observed that students who are put down soon develop emotional side effects. There are incidents reported of children suffering physically and mentally. This harmful cycle needs to disappear forever. The exceptional teachers and keen parents courageously look for effective methods to keep the evil at bay. Delay in admitting the guilt and postponement of punishment is the alternative pragmatic method gone obsolete.

Time, being a great healer, brings out a sea change in the students' behaviour. Many educationists prefer to give time to the mischief-doers to let them ponder over their faults. M. N. Kapur made us experiment that postponement of punishment to the guilty brings in its cathartic effects in a majority of cases. Good sense prevails over heavy arrogance. The norms of punishment in schools should reform, but not alienate them from school and home. Parents and schools should share the responsibility. No miracle is possible overnight. Steps should be initiated to root out this primitive deterrent.

Teachers break the mould with their innovative methods of dealing with offences. Their positive interaction with students helps in bringing a change in the perception. They advocate building up good values of behaviour, patience, tolerance and empathy. Kamakshi Balakrishnan prescribes exposure to life-skills to combat the exposure of media, and deal with the challenges of life.

Besides, theatre and media provide effective platforms for smoothing out the strained situations and mental conflicts leading to better learning. The thought-patterns of literary characters that students enact on stage vent their emotions. Role play, workshops and story-making are some of the anti-bullying strategies. Fine Art and Music help in purging the heavy emotions. Art is the saviour of mankind. Sasikrishnan feels that a piece of art goes beyond the frame to instill an attitude of achievement, pride and self-respect. Through group activities, children learn to share ideas, space, time and other resources.

Students are leaders of future. What they think today, the nation will enact tomorrow. If schools involve them in framing their perceptions of life, they are on the way of becoming responsible citizens and torch-bearers of tolerance and compassion for the world around.

Confessions and forgiveness in education are obsolete concepts today. Students need to be encouraged to retrospect and write their confessions. Educationist P. Aravindakshan recommends developing a mindset of feeling sorry on getting into the errant mode, irrespective of being right or wrong. This does not hurt anyone's pride. It is

unwise to retaliate every time to an offence. Denial, rejection and disregard are powerful tools of the alternate punishment. Negative impulses do not make the curriculum. Competitiveness and an obsession to excel lead to aggression. Education philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti rejects comparison with other kids. Praise and rewards disrupt the spirit of good-will, co-operation and discourage them from adopting correct thinking patterns.

An aura of positive confidence can be built up by providing them with a platform to express their views on discipline, morals and ethics. The lives of great persons always inspire. Besides, some light chores give them a sense of building and protecting, like nurturing a garden, fixing broken parts of a gadget or machinery; and team work like painting, cane work, cleaning the environment and helping the weak peer.

The leadership of educators strengthens administrative commitment and builds up the right climate. Schools can evolve more suggestive strategies. No readymade solution is on the platter, but the attitude to invent is to be encouraged.

## 10. charisma of parents

Rabindranath Tagore said that a parent may only chastise his child if he loves. Parents should understand that the Lord disciplines the one He loves. His ways are different. People consider it is their birth right to punish their children. Not only schools being guilty of it; but in few cases, parents are equal partners in this.

Raising a child in nuclear families is a joyous experience, but it is a challenging task. It is a blessing to have parents who can raise well-adjusted children. Even a mischievous child can have a great potential. Unfortunately, various school experiences lead some parents to exercise the norms of conventional punishment under the pretext of love and care. They are surprised at their children not being caned even for small offences in schools.

A newly admitted child in the first standard at my school, whose father had not yet relocated from Dubai, was a reluctant student. His teacher wanted him to do what other students are doing, but she

got beatings and reprimands from him in front of the class. She got exasperated by this new experience. In spite of her counselling, there was no change in the scenario. On probing further, his mother revealed that she was offensive to her son at home for his behavior in the class. The situation improved after the father reached there.

Many parents are left in ire and awe on reading about Lulu, Amy's 7-years-old daughter, in Amy Chua's novel *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Her maternal ruthlessness makes Lulu practise on piano continuously, with no breaks for water or even bathroom, until at last, she mastered the piece; besides scoring grade not lower than 'A' in Mathematics and spelling drills with practice seven days a week was Amy's obsession. She teaches that perfection comes with practice for survival in the global economy.

Omar Farooq Ali recommends that today's parent should play the role of a parent rather than of a friend. Parents need to accept their children for their skills and capability and guide them what they can achieve, rather pushing them in unknown zones.

Family dynamics remain active at home in various ways. A child's vision is shaped by the harmony between the parents. Children sometimes become unintended victims while intervening in conflicts between the parents. In an instance, a teacher on my staff whose husband in anger had aimed a projectile at her accidentally that struck her daughter instead. This coincided with her school time. She was furious on reaching there. Her domestic tension was instantly passed on to her work field. Just imagine her mental poise in the classroom. I believe millions of children get victimised in domestic violence each year.

Parents influence their children's destiny and shape their behaviour. While some tolerate their parents' tantrums at home, others buckle down with pressure.

Their pent-up rage may make them give a bellowing war cry. This leads them to be insecure, violent and full of complexes; while, many retaliate by running away from homes, hiding facts, abusing and hurting.

The high-achiever parents tend to be demanding and have higher expectations of their children along with their threats, insecurity and

anxieties. They are noticed behaving like cruel taskmasters. A social worker once narrated to me that she knew a housewife, who during the chores, would keep her mentally retarded son tied up with ropes for hours. Somewhere the father made it a ritual to beat his son behind closed doors every day to avoid him getting distracted. No one is amazed to see that their children are losers in every field since they are being regularly spanked. Such sadistic behaviour resembles the nature of maltreatment given in prisons and concentration camps.

What the Lebanese poet Kahlil Gibran said about children long ago, is relevant for all the generations:

They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.  
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.  
For they have their own thoughts.

*(The Prophet, p. 18)*

It is a pity that parents need quality time for their children. The working parents are too tired to attend to the children's needs as the day ends. Hence, they seem to lose rapport and go out of tune with their children. Some psychologists ascribe it to the break-up of the joint family system, but parents pass on the buck to schools.

The child gets squeezed between the terrorising teachers and uncompromising parents at large. Many hats off to the innumerable parents who are role model for them.

Some parents are having expectations from their children which are coupled with the threats, building insecurity and developing anxieties.

## 11. confessions

During my school days, I was always scared of the fear of punishment. In an instance over fifty years ago, I was caught unawares whispering to another pupil. Without asking to explain my stance, my teacher

thrashed me so ruthlessly that I began to despise the whole institution of awards and punishment. Had I been given a chance then, I would have 'owned up' to my fault.

Innumerable helpless students sigh for relief. I feel that the cult of *owning up* is extinct now. Their sincere confessions liberate defaulters from the hard clutches of primitive action; unfortunately, students are not encouraged to consider its importance at large. These values are obsolete now, whereas students conceal their faults and sins. The instant spanking never makes a teacher good, but the insight in making them realize their mistakes and giving them chance to improve.

The fear of punishment does not lead them to admit their fault. In real life, it makes children dull, curbs their initiative and destroys sympathy from their hearts. To be free from fear is of much higher value than any educational success. Schools should present a fearless utopian vision with one's head held in high esteem. In days of yore, schools believed in honest confessions. Postponing punishment and giving offenders time to re-think over their offence can lead them to realise their actions. In wrong cases, their conscience pricks them. Students do admit their wrong actions. One never *owns up* for other people, but for oneself. If a child has repented of his action, there is no punishment for him, but a different way to tread for his sincere tears. Children are not categorised as 'good' or 'bad', but born with various reflexes and instincts. They have the stuff of a noble citizen as well as of a criminal.

The famous legend of George Washington's confession of his act of chopping down the cherry tree that his father had grown and nurtured about which he was unaware of. On seeing his father angry, he felt sorry and confessed that he did it with his hatchet. His father's anger cooled down, and he said, 'My son, that you should not be afraid to tell the truth which is more to me than a thousand trees, though they were blossomed with silver and had leaves of the purest gold!' The boy later rose to be the first President of the USA.

Similarly, my experience in a residential school in the Aravali range of mountains became a pacesetter for me. In an incident, a

mischievous boy Kiran\* was involved in the boarding house theft. He was asked and made to realize what he had done, but he remained adamant. The House Master recommended his suspension from the school and his immediate deportation to his house.

After giving Kiran a lot of time and persuasion, I asked him to walk up quietly to the school main gate at a distance of about a kilometre and a half from the school main building, pondering over his action. He did it obediently. On his return, he admitted his offence. Delay in awarding punishment had a cathartic effect. Time is a great crusader. Postponing the decision made him confess his guilt.

## 12. time - the greatest innovator

It is not always the school children who commit an offence and get punished. On certain occasions, even teachers go scot-free after punishing children irrelevantly. Principal Jack Gibson was supposed to be a strong protagonist of the fair deal. Whenever he felt his act leaving wrong effects on the students, he immediately somersaulted to atone for his sin in front of his amazed students.

Naren was also spanked mercilessly by the Geography teacher for his seemingly wrong answer. He held on to his own stance. The teacher slowly realised his mistake. He apologised to Naren and gave him due love and respect. This boy was later known as Swami Vivekanand.

Mahatma Gandhi had to punish one of his boys at the Tolstoy Farm since he was wild, adamant and argumentative. Gandhi admits that he picked a ruler and delivered a blow on his arm most violently. He was exasperated and he trembled since he had never punished. The boy cried out, not because he was in pain, but he couldn't see his teacher's pain in being driven by this violent resource. Gandhi was repentant.

Sanctity of aims and purity of conscience are the most important virtues in education, but these are in short supply now. The closed

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\* Names are changed for keeping privacy.

heart is our enemy. Hiding guilt besides ignoring true promptings of one's conscience is today's order. Bad emotions get damned like a polluted river and need some outlet. Since indiscipline and disorder predominate in schools, the ethic of 'owning up' of one's guilt is rare.

Educationists believe that the desired change should come from within us. The act of *owning up* purges the mind of guilty obsessions and resurrects the institution of faith-healing and sincerity. Concealing the truth and accepting falsehood is a sort of blasphemy.

It is essential that the schools possess positive culture and ambience of good behaviour; otherwise, chastisement thrusts them to medically critical zones and they may develop high-stress hormones deadly for their brain areas. Their immune system may be at the crossroads. Psychologists find the reflection of their violent future in it.

We need to envision a world of prosperity and hope for the future. Road rage is out of context and people need to be more tolerant and loving towards each other. We should exhibit compassion, peace, love and tolerance towards our children to ensure that they grow up seeing no violence. 'It is difficult to deal with terrorism through non-violence. The only way to tackle it is through prevention', said His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This is what the world needs today.

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