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Be Prepared-Exams or Otherwise

As the resplendent Sun approaches the vernal equinox (March 21st), there is a steady rise in day temperatures and the mercury keeps climbing all the way till you hit the *Mrignakshatra* (mid-June). This is also the time for frantic activity both in the commercial and academic spheres. Events like the Annual Budget, build up a kind of psychosis in business circles while the end of the financial year marks hectic activity among the professionals to meet their targets and deadlines-and yes, pay the taxes as well. The green earth keeps rapidly changing its colours to dark brown, probably in synch with the mood of the habitat.

There is also an apparent change noticeable among the children and the youth. The *maidans* wear a deserted look while the coaching classes and tutors seem to attract more and more crowds and attention. The queues at entertainment units and cultural bashes seem to evaporate giving way to anxious parents/youth lining up to collect forms, applications and admit cards for one exam or the other. Gone are the smiles and carefree faces seeking merriment, often replaced by grave and often confused countenance so unlike the years carried by their delicate shoulders. Anxious mothers and overzealous fathers add to the tension build-up, unknowingly stoking the stress ambers of the malleable youth. One thing leads to another as the paranoia builds up the phantom of examinations.

It is unfortunate that the process of annual examinations and testing is misunderstood and misconstrued as a means of elimination or denial of opportunity by many. The entire world over, including our country, testing and examination is basically a user-friendly mode for assessment and evaluation of the participants. Transparency, fairness, equity and decisiveness for all the stakeholders are the cardinal principles, which benchmark the process of evaluation and certification. The system therefore succeeds and perpetuates on the strength of the faith reposed by the stakeholders in it. Whispering doubts or misplaced fears of the stakeholders spell death knell of any order or authority. We should not be led by our fears but by our hopes, or else we would be hurting ourselves.

As the youth face one challenge after the other, in their struggle of survival and dominance in this competitive world, they must realise that testing and evaluation is an inseparable part of one's learning. Only when we have received and digested our knowledge can we hope to self-actualise and live by it. Therefore continuous monitoring and evaluation of our learning can alone lead to development of competencies, skills and proficiencies critical for our success in present times. As the world expands to a global village, the best in our country will have to match up to global competition and yet there is no '*measure for measure*' other than the measure of exams. We have to excel now to survive on this planet.

Therefore knowledge and examinations/assessments are two sides of the same coin. Just as you cannot separate the day from the night or a man from his shadow, you cannot hope to survive and deliver in a world without exams. However, what has to be understood is that we are put to test here all the time and whether there is the formality of a test or otherwise, we have to be always prepared to deliver when needed. "***Be prepared,***" said Lord Baden Powell and the call is addressed to one and all. If we spend each day and each hour of the day keeping this *mantra* in mind and practice, the phantoms and paranoia of exams will evaporate for good.

If the schools and colleges help build up a system of imparting knowledge in a participatory and experiential mode followed by continuous evaluation, assessment and counseling, the youth would be greatly benefited and unfortunate mishaps and psychological disasters could be easily averted. Learning will be enhanced, since knowledge will have to be practiced and shared with the beneficiaries and stakeholders. Outbound training, apprenticeships, internship with NGOs for socially relevant causes as well as programmes to develop sensitivity, care and compassion to the causes of the underprivileged sections of society will greatly enhance this process.

Exams or not, let's all be prepared to meet our teacher, our mentor and our examiner at any time and all the time. Maybe this will equip us to meet our ultimate teacher-the Creator when the time comes. Remember, as the poet John Donne said,

**...I am involved in mankind...
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.**