

- Education is not a status; it is a process of involvement in meaningful existence; it is the spirit of eternal questioning and an expanding attempt at discovery.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE EDUCATED?

Magazines and newspapers daily *feature* man's cruelty to man; *review* new and improved ways of lengthening life; *expose* man's continual questioning of God's role in the universe; *analyze* the inventions of scientists and the creations of writers, painters, and social visionaries; *announce* the average age of Nobel Laureates in 1966 as seventy-three in an age of youth worshippers; and, at Christmas time, *editorialize* the true art of giving as the gift of self.

In the midst of rampant chaos, confusion, and contrast, it seems timely for thinking persons, in nations holding high average levels of formal schooling for the masses, to ask, "What does it mean to be educated?" Public formal education is big business in the U.S. The great financial outlay may well be questioned: Why do we spend so much

for what ultimate purpose as far as each individual and/or nation is concerned? Are the people getting meaningful, worth-while return for their financial investment?

Establishing a common premise on which "What does it mean to be educated?" may be reviewed, Erich Fromm has indicated that to be educated is a process of searching for that kind of behavior which is most appropriate to unify, harmonize, and strengthen the individual and which promotes the most meaningful interrelatedness of the individual with human beings generally in the mutual experience of learning how to live. According to this definition, to be born would mean that life exists as a series of questions, problems, and trial and error living, implying a lifetime involvement in a meaningful exist-

tence for himself and for others.

Perhaps, to be educated is not a station to be achieved, as high school graduation, or a series of situations to be endured, as K through 12 programs, but a constantly evolving, expanding individual process in which, from birth to death, a dynamic organism called "man" finds himself in continual series of confrontations with others, with ideas, and with things in his personal search for the meaning of life. The ancient historian Herodotus wrote long ago, "The destiny of man lies in his own soul"; it is not, therefore, in the effectiveness of mass conformity which seems too often to pass for education today.

The dictionary states that *educated* means giving evidence of education. How is evidence of education given other than by materialistic acquisition of a sheepskin in competitive striving where winners take all and losers lose out — some to become drop outs, failures unemployed, criminals? Searching for the earliest meanings of the Latin

derivatives, of the word *education*, we find: (a) the drawing out of a person something potential or latent, and (b) aiding a person to become self-actualizing. No one ever becomes educated but is always in the process of becoming, each in his own way, at his own pace, limited by his own unique experiences and his personal internalizations of the meaning of these experiences.

Michener in his novel *Hawaii* ably described the job of living in these words:

For this is the journey that men make: to find themselves. If they fail in this, it doesn't matter much what else they find Money, position, fame, many loves, revenge — all are of little consequence when the tickets are collected at the end of the ride, if they tossed into a bin marked FAILURE. But if a man learns *why* he lives, if he knows *what* he can be depended upon to do, the *limits* of his courage, the *position* from which he will no longer retreat, the *secret reservoirs* of his determination, the *extent* of his dedica-

tion, the *depth* of his feeling, his honest and unposed *goals* both for himself and others — then he has found a mansion which he can inhabit with dignity all the days of his life.

It seems then that man who gives evidence of being educated has found life more than mere repetitive existence with its earthly rewards of food, clothing, shelter, recreation, diplomas, jobs accompanied by a regular paycheck and business investments, until a social security retirement abetted by annuities. Instead he who gives evidence of education has grown into a vital, creative awareness of his human uniqueness and is involved in the challenge of untangling the web of human potential and radiating glow in the process of creative production for others and with others.

This continuous nature of awareness seems to be the major evidence of becoming educated. When he becomes continuously aware of himself and the world around him and lives in accord with these conditions of being alive, he is a harmonious

part of all being. This is the ability to emphasize or walk around inside another person's skin and feel the way he does. It is the essence of universal brotherhood. When he distorts awareness of these conditions of being, he loses himself and his human uniqueness is out of harmony with others. For man intends both conservation and change, not destruction and chaos, and seeks both rest and variety, not power and competition; so harmony is not an easily acquired state, but must be earned continuously in collaboration with others jointly with self search and development.

Unfortunately, today scientific research tries to narrow man into too concrete, discrete, simple one-to-one relatedness; but he is far more than the sum of all his parts. To be educated is much more than experiencing so many years of confrontations in living. To be in the process of becoming educated means that he is growing within himself continuous awareness that he does not and cannot know all that he needs to know to protect

that which he loves or to forestall that which he fears. So long as he accepts responsibility for his personal choices, which is true freedom, but always recognizes the potentiality of tragedy, a law of life, he is truly aware of his human uniqueness. If he persuades himself that he has achieved certainty, or that he can achieve permanent security, then he distorts reality. This presents a current anomaly since today many feel "If I just get a college degree, I'll have it made!" or "If I make so much money . . ." or "If I get such-and-such job . . ." But the world of daily happenings is set in a larger world of human experiences. One life is inextricably interwoven with all other lives. As science shrinks the world, so the gate of any one man is bound to the fate of all men, like a huge interlocking chain.

To be educated means not only becoming more aware, but also becoming more involved, i.e., more genuine in all encounters, confirmations, engagements, and dialogues with others. This necessitates the belief that all men are created equally human and only a paper thin skin like the outer layer of onion skin hides the great common heart, soul, and mind of all humans. It is man-made barriers that divide the world of humans into enemy camps; only humans who become genuinely aware (truly educated) can remove the barriers of hunger, disease, prejudice, jealousies, and inequalities so that all men may more satisfyingly meet their socio-emotional needs and live in harmony. But too many so-called educated persons want to "Let George do it"; so it never gets done. — *By Prof. Evelyn G. Rimel in The Delta Gamma Bulletin for Spring 1967.*