

Moral thinking and moral questioning

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In 1998, when I was in the final year doing surgery professorial appointment, Professor of Surgery did a long class on a patient. At the end of the class he asked, “Do you have questions?” Everyone was silent. He waited for some time and said, “I will not let you leave the class unless each one of you asks a question.” I understood the meaning of words, but I had no questions because to me there were no thoughts beyond the meaning of words. Some did not understand the meaning of words, but they were afraid to say that they did not understand. A very few, had questions on the content, but kept silent as others were also silent. So we all had to wait till the evening. Finally one student asked “Do we get patients like this in the exam?” I heard the Professor mumbling something in silence and let us all leave.

Over the last 25 years I started realising the importance of critical thinking. When others were listening, I started thinking while listening. I started reading, planning and implementing while getting involved with patients. Doing so, I became more and more confident. When I was not happy or not clear of something, I learnt the importance of raising my opinion according to the situation, but I had wasted 25 – 30 years of my life to come to that point including my university life. I could have done more if I had realised and learnt the habit to think and question early.

Now I have become a Professor. I see staring eyes directed at me with a pen in the hand waiting to write each and every word that comes out of my mouth, hardly questioning me or thinking about what I am saying. What happened to me is repeatedly happening to my students. I feel the pain and sorrow that my Professor had felt when he was surrounded by a silent group of future intellectuals. I think I was lucky, but are they going to be? Like I did, they are wasting their time in the university.

In a society, the lower strata are followers and the rulers are at the top. It's easy to rule when people don't ask questions but a country will not progress when people are immune to liberal thinking and questioning. For instance, even a security guard can do a better job when he strategizes on how to park vehicles in a car park effectively but not when he plots on how to earn extra cash in doing so. What is important is to develop the habit of moral thinking and moral questioning. As medical scientists, the fundamental question that we should ask is, “How can I make the patient's life better?”