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## To follow a code of life



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### Dealing with oneself, and those around you

Life is full of lessons and ringing messages.

Recently, in order to take a flight back home, I travelled by road from Palakkad to Coimbatore. Driver Mani deposited me at my elegant cousin's flat. For a considerable length of time after I stepped in with my suitcase, my cousin did not close and lock her door. It remained ajar. So I myself got up and locked it.

"Do you often forget to close your door?" I asked jocularly. "Ah... no," she said, "It's just that I didn't want to close the door in Mani's face." She further regretted that she hadn't yet offered him something to drink.

I was so struck by her acute empathy and courteous thought that I felt I had to share it. We teach children so many things to socialise them into our families and larger social circles.

Sit up straight, don't cross your legs, don't grab things at meal-time, stand up when an older person enters the room... The list depends on how particular families are and how often a parent is around to advise children on cultured behaviour. Indeed, recognising that parents do not spend the kind of time they once did with their children (given the contemporary work timings) some of the caretaking has been outsourced to schools.

The educationists have put much thought into designing lessons and classes on Ethics Education and Life Skills in schools. At one time the phrase meant learning how to fix light bulbs, how to iron a shirt or mend fuses, but today it encompasses a whole philosophy that trains children in attitudes and value-enhanced patterns of dealing with oneself, the people around you and the environment.

Speaking of which... a few hours later at the airport, I was seated next to a middle-aged *sardar* who was deep in a book. As I was the only other traveller who settled down to wait with a book rather than with a phone, I asked him what he was reading. He flipped the cover in my direction: *Japji*, from the Guru Granth Sahib. He had discovered his religion rather recently because he enthusiastically explained the tenets and said how much he regretted not having paid attention to his father.

"He was a very religious man and I never bothered to ask him what comfort it gave him. His death a year ago struck a spark in me and I am now slowly learning about my religion," he said. More than missing his father, the gentleman regretted not having absorbed his religiosity. "I have so many questions which I know he would have answered, but it is too late."

I merely consoled him saying that the greatest gift a parent can give a child was what he had received from his father: a code of life.

Because, really, that's what 'life' skills are.

minioup@gmail.com