

Address and interaction at  
**SARVODAYA, Colombo**  
22 January 2012

### **What Can I Give**

*Learning blossoms creativity*

I am delighted to address and interact with the students of Schools in Moratuwa Area and Sarvodaya Shanthisena Youth Group workers. My greetings to all the members present here. I was reading about the Sarvodaya movement, which is the largest non-government movement in Sri Lanka with the participation of people from more than 15,000 villages. I am happy to know that the movement has helped villages build more than 5000 pre-schools, community health centers, libraries and cottage industries and is also engaged in the mission promoting bio-diversity and renewable energy. I am glad to learn about the founder of this unique movement, Dr. AT Ariyaratne, who has, through his diligence and hard work, expanded the movement even in the face of difficult times. His spirit of giving selflessly to the people is indeed an example for the youth of Sri Lanka. Hence, when I am here with all of you, I would like to share my views of the topic “What Can I Give”.

First, let me talk about achievement and its criteria.

Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam  
[www.abdulkalam.com](http://www.abdulkalam.com)

## **Criteria for achievement for youth**

How does achievement come? There are four proven steps; having an aim in life before 20 years of age, acquiring knowledge continuously, hard work towards the aim and perseverance to defeat the problem and succeed. In this connection let me recall famous verses of 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi:

### **Wings to Fly**

*“You were born with potential.  
You were born with goodness and trust.  
You were born with ideas and dreams.  
You were born with greatness.  
You were born with wings.  
You are not meant for crawling,  
so don’t, you have wings.  
Learn to use them to fly.”*

- **Jalaluddin Rumi**

- 13<sup>th</sup> Century Persian Sufi Poet

My message to you, young friends, is that education gives you wings to fly. Achievement comes out of fire in our sub-conscious mind that “I will win”. So, each one of you assembled here and elsewhere, will have “Wings of Fire”. The Wing of Fire will indeed lead to knowledge which will make you to fly as a Doctor, or an Engineer, or a scientist, or a teacher, or a political leader, or a bureaucrat or a diplomat or anything you want to be. You all can do it.

## **Knowledge and its dimensions**

Dear children, when you leave your schools, a great friend is accompanying you. Who is that friend? That friend is - knowledge. Now, I am going to give the knowledge equation.

Knowledge = Creativity + Righteousness + Courage

### **Creativity**

“Learning gives creativity  
Creativity leads to thinking  
Thinking provides knowledge  
Knowledge makes you great”

The next component of knowledge is righteousness. Righteousness is described in a divine hymn.

### **Righteousness in the heart**

Where there is righteousness in the heart  
There is beauty in the character.  
When there is beauty in the character,  
there is harmony in the home.  
When there is harmony in the home.  
There is an order in the nation.  
When there is order in the nation,  
There is peace in the world.

Now the question is: How do we inculcate the righteousness in the heart. In my opinion, there are three sources which can build a youth with righteousness in the heart. One is mother, second is father in a spiritual environment and the third and the most important is the teacher, particularly primary school teacher.

The third component is courage, which is defined as follows:

### **Courage**

Courage to think different,  
Courage to invent,  
Courage to travel into an unexplored path,  
Courage to discover the impossible,  
Courage to combat the problems and succeed,  
are the unique qualities of the youth.  
As a youth of my nation, I will work and work with courage to achieve  
success in all the missions.

Wherefrom you will acquire knowledge? Home, good books, teachers and teaching environment, coming into contact with good human beings, teaching websites in internet. When the schools teach the students to use the knowledge with creativity, righteousness and courage, nation will have large number of empowered and enlightened citizens, which is vital for the growth of the individual, growth of the family, growth of nation and promotion of peace in the world.

Dear young friends, when you are completing your education from your schools, you would have been blessed with knowledge with its three components and capacities to have great aim in life, that will make you to flying in life. Now I am going to give few great examples who made a change in the world, one with the determination to succeed in difficult circumstances, another with great heart for a beautiful green environment.

## **Birth of Creativity in a difficult situation**

Mario Capecchi had a difficult and challenging childhood. For nearly four years, Capecchi lived with his mother in a chalet in the Italian Alps. When World War II broke out, his mother, along with other Bohemians, was sent to Dachau as a political prisoner. Anticipating her arrest by the Gestapo, she had sold all her possessions and given the money to friends to help raise her son on their farm. In the farm, he had to grow wheat, harvest; take it to miller to be ground. The money which his mother left for him ran out. At the age of four and half years, he started living in the streets, sometimes joining gangs of other homeless children, sometimes living in orphanages and most of the time hungry. He spent the last year in the city of Reggio Emilia, hospitalized for malnutrition where his mother found him on his ninth birthday after a year of searching. Within weeks, the Capecchi and his mother sailed to United States of America to join his uncle and aunt.

He started his 3<sup>rd</sup> grade schooling afresh and started his education, interested in sports, studied political science. But he didn't find interesting and changed into science, became a mathematics graduate in 1961 with a double major in Physics and Chemistry. Although he liked Physics, its elegance and simplicity, he switched to molecular biology in graduate school, on the advice of James D Watson, who advised him that he should not be bothered about small things, since such pursuits are likely to produce only small answers.

His objective was to do gene targeting. The experiments started in 1980 and by 1984, Capecchi had clear success. Three years later, he applied the technology to mice. In 1989, he developed the first mice with targeted mutations. The technology created by Doctor Capecchi allows researchers to create specific gene mutations anywhere they choose in the genetic code of a mouse. By manipulating gene sequences in this way, researchers are able to mimic human disease conditions on animal subjects. What the research of Mario Capecchi means for human health is nothing short of amazing, his work with mice could lead to cures for Alzheimer's disease or even Cancer. The innovations in genetics that Mario Capecchi achieved won him the Nobel Prize in 2007.

Nobel laureate Capecchi life indeed is an example for the youth to succeed by overcoming difficult problems. Capecchi's life reminds of a song from Pinocchio:-

“When you wish upon a star,  
Makes no difference who you are  
Anything your heart desires  
Will come to you”

### **Planting of trees is the planting of ideas**

Now I would like to talk about Prof Wangari Maathai, who has a passion for environment and bio-diversity and is contributing to the sustainable development and growth of planet Earth. Wangari Maathai Wangari Muta Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya (Africa) in 1940. She was the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree and to become chair of the Department of Veterinary Anatomy and an

Associate Professor. Wangari Maathai was active in the National Council of Women of Kenya and was its Chairman in 1981-87, where she introduced the idea of planting trees with the people and continued to develop it into a broad-based, grassroots organization whose main focus is the planting of trees with women groups in order to conserve the environment and improve their quality of life. Through the Green Belt Movement that Nobel Laureate Prof Maathai has evolved innovatively a movement with 600 community networks across Kenya and branches in 20 countries resulting in the plantation of 31 million trees. She and the Green Belt Movement have received numerous awards, most notably The 2004 Nobel Peace Prize.

Prof Maathai gives a new meaning to the important act of planting a tree by extending it to the whole life, when she says, “the planting of trees is the planting of idea.” She highlights the qualities of patience, persistence and commitment in planning and realizing a future, which is what we learn when we plant trees and wait for them to yield fruits for the next generation. She believes that no matter how dark the cloud, there is always a thin, silver lining, and that is what we must look for. The silver lining will come, if not to us then to the next generation or the generation after that. And may be with that generation, the lining will no longer be thin. India values Prof Maathai’s involvement and contribution in furthering the relationship between India and Kenya and had the privilege of honouring her with the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for the year 2005. She concludes her Nobel Lecture on December 10, 2004 like this: quote, “As I conclude I reflect on my childhood experience when I

would visit a stream next to our home to fetch water for my mother. I would drink water straight from the stream... I saw thousands of tadpoles: black, energetic and wriggling through the clear water against the background of the brown earth. This is the world I inherited from my parents". Prof. Mathai would like all of us to preserve this inheritance.

### **Clean environment**

Dear friends, you may like to review the process of photo-synthesis in the plant and tree family. "When the sun shines, the green plants breakdown water to get electrons and protons, use these particles to turn carbon-di-oxide into glucose and vent out oxygen as a waste product." Each mature tree in a year absorbs 20 Kgs of carbon-di-oxide and transforms into wood and reinforces the branches of the tree, and releases 14 kg of Oxygen. To facilitate this, I would suggest all the students and volunteers present here to plant at-least 5 trees and nurture them in this campus. They may live and keep giving Oxygen to all of us for centuries.

### **Let not thy winged days, be spent in vain**

As you all know, the earth rotates on its own axis once in a day having 24 hours or 1440 minutes or 86400 seconds. Earth itself orbits around the sun. It takes nearly one year for an orbit. With the completion of one rotation of earth around the sun, your age is added by one year as you are living on planet earth. Seconds fly, minutes fly, hours fly, days fly and years fly. We have no control over it. The only thing that we can do is,

while the time flies, we can navigate the time. “Let not thy winged days, be spent in vain”.

### **Conclusion: What Can I Give**

Friends, finally let me now discuss about a very important area which is significant to our quest in evolving a world and a society which is happy, prosperous and peaceful. Of course, we are making significant progress in various dimensions like technology and human development. But we also have many challenges to overcome. They include, corruption and moral turpitude in the societies, environmental degradation and the need to build a compassionate society with tolerance. These are evils which need to be defeated by the goodness of the youth of the world. Where do such evils arise from? It arises from the never ending greed of what can I take? The fight for corruption free, tolerant society, good environment hence will have to be fought against this greed and replace “What can I take?” to the spirit of “What Can I Give”? And if we inculcate the spirit of What Can I Give, it would not only be our strength in overcoming moral degradation, but also ensure a society which is compassionate, environmentally conscious and caring towards each other. As students and youth, we need to ask ourselves one question – What Can I Give? Let me give some examples:

- Can I be an Environment Giver, thereby giving a clean environment and conserve the planet and its habitat from degradation?

- Can I be a Care giver, and providing care to those needy, those who are sick and those who are lonely in their pains? (Visit a hospital and give happiness to the patients who are not visited by anybody. You can offer flowers, fruits and cheerfulness of the youth)
- Can be a smile giver? (Can you make your mother happy everyday)
- Can I be a Rural Reform giver, leading to the transformation of my village and rural regions of Sri Lanka?

Friends, let me share a unique mission, which I along with my young team have recently launched and I would like every member present here to be a part of. It is a called “THE WHAT CAN I GIVE” movement. What can I give is the mission to generate great youth with ethics and great families with value system. Today I am launching before you this mission which you can use to transform the lives of the needy and shape a better society. Such a place is an ideal setting to launch this new citizen led and self actuated movement – “What Can I Give”.

You can write to me with your ideas or visit [www.whatcanigive.info](http://www.whatcanigive.info) and make it a vibrant mechanism of connecting people with a common goal of “Giving”.

My best wishes to all of you for giving your ideas and mind power to evolve a better society, a better Sri Lanka and a better world.

May God bless you.

### Oath for the Students

- 1 I will have a goal and work hard to achieve that goal. I realize that small aim is a crime.
- 2 I will work with integrity and succeed with integrity.
- 3 I will be a good member of my family, a good member of the society, a good member of the nation and a good member of the world.
- 4 I will always try to save or better someone's life, without any discrimination of caste, creed, language religion or state. Wherever I am, a thought will always come to my mind. That is "What can I give?"
- 5 I will always protect and enhance the dignity of every human life without any bias.
- 6 I will always remember the importance of time. My motto will be "Let not my winged days, be spent in vain".
- 7 As a youth of my nation, I will work and work with courage to achieve success in all my tasks and enjoy the success of others.
- 8 I am as young as my faith and as old as my doubt. Hence, I will light up then, the lamp of faith in my heart.
- 9 My National Flag flies in my heart and I will bring glory to my nation.