

THE DREAM OF DR. JOSE RIZAL

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Dr. Jose Rizal, the foremost and greatest Filipino national hero, had a dream. His dream began when he was a little child, just beginning to read. Throughout his life, he would pursue his dream, set the conditions for its achievement, lived his life to accomplish it, and finally achieved it, even after his death.

Rizal's dream was inspired by an insect. As he himself later related in his diary, one night, while his mother was teaching him to read in a Spanish reader, his attention was diverted to the cheerful flame fueled by coconut oil in a curved tube of tin that dimly lit the room. About the flame were some little moths circling. Noticing little Jose's lack of interest in hearing the Spanish sounds of the book being read to him, his mother decided to tell him a story, the fable of the young moth and the old one. The story being read was in the old Spanish book, but Rizal's mother would translate it in Tagalog a little at a time.

Young Jose's attention was focused on the light and the moths circling around it. As Rizal described it, "...it is a curious thing that the light seemed to me more beautiful, the flame more attractive. I really envied the fortune of the insects. They frolicked so joyously in its enchanting splendor that the ones which had fallen and been drowned in the oil did not cause me any dread." The fate of the insects became a great event for him. "I watched it with my whole soul. It had died a martyr to its illusions... I knew why the moths circled the flame."

Light and Freedom

Like the insect's, Rizal's quest was for light – and everything that came with it. He pursued light all his life: the light of knowledge, wisdom and understanding, the light of truth and reason, justice and equity - the light that would lead to freedom and happiness. This was his dream for himself and his beloved country, which then was a colony of a despotic Spanish regime.

Rizal manifested his dream, both indirectly and directly. Indirectly, he spoke through his main character Crisostomo Ibarra, in his first great novel, *Noli Me Tangere* (Noli). In Chapter 38 (of "The Lost Eden", Noli's English translation by Leon Ma. Guerrero), when the Governor General was talking with Ibarra, and the former was asking the latter, "Can I be of use to you in anything? Do you have anything to ask?" Ibarra's answer was:

"Sir, my greatest desire is the happiness of my country, a happiness which I would wish to be due to the Motherland and to the efforts of my fellow citizens, one united to the others with eternal ties of common ideals and common interests. What I ask can only be given by the Government after many years of continuous work and the correct measures of reform." The scene might as well be seen as Rizal addressing Spain, represented by the Governor General.

Directly, Rizal expressed his dream in a beautiful poem, *MI ULTIMO ADIOS* (My Last Farewell). As translated to English by Charles Derbyshire, the poem's fourth and fifth stanzas run as follows:

“My dreams, when life first opened to me,
My dreams, when the hopes of youth beat high,
Were to see thy lov’d face, O gem of the Orient sea,
From gloom and grief, from care and sorrow free,
No blush in thy brow, no tear in thine eye.

Dream of my life, my living and burning desire,
All hail! cries the soul that is now to take flight,
All hail! And sweet it is for thee to expire,
To die for thy sake, that thou mayst aspire,
And sleep in thy bosom eternity’s long night.”

In straightforward language, Rizal expressed his dreams (made plural in number) as to see his beloved country, the Philippines, which he called “gem of the Orient sea” (or “pearl of the Orient sea” in the first stanza), free from gloom and grief and care and sorrow – in short, FREE and HAPPY– without shame, sadness or suffering. This is the desired end of his dream. The means to achieve it is expressed yet as another dream, his living and burning desire: to die for his country’s sake.

Means to Achieve the Dream

Surely for the dream to come true there would be conditions or considerations; there would be struggle. And the greatest consideration for its achievement he expressed directly in a likewise beautiful poem, and indirectly in dialogues of main characters of the Noli. In the poem, “THROUGH EDUCATION OUR MOTHERLAND RECEIVES LIGHT” (English translation by Frank C. Laubach), Rizal poured out lavishly his thoughts on the virtues and power of Education in nine stanzas of eight lines each.

Some selected lines in the poem:

“The vital breath of prudent Education
Instills a virtue of enchanting power” (1st stanza)

“For her are born all science and all arts,
That brows of men with laurel fair enclose.
As from the towering mountain’s lofty heart,
The purest current of the streamlet flows,
So education without stint or measure gives
Security and peace to lands in which he lives.” (2nd stanza)

“Where education reigns on lofty seat
Youth blossoms forth with vigor and agility;
His error subjugates with solid feet,
And is exalted by conceptions of nobility,
She breaks the neck of vice and its deceit;
Black crime turns pale at Her hostility;

The barbarous nation She knows how to tame,
From savages creates heroic fame.” (3rd stanza)

“So he who prudent Education doth procure
The towering heights of honor will secure.” (4th stanza)

“From out his lips the water, crystal pure,
Of perfect virtue shall not cease to go,
With careful doctrines of his faith made sure,
The power of evil he will overthrow,”... (5th stanza)

“Within the breast of wretched humankind
She lights the living flames of goodness bright;
The hands of fiercest criminal doth bind;
And in those breasts will surely pour delight
Which seek her mystic benefits to find, --
Those souls she sets aflame with love of right,
It is a noble fully-rounded Education
That gives to life its surest consolation.” (6th stanza)

“So skillful noble Teaching doth unfold
To living minds the joy of virtuous ways.
She offers our dear motherland the light
That leads us to immortal glory’s height.” (9th stanza)

In an indirect way, Rizal set the condition for accomplishing his dream in Chapter 51 (still of Guerrero’s translation of the Noli). Again, in the character of Ibarra, he said to Elias, his other character advocating armed revolution, “I want my country’s good, that is why I am building a schoolhouse, but I seek it through education, through progress. We cannot find our way without the light of knowledge.”

In pursuing his dream for his country, Rizal set himself as the great example. He first pursued education in earnest. With great dedication and conscientiousness to his studies, Rizal proved that a Filipino in him could rise to be among the greatest men in history. His accomplishments in life find no match from any one on record, if versatility on the various educational disciplines is the criterion. He was, among many laurels to his name, an accomplished doctor of medicine and specialist as ophthalmologist, a man of letters (a novelist, essayist and poet), a scientist (the scientific world named two species of insect after him), philosopher, sculptor, polyglot (he knew 17 languages), sportsman (he was skilled in fencing, marksmanship, and chess), he was a recognized political leader among his compatriots (which led his accusers to charge him with leading a revolution that became a basis for his execution).

The Youth – The Hope to Achieve the Dream

With him as example, he also exhorted the generation or age group that could best pursue similar dreams and idealisms: the YOUTH. Again indirectly, he used his main character of the El Filibusterismo (Fili), Simoun, to challenge the youth in Basilio, thus: “You, what have you done to the land that gave

you existence, that supports your life, that affords you knowledge? Don't you realize that that is a useless life which is not consecrated to a great idea? It is a stone wasted in the fields without becoming a part of any edifice!" (English translation by Charles Derbyshire).

And in the same novel, through Padre Florentino, in the closing chapter, he spoke:

"Where are the youth who will consecrate their golden hours, their dreams, and their illusions to the welfare of their native land? Where are the youth who will generously pour out their blood to wash away so much shame, so much crime, so much abomination? Pure and spotless must the victim be that the sacrifice may be acceptable! Where are you, Youth, who will embody in yourselves the vigor of life that has left our veins, the purity of ideas that has been contaminated in our brains, the fire of enthusiasm that has been quenched in our hearts? We await you, O Youth! Come, for we await you!"

And then, directly, Rizal addressed the youth in the poem, "A La Juventud Filipina" (To The Filipino Youth), a poem awarded first prize by the all-Spaniard board of judges in the literary contest held by a society of literary men and artists, when Rizal was just eighteen years old. The first three of the ten stanzas of the poem, as translated in English by Derbyshire, follow:

"Hold high thy brow serene,
O youth, where now you stand,
Let the bright sheen
Of your grace be seen,
Fair hope of my fatherland!

Come now, thou genius grand,
And bring down inspiration;
With thy mighty hand,
Swifter than the wind's volation,
Raise the eager mind to higher station.

Come down with pleasing light
Of art and science to the flight,
O youth, and there untie
The chains that heavy lie,
Your spirit free to blight."

The Dream's Achievement and Realization

Did Rizal realize his dream? The answer is evident in both his life and in his country's. By becoming so great and popular with his personal achievements – intellectually in person and in his works – he was regarded as the most influential person in the Philippines in his time. Although he admonished his compatriots against armed revolution, his name was still regarded as the soul behind it. With his novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, he had awakened his countrymen from apathy and fear to rise and fight against the oppressive regime of the Spanish government in the Philippines. He was, in fact,

charged with and convicted of rebellion, and executed by a firing squad on 30 December 1896 at the Bagumbayan Field (now Luneta or Rizal Park) in Manila. He thus achieved for himself his dream of becoming a martyr for his illusions, like the moth that inspired him in his childhood.

Rizal's dream for his country materialized on 12 June 1898, when General Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed independence from Spain in Kawit, Cavite, after many bloody revolutionary wars fought in many parts of the country. With Rizal's inspiration, Filipinos have united to become one nation – proud and free, with “no blush in thy brow, no tear in thine eye.”

While succeeding events, such as the intervention of American and Japanese occupations, as well as the imposition of martial law, in the course of Philippine history, would temporarily intervene in the country's progress, it can be said proudly that the greatness of the Philippines as a nation is marching forward in due course of time. With Rizal's martyrdom in 1896, the Filipino's spirit soared to greatness to make the country the first Asian to gain freedom from foreign domination. In 1986, we again showed our greatness as a people by showing the world we could win a revolution against a despotic regime without shedding blood - with people power - and many other nations imitated us afterwards.

In education, which Rizal exhorted our youth to pursue, we have many who have held “high the brow serene” in the international arena of intelligence and skills – in arts and sciences, inventions and creations, songs and music, literature and public speaking, math and engineering, medical, dental and social services, mass communications and the media, beauty and brains and sports competitions, culinary arts, naval and seafaring, and every other aspect of human endeavor and discipline. Now, we boast of having about twelve million overseas Filipino workers scattered throughout the world, testament to the versatility of the Filipino exemplified by Rizal.

Thus is how the dream of Dr. Jose Rizal affects us Filipinos. His life and death continue to inspire us. His honor is our honor. We can only emulate and spread his virtues and his ideals. Let us show the world we have had a Rizal. And let us show the world we are worthy of him and his dream. #

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