

A young Apollo, golden-haired,
Stands dreaming on the brink of strife,
Magnificently unprepared,
For the long littleness of life.

Rupert Brooke

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THE BIG DREAMS IN LIFE

“What is the *big dream* in your life?” I asked my class of undergraduate second year students at IIT Madras, a few years ago.

The ‘young Apollos’ gave me responses like: “*a genius the world will never forget*”, “*a world-famous academician*”, “*a billionaire in Silicon Valley*”, “*the CEO of a giant multinational company*”, etc. With the exception of a couple of responses, the ambitions of the majority were loud and clear. One student expressed it rather poetically: “*to have my name etched in gold in the shifting sands of time!*”



I went down memory lane, to some twenty-five years ago, and saw myself sitting in the same classroom at IIT Madras. The scene looked unbelievably the same. It seemed as though time stood still. The dreams seemed no different except, perhaps, that they were now being expressed more forcefully. These kids appeared less doubtful and more focused.

Like their seniors, most of them are headed for the United States, *the promised land*, and they know that nothing can stop them from achieving their ambitions. They believe that they are the brightest and the best in today's technology-driven world, and have good reason to do so. During the 2002 Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Indian Institutes of Technology (India's premier institutes of higher education), inaugurated by Bill Gates in California, the world came to know that "gaining admission to the IITs was more difficult than getting into the best Ivy League schools in the United States."

(Source: CBS News)



What happens when the big dreams get fulfilled? What happens when you become rich and famous? Will you attain an enduring state of fulfilment? Will you then be able to live happily ever after? Or, will there be something vital missing, something that you need to address now, when you are young and full of life? Is there not a deep truth in the saying of Jesus: "*For what does it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*"

When I pose these basic questions to the students, they feel uncomfortable – but usually not sufficiently to seriously question their direction in life. The majority are too heavily programmed; one cannot really blame them for their strong

Stop sleepwalking through life !

sense of insecurity, discomfort, and inability to address the questions. There appears to be too much at stake in the rat race of life, and it takes considerable courage, even just to pause and reflect, especially when one has traveled far and got ahead in the race. It becomes even more difficult, if not impossible, as one grows older. The dreams of our brightest and best students are ones that have been consciously and unconsciously ingrained in them by social conditioning, by their parents and teachers. Their dreams are but a direct reflection of the prevailing materialistic world-view.

There is little in their education to persuade them to think otherwise. Everywhere, they see the extraordinary emphasis on competitive performance, on getting ahead of others. These kids have sweated it out to be way ahead of others. They, and the institutions that nurture them, are the leaders of the pack, the role models for the rest to emulate.



Is this the best our education has to offer today? Are we not completely evading certain key issues in life? Are we not leaving our young students “*magnificently unprepared, for the long littleness of life?*” as Rupert Brooke puts it so eloquently.