WOBBLING PILLARS (II)

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Vahe H. Apelian, OH USA, 24 August 2013

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The Armenian Diaspora has experienced seismic tremors in the last few decades, mostly due to the unfolding of violent political events in the Middle East--the cradle of Armenian Diaspora--and due to the global economic recession. We have no control over these events. The best we can do is to adjust.

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Pillars wobble, if not topple, because the ground on which they were entrenched ceases to be the solid support it was once. The analogy refers to our evolving perception of Armenian schools.

Two fundamental issues have always surfaced regarding an Armenian parents' rightful concern in Armenian schools in North America or in the Middle East. The two concerns are the education their children would receive and the ease with which their children would be able to communicate in the society they live in. The latter being not only the mastery of the larger society's language but also its conveyance, that is to say, accent. A few years ago the late George Apelian, educator, author, pointed out to me that more affluent Armenian parents were sending their children to non-Armenian schools in Lebanon for this very reason.

Solid education and accent are valid concerns. Let's put them in perspective.

A few years ago I attended an annual conference which had to do with my specialization--pharmaceutics. It was attended by people from all over the world. To warm up his audience for a dry subject he was about to deliver, one of the lecturers asked: "What is the language of science?" He then answered it: "In the United States it's English spoken with an accent". How true. In this interdependent world, it's also Hindi, Mandarin or Arabic spoken with an accent as well. Those who

have heard Vartan Gregorian have surely noted that he speaks with an accent. But that has not prevented him from reaching the uppermost echelon of society. No one really cares much about your accent as long as you offer what your interlocutor needs to forge a win-win relationship with you--be it personal or impersonal.

Capable teachers have transmitted solid education since antiquity in structurally much more modest environments and without the gadgetry modern schools enjoy. Computers are the outcome of such basic education and will never be able to replace it. Armenian schools historically have done well in imparting sold basic education to generations of students. I have yet to hear a friend or an acquaintance tell me, in hindsight, that he or she wished their parents had sent them to a non-Armenian school to better prepare them for life. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of former students in Armenian schools I have met fondly remember their times there. There is a reason for it and it has to do with EQ-- Emotional Quotient of the former students.

EQ is a measurement of a person's ability to monitor his or her emotions, to cope with pressures and demands, and to control his or her thoughts and actions. Most educators agree that EQ is as important as IQ (Intelligence Quotient). There was a time when what students learned in a classroom stayed with them unchanged for a long time. Not anymore. Education is also learning to constantly learn new things. A student has to be emotionally well adjusted and prepared to surmount this ceaseless onslaught of newer things. Along with imparting solid and basic education, Armenian schools have been very successful in preparing their students to score higher in their EQ. Most of the students I knew in my formative years, while attending Armenian schools in Lebanon, have done well. In fact, very well whether they attended college or not.

I do not want to paint a picture of an all-too-perfect Armenian school. I simply want to elaborate on the issues of accent and of basic education so that parents would have a broader perspective should they be considering to enroll their children in an Armenian school. Historically, Armenian schools have not failed us. On the contrary, they have successfully equipped their former students with basic knowledge and social anchor to venture out to make a living . After all, for us it has always been and will always be – "Ուր Հաց, Հոն կաց".

Pictures are from Zvart Apelian's Facebook Album