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BOOK REVIEW

Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, "Finding Your Element- How to Discover Your Talents and Passions and Transform Your Life", Penguin Books, London, England,2014

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This book may be looked upon as an elaboration on Confucius's famous saying "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life". A job in which the natural aptitude of an individual meets an individual's personal passion is defined as one's "Element".Element is created from an intersection between your natural instincts and what you nurture through a process of constant efforts or passion. Your element is like the shell of a tortoise in which it goes upon threat from outside. Element is an individual's natural habitat. When you create it in your life, it becomes whatwater is for a fish. Conclusion of the author is- do something that feels so completely natural to you, rather than meeting someone else's expectations from your life. Find out for yourself if in your Element, you are a teacher, designer, homemaker, entertainer, medical practitioner, firefighter, artist, social worker, accountant, administrator, librarian, forester, soldier, or whatever. Each one of us is unique in one's own way. People differ in terms of their temperament,disposition, and character. What is liked by one may be completely disliked by another.

A person loves wading through sewers. Someone may loath at this same idea. Someone may like the idea of mountaineering and trekking through jungles, but others may dislike it. Jobs of accountants,lawyers,nurses, police officers,and teachers are not loved by all in equal measure. Some people love to collect the trash, work on assembly lines and clean the toilets. Author shares the following story narrated to him bysomeone: "His mother had been an office cleaner for more than twenty years and she absolutely loved it. She worked evenings and looked forward to it all day. She loved the process of cleaning in itself and the feeling of satisfaction at the end of her shift when everything was neat, organized in good order". So, the key lies in connecting to what we like doing most.

Authors point out that in order to get the most out of life;one should live effectively in all the five areas of life, viz. Career, Social, Financial, Physical, and Community.

Chapter one sets out the basic principles and ground rules for finding your Element and why it is so important that you try. Chapter Two is about understanding your own aptitudes, and offers tools and techniques for doing that. Chapter Three looks at why you might not know the real depth of your natural abilities and what you can do about it. Chapter four is about discovering your passions and what that really means in terms of finding your own Element and feeding your own spiritual energy. Chapter Five explores the idea of happiness and how finding your Element can increase it in your own life. Chapter Six focuses on your own attitudes and whether they are holding you back or moving you forward. Chapter Seven helps you to take stock of your current circumstances and create opportunities for change. Chapter Eight is about connecting with others who share your Element and how to do that. Chapter Nine helps you to draw together an action plan and to take the critical next steps. Chapter Ten is a reflection on the main themes of the book and a reinforcement of why you should take this journey in the first place.

The questions, exercises and techniques are suggested in the book to help an individual to reflect one's talents,interests, learning styles, aptitudes,

attitudes, personality, happiness etc. Notable among the tests suggested in the book is VARK questionnaire developed by Neil Fleming. It categorizes participants by four learning preferences: visual, auditory, read/write, and kinesthetic.

The role of these exercises is to stimulate imagination; self-knowledge and a sense of possibility. Finding out Element can be truly transformational. Authors warn that the book as a whole is not a task to complete but a resource for a process that would continue long after one has read the final chapter.

The book contains ideas about meditation and spirituality. Meditation is a process of calming your mind and dwelling in the quiet flow of your own being. It is a way of easing the outer world's expectations of you and allowing your essential self to breathe and to be. The most common challenge in meditation is to stop thinking, which turns out to be one of the reasons for doing it. Meditation is not thinking. Thinking is not the same as consciousness. Thinking too much can limit our consciousness.

One of the aims of meditation is to reduce this mental static so that you can experience deeper levels of consciousness. An ancient analogy compares the turbulence of the thinking mind with the waves and ripples on the surface of a lake. It is only by calming the disturbed surface that an individual can set into the depth that lie beneath.

Authors opine that Consciousness has simply evolved in human beings over millions of years, like opposing thumbs and binocular vision. Human spirit is much more than the chemical simmering of brain and nervous system. Spirit is not a by-product of biology but part of larger energy beyond our everyday understanding. To connect with true self and with the divine, one has to calm the demands of our mind and ego. Sample the following observation on relevance of meditation and Yoga in discovering "Element":

"The practice of mindfulness draws on many ancient principles of meditation. It can have many benefits in itself. It can also be among the ways in which you can connect with your true spirit and your positive emotions. In these ways, it can also help you to find your Element."

The greatest source of achievement is passion. Aptitude matters, but passion often matters more. We achieve our best when we have strong internal motivation. One does need some aptitude for what one does, but passion is what makes the real difference. There are plenty of extremely talented people who never do anything worthwhile.

Authors make a point when they state "If you are in a job that you dislike, it is even more important spending some part of your day doing something that fulfills you and connects to your true passion. While not everyone can become financially rich through their Element, everyone is entitled to be enriched by it."

Answers to following questions are the central points covered in the book:

1) What are your hidden talents and passions?
2) How can you help your children in discovering their talents?
3) What to do if you love something which you are not good at.
4) What to do if you cannot make a living by doing things which you love to do.

The book contains more than fifty questions, and fifteen exercises on various aspects of "Element". A large number of websites are suggested for attempting exercises and getting feedback on one's own personality characteristics and aspects of nature. These can be useful for discussion in a group situation and for enhancing self awareness. Researchers in the area of Human Resource Development and Human Psychology can have access to wealth of material through this book for raising hypotheses and for getting psychological instruments. Questions raised throughout the book provide ample scope for research work.

Interviews conducted by another writer Bronnie Ware among patients suffering from terminal illness are quoted by Robinson as a reminder to elderly people for the blunders of their life. The following are some of the comments available:

1) I wish I had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.
2) I wish I had not worked so hard. I had missed my children's youth and partner's companionship. I regret spending so much of my life on the treadmill of work.
3) I wish I did not suppress my feelings to keep peace with others.

4) I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.I regret for not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved.

5) I wish that I had let myself be happier.

Bronnie Ware's experience with terminal patients suggests some simple but important lessons for those with much of their lives still ahead of them. Here are some of them:

1) Take the opportunities you have, especially when your health is good. Health brings freedom very few realize.

2) Reduce the burden. Simplify your lifestyle.

3) Value your own life and feelings.

4) Value those you love.

One wonders what will be the findings of a researcher doing work in India on similar theme.

In conclusion, Robinson's work alerts us about the significance and mechanics of living a life of passion and purpose.

Ken Robinson's earlier book "The Element" was an international bestseller and has been translated so far into twenty-three languages. The book under review is yet another contribution in the same area and must be read with interest by those interested inthemes on self-development / self-awareness/ self-analysis/ personality development etc.