

S.N. Goenka – Swimology

Once a young professor was making a sea voyage. He was a highly educated man with a long tail of letters after his name, but he had little experience of life. In the crew of the ship on which he was travelling was an illiterate old sailor. Every evening the sailor would visit the cabin of the young professor to listen to him hold forth on many different subjects. He was very impressed with the learning of the young man.

One evening as the sailor was about to leave the cabin after several hours of conversation, the professor asked. “Old man, have you studied geology?”

“What is that, sir?”

“The science of the earth.”

“No, sir, I have never been to any school or college. I have never studied anything.”

“Old man, you have wasted a quarter of your life.”

With a long face the old sailor went away. “If such a learned person says so, certainly it must be true,” he thought. “I have wasted a quarter of my life!”

Next evening again as the sailor was about to leave the cabin, the professor asked him, “Old man, have you studied oceanography?” “What is that, sir?”

“The science of the sea.”

“No, sir, I have never studied anything.”

“Old man, you have wasted half your life.”

With a still longer face the sailor went away: “I have wasted half my life; this learned man says so.”

Next evening once again the young professor questioned the old sailor: “Old man, have you studied meteorology?”

“What is that, sir? I have never even heard of it.”

“Why, the science of the wind, the rain, the weather.”

“No, sir. As I told you, I have never been to any school. I have never studied anything.”

“You have not studied the science of the earth on which you live; you have not studied the science of the sea on which you earn your

livelihood; you have not studied the science of the weather which you encounter every day?

Old man, you have wasted three quarters of your life.”

The old sailor was very unhappy: “This learned man says that I have wasted three quarters of my life! Certainly, I must have wasted three quarters of my life.”

The next day it was the turn of the old sailor. He came running to the cabin of the young man and cried, “Professor sir, have you studied swimology?”