



***STORIES TO TEACH YOUR MIND,
TOUCH YOUR HEART AND UPLIFT
YOUR SPIRIT***

THE DANGER OF ANGER

There was once a young boy with a terrible temper. He used to speak harshly and get angry many times a day, at the slightest provocation. His wise father told him that every time he got angry he had to hammer a nail into the wood fence in the backyard. The first day the boy hammered 45 nails into the fence – practically his entire day was spent in the back yard. The next day, with his arm sore from hammering, he tried to get angry less. He hammered only 25 nails into the fence the second day. By the end of a few weeks, the boy proudly went to his dad and told him that he had not gotten angry at all that day.

So, the boy's father told him that now he could start removing the nails from the fence. There were 2 ways that nails could be removed: either if the boy could go an entire day without getting mad, or if the boy apologized sincerely to someone whom he had hurt through his anger.

So, the boy began to apologize to people whom he had wounded and he tried hard not to get angry. Slowly, slowly, the nails began to get pulled out of the fence. One day, the boy proudly went to his dad and told him that all the nails were out of the fence. He told his dad that his anger was "a thing of the past."

His dad then led the boy by the hand to the fence and

showed him how the fence was now riddled with holes. It was no longer the sturdy, strong fence it once had been. It was now weakened and damaged. Every time the wind blew strongly the fence swayed in the wind, for it was so full of holes that the breeze caused the fence to move.

"Do you see that?" The father asked the boy. "For you, anger is a thing of the past. Yet, this fence will never recover. Every time you get angry at someone it is like driving a nail into them. You may later remove the nail, but the hole is still there. The effect of your anger can not be removed."

In life sometimes it is easy to get angry, easy to yell, easy to hit those we love. We assuage our own consciences by saying, "He made me mad," or, "She made me hit her." But, whose hand is it really that hits? Whose mouth is it really that speaks harsh words?

We think, "It's no big deal. I said sorry." Or we say, "Oh, but that was yesterday. Today I've been nice." For us, it may be that easy. But remember the fence is still sitting there with a hole in it, even though you have moved on. If you hammer enough nails into someone, eventually they will be forever weakened, forever damaged. You can stab someone with a knife and then pull out the knife but the blood will continue to pour. "Sorry" does not stop the blood of wounds. It may pave the way to recovery, but the wound is still there.

The goal in life should be to be like water – a stone falls in and only causes a ripple for a moment. The "hole" in the

water caused even by a large boulder does not last for more than a few seconds. When we get hit – verbally, physically or emotionally –we should be like the water. We should be able to just let the ripples flow and, within a few moments, it should look as though nothing happened.

However, unfortunately it is very difficult to be like the ocean. Very few people in the world are able to accomplish this task, for it is a task of great sadhana and vairagya (non-attachment). It is much more common that people are like fences – the holes you hammer into them stay with them for a lifetime. Children, especially, are like the wood fence. No matter how much they grow in life, no matter how wise they become or how old and strong they become, those holes are still there.

We must remember that our loved ones are like wood. Therefore, we must try to be very, very careful before we hammer holes into anyone, before we stab knives into anyone’s heart...if there are too many holes, the fence will fall.

THE MESSAGE OF THE BUDDHA

There is a beautiful story told of a disciple of Lord Buddha who wanted to publish a book of the teachings of Buddhism. So, he spent several years compiling the great wisdom of Lord Buddha and placing it in book form. Then, it was time for the task of raising enough money to publish the book. He went door to door to his friends and neighbors requesting help in bringing this project to fruition.

After he had collected enough funds, he was about to publish the book when a large cyclone hit a poor area of the country. Immediately, he sent all the funds to the disaster-struck region to help the victims.

Again, then, he underwent the task of collecting money to publish this important book. Again, his friends, relatives and colleagues helped him reach the goal. Then, an earthquake struck another area of the country, killing thousands. Again, the disciple sent all of his hard-earned funds to the region.

Several years passed during which he tried, with difficulty, to raise the funds a third time. However, people were not ready to keep giving for the same book. Thus, it took him quite some time to raise enough money to publish the book. No catastrophe struck and the book was published. On the inside cover of the book, beneath the title “Teachings of Lord Buddha” was written “Third Edition.”

So many times in life we read spiritual teachings, we listen to lectures and katha, we say our prayers. However, do we actually implement these teachings in our life? The book was a “Third Edition” because the teachings of Buddhism include compassion, non-attachment and service to the poor. Thus, by donating the funds for the book to disaster-struck victims, the disciple was, actually, teaching and illustrating the word of the Buddha.

He knew that the word of the Buddha was to help those in need. Thus, it is even more illustrative of Buddhism to help the poor than to publish books.

In our lives, too, we must remember not only the words of the teachings, but also the true message of the teachings. We read the books, we listen to the lectures, but do we absorb the message? Sometimes we get so caught up in reading, hearing and reciting these teachings that we forget to live them!

Service to others is the true message, the true teaching, the true wisdom of spirituality.

BREAKING THROUGH OUR SHELL

There was once a man who noticed a beautifully woven cocoon on a tree outside his home. He carefully watched the cocoon every day in order to catch the first glimpse of the beautiful butterfly he knew would emerge. Finally, one day he saw a tiny hole in the cocoon which grew quickly as the hours passed. He sat watching the butterfly break her way out of the cocoon. However, suddenly he noticed that it seemed the butterfly had stopped making progress. The hole did not get any larger and the butterfly seemed to be stuck. The cocoon was bouncing up and down on the branch as the butterfly tried to squeeze herself, unsuccessfully, through the hole she had created.

The man watched in dismay as it seemed his butterfly would not be able to emerge. Finally, he went inside, took a small pair of scissors, and carefully cut the cocoon, allowing the butterfly to emerge easily. However, the butterfly immediately dropped to the ground instead of soaring gracefully into the sky as he imagined she would.

The man noticed that the butterfly's stomach was swollen and distended but her wings were small and shriveled, explaining her inability to fly. He assumed that after some time, the stomach would shrink and the wings would expand, and she would fly in her fullest glory. However, this was never to be.

The man didn't know that it was the very act of forcing her body through the tiny hole in the cocoon which would push all the fluid from her stomach into her wings. Without that external pressure, the stomach would always be swollen and the wings would always be shriveled.

In life, too frequently, we avoid the challenges, looking for the easy way out. We look for people who will “cut our cocoons,” so that we never have to work and push our way through anything. However, little do we realize that it is going through those times of difficulty which prepare us for the road ahead. The obstacles in our path are God's way of making us able to fly. With every bit of pushing and struggling, our wings become fuller and fuller.

So frequently, people come to me and say, “*Oh, why has God given me so much strife. Why has He put so many obstacles in my path? Why is He punishing me?*” We must realize these are not punishments. Sure, karma plays a large role in what we receive in this lifetime, but even the things that seem like “bad” karma, are actually opportunities for growth. Even an extra small hole to squeeze through is actually an opportunity for our wings to expand to great lengths.

So, let us learn to take our challenges for what they are, rather than looking around for a “different” hole, or for someone with a pair of scissors. These things may help us quickly through the cocoon, but we will be unable to fly in life.

GOD'S WIFE

A small, impoverished boy was standing barefoot on the New York City streets, looking wistfully in the window of a shoe store. A well-dressed woman saw him and asked him, “Why are you looking so solemnly in this window?” The small boy looked up at her and replied, “I am asking God to please give me a pair of shoes.”

The woman took the boy's small hand and led him into the shoe store, where she immediately asked the clerk for a bucket of warm water and 10 pairs of socks. Then, placing the boy's dirty feet into the water, she tenderly washed them and then put a pair of warm socks on him. Then, she told the clerk to bring shoes for the boy.

As they left the store, the boy's small feet now snugly in a pair of new shoes, he clenched the woman's hand and looked up into her eyes. “Are you God's wife?” He asked.

This story is not only a beautiful snippet from life in a big city. Rather it is a deep lesson about how to live our own lives. Instead of simply saying, “Oh, how sweet,” and moving on, let us really take this story to heart.

How easy it is to pass by those less fortunate with a simple sigh of sympathy or with a token “aid,” perhaps a coin or two tossed in their direction. These small gestures of em-

pathy and charity make us feel like we are compassionate people who just live in an “unjust” world. However, is the homeless man helped by our sigh of disdain? Does the coin we hand him really make a difference? Are we really being compassionate, or are we just soothing our own consciences?

How much more difficult it is to really stop, take a moment out of our hectic lives and see what is needed. Yet, how much more divine that is. There are always places to be and things to do. If we wait until we are “free” in order to take care of others, the time will never come. Real divinity, real selflessness is giving when it is not necessarily convenient to give. It is giving according to the others’ needs, not according to our own agenda and convenience.

The wealthy woman probably had some place else to be on that cold day in New York City. She could have easily walked by the boy, thinking to herself, “Our government really needs to do something about homelessness;” she could have looked the other way and continued on with her errands. But she didn’t. That is what makes her special.

We tend to give decadently to ourselves and to our own families. We will pile gifts under Christmas trees until there is no room left. We will shower each other with new clothes, toys, and other merchandise on birthdays and anniversaries. No problem. We love each other and so we give gifts. This is fine. However, let us also remember, though, to extend that compassion and that love to others who really need it. Let us vow never to turn a blind eye on someone in need. Let us vow to use what God has given us to really

serve His children. Let us live our lives as though we, too, are “God’s wife.”

SACRED DROPS OF BLOOD

There was once a very great sanyasi; he possessed the ability to transform people by his mere words. The sound of his voice carried listeners into the stillest, most peaceful meditation. But, he wanted to do more for the world. His vision was to help all of humanity, to be of service to all those he met, to heal the world on a massive scale.

He prayed to God to give him the ability to save people's lives. "You cannot save everyone; you can not be of service to everyone. Just keep speaking, keep chanting, keep writing, keep praying. In this way you will really heal," God said to him.

But the saint was not persuaded. "Please, God, let me be of service - of direct service - to all. Let me save people's lives."

The sanyasi had performed so much tapasya and was so pure in his desire to help, that God granted him the boon of being able to save the life of anyone who came to him. He had simply to take a drop of his blood and place it on the patient's upper lip. Any ailment would be cured; any suffering would immediately be alleviated. The saint was exuberant; his dream had been fulfilled. Now he felt that he would really be able to save the world and to cure those who came to him.

The first day four people came. For each person, he simply pricked the tip of his finger with a needle and the blood came out. One small drop had such miraculous healing powers. That night, the selfless saint had a beaming smile on his face for those whom he had cured.

The next day, forty people came, having heard of his miraculous powers. For each he squeezed a small drop of blood from his finger and blessed them as he placed it on their upper lip. Each was instantly cured. Paralysis, leprosy, depression, anxiety - all disappeared with the simple drop of the sanyasi's blood. As word spread throughout the land, more and more people flocked to his healing magic. And the sanyasi was in bliss - here he was using his simple God-given blood to cure so many. He dispensed these drops freely - with no hesitation, no discrimination, no vacation. "I am in your service..." he would say.

Soon, thousands were flooding the simple ashram in which he lived; they were overflowing in the streets. The saint was dispensing the equivalent of cups of blood each day. But, he did not even notice. Such was his dedication and devotion to those whom he was curing. He sat, in meditative bliss, as he squeezed first his fingertip, then the veins in his arm to dispense blood to those in need.

It was not long before the sanyasi had to squeeze harder in order to coax the blood from his body. Soon, a mere needle prick was not a large enough opening; he needed small knives to pierce the prominent veins of his forearms and legs. From there, the blood flowed freely again, and all were relieved. However, soon, even those veins were no

longer coursing with high volumes of healing nectar. They, too, were becoming drier and drier.

As his blood volume dropped each day, the sanyasi became weaker. The color drained from his once vibrant face. Darkness drew circles around his eyes. His voice, which previously had boomed, singing forth the divine glories of God, was now not much more than a whisper. But, the sanyasi was not worried. Those who loved him urged him to take rest, to take at least a break from giving blood, to let himself recuperate.

Although he listened with his ears and appreciated the concern, he could not stop pumping blood from his body. He would say, "I am in the service of the world...These people have come from so far...They have been waiting for so long...This man is an important minister, but he's suffering from pneumonia...I feel no pain. I feel no weakness. I feel only the joy of giving myself to others." Those who loved him could do nothing, other than watch the scores of people continue to pour in, continue to plead for "just one drop."

Soon, even the once succulent veins of his forearms would give no more blood. Even the largest, most abundant veins of his body held on selfishly to their sparse quantity of this life-giving fluid. But, the sanyasi was not deterred. "This is only a challenge. Only more tapasya to do," he would say. He ordered his servants to build a device which would squeeze harder than human hands were able to, a vice-like apparatus into which he could place a limb and have it milked completely of the blood inside.

Throughout this, the people kept coming. As word spread – in frantic whispers – that the saint was ill, that the blood was running dry, the people flocked even more frenetically. They pushed and trampled one another in an effort to get "just one drop." People, who perhaps had been postponing a visit until a later date, dropped everything and came running. "Please Maharajji," they would plead. "Please, just one drop. We have come from Madras, we have come from Nepal, we have come from London. My daughter has this horrible affliction on her face. My husband lost his arm in a car wreck. My son refuses to get married. Please Maharajji, please just one drop. Just one drop and then we'll go away so you can take rest." For each who came, the saint smiled as he placed a drop of blood on their upper lip.

The ocean of his blood soon became an arid desert. Where once his veins had flowed like copious rivers, they were now limp and desiccated

His devotees pleaded with him to stop; their tears of concern poured onto his holy feet. But, all he could see were needy, ailing people stretching out to the horizon, each one crying pitifully, "Please, Maharajji, just one drop."

When those who had flocked for blood realized that the sanyasi could give no more, they were un-deterred. "We will work the pumping machine," they screamed. And they stormed toward the saint, who sat peacefully, although nearly lifeless, draped only in his simple dhoti. But, the pumping machine was not powerful enough to pump water from a desert. So, they tied him up, the ropes cutting deep into his parched skin. And as some pulled the ropes tighter and

tighter, others cut into his veins with knives (no longer small ones, but now the type used for butchering animals). "There must be another drop left. There must be," they cried furiously.

As his beloved devotees watched, the last drop of life blood was cut from their great sanyasi, who had once overflowed with life, with vigor, with dynamism. Now he hung, lifeless, still in the ropes which had tied him, completely desiccated. However, they noticed, there was a smile on his limp and pallid face.

"Just five minutes," we plead. "Just step foot in my house to bless it...just take one meal at my home." It may not be physical blood we demand, but both our desperation and the effects on the saints is the same. "But, I've waited 5 years. But I've come from America. Please, Maharajji, just five minutes....but Maharajji, my daughter said she won't get married unless you are there...but, I can not go into surgery unless you come to the hospital...but it would mean so much to us if you could just come to our home for 10 minutes..."

When we go to visit a saint, rarely do we ask when he last took his meal or what his usual time for rest is. "It's only 5 minutes," we convince ourselves. "Just one drop, one drop of blood..." When we are blessed enough to have a saint at our home, rarely do we say to him, "Go to sleep. You must be tired. You have sat with people [or worked] all day long." Rather, we think "But, it's only once a year he comes," or "But this is the first time we've ever had him alone."

"Just one drop...just one drop and then we'll let you take rest."

Sure, it is only five minutes, or one hour, or one night. For us. But, we do not have the vision to see the streams of people, flooding out to the horizon, who will beg for "just five minutes," after we have had ours. Rarely, even do we lift our eyes to look.

"But," you may ask, "if the saint healed so many with his blood, why does it matter that he died? His purpose on Earth and his desire were to heal people. So, why does it matter that he lost his physical body in the meantime?" The answer is that a doctor could have healed most of the physical ailments that came to him. Those suffering from emotional/psychological problems could probably have been helped had they put into practice that which he taught in his lectures. He did not need to give his actual blood to so many. But, it is easier to get the "instant cure," easier to let him place the blood on us than to make the trip to the doctor and take the medicine he prescribes, or to implement the necessary diet of less fat, less sugar, no meat, etc.

It is easier to be cured by someone than to cure ourselves. Somehow, when a saint speaks in public, giving instructions and messages publicly, we think that it pertains to everyone but us. "But I need to speak to him personally," we decide. "My problem is different." Rarely do we take a saint's "no" as "no." We know that if we plead harder, beg more desperately that they will give in, because they truly are in the service of humanity.

But, do we want to milk the blood from their bodies? Do

we really want to be healed at their expense? Is that what love really is? We must realize that each of our demands, that each 5 minutes, each compulsory visit to a home, each one drop of blood, is only one of thousands more that he is selflessly giving to others. We must be careful to let him nourish himself such that his blood continues to flow. We must make a sincere effort to keep the life alive in these saints who would give their lives to us, without hesitation and without discrimination.

GOLD UNDER BOULDERS

I heard a beautiful story of an ancient village where one day the villagers found a large boulder in the middle of their main pathway. The busy, rich businessmen and merchants had their servants carry them around it. Others simply turned back and returned in the direction from which they'd come, realizing that to try to pass was futile. Others gathered around the site of the boulder to criticize the King of the area for not taking better care of the roads. They stood by as the boulder obstructed passage on the road, condemning the King and his ministers for their laziness!

Finally, a peasant came by who was carrying a load of vegetables to sell in the market. He needed to pass the boulder, and so he calmly put down his heavy load and tried to push the boulder out of the way. However, the boulder was quite heavy. The peasant, though, just kept pushing from different angles and finally the boulder rolled out of the road. As he bent down to pick up his load of vegetables, the peasant noticed something lying in the road where the boulder had been. It was a wallet filled with gold coins and a note from the king. The note said, "This reward is for he who has the commitment to move the boulder from the road."

So frequently in life we see that the "King" has thrown

obstacles in our path. Our natural instinct is to bypass them – using our influence or wealth – or to simply turn around and go a different path. Or, we give up the path altogether, seeing the obstacles as insurmountable. Perhaps we find ourselves criticizing life, circumstances, or the great “King” who is making our lives difficult. Yet, for he who has the commitment and dedication to conquer the obstacle, the rewards are great. Not only will the path be clear, but we will also become far richer (whether spiritually, mentally or financially) by having the tenacity to overcome the hurdles in our path.

Life is not always a clear path. If it were, we would learn very little. Rather, to test us, to teach us, to mold us and to make us stronger God challenges us. He – as the King of kings – places obstacles on our way. And, just like the king in the above story, He watches to see who will have the courage and the commitment to overcome these difficulties.

There is a beautiful saying in our scriptures which says:

*Prarabhyate na khalu vighna bhayena nicheh
Prarabhya vighna vihata virranti madhyah
Vighneh Punah punarapi prati-hanya manah
Prarabhya chottam-janah na parityajanti*

This means that there are three types of people in the world. The first type, the lowest on the hierarchy of evolution toward God realization, contemplate the possibilities of failure before undertaking any task. Then, realizing that some obstacle will inevitably arise, and fearing the difficulties inherent in overcoming the obstacle, they decide not to act. Thus their lives pass in vain, and they perform

no good deeds at all, for they are paralyzed by thoughts of hurdles that may arise.

The second type of people begin to perform good deeds but as soon as they encounter any difficulty, they turn back and relinquish the task. These people have good hearts and good intentions and they want to perform worthwhile deeds; however, they are unable to gather up the inner resources necessary to overcome any challenges. Thus, their lives also pass in vain, and although they have innumerable projects that were well-begun, they have not even one that was completed.

The third, and highest type of people are those who just keep going, no matter what obstacles they find in their path. They are so committed to completing their duties successfully that they steadfastly remove all hurdles from their way. They are entirely focused and centered on the ultimate goal, and they keep God’s image in their mind, knowing that He is with them and that He will help them achieve their noble goals. These are the people who succeed, not only professionally in life, but also spiritually and mentally.

DIVINE ASSISTANCE

There was once a man who was a great devotee of God. He always believed that God would take care of him, regardless of the circumstances.

One day a great flood came to the town in which he lived. All the neighbors began evacuating their homes. However, this man was not worried. "God will take care of me," he assured himself.

Soon, the flood waters began to rise and water filled the first floor of the man's home. "No problem," he thought and moved to the second floor. At this time a boat came by, and the men in the boat shouted to him through the window, "Climb in, we'll save you."

"No," the man replied calmly. "That's all right. God will save me."

The men in the boat urged him to evacuate his home. "The waters are rising and rising," they cried. But, the man was undisturbed and sent them away, firm in his conviction that God would come through for him.

However, the rain continued and the waters rose and rose. The second and then third floor of his house filled with water. "No problem," he thought as he moved onto his roof-

top. Sitting on the rooftop, wrapped in a rainjacket, the man saw a helicopter fly overhead. From the helicopter, a life preserver dropped down into the man's lap. "Grab on," the pilot yelled. "I'll save you."

But, the man would not grab on. "God will save me," he yelled back. "I don't need your life preserver." So, eventually, the helicopter flew away.

The flood rose and soon the man drowned.

When he entered Heaven, he said to God, "What happened? How could you let me drown? I thought you said you'd always save me. I had such faith in you."

God looked at the man sadly and said, "I sent you a boat; I sent you a helicopter. What else could I do?"

How many times in life do we avoid taking advantage of the situations which present themselves, instead holding tenaciously to our belief in karma, or fate, or divine will/intervention? God will not always come to you draped in a saffron dhoti, flute in hand and whisk you away from unfortunate situations in His chariot. He is more subtle, less obvious. He sends us the life preserver, but it is our choice whether to recognize it as "God sent" and grab on, or to cling to the belief that something better and easier will come along shortly.

Karma does not mean that we have no choice or no free will. It means we are handed a certain set of circumstances due to past lives, sanskaras, and so many other factors.

However, what we do with that set of circumstances is only partly determined by “fate;” the rest is determined by our own free will. For example, let’s say that due to past karmas, in this birth we are given a cow. The cow is due to our past karma and our fate. We cannot change it and get a goat or a dog instead. But, what we do with the cow is up to us. If we drink its milk and use its manure in our fields, then we will have radiant health and rich, fertile crops. However, if we eat the manure and spill the milk on the ground, our health will suffer and our crops will be weak and unproductive.

So many times we blame God for the situations in our lives, or we simply concede that it “must be our karma.” Yet, sickness and failing crops are not our “karma”; rather they are due to our own bad choices that we made with the cow that we were given.

We must realize that everything comes from God, that everything is due to His will, and simultaneously we must understand that He has given us the power of discrimination and reasoning to make the right choices. It was the man’s karma to have a flood destroy his home. It was God’s kindness and compassion that sent the boat and helicopter, but it was the man’s own ignorance and obstinacy that led him to drown.

So, when a flood comes in our lives, no problem. Perhaps that was meant to happen. BUT, when boats and helicopters come to save us, we must recognize them for what they are – God sent.

HEAVEN AND HELL

I have heard the story of a land called Hell. In this land the people are emaciated and famished. Yet, they are surrounded by bowls and bowls and platters and platters of luscious food. Why, then, are they ravished with hunger? Because, in this land called Hell, their arms cannot bend and thus they cannot carry even one morsel of food from the plates to their mouths. Their hands grasp fresh breads, ripe fruits, spoonfuls of hot stews. But, in this land of Hell, their bodies can not receive the nourishment of this, for it cannot reach their mouths. Their stick straight arms wave wildly in the air, desperately trying to figure out a way to carry the delicious food to their mouths.

The people in Hell cry out day and night. They futilely try to force their arms to bend. But the arms are rock solid straight. They try to eat directly with their mouths, but this is forbidden and they are beaten for it. So, they wither away eternity in this land of never-ending frustration, deprivation, and starvation.

I have also heard the story of a land called Heaven. In this land, as well, the people have only stick-straight arms. They, too, are surrounded by platters and bowls of scrumptious food which they cannot carry to their mouths. Yet, in Heaven, everyone is plump, well-fed, satisfied and joyful. Why is this? If you look carefully you will notice that,

rather than obstinately trying to bend their own unbendable arms, they have simply learned to feed each other...

This is, truly, the only difference between Heaven and Hell...do we stubbornly fight the will of God? Do we wrestle unsuccessfully each day with situations that cannot be changed? Do we flail around, wildly and desperately, trying to change the unchangeable? Do we ignore our loved ones, our friends, our colleagues who could help us immeasurably? Do we insist on suffering in silence, never asking for a helping hand from those near us? Do we watch others suffering and withhold our own help because we are so caught up in our own distress? If so, then we are living in Hell.

Or, do we assess the situation, look around and see how the situation can be improved? Do we graciously offer our hands and our help to others? Do we accept others' help when we are in distress? Do we take joy in "feeding others"? Do we spend time nourishing other's bodies, minds and hearts? Do we let ourselves be fed with love? Do we allow others to nourish us, rather than thinking "I can do it myself?" If so, then we are living in Heaven.

Too often in the world I see people who are living in the Hell of their own isolation, in the Hell of their own frustration, in the Hell of their own determination to change the very nature of the world in which they live.

Families and friends gather together, frequently after many months of separation. Too frequently, though, I hear people say, "Oh, I dread this time of year. I dread it when

the whole family comes together," and then they continue on in a litany of complaints about this relative, that in-law, this friend. I have seen innumerable situations in which family members and friends could so easily put an end to another's pain. Yet, they won't. They don't want to be the one to offer, "Here, let me feed you."

Or, in the opposite, but similar situation, I see so many people suffering who could be helped by their families and friends. Yet, they won't ask for help. They won't let others help them. They say, "I can do it myself." Their pride and ego will not allow them to say, "Will you feed me, please?" However, this is not the way it should be. When we gather with our loved ones, we must realize that it is they who can feed us when we are hungry, it is they who can alleviate our suffering, it is their love which will turn our lives from Hell to Heaven.

But, we must be willing to see the situation as it stands. If our arms are unbendable, we must accept that they are unbendable and then look for other ways to solve the problem. If we keep trying to change the unchangeable - in ourselves, in others or in the world - we will forever be frustrated and hungry - not only in the body, but also in the heart and in the soul.

So when families and friends gather together, if you see someone suffering, be the first to offer your help. Put aside any grudges or complaints or judgments. Simply offer your hand in assistance. And, if you are in distress, ask for help. These are your closest family and friends. Put aside your ego and pride. See how they can help you and ask for that. Then, as you feed

them and as they feed you, your lives will change from Hell to Heaven.

A NEEDLE TO HEAVEN

Once, Shri Gurunanak Devji Maharaj, the founder of Sikhism and a very great saint, was on a pilgrimage. This was approximately 500 years ago, and the saint would travel by foot, freely dispensing wisdom, guidance and blessings to thousands of people. Along his way, a very rich man invited Gurunanak Devji to his home for the night. This home would be more aptly called a palace. There was marble and gold everywhere; expensive horses and carriages; dozens of sumptuous foods served out of sterling silver dishes. Tokens of the man's success abounded.

A truly great saint is always thinking about how to help us grow spiritually, how to uplift us, how to turn our minds and hearts to God. Gurunanak Devji Maharaj was such a saint. Additionally, a saint will never take anything without repaying the giver in some way. So, when he left the rich man's home, he handed the man a small sewing needle. "Hold on to this for me. I will take it back when I next see you," the saint said to the man.

Later, when the man told his wife what had happened, she was furious. "How could you have taken something that belongs to a saint? What happens if he dies before he sees you again?" It is considered a great sin to keep something belonging to a saint or to be in a saint's debt. This is why the rich man's wife was so angry. She told her husband,

“You can not take the needle with you to Heaven when you die. So, if he dies first, you will never be able to give it back to him. Go now. Return the needle immediately!” So the man set out after the saint.

When he found Shri Gurunanak Devji, he handed him the needle and said, “Guruji, I cannot bear the thought that if you should die, I would have no way of returning your needle to you. It is not as though I could take it with me when I die and then give it back to you in Heaven. I cannot. So, please take it now.”

The saint smiled, took his needle, and looked deep into the rich man's eyes. “You are right. You cannot take this needle with you when you die. But, if you cannot even take this tiny needle, how do you think you will take all your possessions and wealth? That, too, must stay behind when you go. You can not even leave this Earth with a tiny needle, let alone a palace full of wealth.”

“Oh my God. You are right.” The man became white as a sheet. “All my life I have struggled for things that are as transitory as this body. I have sweat and slaved and forsaken my family in favor of acquiring more and more wealth. Yet, if God takes me tomorrow, I will lose it all in a breath. And, I have acquired nothing that will last. I have not done good deeds for others; I have not practiced sadhana; I have not served the world.”

When he returned home, he immediately sold all his possessions - except the most basic necessities - donated all the millions of rupees to the poor, and devoted the rest of his life to God and the world. And do you know what? As

he lay on his death-bed in the small, simple house with his wife and family by his side, he said, “I am far richer today than I was 30 years ago when Shri Gurunanak Devji came to my home.”

What can we learn from this wise saint? His message is as apt and valuable today as it was in the rural villages of India centuries ago. We come into this world with nothing but the love of our parents; we leave this world with nothing but the love we have created. All material things we acquire we must leave behind. I have never seen a rich man, a sports-star, a movie actress, a businessman, a doctor, a fashion model, or even the president ride to Heaven in a Mercedes, carrying a basket filled with luscious snacks. No, we leave this Earth alone. We cannot take our car, or our favorite clothes, or our finest china, not even one cent. All we can take is the karma of this life and the knowledge that we have spent this life in service, that the world is a better place because we lived.

When Alexander the Great was dying he begged his doctors to find some cure, to somehow salvage his failing health. The doctors sadly explained that there was nothing more they could do, that they could not give him even one extra breath. At this Alexander asked that, upon his death, his arms should be kept out of his casket instead of inside. When a corpse is placed into a casket, the arms are always laid neatly at the body's side. However, Alexander wanted his arms, palms up, out of the casket. He said that it was important for people to realize that even though he had conquered entire countries and kingdoms, even though he had obtained vast amounts of riches, even

though his wealth and power were unparalleled, he still had to leave this world empty handed. His bounty of wealth and power could neither prolong his life nor travel with him into the next world.

HALF A SHAWL

A wealthy man is walking back to his home on a cold, windy, winter night. On his way he meets a beggar who is clad in nothing but a thin cloth. The beggar beseeches the rich man, "Please, sir, give me your shawl. Otherwise I fear I will not make it through the cold tonight." The rich man is also a pious man, a devoted man.

However, he still has a few blocks to walk to his home. He does not want to suffer during those few blocks without a shawl. Yet, his heart is pulled by the poor man and he knows that one must always help those in need. So, he decides that the best solution is to give half of his shawl to the poor man, and he will keep the other half. So, he cuts the shawl in half, wraps himself in one half and gives the other to the homeless man.

That night as the wealthy man sleeps, Lord Krishna comes to him in a dream. In the dream, it is winter and Lord Krishna is shivering, wrapped only in half of a shawl. "Lord, why are you wearing only half a shawl?" the man asks. Lord Krishna replies, "Because that is all you gave me."

Our scriptures say that God comes in many forms. Frequently He comes to us in the guise of someone in need – an orphan, a homeless beggar. That is why our scriptures say to look on everyone, whether it is a prostitute, a

crippled man, a dirty child or a crook as divine. It is easy to see God in His glorious, beautiful form. It is easy to adorn the temple deity with fine clothes and sandalwood tilak and to cook for Him with love. It is easy to sacrifice our own needs while we do the seva of a revered saint. It is much more difficult to extend the same love and selflessness to those in whom we don't see the direct embodiment of the divine.

However, that is the task; that is the divine challenge. Our vision is limited. We see only on the surface. We see only the outer manifestations of what we perceive to be either holiness or lowliness. And we make our judgments based on these faulty perceptions. We give to those whom we deem worthy; we give as much as we decide the other needs. This is our mistake, and this is why we see Lord Krishna wearing only half a shawl!

So, we must learn to cultivate divine vision. We must pray for the sight that shows us God in everyone and in everything. Who would give God only half a shawl? Who would even hesitate before offering God all we have and all we are? No one. In fact, our tradition is based on the very idea that everything we are and everything we do is for God. In yagna we say *Idam namamah*. "Not for me, but for you." Before we eat, we offer prasada to Bhagwan. We will not take food until He has first been served.

So, as our world is flooded with poverty, with violence, with hunger, with homelessness with destitution, let us open not only our two physical eyes, but let us also open our third eye, the divine eye. Let this eye show us God's existence in everyone, and let us serve others and treat

others just as though they were Lord Krishna Himself who had come to us for assistance. Then, and only then, can we obliterate the distress in the world.

LOVE, SUCCESS AND WEALTH

A young woman heard a knock on her door one day. When she went to open it, she found an old man on her door step. "Come in, come in," she said. The man asked, "Is your husband home?" The woman explained that her husband was not home, but she invited the man inside anyway.

He refused, however. "I am here with my two friends," pointing to two elderly men waiting in the front yard. "However, we will wait outside until your husband returns."

That evening as soon as the husband came home, his wife told him what had happened. "Quick, quick, call them inside," the husband exclaimed. "We cannot leave old men standing in the cold outside."

So, the woman went outside and beckoned the men in. One of them rose and said, "Ma'am, we actually cannot all three come in. You see, I am Love, and with me are Success and Wealth. Only one of us can enter your home. Please, go and ask your husband which of us he would like in the home." So, the woman went and — relaying the story to her husband — said, "I think we should invite Success in. Then, you will get the promotion you've been waiting for and we will become more prosperous."

However, the husband thought and said, "But, Honey, I

only want the promotion so we can be rich. If we invite Wealth into our home, then it won't matter if I get the promotion, because we will already be rich. I think Wealth is a better choice."

Their daughter then quietly spoke, "Mom, Dad. Let us bring Love into the home. If we have Love with us, then we won't care so much about Success or Wealth. We will be rich on the inside."

Her parents thought for a moment and finally acquiesced to their daughter's wish. So, the woman went outside and — addressing the man who had introduced himself as Love — said, "Okay, we have decided. You can come inside." So, Love took a step forward and began to walk toward the house. As he passed through the doorway, the woman noticed the other two men following. "Wait," she exclaimed. "We have chosen Love. You said that only one could come inside."

Love then paused and explained gently, "If you had chosen either Success or Wealth he would have had to enter alone. However, wherever Love goes, Success and Wealth always follow."

If you ask most parents what their concerns are regarding their children, you'll hear "I want him to get into a good university. I want her to get a good job and be successful." Time and energy are therefore expended in pushing the child academically, encouraging the child to excel, punishing or reprimanding the child for less than superb performance. Yet, a degree from a top university, a well pay-

ing job, a lucrative career — these are not the true marks of “success” in life.

True success comes when we are fulfilled, joyful, peaceful and prosperous – both internally and externally. So, fill your homes with love — love for God, love for each other, love for the community, love for all of humanity. Then, through that love, through that divine connection, all else will automatically follow. It is when we focus only on Success or Wealth that we find ourselves rich but not fulfilled, successful but not content.

LOYALTY OF THE BIRDS

A long time ago, in the times when animals and man and plants still spoke the same language, there was a large fire that threatened to burn down many, many acres of forest. Flames whipped through the ground, devouring small shrubs, bushes, flowers and grass-lands. All the animals scampered for safety. Squirrels climbed high in the trees, frogs hopped quickly to lily pads in the middle of ponds, deer ran briskly to higher ground, birds flew to safety. As the fire raged, the billowing flames became more and more ominous, engulfing more and more of the forest. The waters of the pond began to boil, and the frogs hopped desperately from lily pad to lily pad.

Soon the rising flames began to envelop even the oldest, sturdiest, densest trees, consuming them from the inside out. Squirrels hopped and monkeys swung from branch to branch, tree to tree, trying feverishly to escape the fury and momentum of the fire.

High in one tree sat two birds, and they neither cried with fear nor attempted to fly to safety. When the forest ranger, clothed in a fire proof suit and attempting to ensure the safety of as many animals as possible, saw them he became frantic. “Fly away,” he cried. “Go...shoo...fly.” He yelled as loudly as he could, hoping to startle them into flight.

Yet they remained still, unwavering, complacent. The ranger picked up branches and began to throw them into the tree. "Fly away....Go! Go!" He beseeched them. But the birds would not budge.

Finally, the ranger looked up and cried, "The forest is burning. This tree will be nothing but ashes in a few hours. You will die for sure. Why in the world won't you fly away?"

After many moments of silence one of the birds spoke. "We have lived our lives in this tree. She has given us branches on which to build our nests and raise our young. She has given us fruit to eat and worms to feed to our babies. Her leaves capture the moisture each night, and in the morning she has let us suck on them for water. In the summer, she has blocked the sun and provided us with shade. In the winter, she has caught the snow herself, so it would not fall on us. As the wind blows through her leaves, she has sung to us. She has let us fly quickly to her highest branches to escape the tigers or other animals who would eat us. We know she will burn. If there were anything we could do to save her, we would do it. But, as much as we have tried to think of something, we realize we are helpless. There is nothing we can do. However, we will not leave her now.

"Our whole lives, and our parents' lives and our grandparents' lives, she has stood beside us, never flinching, never failing to provide us with anything we could need. How, in this most dire moment, could we abandon her? We may not be able to save her, but we will not let her die alone. That is why we stay. She will die, and we will die, but she will not leave us and we will not leave her."

We are so quick in life to switch loyalties - from one teacher to another, from one spouse to another, from one way of being to another. Our hearts are fickle. We will remain loyal as long as it serves us to do so, as long as we, too, benefit from the loyalty. But, is that really devotion? There is a reason that wedding vows include the phrase "for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health."

It is very easy to be attached to someone who is healthy, happy and prosperous. It is more difficult to remain with someone who is sick, depressed and indigent. It is even more difficult to maintain the devotion when it may bring what looks like harm to you. I say "looks like harm" because the loss of your faith actually is much more damaging to your soul than any of these other superficial "catastrophes."

Pure, single-minded devotion is one of the most beautiful things on Earth. It is, in fact, the path of Bhakti. Yet, how many of us are really able to maintain this? Usually, we love God and have faith in Him when all is wonderful. It is more difficult to believe in a Divine Plan when that Plan causes agony. Know, though, that it is at times of distress that your faith is most important. For, these are really the lessons of life. This is real spirituality. Spirituality is not about being where and with whom you are most comfortable. It is keeping the fire of your loyalty burning regardless of how much water is being poured on the flames.

This is the beauty of the birds. They realized there was nothing they could do to keep the fire away from their tree. So, they calmly and faithfully waited out God's plan. This sort of devotion may be seen as blind; it may be viewed

as childish. Yet, those views are from a modern, Western standpoint which can only see devotion and loyalty as means to another end. However, they are ends in and of themselves.

Their simple and pure loyalty is going to carry these birds' souls to Heaven more than anything they would be able to accomplish with their remaining years, if they had forsaken their "mother" tree.

THE POWER OF LOVE

I heard a beautiful story of a college professor in New York who gave his business-economy students the assignment of going into a slum and finding 10 children each to interview. Then, the university students had to prepare reports on each of the 10 children they had interviewed. The final item of the assignment was for the students to rate each child's chance of success in the world.

So, the students all completed their assignments. With 20 students in the class, the professor ended up with 200 papers on 200 different children living in a slum area. Every single report ended with the last question of "What are this child's chances of success in the world?" Each had the same answer: "This child has no chance."

Twenty or thirty years later, another professor at the same college came upon these 200 old reports in the economy department's filing cabinets. He thought it would be interesting to see whether all 200 children had really turned out to be victims of their impoverished, crime-ridden upbringings.

Amazingly, over 90% of the children who had "no chance" had turned out to be successful doctors, lawyers or professionals. The professor was astonished and went to each one to ask what had helped him or her become a success.

Every single respondent (now they were middle aged) said, "Well, there was this one teacher I had who changed my life and gave me the ability to succeed."

The professor finally found this one teacher who had changed the lives of all the children. When he found her, she was past ninety and very frail. He asked her how she had possibly taken these impoverished children who had no chance of success in the world and turned more than 90% of them into successful professionals. The old woman looked at the professor very simply, smiled and said, "I just loved those children."

The power of love is enough to give hope to the hopeless, enough to turn failures into successes, enough to make lives worth living.

The teacher had not done any special program, nor had she taught the children any special skills. None of them recalled a particular lesson, activity or project. Rather, the simple fact that she loved them and believed in them was enough to change their lives.

We all have this power to transform not only ourselves, but others as well. Yet, do we use it? Do we take the divine gift of love in our hearts and use it as much as possible, to help as many as we can?

The message of Bhagwan Shri Krishna is, "Love, Love and Love all." From the moment He was 6 days old, He had enemies. So many demons and asuras came to kill Him. But what did He do? Did He fight them with anger? Did

He hate them? Did He send them forever to Hell? No. He granted them all liberation.

Wherever Bhagwan Krishna went — whether it was to palaces, to the simple hut of Vidurji, to the gardens of Vrindavan — He brought only His divine love. His divine love changed not only the lives of all those who met Him during His physical presence on Earth, but the ever-present love He continues to shower upon us change all who open their hearts to it.

Let us take to heart His divine message of
"Love All, Hate None. Heal All, Hurt None."

God has given us a special ability to touch others with our smiles, to change a life with a simple warm embrace, to bring meaning to the lives of others by our love. We must use this divine gift and never let it go in vain.

Flowers blossom under the warm rays of the sun, and the flowers of our lives — our children, our families, and all those around us — will blossom only under the warm rays of our love.

If we learn how to love others, really, truly love them, not for who we want them to be, but rather for who they are — for the perfect souls that God has created — then we have learned one of the greatest lessons of life.

ONLY YOU

There once lived a king, but he was not just any king. He was one of those kings who was so important, so powerful that history books will talk about him forever. This king ruled an area bigger than the land we now call America. His territory extended from sea to sea, across mountain ranges and deserts, through the jungle. No one knows how many subjects he had, because there were too many to count. People used to say that if you put all his money together, in one place, it would fill the oceans.

This king was the most powerful man the world had ever seen. Anything he commanded happened instantly. They tell the story that one time in the middle of winter, the king was craving mangoes. But, it was winter, and as you know the trees only give mangoes in the summer. However, this king was so powerful that when the mango trees heard he wanted their fruit, they began to produce huge, beautiful mangoes. The snow was washed off, and the king had sweet mango in December.

Being such a powerful king of such a large region, he had to travel quite a bit. And travel in those days was not as easy as it is today. There were no trains or airplanes. The king traveled by carriage, or it is more correct to say, he traveled with an army of carriages. And, because travel was so slow and difficult, he was frequently gone for long

periods of time.

One time, he had been away for many months, visiting the farthest reaches of his kingdom, ensuring that everyone was happy, that everyone was taken care of. For, even though he was so rich and so powerful and had more subjects and money than one could count, he had a very pure heart and was very dedicated to all of his subjects. When he was about to return home, he sent letters to all of his queens (in those days kings had many, many queens). In the letters he asked if there was anything they would like, any special gift he could bring them from far away. Of course, he always returned with carriages collapsing under the weight of so many gifts for his family, but he wanted to know if they had any special requests.

Each queen sent a list back to the king. "Bring me silk sarees, lined with gold...bring me diamonds, fresh out of the Earth....bring me pearls from the depths of the sea..." However, while all of the other queens sent long lists, one queen sent only a piece of paper with "1" written on it. The king was baffled, for even though he was very pure and very devoted, he was not always very smart. He turned to his chief minister and said, "This queen is stupid. I knew when I married her that she was stupid. Everyone else sent a list of gifts they want. This queen writes only '1' on the paper. What is '1'?"

The chief minister was very wise; he was a true man of God, and he could see people's hearts. He laid his hand on the king's shoulder. "No, no." He said. "The '1' means 'only you.' She is saying that she only wants you. Everyone else wants jewels and sarees and silks. When this queen writes

'I' she is saying that you are number one. That you are all she wants. If you are there, with her, everything is there. In your presence, she wants nothing, needs nothing. And if you are not there, nothing can fill the hole left by your absence - not sarees, not diamonds, not jewels. If you are not there for whom will she wear the sarees? For whom will she wear the silks, the diamonds? What is the point of all these things if you are not there? Where you are, everything is. So, she wants you to bring yourself to her, and nothing else."

The king was silent. "Oh," he whispered, trembling. For now he understood. His whole life people had wanted him for what he had, for what he could do for them, what he could bring to them. He could bring wealth, he could bring possessions, he could bring health (for he had all the best doctors), he could bring grace and blessings (in those days, people believed that kings carried divine powers). But, no one had ever wanted only him, just for him. No one had ever wanted only his presence, even if it carried none of the other gifts.

Immediately, he sent his servants to fill the orders on the lists sent by the other queens; he sent his messengers to deliver those orders. And he, himself, went to the queen. When he saw her, his eyes locked with hers. Their tears seemed to flow together. Their souls seemed to embrace, although their bodies were still many feet apart. He moved slowly, almost as though floating, toward her. And he took her in his arms and held her. "You are the only one who has ever really loved me. The others thought they loved me. But, they loved me for what I brought to them. They loved me for how they felt when they were with me. They loved

me for what I symbolized. And you love me only for me."

And the king stayed there, forever, with the queen. Because of its purity, their love just grew and grew, and it showered everything near them with light and joy. Everything in their presence flourished and blossomed. People talked far and wide about how the flowers in their garden were brighter, bigger, more alive than flowers anywhere else, how the birds all seemed to stay close to the castle. Even in winter when all the other birds flew to warmer ground and the land became silent, the birds at this castle stayed, and sang their blissful songs all year long. Even on cloudy days, there was always a break in the clouds big enough to ensure that the sun could shine on this castle.

And the king became even more rich, and even more powerful - although if you asked him, he would not have even noticed; he was too busy serving his subjects, serving God and loving his queen. And their love and light was so strong that it radiated to the farthest reaches of the kingdom, bringing joy and peace to all the creatures of the land, from sea to sea, across mountain ranges and deserts, through the jungles.

So many times we become completely convinced that having this or doing that or going there will bring us happiness. "If only I had more of this," we say. Children are famous for this, but perhaps they are actually only more vocal. We watch TV, we see movies, we see advertisements. The message in all of these is "Buy this, and then you will be happy." Sure the "happiness" takes different forms: some products bring happiness through beauty, others

bring it through success, others bring it through the right foods. But, the message is the same: own this and you will be happy.

God is kind; God is giving. And we are His children. So, naturally, He will frequently give us what we ask for.

But, when we ask for these things, aren't we saying to God, "I don't really need you, I only need this possession. Your only purpose is to bring me the possession?" If, however, we have God in our lives, we have everything. Do you think that when the King himself goes to the queen's palace, all his messengers and servants, all his possessions don't come with him? Of course they do. Everything goes with the king. Where the king is, everything is.

God is the supreme king. The king of our lives. Where He is, everything is. Let us not lose sight of what it is we really need to be happy.

SERVICE TO OTHERS IS THE BEST MEDICINE

There is a beautiful story of a princess who was suffering from an undiagnosable illness. She lay in bed, listless, unable to walk or to exert herself at all. She had lost all appetite and her parents feared she would soon perish. Her father, the King, called in all the top doctors and medical specialists, but none could either diagnose or cure the young princess. They gave her allopathic, homeopathic, and ayurvedic medicines. They gave her pills, compresses, powders, massages and mineral baths. Nothing made even a dent in the princess's condition. She continued to lay, limp and mute, on her bed, staring blankly at the ceiling above her.

Finally, in desperation, the King called a revered holy man, a saint who was worshipped throughout the kingdom as having divine knowledge and powers. As soon as the sage saw the princess, he understood exactly what was wrong. "Pick her up and place her in the carriage," he ordered. The King refused. "How can you take this weak, fragile being outside in the carriage?"

Yet, the saint insisted. "If you do not follow my orders, your daughter may not recover. Wrap her warmly if you like and place her in the carriage. We will travel alone." The King had no choice; his options were exhausted and none had borne any fruit. He could only pray that the holy

man knew what he was doing.

So the princess was wrapped in the warmest shawls and gingerly placed — supported by numerous feather pillows — in the King's carriage. The holy man got in beside her and instructed the driver where to go. He explained to the princess as they traveled, "I have a few urgent jobs to take care of on our way. You can accompany me." They soon stopped in a poor area on the outskirts of the Kingdom. The sage stepped down from the carriage, carrying large sacks filled with clothing and food. He walked house to house, delivering bags of rice, lentils, wheat to the impoverished villagers.

Soon, he returned to the carriage to find— as he had expected — the princess sitting up straight in her seat, peering eagerly over the side of the carriage. They drove a little ways, and again the sage stopped the carriage in another poor, rural village outside the wealthy kingdom. "I need your help in this village. There is too much for me to carry," he told the princess. She barely needed the help of his hand to get down from the carriage.

The sage carried the heavy bag and gave the princess the task of handing the food items and wool sweaters to the grateful villagers. At the first house, she walked slowly, delicately, and meekly put her hand in the large sack to take out the bags of rice and lentils.

However, by the third house she was striding confidently down the path, and by the fifth house she was picking up the young children to hold them in her arms. As they walked back to the carriage, she insisted on helping the saint carry

the sacks of food, and she did not need any assistance to get back up into the carriage. Her cheeks were rosy; there was a beautiful, radiant smile on her face and a glow in her eyes.

Upon returning to the kingdom, three short hours after leaving, the princess nearly jumped out of the carriage and skipped up the steps to the castle! The King was amazed! How had the saint cured his daughter so completely, in such a short time?

The saint explained, "Your daughter was suffering from a lack of meaning in life. She was suffering from the disease of being spoiled and having every whim gratified. She was ill from a life being lived in vain. A journey to the poorest of the poor, a few hours of giving rather than taking, the experience of service and selflessness are the only possible cures."

Thereafter, the princess traveled twice each week with the saint, back into the poor villages, distributing food, clothing and other necessary supplies. She used her position as princess to help improve the living conditions of all those who lived in poverty. She dedicated herself to helping all those in need.

And she never suffered from a day of listlessness again...

Every day people in the West go out, go to work, earn money and become more prosperous. Yet, at the end of the day, when they return home, they are not happy. What is the true secret to internal peace and everlasting joy? I

always tell people, *“Be God conscious, not glamour conscious.”* Have Him in the center of your lives and you will find peace, happiness, meaning and joy.

However, it is difficult frequently to know HOW to implement the teaching of God in daily life. Yes, we should go to temple. Yes, we must chant His name (any name which appeals to us — whether it is Krishna, Rama, Jesus, Allah or Adonai). Yes, we must read from His holy words. Yes, we must pray to Him and offer our lives to Him.

However, what else can we do, so many people ask, to really become aware of God — full of God consciousness — in our daily lives? *We can serve His people!* Through service of the poorest of the poor we come closest to God. It is easy to see the divine in holy people, easy to serve those who look pious, proper and beautiful. But, the spiritual challenge is to see the divine in all, to serve all — from the highest King to the sickest leper — as though they are manifestations of God.

Through this selfless service, we not only benefit those whom we are serving, but we also benefit ourselves immeasurably. Our hearts fill with joy, with peace and with love. Our lives become full of meaning.

SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP

There is a story of a farmer who had an old mule. One day the mule fell into the farmer’s empty, dry well. As the mule cried for help, the farmer assessed the situation. Although the mule had served the farmer faithfully for many years, the farmer decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble. So, he decided that instead of bothering to lift the heavy mule from the well, he would simply bury him in there. The farmer called his friend and together they began to shovel dirt into the open well.

When the first shovelful of dirt hit the mule he panicked. “What is this?” He thought. When the second shovelful hit him, he began to cry. “How could the farmer do this to me?” he wondered. When the third shovelful hit him, he realized the plan. However, the mule decided that he would not allow himself to be buried alive. As each shovelful hit fell upon his back, he rallied himself to “shake it off and step up.” As shovelful after shovelful of dirt hit him on his back, and as he felt dejected and pained, he continued to chant to himself, “shake it off and step up.” This he did, shovelful after shovelful, until — as the dirt reached the top of the well — the mule triumphantly walked out of what would have been his tomb.

If the farmer had not decided to kill the mule, the mule would never have survived. Ironically, it was the dirt which

was meant to end the mule's life that actually ended up saving him, simply due to the way in which the mule handled the situation.

In life, sometimes we feel as though the world is "throwing blows at us." We feel shattered and broken. We feel as though we are being "buried alive." Perhaps someone is actually trying to injure us; or perhaps we are simply stuck in a difficult situation. Either way, we have two choices. We can either succumb to the onslaught and allow ourselves to be buried, or we can "shake it off and step up." The latter is surely a more difficult path. It requires resolution, will to survive, fortitude and faith. But, in the end, it is the path that will lead to our triumph. If we continue to "shake off" whatever hits us in life, and we continue to "step up" and rise above any situation, then we, too, will always be victorious and our lives will be successful and joyful.

WE ARE ONLY HIS TOOLS

Several years ago the United Nations was having its 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee celebration. World leaders - religious, political, social - were gathered together to commemorate this special anniversary. Numerous renowned people gave speeches -- on the global significance of the UN, on the importance of fostering inter-ethnic harmony, on how to curtail the insidious trafficking of drugs, on the necessity of preserving and protecting our rapidly diminishing natural resources.

Each was allotted a short period of time in which to speak. Most were given 3 minutes; some were given 5 minutes. Time was watched carefully. Note cards were held up, alerting the speaker that he or she had 3 minutes left, then 2 minutes, then 1 minute.

A divine, old, revered Indian saint, clad only in scant saffron robes, walked slowly, yet purposefully and unwavering to the podium when it was time for his talk. As he spoke, silence descended upon the room. While most speeches were read from notecards, or were the product of careful and deliberate editing, his words seemed to speak themselves. Dadaji was given 5 minutes to speak. However, as the organizers held up signs that read, "2 minutes left," then "1 minute left," he showed no signs of winding up his talk. The signs then read, "30 seconds left," then "Fin-

ished!!!” However, the saint was in such ecstasy, he was so impassioned with the words that were effortlessly flowing from his mouth, that he seemed not to even notice the signs.

At first the organizers were noticeably restless and anxious. After all, there were so many other people to speak, so many other segments of this important function. How to get this saint to step down from the podium? However, as he continued, his words were like a lullaby. Even the anxious organizers became still and peaceful, mesmerized by the quality of his words and his tone. The hall - filled with an audience of thousands - was as quiet as if it were empty. Dadaji spoke for 25 minutes, an unprecedented amount of time.

When he concluded, the silence of the auditorium broke like thunder into a clamorous standing ovation. No one who was present was unchanged. The saint’s words had reached not only minds, not only hearts, but also souls. He was flooded with accolades and tear-streaked faces as he descended from the stage. “Oh Dadaji, your speech was incredible. So inspiring. So uplifting. It was just wonderful.” Everyone wanted to praise this elderly yet seemingly ageless Indian saint. After one man took Dadaji’s hands and gave particularly effusive praise, the saint looked sweetly into his eyes and replied, “Yes, it was wonderful. I was also listening.”

“I was also listening.” “I was also listening.” This should be our mantra. For, it is not we who speak. It is He who speaks, although we like to take the credit. How easy it

would have been for Dadaji to have simply replied, “Oh, yes, I know my speech was good. I spent days preparing it.” Or “Yes. I’m a very good speaker, aren’t I?” However, he is a true man of God. He knows from where his words come. He knows whose words flow through his mouth. Those who are the true inspirations, who are the true teachers of this world, are actually simply channels. They are not the ones who spend lifetimes refining their tenaciously held beliefs and then impose these upon others. Rather, they simply open up the channels inside them and let God flow into their hearts and through their mouths or their pens. We are all here as tools for His work, as expressions of His love. Let us realize that; let us break the dams within us, so the river of His work and His message can flow ceaselessly through us.

WHO IS HANDICAPPED?

Across the world there is a wonderful organization called the Special Olympics. This foundation sponsors "Olympics" for people who are physically and/or mentally handicapped. These are people who may be suffering from anything ranging from partial paralysis to brain damage to what is just referred to as "retardation." Participating in these events not only trains the athletes to perform up to their highest potential, but it also infuses them with a sense of success, of competence, of achievement.

Recently, I heard a beautiful story about a race taking place in the Special Olympics. The athletes were lined up at the mark. The official yelled, "Ready, set, go!" and the athletes took off, all running as fast as their legs would carry them, with looks of determination, dedication and drive on their faces. All except one, that is. A young boy had tripped, immediately after starting, and had fallen into the dirt. He looked forlorn as he watched his peers race off without him.

Then, suddenly, a young girl who was running turned her head to see what had happened to the boy. As soon as she realized he fell, she turned around and ran back toward him. One by one, each of the athletes turned around to go back and look after the fallen boy. Soon all the runners were gathered around the young boy; they helped him to

his feet as one girl brushed the dirt off his pants. Then, all the athletes held hands as they walked together, slowly, toward the finish line.

These are the people we refer to as "handicapped" or "retarded" or, euphemistically, "mentally and physically challenged." Yet, would we who have full use of all our limbs, whose brains function at their highest capacity, ever turn around in the middle of a race, giving up our long sought-after hope of winning and go back to look after someone who was down? Would we ever sacrifice getting to the top, being the best, winning it all, just to lend encouragement to another? Rarely.

We spend our lives pushing to be higher and higher, better and better. We want to be the best, to be the top, to be number one. But at what stake? What do we give up in the process? They say, *"The mark of a true man is not how tall he stands, but how frequently he bends down to help those in need."* How frequently are we willing to bend?

The goal of life is not the accumulation of more and more possessions, or more and more degrees. The point of life is to move toward God, to realize our oneness with Him. The point of life is to fill every moment with compassion, with love, with prayer and with service.

Yes, of course, we must go to work and we must do our best in every possible arena. Of course we must attempt to succeed; we must live up to our fullest potential. But, too frequently, we become narrow minded in what we see as our "potential." Is our potential merely financial, or academic or professional? Might we have another potential,

a divine, compassionate, pious, devoted potential that is just waiting to blossom?

Let us vow to live up to every potential — not just those that confront us obviously in our daily life, but also those which may be hidden below the surface. The athletes may have thought, (and the audience may have thought as well) that their success, their achievement would be marked by how quickly they could run the 100 yards. However, the deep potential of these athletes was even greater than completing a “quick sprint.” They chose compassion over competition; they chose unity over individual success; they chose to really show us what it means to be divine souls.

Let us take a lesson from these athletes, who are far less “handicapped” than most of the people in the world. Let us learn that each race in life may have two different paths for success; let us learn that compassion, love and unity are much more everlasting achievements than a blue ribbon.

Let us vow to turn our heads around frequently and see whether, perhaps, there is someone who needs our help.

REAL EDUCATION

Once there was a boat, sailing in the middle of the ocean. On the boat, were a philosopher, a scientist, a mathematician, and the boatman. The philosopher turned to the boatman and asked, “Do you know the nuances of Vedanta? Do you know the theories of Plato and Aristotle?” “No,” replied the boatman. “I have never studied those things. I only know to take God’s name in the morning when I wake up and at night before I sleep, and to try to keep Him with me all day long.” The philosopher looked at him with disdain. “Well, then at least 30% of your life has been in vain.”

Next, the scientist asked the boatman, “Do you know Einstein’s Theory of Relativity? Do you know Newton’s laws?” The boatman looked out at the reflection of the moon on the water. The light seemed to dance playfully off of the waves, touching first here, then there. He gently shook his head in response to the scientist’s question. “No,” he said. “I am not learned in that way. I have only learned to be kind, to give more than I receive, to be humble and pious.” “Well,” the scientist exclaimed. “Then at least 40% of your life has been in vain.”

The mathematician then turned to the boatman. “You must at least know calculus? You must know how to compute advanced equations?” The boatman closed his eyes and entered a meditative trance. “No,” he said softly, a smile

creeping across his sun-weathered face. "I do not know those things." "Then, your life has been at least 50% in vain!" The mathematician retorted.

The four sat in silence for awhile, when suddenly the waves began to rise up furiously; the sky turned dark, obscuring the blanket of stars. The boat - thin and wooden - began to rock back and forth, up and down, with each thrust of the waves. The boatman fought diligently, using every muscle in his body, every skill he had to regain control over his boat. But the storm was winning the fight, and with each surge of the waves, the boatman became more and more convinced that the boat could not withstand this beating. As a wave lifted the boat high into the air, the boatman asked his passengers, "Do you know how to swim?" "NO!!!" they all cried at once. The wave dropped the boat, upside down, back in the raging water. The boatman watched sadly as the scientist, the philosopher and the mathematician drowned. "Well," he whispered "I think 100% of your lives have been in vain."

In this life, there are so many things to learn, so many things people say are important. Education is, of course, quite important. A doctor cannot operate if she doesn't know where the organs are, or how to sew a wound back up again. A scientist cannot perform experiments unless he knows which chemicals to use, and how much of each. An architect cannot design buildings without knowing what foundations and support are necessary.

However, in the big picture, these are not the lessons or the education that truly liberate us. It is not this knowl-

edge that saves us from drowning in the ocean. Only the knowledge of God can do that. Only love for Him, devotion to Him, and a life-vest inflated by Him can protect us in the raging sea of this world. For, many times in life, we feel like we are drowning. Many times we feel like we have swallowed so much water we can't breathe. It may seem as though our legs cannot possibly tread water for another minute.

At times like this we tend to turn to what we already know - more education, the acquisition of more possessions, the fulfillment of more sense pleasures. However, perhaps it is these that have caused our boat to capsize in the first place. Perhaps the ominous waves of the ocean are actually made up of our insatiable desires, of our purely academic educations, of our disregard for the Supreme Power behind and within everything.

Instead of making ourselves heavier and heavier, in which case we will surely drown, we must turn to the light, ever-present life vest around our bodies. It is knowledge of God, of how to truly live that will save us. The boatman knew how to see the stars; he knew how to watch God play in the light; he knew how to remain calm and serene even when challenged and insulted. He knew how to really swim.

DO YOUR DUTY

There was once a horrible drought. Year after year not a drop of rain fell on the arid ground. Crops died, and, as the land became parched, farmers gave up even planting their seeds. As the time of planting and tilling the ground came for the fourth rainless year in a row, the farmers of the region had given up hope and they sat listless, passing their time with playing cards and other distractions.

However, one lone farmer continued patiently to plant his seeds and sow and till his land. The other farmers poked fun at him and derided him as he continued daily to take care of his fruitless, barren land.

When they asked him the reason behind his senseless tenacity, he said, "I am a farmer and it is my dharma to plant and till my land. My dharma does not change simply due to whether the clouds rain or not. My dharma is my dharma and I must follow it regardless of how fruitful or fruitless it appears to be." The other farmers laughed at his wasteful effort, and went back to their homes to continue bemoaning the rainless sky and their fruitless land.

However, a passing rain cloud happened to be overhead when the faithful farmer was giving his answer to the others. The cloud heard the farmer's beautiful words and realized, "He's right. It is his dharma to plant the seeds and

to till the land, and it is my dharma to release this water which I am holding in my cloud onto the ground." At that moment, inspired by the farmer's message, the cloud released all the water it was holding onto the farmer's land. This rain cloud then continued to spread the message of upholding one's dharma to the other rain clouds, and they too – upon realizing it was their dharma to rain – began to let go of the moisture in their midst. Soon, rain was pouring down upon the land, and the farmer's harvest was bountiful.

In life, we tend to expect results from our actions. If we do something well, we want to be rewarded. If we work, we want to be paid (whether financially or in some other way). We want to work only so long as the work reaps rewards. If the fruits cease to come, we decide the work is not "meant to be," and we abandon it.

However, that is not the message which Lord Krishna gives to Arjuna in the Gita. The message is that we must do our duty regardless of the fruits. We must live according to our dharma regardless of whether it appears to be "successful." We must perform our duties for the simple fact that they are our duties.

Lord Krishna tells Arjuna to stand up and fight, and says that, even if he dies in the battle, he must still do his dharma. The Lord tells Arjuna that it is divine to die on the battlefield of life (meaning engaged in performing your duty). He explains that either way, Arjuna will "win." If the Pandavas win the battle, then they will obliterate the evil influence of the Kauravas and inherit the kingdom. If, on

the other hand, the Kauravas win the battle and the Pandavas are killed, then they will go straight to the Lord's eternal abode, for they died in the service of Dharma.

Usually in life, we know what our duties are. We know our responsibilities. We can see the "right" thing to do. This is especially true if we take quiet time to meditate, reflect and contemplate. Yet, too frequently we walk away from doing the "right" thing or from performing our duty due to the uncertainty of the result. We don't want to "waste our time" or "look like a fool." We neglect our responsibilities by saying, "It doesn't matter any way." We shun our duties with words like, "Well, no one else is doing it, so why should I?"

This is not the way to live. We must realize that there is an enormous, infinite cosmic plan at work and we must all perform our allotted tasks to the best of our ability. Whether we actually succeed or fail in the venture should not be the biggest concern. True success comes not in a financial "win," but rather in the humble, tenacious, dedicated performance of our tasks.

Interestingly enough, when we act with righteousness and integrity, we find that others will follow. It is not that we are taken advantage of, as we frequently fear. Rather, if we set the divine example, others will follow. Just as the rain cloud followed the example of the tenacious farmer, so will those in our lives follow our own examples. If we act with honesty, we receive honesty. If we act with dedication and love, so we will receive dedication and love. If we fulfill our dharma, so will those around us learn to do the same.

Yet, even if we are the only ones acting piously, acting honestly, acting with devotion, it should not matter. Our lives, our happiness and our karma are individual entities. They are not dependent upon the response from others.

Therefore, we must all learn to stand up, have courage and keep performing our duties, regardless of whether it looks like success or failure will result. Through the fulfillment of our dharma we will achieve the greatest success in life – bliss, peace and enlightenment.

THE LEAKY BUCKET

In the very olden times, there was once a great king. This king had many, many servants to take care of every task. One particular servant was responsible for bringing water from the well to the King's table. However, it was a long journey from the castle to the well from which fresh, clean and pure water could be obtained. As this was the time before cars and other convenient machines, the servant carried two buckets - one attached to each end of a long stick - to transport water back to the castle. One of the buckets was new - it shone in the sunlight and it was perfect in every way. The other bucket was older and it had a small hole on one side that caused water to leak from it onto the ground, along the road back to the castle.

Thus, whenever the servant arrived back to the castle, although he had filled 2 buckets of water, he had only 1 and a half to present to the king. This caused the leaky bucket great distress. Twice a day when the servant picked up the buckets to go to the well, the older one would look longingly at the new one, "Oh, why can't I be as shiny and flawless as the other?" the bucket would bemoan. The leaky bucket would cast envious looks at the new bucket as not a single drop fell from its new, glistening metal.

The leaky bucket tried every possible way of shifting its weight, of rotating its sides to minimize the leakage, but

all to no avail. It could retain no more than half a bucket of water through the long walk back to the castle.

One day, the leaking bucket was distraught and cried out to the servant, "Why don't you just throw me away? I'm of no use to you. I can do barely half the work of your new bucket. You have to walk such a long way back and forth to the well and I leak out half of the water you fill me with. The king is such a good, noble, divine king. I want to serve him as well as your new bucket. But I can't; I can't even give him a full bucket of water."

The servant was very wise (sometimes wisdom lies hidden in places where we don't expect it). He said to the bucket, "Look down. Look below you on the path to the castle, the path upon which you leak your water." The bucket at first was too ashamed to look and see drops of precious water scattered on the ground. When it finally looked, however, it noticed a thick row of beautiful flowers - so many lush, blossoming varieties - lining the path with vibrancy and beauty.

"Every day I pick these flowers to decorate the king's table and his room," the servant said. "When I noticed that you were leaking, I planted seeds all along the path on your side of the road. Then, twice a day you come and water them. Now, they have grown and blossomed into the king's favorite centerpiece. He says their fragrance calms his mind and brings peace to his heart. So, see, you are not useless at all. Rather, you are serving two purposes - both to bring water and also to bring beautiful flowers to the king's castle.

So many times in life we condemn ourselves for our failures, we compare ourselves unfavorably to others, we grieve over our own shortcomings, wishing that we could be different, more like someone else or some pre-conceived ideal. And as we do this, we blind ourselves to our real assets, to the flowers we are watering each day, to the real gifts we can give to the king.

God has given everyone a unique, special set of gifts and it is up to us to make the most of these. Some of us will be able to carry water without spilling a drop. Our gift to the world will be a full bucket of water. Others of us will be able to give only half a bucket of water, but we will line the world's paths with beautiful flowers and sweet fragrance. Let us never underestimate our potential or the significance of our own gifts. Let none of us ever feel just like a "leaky bucket."

THE LITTLE THINGS IN LIFE

Once there was a saint who lived in the Himalayan forests. He lived in an ashram deep in a beautiful jungle where he spent his time in meditation and looking after the ashram.

Once a traveler came upon the saint and the ashram while trekking through the Himalayas. The young man started talking to the saint about the spiritual life. The young tourist asked him, "What did you do before you became enlightened?"

The saint replied, "I used to chop wood and carry water from the well."

The man then asked, "What do you do now that you have become enlightened?" The answer was simple. The saint replied, "I chop wood and carry water from the well."

The young man was puzzled. He said, "There seems to be no difference then. What was the point in going through all those years of sadhana in order to attain enlightenment if you still spend your days doing chores and menial tasks?"

The Master replied, "The difference is in me. The difference is not in my acts, it is in me: because I have changed, all my acts have changed. Their significance has changed.

The prose has become poetry, the stones have become sermons and matter has completely disappeared. Now there is only God and nothing else. Life now is liberation to me, it is nirvana."

So many people complain, "My job is not spiritual." Or "How can I live a spiritual life while I have to care for children and a family?" The answer to a spiritual life is not in WHAT you're doing, but in HOW you're doing it. How attached are you to the details of what you're doing or how focused is your mind on God? Have stones become sermons? A spiritual life is not about renouncing work or renouncing chores or renouncing tasks that we may see as "beneath us." Rather, a spiritual life is about turning these tasks into tapasya, turning jobs into joy, turning stress into sadhana. This is a spiritual life.

People tend to think: first I'll complete my householder years and then I'll turn myself to God. Yes, in our culture, one dedicates one's life after retirement to God, to simplicity, to seva, to spirituality. But, you don't have to wait until you've retired in order to attain that glorious state. You can attain it while living IN the world. It's all a matter of the mind. Are you counting cars in front of you before you reach the tollbooth on the highway or are you counting the names of the Lord in your mind? Are you reciting lists of things to be done when you get home from the office, or are you reciting God's holy name? Is your tongue speaking angry remarks at your family, your co-workers and your neighbors or are you speaking only pure, calm, peaceful words?

Attaining enlightenment does not mean being out of the world or away from tasks. It means being IN the world, but not OF the world. It means DOING tasks, but not BEING the tasks.

Let us try – today – as we complete our daily routine to ask ourselves, "How would this routine be different if I were enlightened? How would my attitude change? How would my actions change?" Let us then pray to God for the strength to act accordingly. Then we'll know that we're really living a spiritual life, not merely relegating it to a few moments alone in the mandir at the end of the day.

TREASURE CHEST

There is a beautiful story of a beggar who lived all of his life under one tree. Each day he would go out into the villages and beg for just some dry bread crumbs to sustain his life. Then, he would come back to his tree and eat his bread or whatever scraps the villagers had given him that day. For forty years the beggar lived under the same tree, pleading with the people to give him some food. He'd walk to all the nearby villages, alternating days, begging for his nourishment. Slowly, day by day, he became weaker, and finally one day his body could no longer sustain itself and he passed quietly into death.

When the villagers found him, they decided to bury his ashes under the tree where he lived out his life. As they began to dig, in order to place his ashes deep in the ground, they found a treasure chest – full of gold, diamonds and jewels, a mere six inches below the ground.

For forty years, the beggar had lived, barely scraping by on his dry bread crumbs, sitting six inches above a treasure chest which would have rendered him as rich as a king. If only it had ever occurred to him to explore the depths of the Earth on which he sat, or to delve deeply into the recesses of his home – he would have discovered this treasure chest. But, he did not. Rather, he sat on the surface, suffering and withering away, day by day.

Too frequently in life we are also like this beggar – running here and there searching, begging for that which we need to fulfill our lives. Perhaps we are not begging for food or basic life necessities. More likely we are searching and yearning for peace, happiness or God. We go here, we beg there. We search this place, we search that place. But that priceless and yet crucial peace and happiness still elude us.

If only we would sit still for a moment and go deeper within, we would find that treasure chest. We don't even have to dig six inches. Just right within us, sitting in our heart, is God, and through our connection to Him, all of the riches of the world are bestowed upon us.

However, too frequently I see people running in the opposite direction in their fruitless search. They run from this workshop to that workshop, from this new trend to that new trend, all the while being frustrated in their search. Stop for a moment and look within.

The Indian youth, especially, are all incredibly blessed. Your culture, your heritage and your traditions are a true treasure chest of meaning, understanding, wisdom and insight. Through opening this box of jewels you will definitely find the happiness, contentment and peace for which you are searching.

Go back to your roots, back to your heritage, back to the temple. Listen to the stories of your parents and grandparents. Perform aarti with deep devotion. Go to have the satsang and the darshan of visiting saints. Take a trip to India rather than to the beaches or ski slopes. Through

this re-connection to your culture and your heritage you will find the key which will open the treasure chest.

But, never forget that the treasure chest is inside of you, flowing through your veins. It is not some external “thing” to be obtained or found. Rather, the divine joy is residing within you, in your heart, in your breath and in your blood.

FOOTPRINTS

I heard a story once of a man who was a great devotee of God. Always throughout his life, God was his companion. He loved God more than anything else in all the world. When the man was very old, he lay in his bed one afternoon and had a dream. In this dream, he could see his entire life stretched out before him, as though it was the coastline along the ocean. And he could look back and see his footprints — deep impressions in the wet sand — marking the path he had walked in this life. As he looked back further and further, he could see that, in fact, there was not one, but 2 sets of footprints, side by side, along the edge of the ocean. He knew the other footprints were those of God, for he had felt God's presence beside him throughout his life.

But, then he saw something that woke him immediately from his dream; his heart beat fast and he could not hold back the tears. “God!” He cried out. “I just had a dream, and in this dream I could see the whole path of my life; I could see the footprints I left along the way. And beside my footprints, there were yours, for You walked with me, and...” Now the man was full of tears and could barely speak. “But, God, sometimes there was only one set of footprints, and when I looked, I could see that those were the times I was really fallen, really broken, when I needed You most. How, God, how could You leave me when I needed

You most? I thought You promised You'd be with me forever. Why did Your footprints disappear at the times I really needed You?"

Softly, gently, God laid a hand on the man's head, wiped away the tears. "My child, I promised to always be with you, and I have never left you for a second, not even while you slept. Those times when you see only one set of footprints, those darkest moments of your life, it was those times that I carried you in my arms."

There are times we feel abandoned by God, times we doubt His presence in our lives. It is easy to have faith when all is going well, easy to believe in a plan when that plan brings us joy and fulfillment. It is much more difficult to believe in the inherent goodness of the Planner when the plan causes agony. Do we all not, on some level, feel that when our lives are tough, that we have been left by God? But, it is those times that our faith will carry us through. It is truly those times in which we are being carried by God. Perhaps, as we get so much closer to him, as we move from walking beside Him to being in His arms, we actually feel His presence less, so we doubt it. Perhaps as the boundaries and borders between Him and us dissolve, and we simply become His children, perhaps that is when we truly lose ourselves in Him. As the otherness is gone, perhaps we feel less aware of the presence.

RAISE YOURSELF - DON'T ERASE OTHERS

Once, a wonderful spiritual master gave a demonstration in front of a large class. He drew a horizontal line on the chalkboard and asked the class the following question: "Is there anyone in the room who can make this line appear shorter without erasing it?" The students thought and thought. They concluded that the only possible way to reduce the size of the line would be to erase part of it from either side. Thus, they told Swamiji, "No, there is no way to reduce the size of the line without erasing any of it."

Swamiji then proceeded to draw another, much longer, horizontal line on the board, a few inches above the previously drawn line. "Now," he asked. "Hasn't the first line become shorter in comparison to the new, longer line? Doesn't it appear quite short?" Everyone agreed that the line now appeared much shorter. "One does not have to erase a piece of the first line in order to make it appear shorter. One simply has to draw a longer line near it, and it will automatically seem shorter."

In life, in the rush to get ahead, in the rush to prove ourselves and make a name for ourselves, we frequently resort to criticizing, condemning and badmouthing others. In order to make ourselves look better, we put other people down. So many times we tell examples of the shortcomings of our colleagues so that we – in comparison – will

appear better, or we criticize those with whom we are in competition.

However, this is not the way to get ahead or make a name for ourselves. Let us not try to diminish others in order to look good ourselves. That is like erasing the line to make it shorter, simply so we will look bigger in comparison. The way to get ahead in life should not be at the cost of others. Instead of bringing others down, let us raise ourselves up. Instead of cutting others, let us learn how to grow. Let us become long lines ourselves, rather than erasing others. If we focus on becoming as “long” as we can, then we will naturally shine above others.

It is very difficult in life to accept our own responsibility, our own mistakes. It is much easier for us to condemn others, criticize others, judge others and blame others. We rarely realize how frequently our own actions contribute to a negative situation. It is so much easier to simply blame others. This is like erasing others in order to look long ourselves.

A woman once went to the doctor. She told the doctor, “My husband talks all night long in his sleep. You must give me some medicine for him to make him stop talking in his sleep.” The doctor gave the woman a prescription for medicine and told her, “If you take this medicine every day, your husband will stop talking in his sleep.”

But the woman was shocked, “Why must I take the medicine, doctor? It is my husband who has the problem. I am not sick. My husband is the sick one who talks in his sleep. It is for him you must prescribe medicine.”

The doctor explained to her as follows: “Ma’am, your husband talks in his sleep because you don’t let him talk during the day time. Every time he tries to say something you correct him, belittle him or tell him to be quiet. So, he has no choice other than to talk in the night. The medicine will make you be quiet during the day so your husband can say what’s on his mind. Then he won’t have to talk in his sleep anymore!”

Whenever we are in a difficult situation, a frustrating situation or a challenging situation, let us examine what we can do to solve the problem. Let us examine what role our own actions may have played in bringing about the current circumstances. Let us work WITH others to get ahead, rather than work AGAINST others. Let us cooperate instead of compete.

Indian culture teaches us “milaanaa not mitaanaa” and “journa not tourna” [bring together, don’t cut. Unite, don’t break]. But, don’t break what? Don’t break others’ minds, hearts and spirits with our selfishness. When we push ourselves ahead at the expense of others, we naturally hurt them in the process. We break their spirit, their enthusiasm and their self-esteem. Heights of success must not be attained through lowering others. Rather, we must climb and climb higher and higher to fulfill our own divine potential, to live our own divine Dharma.

When Bhagwan Rama sent Angadji to Ravana in Lanka in order to bring Sitaji back, he told Angadji, “KaaJ Hamaara taasu hita hoi.” [Fulfill your mission in rescuing Sita, but do not hurt Ravana in the process. Just try to make him

understand that he should peacefully return her.] This is the Divine way: do your duty, do your best, fulfill your obligations, but don't hurt anyone in the process, either physically or emotionally.

We must dedicate our lives to growing as much as we can, to learning as much as we can, to serving as much as we can and to getting closer and closer to the ultimate goal of Union with the Almighty. We must not let competition, jealousy, complexes or petty complaints stand in the way of our great Mission.

THE TIME FOR A SPIRITUAL LIFE IS NOW

There was once a disciple of a Guru who was living a divine life of sadhana and seva in his Guru's ashram. One day, he went to his Guru and said, "Guruji, I want to live a spiritual life. I want to live in the service of God. I want to go beyond the binding chains of this mundane, materialistic world. But, I feel that I am not quite ready. My desires for a family, for wealth and enjoyment are still too strong. Grant me some time to fulfill these wishes and then I will return to your holy feet."

So the Guru said, "No problem, my child. Go. Get married, have a family and earn wealth. In ten years I will come back for you. My blessings are with you."

With the blessings of his Guru, the man went out and quickly found a beautiful girl to marry. They had 3 beautiful children, and the man became financially successful.

After 10 years, there was a knock on the door of their home. The man's wife opened it to see a haggard-looking beggar standing on the doorstep. The beggar asked to see her husband. At first she started scolding the beggar, thinking that he was just there to beg for money. But, the husband realized that the beggar was his Guru so he lovingly invited him inside.

"I have come to take you away from this world of illusions now that you have fulfilled your desire of having a wife, family and earnings. Come with me, my son, let me show you the way to God."

But, the man looked at his Guru pitifully and he said, "Dear, Beloved, Guru. Yes, you are right. You have given me my 10 years ever so generously and with your blessings I have prospered. But, my children are very young and my wife would not be able to handle the burden of all of them alone. Allow me to stay another ten years until the children are old enough to care for themselves."

A true Guru will guide you to the path, show you the light and help when help is requested, but will never force a disciple — against the disciple's will — to follow any particular path. Thus, the man's Guru compassionately agreed, saying, "So be it, my son. Stay another 10 years until you feel that your mission is fulfilled."

Ten years later, the Guru returned to the home and again gave his disciple the call, "My child - I am here to take you away from this world of illusion. Your children are now grown. You have given 20 years to married life. Come now and embark on your spiritual journey."

However, the man fell at his Guru's feet and cried. He said, "My Divine Guru. Yes, it is true that 10 more years have slipped by, but you see that now my children are just finishing their education and they are just getting ready to marry. I cannot leave this householder world until I marry off my children and get them settled professionally. My youngest is fifteen, so if you could ever so graciously give

me only ten more years, then all of my responsibilities will be complete."

"So be it, my child." The Guru said. "But remember that your true path is a spiritual path. Remember to keep your aim on God. Fulfill your duties but do not become too attached."

Ten years later, the Guru returned to the house to find a large bull-dog out front guarding the house. Immediately he recognized his disciple in the dog and saw — with his divine vision — that the man had passed away in an accident several years prior but, due to his intense protectiveness over his family and wealth, he had reincarnated as a guard dog. The Guru put his hand on the dog's head and said, "My child, now that you have regressed from a human to a dog due to your attachment to these worldly things, are you finally ready to come with me?"

The dog licked the hand of his Guru lovingly and said, "My beloved Guruji. You are right that it is my own attachment which has driven me to take birth as a dog, but you see my children have many enemies who are envious of their wealth and power. These enemies are very dangerous to my children and I must stay here to protect them. However, I am sure that within a few years everything will sort itself out and they will be fine. Give me just seven more years to protect them, then I am yours."

The Guru left and returned 7 years later.

This time, there was no dog out front and the home was filled with grandchildren running around. The Guru closed

his eyes and saw with his divine vision that his disciple had taken birth in the form of a cobra, wedged into the wall near the family safe to guard the money. He called the grandchildren of the house: "My children," he said. "In the wall to the right of your safe, there is a cobra curled up in a small nook. Go there and bring the cobra to me. Do not kill it. It will not harm you, I promise. But, just break its back with a stick and then bring it to me." The children were incredulous, but went to the wall where the old man had directed them. Incredibly they saw that — just as the Guru had said — a cobra was curled up in the wall. Following his orders, they broke the cobra's back and carried it outside to the Guru. The Guru thanked the children, threw the cobra over his neck and left.

As he walked away carrying the cobra over his neck, the Guru spoke to the cobra, injured and aching, "My child, I am sorry for hurting you, but there was no other way. Thirty seven years and three births ago you left to taste the material world of sensual pleasures. But the ways of Maya are so alluring and so subtle that they trap us instantly. You have wasted these lifetimes in the futile pursuit of material success and in attachment to people who also are only actors in the Cosmic Drama. My child, all here is Maya - Cosmic Illusion. It lures us into its trap, convincing us that it is real, permanent, everlasting and significant. But, in reality, the only thing which is real is Him, and the only true purpose of life is to get close to Him. These attachments merely divert our attention and focus away from the true purpose of life. I had no choice but to come to your rescue as I saw you sinking deeper and deeper into the deep clutches of Maya."

So frequently in life we think, "Just one more year" then I will cut back on my luxuries and cut back on my time at the office. "Just one more year" and I will dedicate more time to meditation and spiritual pursuits. "Just one more year" and then I will go to India, sit at my Guru's feet and delve into the divine depths of spirituality. "Just one more year" and then I will cut down on my sensual pleasures."....and on and on. But, that "one more year" never comes. Our intentions are good. We want to be more spiritual. We want to devote more time to spiritual pursuits. We want to spend less, need less and serve more. We want to be the master over our lust, anger and greed rather than vice versa. But, the power of Maya is stronger than the power of our will. Thus, we continue to find excuses for why we must continue to work 50 or 60 hour work-weeks, why we still have no time for meditation, why we can't squeeze a visit to the holy places of India into our year's planning, and why we must continue to satiate our insatiable sensual urges.

The only way to break free from the veil of illusion that Maya wraps around our minds is to surrender to God and beg Him to show us the true light. The only way to break free is to make AND STICK TO concrete vows of how we are going to be better people. Rather than saying "I will find time to meditate" we must say "I will not leave for work without sitting in meditation and I will not sleep at night without doing my nightly introspection." Rather than saying, "I will try to come to India and visit holy places whenever I can," we must say "I will take my vacation this year in India." Rather than say, "I will try to cut back on my expenses so that my financial needs are less," we must

say, "I will not buy another jacket or pair of shoes [or anything] until the ones that I have are broken, torn or no longer fit me." Rather than say, "I will try to overcome my anger, lust and greed," we must commit to having daily appointments with God in which we introspect on all the times we allowed ourselves to be overpowered by these emotions and we must pray for strength, DAILY, to be remain calm, peaceful and sattvic in our lives."

If we wait for the right time, that time will never come. The only time is now.

THE PAIN IS ALL IN OUR PERSPECTIVE

A man once went to see a doctor complaining of aches and pains all over his body. "Doctor my whole body hurts me," he moaned. The doctor asked him to show exactly where the pain was.

The man explained, "When I touch my shoulder, it hurts. When I touch my back it hurts. When I touch my legs, they hurt."

The doctor did a thorough examination and told the man, "Sir, there is nothing wrong with your body. Your finger is broken. That is why it hurts wherever you touch. Get your finger plastered, rest it for a couple of weeks and all of your pains will disappear."

In life so frequently it is our own perspective that causes us pain. As we go through life "feeling" the world with our fingers, if our finger is broken naturally we will experience pain everywhere. But, we make the mistake of blaming the external world for our ailments: "My job is over-taxing, my husband is too demanding, my wife nags, my children are disobedient, my in-laws don't understand me, etc. etc." But if you look throughout the world you will be able to find someone who has the same type of job but is calm, or someone who has the same type of spouse but is happy,

or someone who has the same type of children but is patient, or someone who has the same type of in-laws but is grateful.

What is it that allows two people to experience the same external situation but respond in two different ways? Our own perspective. Our own perception. The key, then, is not to try to change every situation in our life, but rather to change the glasses through which we see the world. Sure, if we have a fixable situation at the office or at home, we should definitely do our best to improve it. But, what I have seen is that if someone has the nature to be dissatisfied, or the nature to be stressed, or the nature to be pained, that person's nature is not going to change simply by changing the external situation.

A massage for the back, shoulder or legs or a chiropractic or acupuncture treatment would not help the man in our earlier example because it is his finger which is broken. He could spend hundreds of dollars to ease the pain in his body, but unless he puts his broken finger in a splint, he will continue to experience pain every time that finger touches the various parts of his body. Similarly, we run around through life trying to "fix" our jobs or marriages or family life, but frequently the reality is in our own perspective. If we spend the same amount of energy "fixing" our perspective as we spend trying to "fix" our spouse or children, everything would be fine.

This is not to say that pains and troubles don't really exist in our day to day life. Of course they do. The man in our example may also have a stiff back or sore shoulders. But the excruciating pain he experienced was due not to the

minor aches and pains in his body, but due to the severely broken finger with which he was touching them. Similarly, our jobs and our families are taxing. They demand a lot of us. However, the unbearable pain many of us experience is due not to the demands and commands from without, but due to the demands and commands from within ourselves.

In the Gita it is said that we are our best friend and also our own worst enemy, depending upon how we live our lives.

Let us all take some time to examine what our own personal "broken finger" is. What is it within ourselves that causes us to experience pain in the world? What irrational fear, what unfulfillable desire, what selfish motive, what ego-driven need has broken the finger with which we feel the world or has colored the glasses with which we see? We spend so much time examining others, but very little time examining our own selves.

The Source of all joy and peace lies within us. We are blocked from that Source by a host of desires, fears and ignorance. The key to finding and tapping into that Source must come from within. Let us find the key within ourselves and unleash the Ocean of Divine Bliss in our lives.

SEARCHING FOR THE NEEDLE

Once a woman was standing outside in the street searching and searching for something under the bright street lamp. A wise man walked by and asked her, "Mother, what are you searching for?"

She replied, "I have lost my needle and I am looking for it." The man helped her search for quite sometime, all to no avail. Finally, he asked, "Mother, where exactly did you lose your needle?" She replied, "I was sewing inside on the chair and the needle was lost there."

The wise man queried, "But Mother, if you lost your needle inside then why are you searching outside for it?"

The woman answered, "Because inside it is dark and I cannot see. Here, with the light of this lamp I can see easily and search for my needle."

The wise man counseled her, "Mother, go back inside. It may be dark and difficult to see, but your needle is inside. Light a candle and search inside. You will never find your needle out here."

We laugh at the silliness of the old woman who looked for her needle outside even though it had been lost inside.

Yet, don't we do the same thing in our lives? We look outside for our happiness, for our fulfillment and for our joy. We look to possessions to fulfill us. We think that if we have the newest model car, a new CD or a new pair of shoes that we will be happy. When we feel depressed or stressed, what do we do? We go shopping or we go on a holiday to the beach.

Yet, we all know that happiness and peace are not there. We are never truly happier or more peaceful the day after buying something new than we were before. In fact we frequently forget that we even bought it! The new coat, pair of shoes or CD gets put in a closet or store room and we forget about it.

The reason that these things don't bring happiness is that we may have a new coat, but it is still being worn by the same person. We may have new shoes, but they are covering the same feet. We may be driving a new car, but the driver is the same. We may be in Hawaii or Tahiti or on a cruise ship – but WE are still there and the pain comes from within, not from without. If the dissatisfaction and the pain come from within then how can the satisfaction and joy come from without?

They cannot. The sooner we realize that the true answer lies within - in our hearts, in our relationship to God, in our inner selves – the quicker we will find that answer. It is a rare person, though, who pauses to look inward for answers. Most of us are so busy searching shopping malls, vacation catalogues and our relationships with other people for the answers.

Why do we look outside? Because it is lighter. It is easier. It is easier to see things and other people than our own selves. So we search these things and these other people for the keys to our happiness. But, although the light is there, the needle is not.

We must go inward, even though it seems dark and even though it seems that we may never find anything. We must have faith and start searching. Meditation, prayer, faith in God, a spiritual practice, a Guru, introspection, silence – these are all things that light the way for us to look inward, to find that needle.

Our candle may be dim at first, it might be hard to see. But slowly that candle will get brighter and brighter, and we will eventually find the needle which we lost. However, the longer we search outside, the longer our needle will remain lost.

I pray that you all may turn inward. I don't mean that you should ignore your family and friends or not to buy gifts for your children. Rather, as you enjoy the time with your family and as you enjoy the gifts you receive, please remember that nowhere - other than within your own heart - lies the true answer to your happiness. Love your family without expectation. Enjoy the material gifts without expectation. Enjoy the vacation without expectation. When we expect these external things, people and places to bring us the ultimate bliss in life, that is when we will be disappointed. When we love and appreciate them as they are, but turn inward and to God for the true bliss, that is when we will be satisfied both externally and internally.

THE SAINT AND THE SCORPION - WHAT IS OUR DHARMA?

Once there was a sadhu, a renunciant living on the banks of a river, performing his sadhana with great piety and determination.

One day as the holy man went for his bath in the river, he noticed a scorpion struggling in the water. Scorpions, by nature, cannot swim and the sadhu knew that if he did not save the scorpion, it would drown. Therefore, carefully picking up the scorpion, the saint lifted it out of the waters and was just about to set it down gently on the land when the scorpion stung his finger. In pain, the sadhu instinctively flung his hand and the scorpion went flying, back into the river.

As soon as the sadhu regained his composure from the sting, he again lifted the drowning scorpion out of the water. Again, before he could set the scorpion safely on land, the creature stung him. Again, as the sadhu shook his hand in response to the pain, the scorpion fell back into the water. This exchange went on for several minutes as the holy man continued to try to save the life of the drowning scorpion and the scorpion continued to sting his savior's hand before reaching the freedom of the river bank.

A man, who had been out hunting in the forest, noticed this interaction between the holy man and the scorpion.

He watched as the saint carefully and gingerly lifted the creature out of the water, only to fling it back in as his hand convulsed in pain from each fresh sting. Finally, the hunter said to the sadhu, "Revered Swamiji, forgive me for my frankness, but it is clear that the scorpion is simply going to continue to sting you each and every time you try to carry it to safety. Why don't you give up and just let the evil creature drown?"

The holy man replied, "My dear child, the scorpion is not stinging me out of malice or evil intent. It is simply his nature to sting. Just as it is the water's nature to make me wet, so it is the scorpion's nature to sting in order to protect himself. He doesn't realize that I am carrying him to safety. That is a level of conscious comprehension greater than what his brain can achieve. But, just as it is the scorpion's nature to sting, so it is my nature to save. Just as he is not leaving his nature, why should I leave my nature? My dharma is to help any creature of any kind, human or animal. Why should I let a small scorpion rob me of the divine nature which I have cultivated through years of sadhana?"

In our lives we encounter people who harm us, who insult us, who plot against us, and whose actions seem calculated simply to thwart the successful achievement of our goals. Sometimes these are obvious acts, such as a co-worker who continually steals our ideas or speaks badly of us to our boss. Sometimes these acts are more subtle – a friend, relative or colleague who unexpectedly betrays us or whom we find has been surreptitiously speaking

negatively about us behind our back. We often wonder "How could he/she hurt me like that? How could they do this to me?" Then, our hearts become filled with anger and pain, and our minds start plotting vengeance.

Slowly we find that our own actions, words and thoughts become driven by anger and pain. We find ourselves engaged in thoughts of revenge. Before we realize it, we are injuring ourselves more by allowing the negative emotions into our hearts than the other person injured us by his words or actions. She insulted us, plotted against us or interfered with a well-deserved achievement at work. But we injure ourselves more deeply and more gravely by allowing our hearts and minds to turn dark.

Our dharma is to be kind, pure, honest, giving, sharing, and caring. Others, due to ignorance, due to lack of understanding (much like the scorpion who doesn't understand the sadhu's gentle intention) or due to the way in which their own karmic drama must unfold, may act with malice, deceit, selfishness and indifference. But we must not let their actions or their ignorance deprive us of fulfilling OUR dharma. We must not allow ourselves to be lowered by their ignorance, their habits or their greed. The darkness in their heart should not be allowed to penetrate into the lightness of our hearts.

Sometimes people ask, "But Swamiji, how long should we continue to tolerate, to forgive, to love in the face of other people's aggression, jealousy, hatred and malice?" The answer is forever. It is not our job to hand out punishment to others based on their negative actions. That is God's job and the job of the law of karma. They will get their

punishment. Do not worry. They will face the same misery they are bringing to you. Do not worry. But it is not our job to give that to them. It is God's job and – with the exacting law and science of karma – evildoers will receive punishment. But not by our hands. If we allow ourselves to injure them, insult them, plot against them and hurt them, then we are simply accruing more and more negative karma for ourselves.

If the sadhu had allowed the scorpion to suffer and drown in the river, he would have forsaken his own divine path in life. Sure, we can say that the scorpion deserved to die for what he had done to the sadhu. We can say that the sadhu had tried and tried to save the scorpion but the scorpion would not let him. We can give a list of explanations to excuse the sadhu for not rescuing the scorpion. But, to pardon bad behavior is not the goal. To excuse ourselves for failing to fulfill our duties is not the goal. The goal is to live up to our full, divine potential as conscious, holy beings.

So, let us pledge to always remember what OUR dharma is – to live lives of purity, piety, peace, selflessness, integrity and love – and let us never allow anyone to divert us from that goal.

HOW TO WALK ON THE PATH OF LIFE

When I was very young, not long after I came to Parmarth Niketan, a very old, revered saint came to Rishikesh to give his divine satsang at Parmarth Niketan.

However, rather than staying in the comforts of the ashram, he used to stay in a small hut on the banks of Ganga a little bit away from the center of the ashrams.

I was given the special seva of going to pick him up each morning and bring him to the ashram. As we walked through the busy marketplace, I would try to push everyone and everything out of his way so that this revered saint could walk comfortably and unimpeded to the ashram. I asked everyone along the way, *Side please. Please give us the way to walk.* I would gently push all of the wandering cows out of his path. I moved standing bicycles and fruit carts out of the way so he could pass.

Finally as we reached the gate of the ashram I was feeling very glad that I had been able to bring him so safely and smoothly to the ashram, and that I had been able to clear such a nice path for him to walk.

This saint, however, looked at me lovingly and said, *Beta, kis kis ko hatate rahoge? Aur kab tak hatate rahoge?* My child, how many people and cows can you push out of the

way? For how long can you move other people and things out of your path? That is not the way. *Apna rasta banate jao. Apna rasta banake nikalte jao.* Do not try to move others; rather find your way between the others and around them. Make your own path, but do not worry about moving others. Find your own way in the midst of the chaos.

In our lives we frequently get frustrated and broken by feeling that others are blocking our way and thwarting our path. We blame their presence and their actions for our own failure. We explain to ourselves that we would have been able to succeed if only they had let us, if only they had moved out of the way for us. We try to push people and obstacles aside to clear a way for ourselves in life.

However, obstacles never stop coming. People who are jealous never stop trying to block our path. For how long can we try to move them aside? How many obstacles, how many enemies can we try to push away? The answer is to simply find our own way, around them, between them. If they are blocking the path on the right, we walk on the left. If they are blocking the path on the left, we walk on the right.

We must be more concerned about finding our own way rather than focusing on moving all of those whom we think are blocking our path. For those who are pure in mind, thought and deed, there will always be a path in which to walk. The path may be narrow at times and it may seem

that obstacles and enemies line both sides. But we must humbly and sincerely make our own way on the path of life. We must just keep walking the path of our dharma, the path of righteousness, the path of honesty, purity and piety without worrying about those who try to block our way.

So much of our precious time, energy and focus are wasted in the futile task of trying to remove obstacles and other people from our path. It is not necessary. Find your own path around the obstacles. Find your own path around the enemies. Do not try to push them aside or push them down or fight them for the right of way. Rather, carefully examine the situation and see where the path is clear. Then, choose that path and continue on your way.

The more attention we give to those who are trying to sabotage us and trying to thwart our progress, the less time and energy we have to walk to right path. In that way, then, the enemies win, for they have stolen our peace of mind, our tranquility, our joy and also our time. Instead of trying to fight them out of the way, we must remain humble, pure and single-minded on the goal. If we can see our destination clearly then we will always be able to find a path in which to walk.

So, keep the destination firm in your mind. Stay focused on the goal and *nikalte chale, nikalte chale jao* [move around the obstacles and continue on the path.].



PIECES SENT BY OTHERS

(We offer our appreciation to those who have forwarded these
important pieces to us,
and we apologize where the name of an author is unknown)

GIVE

BY: KAHLIL GIBRAN

You give but little when you give
of your possessions.
It is when you give of yourself that you truly
give.
For what are your possessions but things you
keep and guard
for fear you may need them tomorrow?
And tomorrow, what shall tomorrow bring to the
over-prudent dog burying bones in the trackless
sand as he follows the pilgrims to the holy city?
And what is fear of need but need itself?
Is not dread of thirst when your well is full,
the thirst that is unquenchable?
There are those who give little of the much they
gave – and they give it for recognition, and their
hidden desire makes their gifts unwholesome.
And there are those who have little and give it
all.
These are the believers in life and the bounty of
life, and their coffer is never empty.
There are those who give with joy,
and that joy is their reward.
And there are those who give with pain,
and that pain is their baptism.
And there are those who give and have not pain
in giving, nor do they seek joy, nor give with
mindfulness of virtue; they give as in yonder
valley the myrtle breathes its fragrance into
space.
Through the hand of such as these,
God speaks, and from behind their eyes

He smiles upon the earth.
It is well to give when asked, but it is better to
give unasked through understanding.
And to the open-handed the search for one who
shall receive is joy greater than giving.
And is there aught you would withhold?
All you have shall some day be given;
therefore give now, that the season of giving
may be yours and not your inheritors’.
You often say,
“I would give, but only to the deserving.”
The trees in your orchard say not so,
nor the flocks in your pasture.
They give that they may live,
for to withhold is to perish.
Surely he who is worthy to receive his days and
his nights is worthy of all else from you.
And he who has deserved to drink from the
ocean of life deserves to fill his cup
from your little stream.
And what desert greater shall there be,
than that which lies in the courage and the
confidence, nay the charity of receiving?
And who are you that men should rend their
bosom and unveil their pride, that you may see
their worth naked and their pride unabashed?
See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver,
and an instrument of giving.
For, in truth it is life that gives into life – while
you, who deem yourself a giver, are but a wit-
ness.
And you receivers – and you are all receivers –
assume no weight of gratitude, lest you lay a
yoke upon yourself and upon he who gives;
rather rise together with the giver on his gifts as
on wings.

REASONS TO GIVE THANKS

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who will not survive the week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people around the world.

If you attend a temple or church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest or torture of death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If your parents are still married and alive, you are very rare, even in the United States.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

If you can hold someone's hand, hug them or even touch them on the shoulder, you are blessed because you can offer God's healing touch.

If you prayed yesterday and today, you are in the minority because you believe in God's willingness to hear and answer prayer.

If you can read this message, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world that cannot read anything at all.

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES IN THE WAKE OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

On Monday we emailed jokes
On Tuesday we did not

On Monday we thought that we were secure
On Tuesday we learned better

On Monday we were talking about heroes as being
athletes
On Tuesday we relearned who our heroes are

On Monday we were irritated that our rebate checks
had not arrived
On Tuesday we gave money away to people we had
never met

On Monday there were people fighting against
praying in schools
On Tuesday you would have been hard pressed to find
a school where someone was not praying

On Monday people argued with their kids about
picking up their room
On Tuesday the same people could not get home fast
enough to hug their kids

On Monday people were upset that they had to wait 6
minutes in a fast food drive through line

On Tuesday people didn't care about waiting up to 6
hours to give blood for the dying

On Monday we waved our flags signifying our cultural
diversity
On Tuesday we waved only the American flag

On Monday there were people trying to separate each
other by race, sex, color and creed
On Tuesday they were all holding hands

On Monday we men or women, black or white, old or
young, rich or poor, gay or straight, Christian or non-
Christian.
On Tuesday we were Americans

On Monday politicians argued about budget surpluses
On Tuesday grief stricken they sang 'God Bless America'

On Monday the President was going to Florida to read to
children
On Tuesday he returned to Washington to protect our chil-
dren

On Monday we had families
On Tuesday we had orphans

On Monday people went to work as usual
On Tuesday they died

12 WAYS TO OVERCOME STRESS

BY: H.H. DADA J.P. VASWANI

1. Fill your minds with thoughts of God: wake up in the morning with a great thought of a Great One or a text from a scripture dear to you.
2. Close the day by reading some positive literature.
3. Practice the presence of God.
4. Never neglect your daily appointment with God.
5. Breathe out peace, love and blessing to all.
6. Forgive before forgiveness is asked.
7. Help others.
8. Be relaxed at all times.
9. Develop a healthy sense of humour.
10. Always see the bright side of things.
11. Develop faith in the goodness and caring power of God.
12. In all conditions of life let the words-- Thank you, God-- be on your lips all the time.

GET A LIFE

This is a commencement speech made by Anna Quindlen at Villanova:

It's a great honor for me to be the third member of my family to receive an honorary doctorate from this great university. It's an honor to follow my great Uncle Jim, who was a gifted physician, and my Uncle

Jack, who is a remarkable businessman. Both of them could have told you something important about their professions, about medicine or commerce. I have no specialized field of interest or expertise, which puts me at a disadvantage talking to you today. I'm a novelist. My work is human nature. Real life is all I know.

Don't ever confuse the two, your life and your work. The second is only part of the first. Don't ever forget what a friend once wrote Senator Paul Tsongas when the senator decided not to run for re-election because he had been diagnosed with cancer: "No man ever said on his deathbed I wish I had spent more time at the office." Don't ever forget the words my father sent me on a postcard last year: "If you win the rat race, you're still a rat." Or what John Lennon wrote before he was gunned down in the driveway of the Dakota: "Life is what happens while you are busy making other plans."

You will walk out of here this afternoon with only one thing that no one else has. There will be hundreds of people out

there with your same degree; there will be thousands of people doing what you want to do for a living. But you will be the only person alive who has sole custody of your life. Your particular life. Your entire life. Not just your life at a desk, or your life on a bus, or in a car, or at the computer. Not just the life of your mind, but the life of your heart. Not just your bank account, but your soul.

People don't talk about the soul very much anymore. It's so much easier to write a resume than to craft a spirit. But a resume is a cold comfort on a winter night, or when you're sad, or broke, or lonely, or when you've gotten back the test results and they're not so good.

Here is my resume: I am a good mother to three children. I have tried never to let my profession stand in the way of being a good parent. I no longer consider myself the center of the universe.

I show up. I listen. I try to laugh. I am a good friend to my husband. I have tried to make marriage vows mean what they say. I am a good friend to my friends, and they to me. Without them, there would be nothing to say to you today, because I would be a cardboard cutout. But I call them on the phone, and I meet them for lunch. I would be rotten, or at best mediocre at my job, if those other things were not true. You cannot be really first rate at your work if your work is all you are. So here's what I wanted to tell you today:

Get a life. A real life, not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, the bigger paycheck, the larger house. Do you think you'd care so very much about those things if you blew an aneurysm one afternoon, or found a lump in your breast?

Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water push-

ing itself on a breeze over Seaside Heights, a life in which you stop and watch how a red tailed hawk circles over the water or the way a baby scowls with concentration when she tries to pick up a Cheerio with her thumb and first finger. Get a life in which you are not alone.

Find people you love, and who love you. And remember that love is not leisure, it is work. Pick up the phone. Send an e-mail. Write a letter.

Get a life in which you are generous. And realize that life is the best thing ever, and that you have no business taking it for granted. Care so deeply about its goodness that you want to spread it around. Take money you would have spent on beers and give it to charity. Work in a soup kitchen. Be a big brother or sister. All of you want to do well. But if you do not do good too, then doing well will never be enough.

It is so easy to waste our lives, our days, our hours, our minutes. It is so easy to take for granted the color of our kids' eyes, the way the melody in a symphony rises and falls and disappears and rises again. It is so easy to exist instead of to live.

I learned to live many years ago. Something really, really bad happened to me, something that changed my life in ways that, if I had my druthers, it would never have been changed at all. And what I learned from it is what, today, seems to be the hardest lesson of all.

I learned to love the journey, not the destination. I learned that it is not a dress rehearsal, and that today is the only guarantee you get. I learned to look at all the good in the world and try to give some of it back because I believed in it, completely and utterly. And I tried to do that, in part, by telling others what I had learned. By telling them this:

Consider the lilies of the field. Look at the fuzz on a baby's ear. Read in the backyard with the sun on your face. Learn to be happy . And think of life as a terminal illness, because if you do, you will live it with joy and passion as it ought to be lived.

AUDREY HEPBURN'S BEAUTY SECRETS

For attractive lips, speak words of kindness.

For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people.

For a lovely figure, share your food with the hungry.

For beautiful hair, let a child run his or her fingers through it once a day.

For poise, walk with the knowledge that you'll never walk alone.

People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed.

Never throw out anybody.

Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of your arm.

As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, and one for helping others.

The beauty of a woman is not in the clothes she wears, the figure that she carries, or the way she combs her hair.

The beauty of a woman must be seen from in her eyes, Because that is the doorway to her heart.

The beauty of a woman is not in a facial mole, But true beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul.

It is the caring that she lovingly gives, the passion that she shows, and the beauty of a woman with passing years only grows!

LETTER FROM GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ WHEN HE RETIRED FROM PUBLIC LIFE DUE TO CANCER

If for an instant God were to forget that I am rag doll and gifted me with a piece of life, possibly I wouldn't say all that I think, but rather I would think of all that I say. I would value things, not for their worth but for what they mean. I would sleep little, dream more, understanding that for each minute we close our eyes we lose sixty seconds of light.

I would walk when others hold back, I would wake when others sleep. I would listen when others talk, and how I would enjoy a good chocolate ice cream! If God were to give me a piece of life, I would dress simply, throw myself face first into the sun, baring not only my body but also my soul.

My God, if I had a heart, I would write my hate on ice, and wait for the sun to show. Over the stars I would paint with a Van Gogh dream, a Benedetti poem, and a Serrat song would be the serenade I'd offer to the moon. With my tears I would water roses, to feel the pain of their thorns, and the red kiss of their petals...

My God, if I had a piece of life... I wouldn't let a single day pass without telling the people I love that I love them. I would convince each woman and each man that they are my favorites, and I would live in love with love. I would show men how very wrong they are to think that they cease to be in love when they grow old, not knowing that they grow old when they cease to be in love! To a child I shall

give wings, but I shall let him learn to fly on his own. I would teach the old that death does not come with old age, but with forgetting.

I have learned that everyone wants to live on the peak of the mountain, without knowing that real happiness is in how it is scaled. I have learned that when a newborn child squeezes for the first time with his tiny fist his father's finger, he has him trapped forever. I have learned that a man has the right to look down on another only when he has to help the other get to his feet.

I have learned so many things, but in truth they won't be of much use, for when I keep them within this suitcase, unhappily shall I be dying.

GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

PARADOX OF OUR TIMES

The paradox of our time in history is that:

we have taller buildings but shorter tempers;
wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints.
We spend more, but have less;
we buy more but enjoy less

We have bigger houses and smaller families,
more conveniences, but less time;
we have more degrees, but less sense;
more knowledge, but less judgment;
more experts, yet more problems,
more medicine, but less wellness.

We drink too much, smoke too much,
spend too recklessly,
laugh too little,
drive too fast,
get too angry,
stay up too late, get up too tired,
read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.
We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

We've learned how to make a living, but not a life,
we've added years to life not life to years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbor.
We conquered outer space but not inner space.
We've done larger things, but not better things.

We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul.
We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice.
We write more, but learn less.
We plan more, but accomplish less.
We've learned to rush, but not to wait.

We build more computers to hold more information to produce more copies than ever, but we communicateless and less.

These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion;
big men and small character;
steep profits and shallow relationships.

These are the days of two incomes but more divorce,
fancier houses but broken homes.

These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers,
throwaway morality, one-night stands, overweight bodies,
and pills that do everything from cheer to quiet, to kill.

It is a time when there is much in the show window
and nothing in the stockroom.

I'VE LEARNED

I've learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow.

I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.

I've learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life.

I've learned that making a "living" is not the same as making a "life."

I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance.

I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mit on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.

I've learned that if you pursue happiness, it will elude you. But if you focus on your family, your friends, the needs of others, your work and doing the best you can, happiness will find you.

I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision.
I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one.

I've learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love that human touch - holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back.

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.....

WITHOUT THE MASTER BY KABIR

A temple roof
Cannot stay up without rafters;
So without Nam
How can one cross the ocean?
Without a vessel
Water cannot be kept;
So without a Saint
Man cannot be saved from doom.
Woe to him
Who thinks not of God,
Whose mind and heart
Remain absorbed in ploughing
The field of the senses.

Without a ploughman
Land cannot be tilled,
Without a thread
Jewels cannot be strung,
Without a knot
The sacred tie cannot be made;
So without a Saint
Man cannot be saved from doom.

A child cannot be born
Without father and mother,
Clothes cannot be washed
Without water,
There can be no horseman
Without a horse;
So without a Master

None can reach the court of the Lord.

Without music
There can be no wedding;
Rejected by her husband,
A bad woman suffers misery;
So man suffers
Without a Saint.
Says Kabir, My friend,
Only one thing attain:
Become a gurumukh
That you not die again.

A.G., Gond, p.8 72

WATCH AND LISTEN CAREFULLY

The man whispered, "God, speak to me" and a meadow-lark sang.
But the man did not hear.

So the man yelled "God, speak to me!" And the thunder rolled across the sky.
But the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said, "God, let me see you."
And a star shined brightly.
But the man did not notice.

Then the man shouted, "God, show me a miracle!" And a life was born.
But the man did not know.

So the man cried out in despair, "Touch me God, and let me know you are here!" Whereupon, God reached down and touched the man.
But the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

I AM THANKFUL:

For the teenager who is not doing dishes, but is watching TV,
Because it means he is at home and not on the streets.

For the taxes that I pay,
Because it means that I am employed.

For the mess to clean up after a party,
Because it means I have been surrounded by friends.

For the clothes that fit a little too snugly,
Because it means I have enough to eat.

For my shadow that watches me work,
Because it means that I am out in the sunshine.

For a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning, and gutters that need fixing,
Because it means that I have a home.

For all the complaining I hear about the Government,
Because it means that we have freedom of speech.

For the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot,
Because it means I am capable of walking and that I have been blessed with transportation.

For my huge heating bill,
Because it means that I am warm.

For the lady behind me in church who sings off key,
Because it means that I can hear.

For the pile of laundry and ironing I have to do,
Because it means I have clothes to wear.

For the weariness and aching muscles at the end of the
day,
Because it means that I am capable of working hard and
that I have employment.

For the alarm that goes off early in the morning,
Because it means that I am alive.

HOW TO SURVIVE A HEART ATTACK (WHEN YOU ARE ALONE)

Let's say you're driving home after an unusually hard day on the job. Suddenly you start experiencing severe pain in your chest that starts to radiate out into your arm and up into your jaw.

What can you do? Without help the person whose heart stops beating properly and who begins to feel faint, has only about 10 seconds left before losing consciousness.

However, these victims can help themselves by coughing repeatedly and very vigorously.

A deep breath should be taken before each cough, and the cough must be deep and prolonged, as when producing sputum from deep inside the chest.

A breath and a cough must be repeated about every two seconds without let up until help arrives, or until the heart is felt to be beating normally again.

Deep breaths get oxygen into the lungs and coughing movements squeeze the heart and keep the blood circulating. The squeezing pressure on the heart also helps it regain normal rhythm. In this way, heart attack victims can get to a phone and, between breaths, call for help.

From: Health Cares Rochester General Hospital

BILL GATES' 11 RULES FOR STUDENTS

Rule 1 - Life is not fair; get used to it!

Rule 2 - The world won't care about your self-esteem. The world will expect you to accomplish something BEFORE you feel good about yourself.

Rule 3 - You will NOT make 40 thousand dollars a year right out of high school. You won't be a vice president with a car phone, until you earn both.

Rule 4 - If you think your teacher is tough, wait till you get a boss. He doesn't have tenure.

Rule 5 - Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping; they called it opportunity.

Rule 6 - Your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life has not. In some schools, they have abolished failing grades; they'll give you as many times as you want to get the right answer. This doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to ANYTHING in real life.

Rule 7 - Before you were born, your parents weren't as boring as they are now. They got that way from paying your bills, cleaning your clothes and listening to you talk about how cool you are. So, before you save the rainforest from the parasites of your parents generation, try "delousing" the closet in your own room.

Rule 8 - If you mess up, it's not your parents' fault, so don't whine about your mistakes, learn from them.

Rule 9 - Life is not divided into semesters. You don't get summers off, and very few employers are interested in helping you find yourself. Do that on your own time.

Rule 10 - Television is NOT a real life. In real life, people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.

Rule 11 - Be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one.

PERFECTION

In Brooklyn, New York, Chush is a school that caters to learning disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career, while others can be mainstreamed into conventional schools. At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a Chush child delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, "Where is the perfection in my son, Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?" The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father's anguish and stilled by the piercing query.

"I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child." He then told the following story about his son, Shaya: "One afternoon, Shaya and I walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball.

Shaya asked, 'Do you think they will let me play?' I knew that my son was not at all athletic, and that most boys would not want him on their team. But I understood that if my his son was chosen to play, it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging. I approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shaya could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his teammates. Getting none,

he took matters into his own hands, and said, 'We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team, and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning.' I was ecstatic as Shaya smiled broadly.

Shaya was to go put on a glove, and go out to play short-center-field. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shaya's team scored a few runs, but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya's team scored again, and, now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shaya was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shaya bat at this juncture and give away its chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shaya didn't even know how to hold the bat, properly, let alone hit with it.

However, as Shaya stepped up to the plate the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came, and Shay swung, clumsily, and missed. One of Shaya's teammates came up to Shaya and, together they held the bat and faced the pitcher, waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya.

As the pitch came in, Shaya and his teammate swung at the ball, and, together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder, and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Shaya would have been out, and that would have ended the game.

Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond the reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, 'Shaya, run to first. Run to first'

Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high, and far over the 3rd baseman's head. Everyone yelled, 'Run to second, run to second.' Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home. As Shaya reached second base, the opposing short-stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, 'Run to third.' As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him, screaming, 'Shaya run home.'

Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate, and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team.

"That day," said the father, softly, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

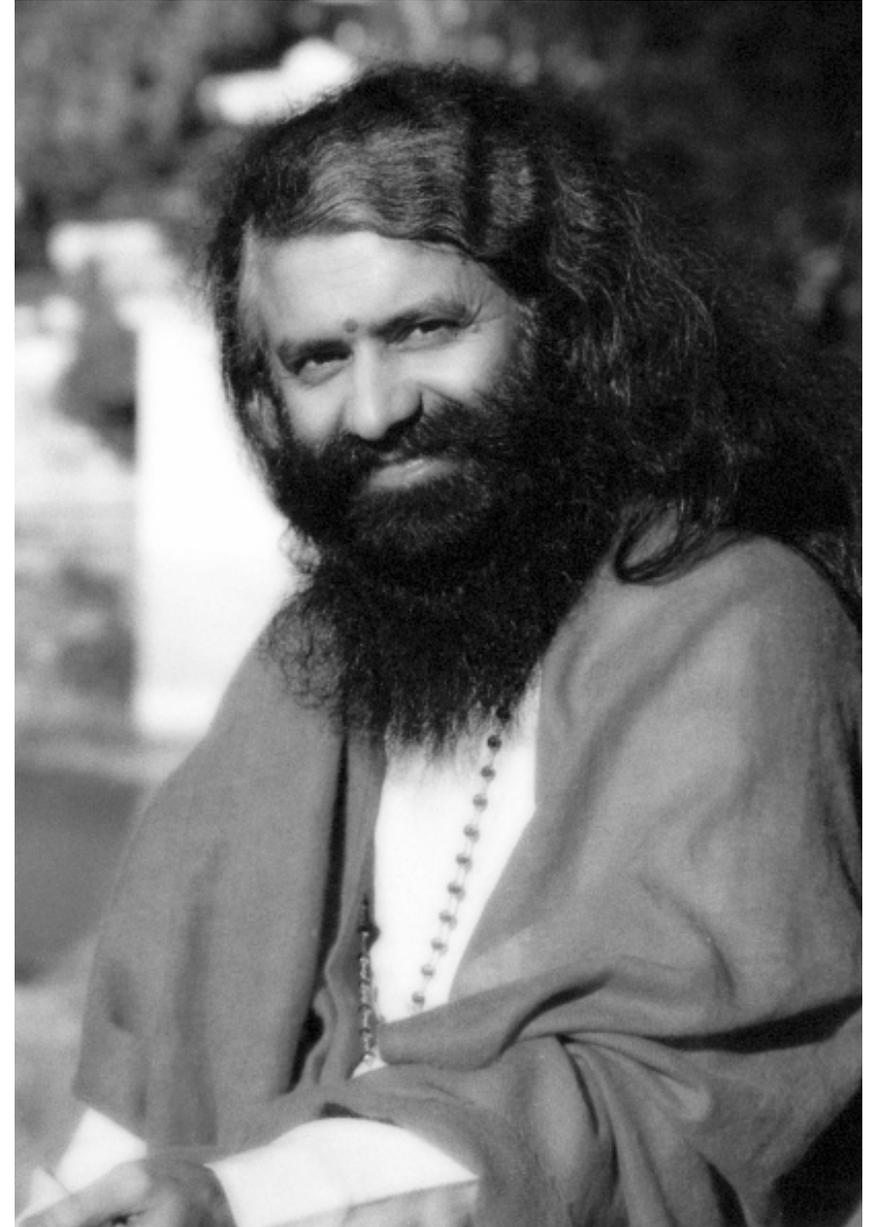
**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
His Holiness Pujya Swami
Chidanand Saraswatiji**

Spiritual and Academic Education: Touched by the hand of God at eight years old, Pujya Swamiji's youth was spent in silence, meditation and austerities high in the Himalayas. At the age of seventeen, after nine years of unbroken, intense sadhana, he returned from the forest — under the orders of his guru — and he obtained an academic education to parallel his spiritual one. Pujya Swamiji has master's degrees in Sanskrit and Philosophy as well as fluency in many languages.

The Teaching of Unity: Unity, harmony, and the belief in infinite paths to God are the foundation of Pujya Swamiji's "religion." His goal is to bring everyone closer to God, regardless of what name one uses. "If you are a Hindu, be a better Hindu. If you are a Christian, be a better Christian. If you are a Muslim, be a better Muslim. If you are a Jew, be a better Jew," he says.

In this line, he has been a leader in numerous international, inter-faith conferences and parliaments, including the **Parliament of World Religions** in Chicago in 1993, the **Parliament of World Religions** in Capetown, South Africa in 1999, and the **Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations** in 2000, the **World Economic Forum in New York** in 2002 and the **World Council of Religious Leaders at the United Nations** in Bangkok in 2002. He is also a leader of frequent Dharma Yatras across America, Canada and Europe.

Spiritual Leader and inspiration: Pujya Swamiji is the



president and spiritual head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, one of India's largest and most renowned spiritual institutions. Under his divine inspiration and leadership, Parmarth Niketan has become a sanctuary known across the globe as one filled with grace, beauty, serenity and true divine bliss. Pujya Swamiji has also increased several-fold the humanitarian activities undertaken by Parmarth Niketan. Now, the ashram is not only a spiritual haven for those who visit, but it also provides education, training, health care etc. to those in need.

He is also the founder and the spiritual head of the first Hindu Jain Temple in America. This beautiful 3-domed, masterpiece is located on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and has paved the way for unity between Hindus and Jains across America. Pujya Swamiji is also the founder and inspiration behind many other temples in USA, Canada, Europe and Australia.

Guide to Youth: Pujya Swamiji knows the youth are our future; he is forever changing the course of that future through his profound effect on every youngster with whom he comes in contact. Children and adolescents seem to bloom like flowers under the rays of his light. Additionally, he gives pragmatic tools to help them unite in the spirit of peace, harmony and global change. Pujya Swamiji runs youth sessions and camps in USA, Europe and throughout Asia.

Ceaseless Service: "Giving is Living," is Pujya Swamiji's motto; he is always in the midst of dozens of projects, each one a noble and tenaciously dedicated effort to make the world a better place for all of humanity. He is the Founder/Chairman of India Heritage Research Foundation (IHRF), an international, non-profit, humanitarian organization dedicated to providing education, health care, youth welfare, vocational training to the needy population. IHRF also, under the guidance and inspiration of Pujya Swamiji, is compiling the first Encyclopedia of Hinduism in history.

Awards and Recognitions: Pujya Swamiji has received dozens of awards for both his role as spiritual leader and also for his unparalleled humanitarian work. Some of the more noteworthy are as follows:

- 1) Mahatma Gandhi Humanitarian award, 1993, given by the Mayor of New Jersey, USA for outstanding charitable and interfaith work,
- 2) Hindu of the Year, 1991 by the international magazine Hinduism Today for masterminding the project of the next millennium, the Encyclopedia of Hinduism.
- 3) Devarishi Award, by Sandipani Vidya Niketan, under the guidance of Pujya Sant Rameshbhai Oza for promoting Indian culture and heritage across the world
- 4) Bhaskar Award, by Mystic India and Bharat Nirman, 1998, for Outstanding Humanitarian Service
- 5) Prominent Personality Award, 1999, by Lions' Club
- 6) Diwaliben Mohanlal Mehta Charitable Trust Award for Progress in Religion
- 7) Best Citizens of India Award

Further, he has been given the title of Patron of the Russian Indian Heritage Research Foundation, Moscow, and he is also a Patron of the Centre for Religious Experience in Oxford, UK.

The True Sanyasi: Pujya Swamiji seems unaffected by this incredible list of accomplishments and remains a pious child of God, owning nothing, draped in saffron robes, living a life of true renunciation. His days in Rishikesh are spent offering service to those around him. Thousands travel from America, Europe and Australia as well as from all over India, simply to sit in his presence, to receive his "darshan." To them, the journey is an inconsequential price to pay for the priceless gift of his satsang.



INDIA HERITAGE RESEARCH FOUNDATION (IHRF)

Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji is the founder and chairman of India Heritage Research Foundation, a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to humanitarian and cultural projects. Founded in 1987, IHRF is committed to preserving the timeless wisdom and ageless grandeur of Indian culture. By weaving together ancient tradition, cultural history, a wide range of non-discriminatory charitable services, and inspiring youth programs, IHRF has created a tapestry of true, universal beauty.

The Encyclopedia of Hinduism

IHRF is currently completing the revolutionary project of compiling the first Encyclopedia of Hinduism in history. The Encyclopedia will mark the first time that the urgent need is met for an authentic, objective and insightful well of information, capturing both the staples and the spices of Indian tradition and culture. This 18 volume work is currently in the final stages of research and compilation by over 1250 internationally renowned scholars. We expect to have the manuscript completed by 2005.

The Encyclopedia of Hinduism will be a significant landmark, encompassing the entire spectrum of called Bharat.

While its current focus is on the momentous Encyclopedia Project, the picture of IHRF is significantly vaster.

The foundation is dedicated to youth, education, spirituality, culture, inter-faith harmony, health care and ecology. To this end, it sponsors medical care programs, schools, gurukuls/orphanages, training centers, large-scale spiritual and cultural events, tree-plantation and clean-up programs, conferences geared toward inter-faith harmony, summer camps, and international youth awareness programs. Additionally, it sponsors (both financially and otherwise) educational institutions that are already established but suffering from lack of resources.

Following are examples of only a few of the numerous ways that IHRF's arms embrace humanity:

Y.E.S. — Youth Education Services



Many villages throughout India are oceans of poverty and illiteracy. The influx of technology, commerce, education and metropolitanism that has

flooded most of India's cities since Independence, seems to have not even touched these villages. They exist as they did centuries ago. However, one crucial change has occurred. Now, basic education and marketable skills are absolute necessities in order to subsist in even the smallest communities. Hence, those who lack this education and training, go to sleep hungry each night.

In the midst of this ocean of destitution, there are islands of light, islands of knowledge, islands of hope. The YES schools are some of these islands. The YES program encompasses dozens of children's schools, women's vocational training programs, and two orphanage/gurukuls.



The children and women in the YES program are given not only an education, but they are also given the priceless gifts of hope and faith.

The YES program is dedicated to providing poor, illiterate and orphaned children a positive, nurturing environment, and to giving them the best chance possible to live a life free from destitution and despair.

Gurukul/Orphanage

One visit to India is sufficient to see the urgent, dire need for orphanages. However, simple shelters with food, beds and babysitters are not sufficient. These children need not only to be fed and sheltered. Rather, they also need to be educated and trained so they can



become productive members of society. They need to be inculcated with values, ethics and spirituality which will make them torchbearers of Indian culture.

Our two Gurukuls/Orphanages serve as places where 150 of these children are housed as well as educated, cultured and filled with crucial values such as non-violence, truth and seva.



Their days are filled with academic studies, yoga, meditation, Vedic chanting, reading of scriptures, seva and special programs designed to instill in them essential sanskaras.

Looks of hopelessness have become looks of optimism and hope. Lightless eyes have become bright, shining eyes. Feelings of destitution and despair have become feelings of pride, faith and enthusiasm.

Mansarovar Ashram and Clinic

Under the guidance, inspiration and vision of Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji, IHRF took on the project of building an ashram, hospital and oxygen plant in the holy land of Lake Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash in Tibet.



Prior to this project, there were no medical facilities for hundreds of kilometers. People frequently suffered from basic, treatable ailments due to lack of medical attention.

There was not even an indoor place to stay. Therefore, after undertaking a yatra to the sacred land in 1998, Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji took a vow that — by the grace of God — He would



do something for the local people (who don't even have running water) and for all the pilgrims who travel there.

Now, the ashram (tourist rest house) and clinic have been built and were officially inaugurated in July 2003.

Further, the contract states that for all future projects in the region (including schools, vocational training program, health care programs, sanitation programs), the government of Tibet/China will give first priority to IHRF to sponsor the project. Thus, this will be the spring board for other much-needed humanitarian projects in the area.

Further, on the yatra to Mansarovar and Mt. Kailash in July 2003, we had the bhoomi puja (ground breaking ceremony) for new ashrams in Saga and Prayang, along the way to Mansarovar, and permission has also been granted to build ashrams/resthouses in Dirapuk and Zuthulpuk along the sacred Kailash parikrama route. These ashrams are in planning stages and will be constructed shortly.

Additionally, we have pledged our support and assistance to the local villagers of Mansarovar in the form of a much-needed tractor, water pump and

agricultural/farming assistance.

We are also building a hall there where satsang, meditation and so many other divine activities can take place.



The project is truly the grace of God and will be a divine gift to the holy land, to all the Tibetans who live there, and to all the pious pilgrims who cross oceans and continents in order to have a glimpse of the abode of Lord Shiva.

Parmarth Shiksha Mandir: Tribal Education

IHRF -- in cooperation with other charitable institutions -- is sponsoring schools in rural, tribal India.

These children live in lands that time forgot. Their villages are islands of indigence and stagnation amidst an ocean of economic and technologic growth. They have probably never seen an electric light-bulb, nor heard the sound of a telephone, nor traveled in a car or train. They, of course, can also neither read nor write nor compute simple arithmetic.

The population of India is burgeoning out of control — the rural, tribal peoples are already being dominated, oppressed and defrauded by those hungry for land, crops and cheap labor. Left to their own simple, uneducated ways, they will never be able to survive.

Rural Development Program:

We are running a rural development program in a town called Veerpur, on the banks of the Ganges, about 3 km south of Rishikesh. In this program, we are doing the following:



Water facilities – although the town lies on the banks of the River, most people had no running water or water for their farms. We dug a boring well and have brought running water to this village.

Tree plantation program

Organic Gardening program – We have started a special organic farming program as well. We have brought in trained organic farmers and scientists to teach the local farmers alternative, chemical-free methods of farming. Further we have a special “buy back” program with them where we buy back from them all of their crops.

Women’s Vocational training program

Construction of a proper road

Spirituality and Culture – we have started an evening devotional ceremony there on the banks of the Ganges, called Aarti. It is a way for the villagers to come together in a spirit of peace, culture and piety.

Gurukul/orphanage: The second of the two gurukul/orphanages is here in Veerpur.

Ecological “Clean, Green and Serene” Programs

IHRF runs programs dedicated to cultivating an awareness of environmental sanctity as well as with the mission of restoring Mother Earth’s natural balance. Its focus is currently on preserving holy pilgrimage areas, called Tirthas.

Currently, IHRF is running a “Clean, Green and Serene Programs,” in Rishikesh, Himalayas and in Veerpur. In these noble programs, IHRF is working to clean up the holy banks of our Mother Ganga.

In order to restore Mother Ganga to her rightful state of sublime beauty, we have instituted “Clean, Green and Serene” programs.

Through these programs, our ancient, holy pilgrimage cities will be restored to their rightful state of purity, sanctity and spiritual sublimity.

In general, IHRF is the backbone of numerous charitable organizations and provides a vast range of services. The Foundation is dedicated to bringing food to the hungry, medicine to the sick, and peace to the troubled. IHRF does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, caste, gender or nationality.

All of its services are open to all & free to all.

IHRF embraces the whole of humanity and seeks to heal whatever ails God’s children

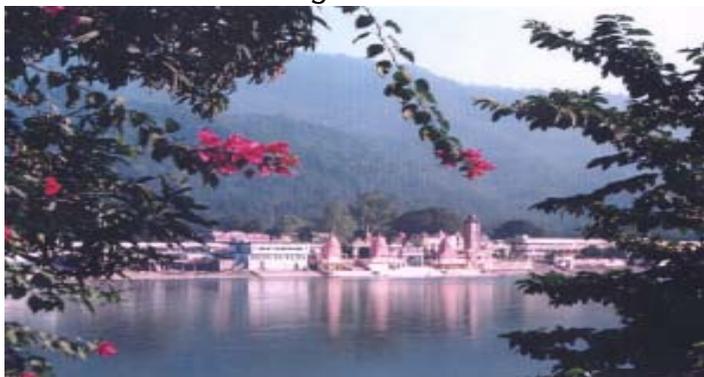
PARMARTH NIKETAN ASHRAM

RISHIKESH, INDIA

H.H. Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji is president of Parmarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh, India, a true, spiritual haven, lying on the holy banks of Mother Ganga, in the lap of the lush Himalayas.

Parmarth Niketan is the largest ashram in Rishikesh. Parmarth Niketan provides its thousands of pilgrims – who come from all corners of the Earth – with a clean, pure and sacred atmosphere as well as abundant, beautiful gardens. With over 1000 rooms, the facilities are a perfect blend of modern amenities and traditional, spiritual simplicity.

The daily activities at Parmarth Niketan include morning universal prayers, daily yoga and meditation classes, daily satsang and lecture programs, kirtan, world renowned Ganga aarti at sunset, as well as full Nature Cure, and Ayurvedic treatment and training.



Additionally, there are frequently special cultural and spiritual programs given by visiting revered saints, acclaimed musicians, spiritual and social leaders and others.

Additionally, there are frequent camps in which pilgrims come from across the world to partake in intensive courses on yoga, meditation, pranayama, stress management, acupressure, Reiki and other Indian, ancient sciences.

Further, Parmarth Niketan's charitable activities and services make no distinctions on the basis of caste, color, gender, creed or nationality. Instead they emphasize unity, harmony, peace, global integrity, health, and the holistic connection between the body, mind and spirit.

True to its name, Parmarth Niketan is dedicated to the welfare of all. Everything is open to all and free to all.



Praise for Drops of Nectar

Dear Bhagwatiji, sadar pranam. Writting to you after long time though I keep getting your communications. Just now I have completed reading the book "Drops of Nectar" by pujya swamiji. I am so much impressed by the contents that two of the stories I have read for the children on our Sydney Marathi radio.

*Kind regards
Sydney Australia*

Dear Swamiji,

Namaskar. Ive been reading the book Drops of Nectar and im truely inspired by your teachings. Sivamani has spoken endlessly about you and I cannot wait to meet you.

*Love and best wishes,
Bombay, India*

Jai Shree Krishna Swamiji,

I am writing to let you know of how much I enjoyed reading your book, I just picked it up yesterday and I finished reading it today... it was one of the most enlightening books I've ever read. Since my parents are extremely spiritual and enjoy philosophy, our home library is filled with hundreds

of books on Hinduism, meditation, self improvement, self realization, etc. Some of these books are geared toward young adults like me. I've skimmed / read through many of them, however none of them have impacted me the waythat your book did. I felt as though this book was specially written for young Indian Americans such as myself.

The thing I found most incredible, was that I could identify with all the issues you mentioned (minus the marriage stuff, of course). Further, the solutions which were presented were logical and seemed to be a happy medium between the Eastern and Western culture. As I read the book, I could see myself practicing what was taught. I learned so much from the book... I thoroughly enjoyed it and I am going to pass it along to many of my Indian friends.

Thank you so much for an insightful piece of work.

Florida, USA

Pujya Swamiji,
Shat Shat Pranam,

Thank you very much for giving us such good guidelines and bringing a drastic change in our life. I feel yr presence every moment. Both of your books are really wonderful. Your books are really a great gift to us and we have become addicted to them. They are of great help in changing our nature and behaviour. All my friends have read them. They really appreciate and trying to change themselves.

Your books are in great demand and we are running short

of them. Please let us know if you can arrange to send few copies to Jakarta

Thank you very much for everything.
Hum par sada apni kripadrishi rakhna

*Aapki Bakt
Jakarta*

Namaste Bhagwatiji,

I have been reading the short stories from Drops of Nectar. Each word that Swamiji writes pours from his divine heart and truly touches ours to illumunate.

Please convey my warmest regards to Swamiji.

*Jai Shri Krishna
Brisbane, Australia*

Dearest Swamiji,

I would love to get 10 - 20 copies of your book, Drops of Nectar, to distribute to the students. We use your book to read from during classes at our Yoga Studio. People deeply respond to your words and I would be honored to share your words as well with my classes.

It is a deep honor to have met you and to have the experience of your true compassion for all beings.

*With infinite gratitude,
Los Angeles, USA*

PUJIYA SWAMIJI,

Sadar Parnam,
Your book Drops of Nectar is a very nicely written document, it answers all our day to day problems, it gives us guidance at every step, it has all solutions to our present day problems provided we follow your teachings. Problems of daily stress are beautifully discussed and easy to follow solutions are in your book.

Through long practice and devotion you have attained a complete mastery over your thought and mind, for us Grastis it is very difficult to forget daily ups and downs in life, we waste our time and life in pursuing wrong objectives, you have rightly said that acquisition does not lead to happiness, whereas renunciation can give us happiness, these are great thoughts, we try to imbibe these and try to lead a peaceful life.

With highest of regards,

*Yours in submission,
Chandigarh*

My Dearest Bhagwatiji,
OM SHANTI!

I am reading the Drops of Nectar again. I like it cause the book opens up my eyes wider each time and surely my heart will be just as wide as the ocean one day.

*OODLES OF LOVE
Bangkok, Thailand*

Jay Siya Ram Puja Swamiji
i hope my e-mail finds you in the greatest bliss of
Parameshwar. i would like to obtain more of your books.

I started reading it and have found so many answers for
myself. It is truly GODS GIFT to whoever may read it.

I do not have a tendency to read but this has got to me. It's
got all the answers to the youth of today for those who are
looking for answers in life.

Swamiji, you are truly wonderful. If anyone needs to be
CLONED it has to be you,because you are so great.

London, UK

Dear Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji,

You know the 'Drops of Nectar' is truly my 'BHAGVAD
GITA'.It is full of honey waiting to be parcticed in reality. What
is happening to me? Maybe everything before was just a
lie.

*Your humble servant and bhakta
(DURBAN,S.A.)*

Pujya Swamiji Pranam!

Me and some of my friends have been so inspired by you
especially through "Drops of nectar...edition 3". I have one
copy of this book yet so many have read it and so many

are waiting to borrow it. I know of so many students want-
ing to read your divine words. If at all possible I would like
to distribute some of your books here. That is if you so wish.

London, UK

