

Twinkling Stars

Every star twinkles differently.
Each individual is unique.

Suresh M. Deo



Twinkling Stars (e-Book Edition 2011)

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Lightning Bugs

Seamless Generations

To my wife, Usha
and our three Twinkling Stars
Deepak, Vikas, and Sagar.

Introduction

Each star in the sky twinkles differently. Every individual relates to life differently and therefore interprets and experiences it differently. Journeying through the life tenure with a companion called curiosity, Man constantly yearns for self-enlightenment.

This book is about the rainbow of individual life experiences and their influence on conscious awareness. Life seems to be a conscious journey that we undertake to learn, unlearn, and enlighten ourselves about what we need to experience. The essence of life seems to lie in experiencing its vibrations. Life experiences teach us how the past gave us the present and the present shall give us the future that we deserve, and not what we desire. The texture of our thoughts condenses into the actions we undertake and the consequences we own. My mother wrote “Life is not determined by the outward circumstances but by the thoughts that habitually engage the mind”.

Water vapor is often invisible to the naked eye. However, water condenses out of it under specific conditions of temperature and atmospheric pressure. In a similar sense, wisdom condenses and crystallizes in our conscious awareness out of our life experiences.

In each one of us, there is a scientist and a philosopher that constantly complement each other. The scientist quantifies experiences, whereas the philosopher internalizes. Both are like concentric circles that share the common center. The sounds and vibrations of life reveal a unique dimension of life in which “Truth alone Triumphs”.

For the common man in each one of us, the essence of life seems to surface mostly through simplicity and clarity of thoughts woven around personal experiences. Consequently, each human has equal and undeniable access to self-enlightening universal wisdom.

Each individual is unique just as every star in the sky twinkles differently and has its own space in the universe.



Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
Keep on experiencing what you are.
Behold with awe and wonder,
In the breath of daily experiences
Lie the secrets,
Who you are, and what you may become.

Suresh M. Deo

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As We Traveled by Bullock Cart in Bastar



On the map of the Indian sub-continent, if you place your finger in the middle, you will notice the name of a major city named Nagpur. During the British Raj of India, Nagpur was capital of Central Provinces (C.P.).

After graduating in Liberal Arts, Law, and a Diploma in Teaching from Nagpur University during 1926-30, our father attempted to practice law while staying in his hometown Raheli in C.P. He worked under the guidance of his oldest brother who was a successful lawyer. However, within a year, our father decided not to pursue the idea of becoming a lawyer. Just at that time, he responded to an interesting advertisement in the newspaper about a teaching and administrative position at Grigson High School in Jagdalpur, Bastar State.

At that time, Jagdalpur in Bastar seemed like a far off place in the wilderness from Nagpur. Getting there from Nagpur was an overnight train journey towards the east to Raipur, and then a 12-14 hour bus journey southwards to Jagdalpur. Stories of mosquito infested jungles, tribals, and wildlife were predominant in Bastar state at the time. As our father traveled excitedly for his first job interview in a

bus from Raipur to Jagdalpur, a different picture of Bastar State gradually started to unfold. A private bus service plied between Raipur and Jagdalpur only few days a week. The road from Raipur to Jagdalpur wound its way through scenic forests, which was a feast for the eyes while riding in the bus. Along the way, the bus made leisurely stops at places including Dhamtari, Kanker, Keskal and Kondagaon. Finally upon reaching the destination, Jagdalpur, situated on the southern banks of Indravati River, we had covered a total distance of 245 km/147 miles.

Visiting Jagdalpur for the first time, our father was impressed with the simplicity and pleasant demeanor of the city and its people. Grigson High School, for which our father was being interviewed, was the only high school facility in the entire state of Bastar. The spacious school facilities spreading over a 3-4 acre area was enclosed within a 4-ft high wall on all sides. Two gates restricted the city traffic through the school facilities. Within the school compound was a cluster of five separate buildings for offices and classes, a hostel (dormitory) with complete kitchen facilities for 30-50 resident students, a teacher's quarter, and a spacious standalone bungalow for the Principal of Grigson High School. In addition, there were two full size soccer grounds side by side. The same ground could double up for playing cricket with a cricket pitch in the middle. Students residing in Jagdalpur City walked to the centrally located school.

Equally interesting in Jagdalpur was the existence of an exclusive Bastar Club, which sported well-maintained lawns, a garden, and tennis courts. During his college years, our father had developed a passion for playing Tennis. The Bastar club seemed to offer plenty of opportunities for social interactions. After the interview, the job of Assistant Principal of Grigson High School was offered to our father and he enthusiastically embraced it.

Background of Bastar State

Bastar was a large State, larger than the current state of Kerala in India and countries like Israel and Belgium. Its early history is obscure - it is believed to have been established in the 11th century. Historically, it did not impact and was not impacted by happenings outside its borders. As such, it developed its own way of life and governance. Bastar was a principality within the framework of British governance of the Indian sub-continent.

Following the death of the ruling queen of Bastar in the 1920's, her son Pravir Chandra Bhanj Deo, who was a minor had ascended to the throne. Although the titular king had total allegiance of the tribal population, the entire administration of Bastar was managed by select British officials, which included a Chief Administrator, a Chief of Police, a Chief of Medical Services, a Chief of Forest Services, and a few other key positions.

Bastar was endowed with lush green tropical forests and a 3-4 month long rainy season. During the rainy season and often with obscured sun, rains seemed to either drizzle or pour for long stretches of time. More than fifty percent of Bastar was covered by forest. The rich flora and fauna of Bastar was graced with majestic tropical trees including Sagwan (Teak), Saal, Mahuwa, Banyan, Pipal, Imli (Tamarind), Kadam, and two prominent waterfalls, Chitrakut and Tirathgadh. Mostly tribal people, who were broadly identified as Gond, inhabited the very thinly populated Bastar and many of them identified themselves as Muriya.

The first job in Jagdalpur

Early on in the job as Assistant Principal of Grigson High School, our father was sponsored by the State Administrator to the University of Edinburgh, Scotland for further studies in Teaching and School Administration. After returning to Jagdalpur, he resumed his job. Within a few years the Principal of Grigson High School retired and our father was promoted as Principal of Grigson High School. He held that position for almost a decade during which he earned the respect and admiration of his students, local people, as well as the Royal family and the British Administrators. During this period in Jagdalpur, he had three more children adding up the total score to five, four boys and one daughter.

Moving on to Dantewada

In 1942, there was a vacancy to be filled in Dantewada, which required a person with legal and administrative background to conduct civil and criminal cases and administrative duties. Dantewada was a small district place, 90 km (54 miles) from Jagdalpur. It had no electricity. There was no bus service from Jagdalpur to Dantewada although there was a motorable road.

The new assignment to fill the vacancy in Dantewada was offered to our father for his consideration with a contingency factor that if the job was not to his liking, he could return to his previous job. Our father accepted the new assignment as an opportunity to further explore the wilderness and simplicity of Bastar. By this time, three of his older children were staying with maternal grandparents for attending school in Nagpur, and two (my younger brother Surendra and I) were in Jagdalpur with them. Thus began a uniquely new and pleasant experience of living in Dantewada, which was located at the junction of two rivers, Shankhini and Dankiny, and surrounded on all sides by thick forests.

Dantewada was a small place contained within 2-3 square mile area. A spacious stand-alone bungalow was assigned to our father in this new capacity. Across the front street was a Police station and on the right side of our house were residential quarters for a Forest Officer and a Tahesildar. Within 30 minutes of walking from our residence, we could be in the thick forest surroundings. During the long rainy season, the 5-foot high bridge spanning across the river would be totally submerged. From my perspective as a ten-year-old, the low bridge seemed to be constructed of timber and bamboo topped with red dirt. Consequently, Dantewada was totally cut off from townships across the river including Geedam and Jagdalpur during the rainy season. But normal life seemed to go on merrily in self-sufficient Dantewada. Our daily movement within Dantewada was either on foot or a bicycle. Our father's daily commute to his office (kacheri) in Dantewada was a leisurely 10-minute walk. His official travel out of Dantewada to visit villages in the District had to be by bullock cart.

Mail carriers manually carried the daily postal mail from the capital, Jagdalpur, to other places in Bastar. The mail carrier held a 5-6 foot long bamboo cane bar across one shoulder and a tarpaulin bag containing the mail was attached at either end of the bar. The mail carrier holding the bar across his shoulder with a tarpaulin bag hanging from either end looked like an old fashioned weighing scale. The mail carrier trekked and jogged bare-foot on the dirt road with a special rhythm over a 7-8 mile (11-12 km) stretch. Some carriers tied a bunch of small metallic bells (Ghungru) on the horizontal bar to help maintain a pleasant rhythm and speed during the trekking work hours. At the end of the trek he would meet another mailman approaching from the opposite direction. There they exchanged their respective mailbags, paused for a break and some friendly chat. Then they returned to their respective starting points with the exchanged mail. It seemed like a relay race of passing on a baton. This process continued in either direction until the mail reached its destination.

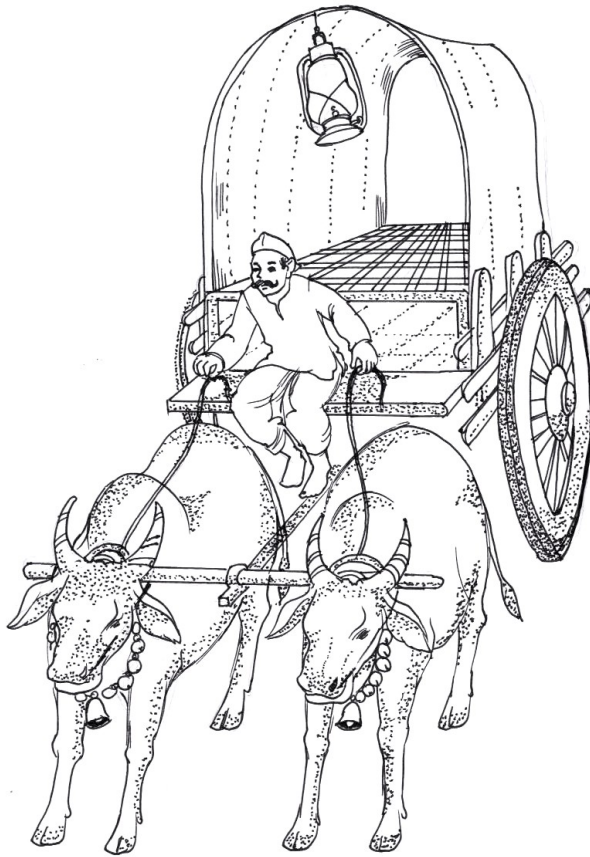
Dantewada was graced by the presence of the main temple of Goddess Danteshwari Mai (Mother Danteshwari) revered by the tribal as well as the local population. The temple was reportedly built in 4th Century AD. A special "aarti" (traditional worship) was performed in the temple every Thursday evening by the main priest addressed as Jeeha. During the aarti, the Jeeha would gracefully hold a brass bell in his left hand and a brass oil lamp, which had 6-8 lighted wicks, in his right hand. While ringing the bell with movement of his left hand and wrist, the Jeeha moved the oil lamp gracefully in front of the idol in a traditional circular motion. The sounds of tribal horns and beats of large drums accompanied the aarti. In the absence of electric lights, the aura of the lighted wicks of the oil lamp and

the whole atmosphere induced a sober and tranquil mood. The acoustics of the temple pleasantly reverberated the confluence of the sounds of the aarti, horn and drums. During the aarti, everybody's palms would automatically clasp together in a reverential gesture for Danteshwari Mai.

Watching the forests while riding in a bus in Bastar was one level of experience, and now living in a small place like Dantewada, surrounded by thick forest on all sides, was entirely a different level of exciting experience. The daily life in Dantewada was as simple and enjoyable as it could be.

Occasionally, our father had to travel out of Dantewada to visit other villages under his jurisdiction. Such travel out of Dantewada in bullock cart was only possible during the dry winter and summer months. Some of this official travel was scheduled during the summer months since all five children would be together in Dantewada for the summer vacation. The whole family would travel with him on some of these trips. A caravan of 4-6 bullock carts would carry the entire family, father's office assistant and the luggage. Travelling by bullock cart during cooler hours of the evening, night and early morning (6pm to 6am) covered longer distances. This uniquely happy, exciting, and enriching travel experience in Bastar during 1943-45 has found expression in the following poem:

“As We Traveled By Bullock Cart”



Drawing by Abhay Purandare

At the age of ten, I have traveled by bullock cart,
Cart with two wheels pulled by two bulls,
A necklace of bells around their neck,
Making tingling sounds with the rhythm of their steps.

The two bulls walked in rhythm pulling the cart
At top speed of two miles per hour in daylight hours,
Improving the speed a little more after sunset hours,
We traveled more at night and rested the bulls at noon.

The bullock cart journey at that young age was fun.
A cot was placed on the bullock cart's flat bed,
A mattress on the cot gave a comfortable ride,
While the cartman sitting at the front steered the bulls,

We sat on the cot or walked alongside the bullock cart.

The cartman often talked to the bulls twisting their tails,
Gently patting the bulls or poking them with a cane,
Cartman's friendly ways of communicating with the bulls,
To keep up the speed of cart to reach the destination.

As we traveled, we counted milestones to gauge the speed,
As we traveled, we looked around admiring the scenery,
As we traveled, we listened to the multitude of sounds,
As we traveled, we sometimes did nothing and just marvel.

The caravan of bullock carts was an amusing sight,
Bullock carts following one behind the other,
Lined up along the side of the road,
With a guide walking in front of the first one.

Each bullock cart had a roof of woven cane- mat overhead,
To protect its occupants from sun, wind, or rain,
Two family members and a cartman rode in each cart,
Making the journey comfortable and entertaining.

The nighttime travel seemed particularly adventurous,
With sleep interrupted by apprehension of a lingering tiger,
Voice of the cartman talking to the bulls in gibberish sounds,
The road winding through forests rich in flora and fauna,
Cool night breeze, humming creatures, and starlit skies,
Crack of the dawn breathing freshness in our veins.

The travel by bullock cart was a multitude of experiences,
Experiences that soaked up in our mind, body, and spirit,
Experiences that subconsciously influenced our very being,
Setting up a pattern for future events to come our way.

On one such trip, the caravan of our chartered bullock carts,
We headed for the village of Nakulnar.
Upon reaching our destination, the village chief called Mukhiya,
Welcomed us with a warm and broad smile.

Sensing the travel fatigue of the guests,
The Mukhia gracefully directed us to a cluster of huts.
The hut with bamboo walls and thatched roof was called Gudi.
A Gudi housed a visiting official for rest and comfort.

The walls and floors of Gudi were coated with red clay.
The red clay surfaces were mopped every morning,
With a mixture of cow-dung and water,
That left a refreshing light brown look after drying.

The toilet was provided outside the Gudi,
In a separate and small bamboo enclosure,
With a 12-inch hole in the ground to squat over,
And to receive whatever you deposited inside it.

A Gudi surrounded by trees was a cool place to stay.
Inside the Gudi, lying on a rope-woven wooden cot,
Was experiencing simplicity in its nascent form.
The warmth of people welcoming us to the Gudi,
Touched and whetted our heart and spirit.

Five Guddis clustered in the dense Mango grove,
Housed our entire family of seven.
Frequently ripe Mangos fell freely on dry leaves beneath,
We listened to behold and experience the campsite.

While our father conducted his duties as a visiting official,
Our mother managed meal preparations in the Gudi's kitchen.
Fresh milk, eggs, vegetables, and fruits enriched the meals,
While we siblings flirted with beautiful Nature all around.

The bulls seemed rested in the Mango grove,
Enjoying the gentle breeze under the tree shades.
We enjoyed picking and sampling the ripe Mangos,
Awaiting mother's invitation for a grand lunch to be.

Nakulnar village folks were looking forward to the evening,
To celebrate the rare visit of a Government official,
And this official had brought along his entire family,
A grand evening tribal dance was secretly planned.

There was no electricity in the entire village,
Dinner by lantern-light was a treat to behold.
Seven cots were lined up in front of the Guddis,
Obviously for our night sleep in the Mango grove.

As we lay on our cots chatting under the starlit sky,
There was surprise awaiting us in the darkness,
Gradually a party of Muriya dancers started assembling,
With oil lamps to light up the evening tribal dance.

Muriya were the tribal residents of this area,
Who laughed heartily and relished simple pleasures,
They loved drinking a wine of Mahuwa or Palm fruit,
And dancing the evening away in sheer joy of life.

Gradually the Muriya dancers assembled within easy sight,
All dancers wore white clothing wrapped around their waist,
Women wore vibrant bead necklaces on topless clothing.
Males and females danced in separate group formations.

Each dancer's left hands around the next dancer's waist,
The right hand held a five-foot stick vertically.
The stick had a small cluster of bells at the end,
To produce a tingling sound to the beat,
As all muscular feet stepped to the rhythm of the drums.

The Muriyas danced routinely for their own fun,
They did it all with such natural ease and grace,
And the sheer joy of dancing mirrored on their faces,
The innocence of all dancers was heart warming to behold.

Then we noticed a young male dancer join the female formation.
He was engaged to the Muriya girl on his left,
So he wrapped his left hand around her waist,
They danced side by side celebrating their engagement.

Under the starlit sky, in the Mango grove,
And in the romantic light of the oil lamps,
The Muriyas danced their hearts off,
Entertaining us and themselves as well.
Village folks giggled and enjoyed as they watched.

Gradually we started feeling sleepy as hours went by,
And one by one we went off to sleep on our cots,
The dancers gradually withdrew in the darkness,
The stars continued to twinkle in the clear sky.

That evening has become a memory for an entire lifetime,
A pleasant memory to cherish that lingers on,
An evening that will never again be a reality,
Because the Muriyas and their spectators have both changed.

Traveling by bullock cart at two miles per hour in 1943,
Later traveling in Boeing aircraft at 650 miles per hour in 1959,
And watching on TV screen, spacecraft landing on Mars
Has changed life entirely to a different dimension of reality.

Seven decades later, my heart longs to travel back to Dantewada,
And from Dantewada to Nakulnar, Palnar, and other villages,
Just to be able to feel the rhythm of the bullock-cart,
And what it felt to travel distances at two miles per hour.

But apprehension and reality of life prompt,
That the onslaught of time and modern civilization
Has robbed from the Muriyas of the region,
The beauty of their innocence and simplicity.

Most of all, what I will miss most,
When I revisit Dantewada, Nakulnar and the other villages,
The hearty and joyous laughter of the Muriyas,
That I have never seen anywhere else since then.

To Muriya's laughter was spontaneous.
Their laughter displayed and radiated,
Self acceptance, vigor, and regal balance,
In a flash of simplicity and pure joy within.

The above poem "As we traveled by Bullock Cart" represents the time period of 1943-45. The first version of the poem had appeared in my blog in 2007. Responding to the blog, a current resident of Nakulnar, Aishwarya, who obviously surfs the Net, offered interesting comments about Nakulnar on July 6, 2007.

Aishwarya said:

Sir,

I don't know when you have visited the Nakulnaar, but the present day position is very much different from what you have narrated in your blog. At present in Nakulnaar, most of the residents are non-tribals who are doing business, I can say that it is one of the most prosperous village in whole Chhatisgarh. You can find brand new SUV's and other Luxury cars running in full speed between Dantewada and Nakulnaar. The distance between Dantewada and Nakulnaar can be covered in just half an hour. I myself have driven a Scorpio in half an hour from Nakulnaar to Dantewada. Majorities of houses have all the modern days facilities like TV, Fridge etc and many of them also have satellite Dish Antenna Connection and computers. I can even say that ratio of vehicle per house can be more than any other village in India.

Please Visit once again and you will find how the World has changed in this part of Country.

Following is the beginning of the first version of the poem that Aishwarya had read and offered her comments in the blog:

As We Travel

As we travel, we count milestones or speed of travel
As we travel, we look around admiring the scenery
As we travel, we listen to the multitude of sounds
As we travel, we sometimes do nothing and just marvel

A travel, naturally is a multitude of experiences
Experiences that get soaked up in our mind, body and soul
Experiences that subconsciously influence our very being
Setting up a pattern for future events to come our way

However, future is unknown and unfathomable
And there lies the beauty and adventure of life
Bringing forth the importance of the present moment
The present is what we can smell, feel and entertain

As a child I have traveled in bullock cart...

Aura of Silence

Knowledge and wisdom gained through personal life experiences helps us comprehend realistic dimensions of life. Whether an individual is literate or not seems to be irrelevant to this process.

In some life experiences, there appears to be a time lag before it translates into a consequential or meaningful inner experience. For example, it is common knowledge that childhood experiences effect behavior in adulthood. Unhappy childhood experiences may manifest through unwise decisions and actions in adulthood. On the other hand, a reasonably stable childhood helps in entertaining a balanced approach to life. The time lag between the childhood experiences and their consequential ramifications silently seep through several decades into adulthood.

During the summer vacation of 1940, I had the privilege of watching Sri Raman Maharshi (1879-1950), a sage, in his simple ashram at Tiruvannamalai. The village of Tiruvannamalai was situated at the foothills of Arunachala in Tamil Nadu, in southern part of India. In this composition, the word “Sage” implies a Self-enlightened Man. I was barely eight years old at that time but I have a clear memory of the visit. We five siblings (four brothers and one sister) had accompanied our grandparents to stay in Raman Maharshi’s ashram for a couple of days. Our maternal grandfather had planned to meet Sri Raman Maharshi personally because he had read about his philosophical thoughts and admired the wisdom reflecting through it.

The ashram facility was a cluster of cottages liberally spaced with clean grounds. Well-maintained flowering shrubs accentuated the ashram’s simple rural setting. The ashram’s volunteers dressed in simple white clothes, seemed calmly busy performing their daily chores. Most of the time, we kids played or wandered on the grounds. The ashram’s disciples, who served the food, cordially invited us to join them for lunch and dinner. Food was simple with rice and sambar, which is a spiced liquid of soup consistency. Curd (yogurt) or buttermilk complemented the simple menu. Simplicity, cleanliness and a sense of revered quietness were the hallmark of the entire ashram’s ambience. We always felt embraced by the warmth and hospitality extended by every devotee on the ashram’s premises.

Finally, it was time to leave. In the morning of our departure from the ashram, all of us bunched together in front of Sri Raman Maharshi to say goodbye. He was sitting in the morning sun mostly bare except for a white cloth wrapped around his waist. He sat comfortably on a simple reed mat stretched over a flat platform in open air. First, our grandfather approached Sri Raman Maharshi to thank him for the opportunity to visit with him and stay at his ashram. Without even attempting to say a single word, Sri Raman Maharshi flashed a warm smile at all of us as if to say that you are always welcome here. While he held his raised arm and palm in a friendly gesture for blessing our entire family, he eyed each one of us singularly. His entire face lit up with an effortless warm and gentle smile. That momentary glimpse of his loving and smiling eyes looking straight into my eyes is pleasantly and permanently etched in my consciousness. There seemed to be no need for exchange of any words. With folded hands, I merely responded with a smile. Instead of Hi and Bye, simply Silence graced the occasion.

Later at the age of twelve, I was able to watch Meher Baba (1894-1969), a Zoroastrian sage in my hometown, Nagpur, in Maharashtra State, India. I watched him from a close distance of ten feet during

his visit to Ramakrishna ashram in Dhantoli, which is a section of Nagpur Township. This ashram was within two blocks from my maternal grandparent's house in Dhantoli. Meher Baba was scheduled to visit the Ramkrishna ashram premises in the evening along with his small entourage. Several thousand local residents had gathered to see him. Some people like me were there to see Meher Baba out of sheer curiosity. Some like my grandparents were present there to seek Meher Baba's blessings. I had noticed during that entire evening that Meher Baba did not utter a single word. He greeted every visitor with a warm and disarming smile throughout that evening. I admired his silent and pleasant demeanor.

I had personally seen Sri Raman Maharshi when I was 8 and Meher Baba at the age of 12. At that age and time, I was certainly not seeking out sages to meet. The sightings of these two sages were pleasant coincidences for me simply because my grandfather was keen on meeting them and I was merely accompanying my grandparents. I had to grow up and mature to realize several years later that my maternal grandfather (1890-1953) was also a sage-like person.

Subsequently in later years, I have often recalled fondly that in the very presence of both of the sages, Sri Raman Maharshi and Meher Baba, I had instantly felt a radiating vibration of grace, and an unconditional acceptance. Each one of these sages had communicated these powerful and yet gentle vibrations solely by their kind, effortless and quiet demeanor. They were clothed in utter simplicity. Sri Raman Maharshi had short and thin graying hair, his eyes reflected warmth and humbleness. Meher Baba wore a simple long robe. Under his twinkling eyes and short black mustache was a constant warm smile. Just being in the presence of these totally silent men felt like a precious gift. I did not hear either of them utter a single word while I watched them from close distances. I did not feel the need to ask them any question either. I merely eyed them in adoration and with reverence that seemed to surge out of me involuntarily and spontaneously. Some time later after these encounters, I was to learn a surprising fact about both of them. They had no inclination to speak or lecture people. But the limited words of advice they offered have been received and documented as words of wisdom for self-enlightenment.

Sri Raman Maharshi and Meher Baba displayed a disarming smile, grace, and pleasantness about them which made you feel instantly accepted and welcomed in their presence. Each one of them radiated an aura of Silence. It took several decades to gradually unravel and appreciate their profound universal messages for guiding individual consciousness. Both of them are still revered as Self-enlightened Masters in the Hindu philosophical context.

My maternal grandfather was a medical doctor who had worked as a Civil Surgeon in government service of Central Provinces (C.P.) during the British rule in India. He retired from the British Government service around 1928 and settled in his newly built spacious house in Dhantoli, Nagpur. During his retirement years, he constantly researched and experimented with alternative medicines such as Homeopathy, Aurveda, Naturopathy and other healing techniques. During his retirement years, he treated his patients absolutely free of charge. My three brothers, one sister, and myself had the privilege of living with our grandparents in their spacious 14-room bungalow in Nagpur during our entire school and college years. Since our mother was the only child of our grandparents, all of us five siblings were warmly welcomed to stay with our grandparents. Our grandfather was a man of very few words. His charitable causes ranged from teaching reading and writing to children in neighborhood who could not afford to go to elementary school, to offering housing and boarding to his nephews who were attending college in Nagpur, but could not afford to stay in a dormitory. He almost never lectured us or anybody else. His overall lifestyle was a living embodiment of simplicity, contentment, worldly wisdom, and

acceptance of all. That is why I considered him saintly. An individual does not have to produce or demonstrate any miracles to earn the respectful place of saint or sage in our consciousness.

An aura of Silence seems to prevail in the presence of people such as those described above. Personal encounters with such self-enlightened individuals and their wisdom communicated without the use of words arouses a latent desire in us to explore the wisdom and vibration of Silence in search of our own self-identity.

Cult

It was the beginning of the 1996-97 fall at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana Campus. The university was conducting its traditional introductory campus tours for the freshman class. The campus atmosphere was charged with the enthusiasm and curiosity of the high school graduates eager to begin their pursuit of college education. A batch of these newly admitted students was led by a student counselor to walk them through the facilities of various departments on the campus. At the end of the 2-hour tour, this batch of students and their accompanying parents were seated in an auditorium. The student counselor asked if there were any questions or concerns that he could answer. After several questions asked by the students and their accompanying parents, one parent asked the last question. The question was from the mother of a student. She expressed concern over some reports that there was growing "Cult" activity amongst students on the campus and how the campus authorities were addressing it. The counselor assured that the college administration and the campus police deal promptly with each situation on its merits and it has not been a major issue on the campus. Besides, he assured that the campus treats all students as responsible adults free to pursue personal interests. The parent did not seem to be quite satisfied with the Counselor's response, but did not pursue the questioning any further. I was in the audience along with my son, Sagar, who was starting off as a freshman in the Engineering School.

Webster's English dictionary defines the word "Cult" with its various implications. The dictionary meaning of the word cult suggests:

"Formal religious veneration or worship. A system of religious beliefs, rituals and its body of adherents. A religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious including its body of adherents. A system for the cure of disease based on dogma set forth by its promulgator. Great devotion to a person, idea, or thing; such a devotion regarded as a literary or intellectual fad. A small circle of persons united by devotion or allegiance to an artistic or intellectual movement or figure".

From this overall perspective, every organized religion of the world fits this definition. A religion or a cult is a way of life.

Even in casual conversations of the twenty-first century, the meaning of the word cult seems to imply a cuckoo group of people involved in dubious activities. Most of the time, a relatively new religious cult may be the focus of a casual conversation. Invariably political issues get intertwined with cult and religious issues. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, various cults have received broad news coverage and publicity due primarily to the active and free press around the world. Therefore the names of groups that have been labeled as radical cults are well known locally as well as internationally. Some of these groups are now inactive or non-existent, whereas some may be over active in the present. Those within these groups may identify themselves as Freedom Fighters. Those who look at these groups from the outside, identify them as cults. In many cases the shroud of secrecy and radical behavior of the so-called cult members has raised waves of discord in local and global community at large. In some instances, local or international laws have been broken resulting in prosecution of irresponsible cult members.

When you have a high riding, euphorious, and adamant ego about your own set of beliefs and values and you want to impose them on others, then knowingly or unknowingly you become a cult propagator. This attitude spits out the message that your own belief system is right and what others

believe is obviously wrong. In this approach to life, logic and reason take a back seat. Most dictatorial or authoritarian oppressors through human history have pursued this path to ultimate self-destruction. With this attitude, individuals, cults as well as nations suffer the same disastrous consequences.

Cult formation is a global phenomenon that has been prevalent in the past and continues even in the twenty-first century irrespective of social, cultural or economic backgrounds. It will be a part and parcel of human behavior as long as one way of life is promoted and forced as superior over the other.

During the past 2500 years of human history, some Prophets have been credited in initiating new religions. The adherents of these religions claim that their respective Prophet is a direct emissary of their God, the one and only. They tend to politicize their own point of view. Their religious zeal may be labeled as, "Propheteering with the intention of Profiteering". The history of a sole Prophet based religions of modern times bears testimony to this statement. Globally, there is no shortage of believers of quick and simplistic solutions offered for resolving problems of life. Prayers and confessions are habitually offered in the hope of redemption and resolving personal problems. A departure from strict religious norms is classified as sin or cardinal-sin. On the contrary, in other human endeavors such as science, arts and music, a departure from the norm is generally considered an expression of creativity and does not imply a cult activity. Cult implies going against the grain. An adult normally advises a child not to swim in a river against the current, and the child asks, why not?

We can choose to look at cult formations with a more empathetic approach. Empathy is an ability to stand in somebody's shoes and look at the world through their eyes, but it does not imply agreeing with their point of view. In generality, a cult seems to spell disagreement and disharmony because it challenges the conventional norms. It is rebellious to the norms and therefore appears threatening. Negative branding of a cult stems from the perception of the perceiver. A cult is invariably a transitory phenomenon unless and until it stands the test of time. The ego of Man entertains manifestation of cult.

Science has established beyond a doubt that Man has lived on this planet a few million years. The modern human calendar and Prophets date back to approximately 2500 years. The time period before that is treated as ancient.

Ancient belief systems honored forces of Nature and embraced them with humility to comprehend the mutual relationship of Man and his environment. Elements of Nature such as sky, gases, fire, water, sun, planets and galaxy of stars that were perceptible with human senses were adored, worshipped, and studied closely in order to attain self-enlightenment. Self-enlightenment is establishing and experiencing the relationship between Self and the Matter including the animate and the inanimate. The animate includes all living beings. The inanimate includes gases, earth and its elements, water, and fire. The ancient Nature based faiths assumed no name identity, and yet each one was a distinct and holistic way of life. Being ancient and different did not mean being deficient. The concept of the word religion and cult may not have existed in ancient times. No self-proclaimed son of God or Prophet has reportedly delivered a binding core message before any of the conventional religions were initiated. Ancient Man was not anti-God, nor was God anti-Man.

The universal philosophical message for humanity has evolved over several thousand years even before the Common Era (BCE) through the progressive contributions of self-enlightened Masters. As sincere social scientists, the self-enlightened Masters worked selflessly and tirelessly contributing to the core body of knowledge. Therefore ancient philosophies of life do not fit the conventional dictionary

meaning of a religion or a cult.

Friction amongst religions and cults has generally been expressed through fanaticism. A fanatic is always the other guy, not me. This behavior can be attributed to the ignorance and intolerance amongst people. Intolerance is reflection of the gap between Man's idealism and actions.

Unfortunately, the twenty-first century continues to be a stage for religious fanaticism under the garb of cult formations. A self-enriching philosophy of life is conveniently misinterpreted for justification and defense. Every organized human activity seeks to define and defend itself. The dynamics of a cult is no different.

At times it seems that the major issues between two philosophies and ways of life are not religious or cultish, but primarily political. Politics is invariably a battle of two royal egos. However, it is interesting to observe that the combined effect of several philosophies of life coexisting side by side, enrich overall human consciousness as much as it contributes to chaos. This phenomenon can be experienced in large cosmopolitan cities such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, London, Hong Kong and Mumbai. An under current of common human instincts seems to enrich the joint consciousness of mankind.

Each cult and religion is simply a philosophy and a way of life, but only a few are willing to accept it. Ego, ignorance, dogma, and greed of Man blind reality.

An orthodox society has a compelling temptation of destroying any group identified as a cult group. Attempts for destruction of a cult often come in various intensities and forms including economic deprivation, social isolation, and sometimes with outright cult cleansing.

Who is to judge a right cult from a wrong cult, a right religion from a wrong religion, a right philosophy of life from a wrong philosophy of life? No rules or constitution of any land can be the judge. Only the conscience of Man can be the judge and the jury. After all, a cult is perception of the perceiver.

Several cults have surfaced and disappeared around the world. Those that disappeared could not stand the test of time. Many cults and religions currently in existence will also disappear if they cannot stand the test of time. Even the span of centuries is a small measure of time for judging relevance and credibility of the philosophy of a cult or religion. Only the philosophy of a cult or religion that appeals to human decency, freedom, and dignity of life will triumph and last. Cult and religion are both Man made institutions.

Truth is neither a cult nor a religion.

Education

My younger brother, Surendra, and I did not attend any formal elementary school until the fourth grade. We were living with our parents in Jagdalpur, which was the capital city of Bastar State in India. Since there was no credible elementary school in Jagdalpur at that time, our mother had taken upon herself to simply tutor us at home.

Earlier she had taught two of my older siblings, Sudhakar and Sarojini, at home for the same reason. She taught us reading, writing, and math to grasp the basics. At that time, our father was Head Master of Grigson High School, which was the only school in town. Adjacent to the Grigson High School premises, there was a separate small but poorly staffed elementary school, which was run by the state. Our parents had planned that their children, five of us, would start attending school in Nagpur once we reached the age for admission to fourth grade of the elementary school. At Nagpur, we had the convenience and privilege of staying with our maternal grandparents. They welcomed us warmly since our mother was their only child. Nagpur was Capital City of the Central Provinces at that time and had several accredited schools and colleges for all levels. We were also blessed because our maternal grandparents took very active interest in our schooling. Travel from Jagdalpur to Nagpur was a full day bus journey from Jagdalpur to Raipur and then an overnight train journey to Nagpur.

Studying at home under our mother's supervision was an enjoyable and rewarding experience. There was plenty of time for playing around. The discipline imposed by our mother always had a sugary coating. A good foundation was being laid down for our education without us even being aware of it.

Then, at the age of eight it was time for me to go to Nagpur for enrollment in the fourth grade of elementary school. The school board's rules required that a student must be enrolled in an accredited school as a full-time student. Going to a school for the very first time was a thrilling experience and I was enjoying meeting new friends and teachers. Adapting to the new environment and school at Nagpur seemed effortless because my grandparents were as affectionate as my parents were. Besides, three of my older siblings were already studying in Nagpur by this time. All of us, five siblings, lived with our grandparents for our schooling. How lucky can you get! At the end of each school year, we looked forward to visiting our parents back in Jagdalpur. The long summer vacations were very enjoyable. It was like having one set of parents at either end of our journey between Nagpur and Jagdalpur. These two places were so different culturally and in so many ways that shunting between them, as we did annually every summer, was in itself an educational experience.

As we grow up, we often ask ourselves a question. What is education? A satisfactory answer to that question always seems elusive and incomplete.

During the elementary and high school years, the time seems to stand still amidst a relatively care free life. This may not necessarily be the case with those who find themselves unable to attend school for reasons beyond their control. And yet each individual gets progressively educated in the school of life based on real life experiences.

At the age of sixteen, we are naturally young and restless. On the day of the high school graduation, each graduate dons a highly educated persona. In that optimistic mood, each step feels springy. Then, we find out progressively that our personal world was so limited. Strolling through the aisles of large

libraries, the massive array of books broadcast how little we know. In the modern world, various search engines such as Google.com provide access to virtually unlimited sources of information. But simply gathering information and becoming an information junkie is not the purpose of education. Decades later, you may not remember what you have learned from books, but you will certainly remember everything that you experienced in life.

Newspapers often report on literacy of people in a region and imply that as an index for education. A direct corollary of education from literacy rate is puzzling. In my personal life experience, I felt like becoming “literate” as I went through 8 years of school and 8 years in university. Then at the age of 30, as I traveled around the world for 6-months on a shoe string budget, mingling amongst the common folks in each country and learning about their life experiences and aspirations, I began to feel that I was getting “educated”. Since then I have not stopped learning.

At a matured stage of life and social consciousness, we try to comprehend broader dimensions of education and its purpose.

So it seems that:

- Education is a passion we cultivate to keep on learning constantly and effortlessly.
- Education is the fountain of youth, curiosity and awe.
- Education is about developing the ability to distinguish between right, wrong, and various shades of gray areas that lie in between.
- Education is about negotiating without sacrificing individual core values.
- Education is to recognize that absolute Truths do not change and are universally acceptable to all people.
- Education is to cultivate humbleness, humility, empathy, and harmony.
- Education is to develop an ability to ask questions and find reasonable solutions.
- Education is to develop the ability to communicate effectively with all fellow human beings.
- Education is the ability to accept and respect life.
- Education is the ability to comprehend our individual responsibilities and obligations to our family, friends, and community.
- Education is about broadening our horizons in all endeavors of life.
- Education is about experiencing and acknowledging diversity in thoughts.
- Education is about self-awareness. You owe it to yourself.
- Education is all about enriching our inner-self.

Ego of Man

During a visit to Nagpur, India in 2001, I noticed an advertisement on a huge billboard at a busy road intersection. It attracted my attention because it was all in plain white color and the text of the message on it was uncommonly brief. It was an insurance company's ad and to my recollection it simply said:

Buddhism
Christianity
Hinduism
Islam
Jainism
Sikhism

We all have an "I" in us. When we remove the "I", we all work so much better together

In another incident my nephew, Ashwin Deo, narrated an interesting story while we were in Pune, India. Two ladies were approaching the entrance of Ramakrishna Mission building in Pune, to enquire about the schedule of meditation classes that they wanted to attend. Two swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission, wearing saffron colored clothing, were standing near the entrance gate conversing amongst themselves. Approaching the swamis, one of the ladies said that they were interested in attending the meditation classes. One swami greeted the ladies with a warm smile, and said, "Of course, you are most welcome to attend the classes". Then he paused and said, "May I ask you what is the reason you wish to attend the meditation classes?" The lady responded, "Because I want peace". After hearing the answer, the swami smiled pleasantly, paused for a moment and restated what he had heard.

You just said, "I want peace". The lady nodded affirmatively.
Then the swami gently suggested:

First you remove the "I"
Then you remove the "Want"
And then you shall have only "Peace"

Ego seems to be a strong and desirable driving force in life for every individual. However, when an individual becomes "Full of himself" the same ego becomes like a blinder and a self-destructive force. Ego is that which comes into play when we attach ourselves to anything that is temporary. Ego is made of stuff that dissolves very slowly.

Egolessness is a state of consciousness in which life is pursued fearlessly, with full zest, without attachment to the fruits of action, and selfish personal gains. The epic Gita alludes to this universal wisdom.

Expectation and Intention

On a leisurely Sunday morning, we were casually chatting with two friends. Both friends were married and had their respective families including wife and children. The conversation was gradually gravitating towards the topic of parent's expectations from their children. We seemed to realize and acknowledge how happy or how hurt parents feel when a child meets or does not meet parent's expectations. Parent's expectations of children are invariably reflections of their own life experiences. Inadvertently or sub-consciously it seems to be a process of transference. Parent's life experiences often shade their own perceptions of ambition, risk, success, failure, dreams, limitations, frustrations, and perceptions of right and wrong. Under the presumption or assumption of love for their children, parents hang out their expectations. Reasonable expectations coupled with guidance help children blossom on their own initiatives. With unreasonable expectations, parents create a cloud of smoke that may suffocate the child's passion for life. Parenting is often a constant balancing act between loving, disciplining and guiding, although nobody goes to a training school for parenting.

In many family situations some anticipated but unshared expectations, right or wrong, affect both sides. When expectations are met, there is a feeling of joy and invariably it is followed with more expectations. When expectations are not met, there is obvious disappointment followed by more unreasonable expectations. In either case, an emotional response occurs disturbing equanimity and draining the energies of all individuals involved. Therefore it seems prudent to temper expectations within reasonable limits. Whatever applies to a family situation, applies equally to a community and humanity at large.

An objective is what prompts an action. An action linked with expectation becomes an effort. An action feels effortless when it is carried out without diluting personal energy with expectation of only positive results. A superior level of performance is achieved when entire personal energy is focused on best execution of the action chosen for the present moment. An individual that is not bogged down with expectations, and is consistently committed to action with a positive purpose in life, empowers self and radiates true essence of life. This type of individual could be a housewife, a brick layer, a truck driver, a janitor, a gardener, a goldsmith, an artist, a computer programmer, a school teacher, an athlete, an entrepreneur, an astronomer ~ in short an individual from any walk of life. This individual is invariably a gracious host/hostess for happy coincidences of life.

“Intention” is goal of the soul. In spite of positive expectation to succeed, if the hidden or latent Intention is not to succeed, the result will be a failure. Total absence of doubts and fears attracts universal forces that empower self in positive ways.

Glimpses of Spirituality

Because I lived in his house in childhood,
I was around my grandfather a lot.
He was true reflection of positive energy,
Always loving, caring, and accepting.

In my grandparent's peaceful residence,
As I grew up from childhood into adolescence,
I could not help but notice him intimately,
Because his daily life reflected spirituality.

How did grandfather's life reflect spirituality?
Not through lecturing or writing
But silently exercising his cultivated powers of
Love, kindness, calmness, and empathy for all.

He once asked me, if I would remember him
Remember him after he was long gone.
I wish he could hear me say now,
That my breath is your breath.

How I wish, I could have told him so
While he was still alive around me
But then, I had some growing up to do
To appreciate what he had revealed, was so enriching

Spirituality is not a religion.
Spirituality is not about philosophy or scholarship.
Spirituality is not of the mind at all.
Spirituality is absolute positive energy within.

Words in dictionary cannot define spirituality.
Mind cannot tread in the realm of spirituality.
Spirituality is positive vibration within,
Devoid of human mind's limitations and reach.

Spirituality is acceptance and love of all
All that is part of Mother Nature.
Mother Nature's all encompassing universes
Universe that lies within us and without.

Inside us is a simple and orderly universe,
That is identical to the universe outside us,
Identical in it's basic nature and essence,
But hidden from our senses and intellect.

God of Individual Choice

Within its own belief system, a traditional religion has a God, a Prophet, and in some cases it has both. The perception of the words Prophet and God varies from one religious faith to another. From the ways religious people pray it appears that God always lives upstairs and the person that prays, including the Prophet, lives downstairs. The conventional religious protocol seems like this, first you worship the Prophet and then you go upstairs to meet God. Several different religious faiths have appeared over the centuries on the world stage. Within one religious faith, there is only one Prophet and one God. Since a Prophet in a religion has been a different individual in a historical and cultural context, it appears from outside that each Prophet has addressed a different God in a narrow bandwidth. That is why there are different religious philosophies, and each one of them seems to be struggling for relevance and legitimacy in narrow bandwidths.

Sanskrit language of Indian origin uses a term “Ishta-devata” which could be translated in English as “God of individual choice”. This term communicates or captures a different meaning for the two words, God and Prophet. The overall philosophy of Hindu religion was not developed by a single individual claiming himself to be a Prophet, Son-of-God, Messiah or Messenger of God. Instead, the broadband philosophy of Hinduism is a cumulative outcome of meditative reflections of self-enlightened Masters through centuries. The books of knowledge of Hindu philosophy are compilations of verses in Sanskrit and Persian language that are contributions of several self-enlightened Masters through centuries. From the perspective of this philosophy, Man ascends to a clearer level of consciousness through his own introspective efforts and becomes self-enlightened. In addition to Hinduism, there are other eastern philosophies, which encourage access to universal wisdom based on introspection and inner experiences. Legitimacy or relevance of words such as Prophet, Messiah, God, Lord, Allah, Ishta-devata, Nirvana, Primal truths (Arya Satya), and Universal Energy is ultimately an individual’s inner experience.

Traditional religion is man-made and it is simply the manifestation of a way of life. In the comprehension of the broadband eastern philosophies, God does not descend from heaven to earth in a physical sense. Instead, a Man, through his individual efforts, ascends to the awareness of God as Universal Energy. It is transference of pure energy and not a physical phenomenon.

Recognizing the emotional faculty of individual human mind and its psychological needs, the philosophy of Hinduism entertains multiple choices for choosing personal God or Goddess and offers total individual freedom to do so. Individual choice of a personal God or Goddess is personification and manifestation of ideal attributes that the individual devotee idealizes in a mutually rewarding friendship. An “idol” (sculpture or picture) is symbolic of an “idea or ideal” that is pursued.

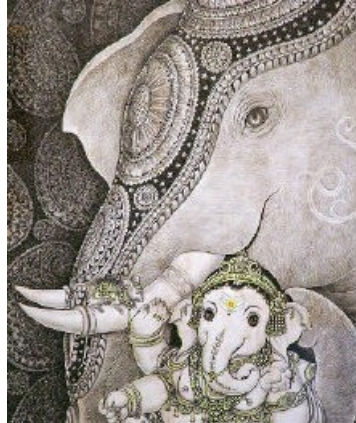
A Hindu chooses a personal God or Goddess (Ishta-Devata) depending upon traditional family background, individual choice and level of awareness. Interesting and captivating stories have been woven around various Gods and Goddesses. Specific functionalities have been assigned to each God and Goddess to communicate messages that enrich human consciousness. Since Man simultaneously entertains several levels of consciousness, the choice of more than one God or Goddess is acceptable to a Hindu. In some instances mythological stories are blended with real life characters to communicate universal messages. Traditional religious rituals have been blended and incorporated in daily life in

order to reinforce universal messages on a daily basis. The mind of a Hindu progressively matures to realize that ultimately there is only one unifying force, source or energy that is universal and without a parallel. In the language of the Star Wars movie “May the force always be with you”.

An emotional relationship established in early childhood with a personal God of individual choice (Ishta-devata) allows for warm and permanent friendship to develop. Numerous interesting stories in religious narration personify God as a compassionate and close friend in need. The friendship established with a personal God in childhood continues throughout lifetime. Each individual empowers the God of individual choice (Ishta-devata) and depends on the trusted relationship, although God is not physically visible. Traveling through the journey of life with an image of God as a constant and reliable companion enriches the journey.

There is great beauty in innocence of a child. Every child should have opportunities to experience an innocent and carefree childhood. This is where a traditional religion and family structure plays a very significant role. Religion and its respective traditions are an outgrowth of collective human experiences. An individual communicates with God of individual choice (Ishta-devata), as a close friend at the inner level of consciousness. Every adult has a child inside that longs constantly for and clings to the childhood friendships including that of a God of individual choice (Ishta-devata).

Ganesha was described as the facilitator of education and success in life. He removes obstacles and bestows happiness. In childhood these were good enough reasons for me to address, adore, and worship him as Lord Ganesha.



Drawing by Sri Padmavasan

In Maharashtra, a western state of India, there is a Ganapati festival every year around the month of September. The date of festival varies every year according to the Hindu lunar calendar. The festival focuses on the worship of lord Ganpati for ten days. During this festive period, Ganpati is worshipped at home as well as in public places. Large plaster or clay models of Ganpati are set up on decorated platforms in public places sanctioned by city ordinance. Temporary decorative tents are set up for sheltering the Ganpati idol and visitors. In these public places, several neighboring residents and visitors join in for worship of lord Ganpati. The ten-day festivities include organized variety entertainment programs such as dancing, singing, dramas, debates, lectures and art exhibitions.

For celebrating the Ganpati festival in our home during the same ten-day period, a new clay model of Ganpati would be purchased every year from the market. It was usually a difficult task to purchase only one clay model of Ganpati from the very broad and colorful selection offered by the retailers, and fit it in the limited budget. I always admired the beautifully crafted and painted models of Ganpati that were offered for sale during the Ganpati festival. Every year, new and imaginative variations of the Ganpati idols emerged displaying artist's freedom to express. The picture shows Lord Ganesha in a traditional pose.



At our home, the first day of the ten-day Ganpati festival involved installation of the new Ganpati idol in the morning. All members of the family would have traditionally taken their baths before commencing the formal installation ceremony in the morning. The Ganpati idol would be placed on a specially prepared flower-decked wooden platform. Oil lamps and other traditional items used for conducting worship would be neatly arranged in front of the idol. The room in which we installed the new idol of Ganpati seemed to develop a special aura ~ as if a very special guest had arrived in the house was the feeling. It just felt good that all members of the family congregated together in front of the newly installed Ganpati idol. Often, some next door neighbors would also join in. We all recited the traditional Ganpati prayers together. Invariably, I volunteered to play the role of a little priest holding the traditional oil lamp in my hands while standing humbly in front of Ganpati. I would move

the oil lamp in traditional clockwise direction facing the idol while the entire family sang together the traditional Ganapati prayers for 10 -15 minutes. After the conclusion of prayers, each family member bowed to Ganpati. I would also bow and then distribute sweets to all that were present. Naturally, all children hung around until the end of the prayer session. During the entire Ganpati festival, these prayers were conducted twice a day, one around 9 AM and the next one around 6 PM. Sweets were distributed at the end of each prayer session and therefore presence of children was assured.

On the tenth and final day of the festival, we conducted the evening Ganpati prayers in the house, and then carried Ganpati's idol to the well, which was located in a corner of our garden. The well was fifteen feet in diameter and had a three-foot high embankment around it for children's safety. The well was reportedly quite deep and had water in it all the year through. Drinking water for the family was always drawn from this well all the year round. Since this was the final day of the celebrations, many more of our neighbors would also join us. This was the Ganpati immersion ceremony. A good-bye prayer was chanted at the well saying "Ganpati bappa morya, pudchya warshi laukkar yaa" which meant lord Ganpati we are immersing you in water to say good bye for now, but you come back soon next year (you hear!). Then the Ganpati idol would be gently released down in the well along with some flowers. I remember tears rolling down my cheeks at the time of immersion of Ganpati idol in the well. Following the event, sweets and fruits were distributed to all those present. It was a ten-days of intense companionship with Ganpati in a festive mood. After the immersion ceremony of Ganpati on the tenth and final day, it felt as if a very dear friend had left us but with a promise to return next year. Re-entering the house after Ganpati's immersion ceremony was a sad feeling. The room and the special platform on which Ganpati sat for ten days, now felt empty and deserted.

Initially, every year we used to purchase Ganpati's new clay model from retail store for the annual festival. Gradually, I got more fascinated with Ganpati and the annual Ganpati festival. In the process, Ganpati had become my personal God and a friend. Often I prayed to him and relied on his help. Ganpati was gradually carving a place in my heart consciousness.

As I got into sixth grade, I became very interested in sculpting Ganpati's idol in clay. I experimented with different clays from our garden to get the right workable consistency. Instead of buying the Ganpati idol from store as we had done in previous years, I was now driven to create the Ganpati idol with my own hands. Encouragement from my grandparents, parents, and siblings was a booster for my new passion in sculpting. I worked the garden clay diligently to give Ganpati a respectable and proportionate shape. I was especially careful while I was shaping his elephant head, trunk, tusks, ears and eyes. Shaping his four arms and rounded belly was equally engaging. I preferred to shape the Ganpati clay model to fit in approximately twelve-inch cube space. After carefully sculpting and then drying the clay model at ambient temperatures, various colors were used to paint the entire model. It took special effort to paint Ganpati's face and especially his eyes because I wanted him to look godly, regal, and friendly. I was ten years old and felt mighty proud to install my first hand-made Ganpati idol at home on the inauguration of the Ganpati festival. For ten days during the festival, I adored my Ganpati because it was my own creation, entirely crafted by my hands and devotion. Unwittingly, this Ganpati seemed to be constantly looking at me and paying special attention to me. On the tenth and final day of the festival, my Ganpati idol had to be immersed in the well just as we had traditionally done during previous years. I almost sobbed when I let go of him from my hands for the final immersion ceremony.

Subsequently each year until I was 16 years old, I sculpted the Ganpati idol for the festivity at home. My friendship with Ganpati evolved progressively over the years. Even in the absence of a two-way

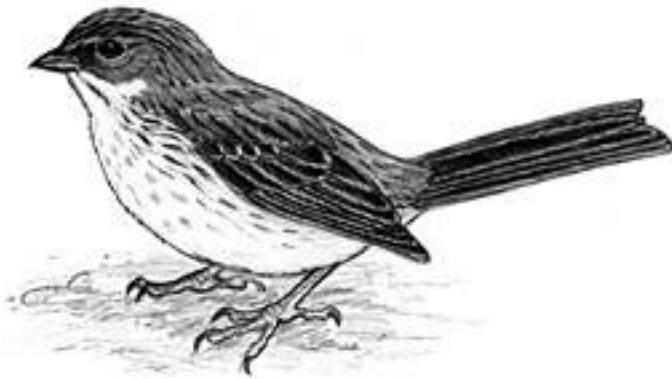
conversation, Ganpati has become my personal god for a lifelong friendship. I have empowered the symbolic clay model to be all of this and much more.

Initially during my innocent childhood years, Ganpati was a living God for me. I imagined that he stayed somewhere up there; I did not know precisely where. But that was not important. It did not matter. I prayed to him and felt his blessings comforting me in times of need such as the annual exams (especially the math papers), competitive sports events, and moments of loneliness or sadness. Gradually, Ganpati became my close friend and a constant companion. For the emotional component of me, Ganpati still is and always will be my personal friend because his personality and image is irreplaceably etched in my consciousness.

Reflecting back on the early years of life, we sense great beauty in the innocence of childhood. Each child should have an opportunity to experience the innocence of childhood and we realize that it is a privilege and a blessing to enjoy. An innocent and safe childhood provides a stable foundation for life. Friendships developed during childhood tend to be resilient, durable and borderless.

Eventually, it seems that all of the traditionally organized religions of the world will have to take a back seat in honor of a universal philosophy of life that will be readily acceptable to each and every human being. This new philosophy of life will not be theorized or prophesized by anyone, because it already exists in the joint consciousness of humanity. It will gradually surface in honor of the ultimate freedom and wisdom of Man.

Indian Sparrow



During my childhood in India, one of the most common sights every day was the sparrow. A sparrow's sweet and gentle chirping sound was always pleasing to the ears, especially in the early morning hours while we were still half-awake. In spite of its tiny size, the sparrow appeared to be a very energetic and sturdy bird. Even the extreme weather conditions including the heavy monsoons, the hot summers, or cool winters, did not seem to bother them. The sparrows hung around in small groups of two to five.

In the early spring, the sparrows seemed to build their new nests. Maybe that was their season to nest, make love and lay some eggs. During this season, a single sparrow would frequently appear holding a small piece of straw in its cute beak. From its movements, I would guess that it was a female on her mission of building a nest. The tiny piece in the beak would be either a piece of straw, fabric, or some other material of construction for the nest. The sparrow would appear to fly in, momentarily touch its feet on ground, and then fly out of sight to wherever it was going. From its movements, the sparrow appeared to be a very busy and dedicated worker. Sometimes, two sparrows hung out together. My childhood instincts said that the sparrow holding the straw was a female, and the accompanying sparrow was a male. The female looking sparrow just looked delicate and dedicated to what she was doing, whereas the male looking sparrow seemed to be there just following her. Maybe, both were building the nest together.

In the rear part of our house in Nagpur, there was a verandah (patio), which was covered with red tiles. An upper corner of the verandah was the sparrow's favorite spot for building a new nest every year. I never figured out if the same couple of sparrows nested there every year in that favorite spot, or was it their descendents that nested there. Their favorite upper corner spot in the patio was out of reach for a cat or another preying creature. The flurry of nest building in spring was always audible from the chirping sounds of the sparrows. We could see the sparrow bringing in reinforcing building materials for the nest. A few months later, the cute sounds of a few chirping offspring were audible as they greeted their mom bringing in rations. Witnessing this annual ritual of nesting gave us the feeling that the sparrows were our family members. In contrast to the sparrows, the Indian crow did not seem to

attract as much attention in spite of its presence all year round. Its crowing always sounded like a broken complaining instrument! These impressions of mine were from the age of five to ten.

At that young age, I had developed a fancy for fabricating and owning a sling. The sling had a wooden yoke, which resembled the shape of the letter Y, which was a piece of wood procured from the guava tree in our garden. We cut up old rubber tube of a bicycle tire to fabricate the two elastic bands for the sling. A small piece of leather attached to the far end of the two rubber bands served to hold a pebble. Almost every boy seemed to know how to make a sling and hurl a pebble with it. I was mighty proud when I made my first sling. I would walk around with the sling pretending to be a fighter of some sort. I was enjoying slinging pebbles at targets and demonstrating my skills at it.

In the yard of our house, we had a few tall trees and quite a few fruit trees including Guava, Papaya, Mango, and Oranges. There were similar trees in the same residential area. The fruit trees often attracted small bands of monkeys numbering from three to ten. There would be larger full-grown monkeys along with smaller ones. Sometimes a mother monkey would be carrying a small baby that hugged her stomach as the mother monkey hopped from tree to tree. The arrival of such a band of monkeys was a nuisance value for our grandparents, while for us kids it was a great entertainment. I used the opportunity to target practice with my sling. If I scored a hit on an adult monkey, the irritation on the face of the monkey was very obvious. However, I remember that I would not dare hurl a pebble with the sling at a mother monkey carrying a small baby hugging her stomach because I was sure that the mother monkey would come at me if I did.

One day, I was idly standing and chatting with my friends in our yard. I had my favorite sling in my hip pocket. As we stood there talking, I noticed a bunch of six to eight sparrows on the ground barely twenty feet away from us. All sparrows looked busy picking something from the ground with their tiny beaks. As usual, the sparrows were chirping and seemed happy. Each time a sparrow chirped, its tail seemed to jerk upwards in a cute movement. Each sparrow looked full of life energy. While looking at the frolicking sparrows, I was reminded of my sling. I pulled out my sling; loaded it with a medium sized pebble and casually, without any specific intention, hurled one pebble at the middle of the group of sparrows. I did not aim at any particular sparrow. The pebble left my sling and hit one female sparrow. She immediately collapsed to the ground and became motionless, while the other sparrows immediately fled away. I rushed to her and realized that I had killed her. I was instantly flooded with a sense of guilt. The guilt of snuffing away the life of an innocent sparrow was overwhelming. I buried the sparrow in our garden under a guava tree. Along with the sparrow I also buried my sling, but I could not bury my guilt. The guilt factor continues in my conscious awareness, which is a price one must pay even for an innocent mistake.

Later in life it was a pleasant surprise to see the sparrow, exactly the same species, chirping merrily in our backyard in Addison, Illinois and in different countries around the world. Upon sighting a sparrow, I am invariably tempted to say Hi my good old friend! Pleasantly a realization dawns that it is the global sparrow, and not just an Indian sparrow. Each sparrow exudes the same aura of cheerfulness and serves as a reminder for always respecting and honoring innocence.

Morning Affirmations

Waking up in the morning after a good night sleep is a nice time for gentle take-off for your mood and awareness. Meaningful morning affirmations are gentle reminders that gradually evolve out of your individual life experiences. Morning affirmations are not meant to be religious rituals bound by rules and regulations.

Communication from a lion at Brookfield Zoo:

One of the lions in the Brookfield Zoo in Lagrange, Illinois seemed to communicate to me that a prerequisite to the beginning of a good day is undoubtedly a good night sleep. That lion in the zoo was sleeping at 10 A.M. with his four legs stretched out and I thought that something was wrong with him. A zoo attendant told me that the lion had a good meal last night and he is simply resting. A lion living in natural habitat also takes a long sleep after a full meal. After gradually waking up, he stretches his entire body and then puts out a royal roar as if to welcome the day and let everybody know that the King is now awake. In the early hours of the morning, his royal roar can be heard for a couple of miles.

Later during the day, when a lion spots and decides to go after a prey for his food, he leaps forward with a sprint. At that time a chemical called Adrenalin gushes through his brain helping him to pick up speed. In a competitive 100-yard dash, a runner also sprints forward to pick up initial speed. Morning affirmations, topic of this composition, are not for triggering or jump-starting an action to go after a prey or competition.

It is a common experience at an individual level that after trying and experiencing different morning affirmations over a period of time, a set of affirmations gradually begins to crystallize and sink in our consciousness. Gently starting every morning with positive affirmations is a choice that an individual makes consciously. It is simply an effort to ease the mental transition from a state of sleepy grogginess to greeting the morning with a smile and positive awareness. A relaxed beginning in the morning sets the tone and tune for the day.

Vibrations from Dantewada:

In 1944 Dantewada was a small and very peaceful place in Bastar State, India. Dantewada was home to simple, unassuming and happy people. Situated at the junction of two rivers, Shankhini and Dankini, Dantewada was surrounded by lush green forests all around. There was no electricity in town nor in the entire district. The full moon or the star-studded sky looked so pretty in that pollution free environment.

The weekly bazaar held in Dantewada under the shade of a sprawling Mango grove provided opportunities for social interactions amongst the village folks and tribals from the surrounding villages. Incidents of crime were unheard of and a police department of less than ten took care of the entire district. A small school with only one teacher offered literacy classes. One has to live in such an environment to experience what simple and peaceful living really means. I was twelve years old and my younger brother, Surendra, was ten at that time.

Our father was posted in Dantewada in an administrative capacity with the Bastar State Government. Surendra and I had dropped out of traditional school for one full school year since our mother had decided to tutor us at home. This way our parents could enjoy our company while three of our older siblings were studying in far away Nagpur, which was the capital of Central Provinces (C.P.). During that one-year stay in Dantewada, we soaked up innumerable pleasant experiences of living in a truly rural environment.

Our residence in Dantewada was a simple and spacious one-story bungalow that was allotted by Bastar State to our father in his administrative capacity. This house had a covered patio on the East Side, which was our favorite place for enjoying morning tea. The patio faced an open ground and therefore offered privacy and quietness. Our parents were invariably up before us by 6 A.M. and enjoyed their first morning tea together. After their tea, both of them routinely recited a set of morning affirmations together. Their small book of morning affirmations was in Marathi language and it was titled Ramdas Swami's "Manache Shlok". Simply translated it means "Reminders for the Mind". Our parents recited and sang the affirmations together in gentle voices because we were still not quite awake. However, hearing their recitations in gentle voices during the early morning hours while still lying idly in the bed was a very pleasant experience. That subtle childhood experience became a motivation for me to find or develop a set of morning affirmations for myself later in life.

The Purpose of Morning Affirmations:

Morning affirmations are gentle reminders on a daily basis. It is a common experience at an individual level that after trying and experiencing different morning affirmations over a period of time, a set of affirmations gradually begins to crystallize and sink in our consciousness. Gently starting every morning with positive affirmations is a choice that an individual makes consciously. It seems to be simply an effort to ease the mental transition from a state of sleepy grogginess to greeting the morning with a smile and positive awareness. A relaxed beginning in the morning with a hot cup of tea or coffee sets the tone and tune for the day for many of us. Similarly, an individual may use morning affirmations to induce a gentle and soothing beginning. Affirmations based on individual life experiences and with freedom of choice are invariably more meaningful. Morning affirmations enable welcoming the day with creative energy in order to experience life from different perspectives. Gradually, out of these daily introspective experiences stems the identity of Man in broader context of the Universe.

Choice Of Morning Affirmations:

Whether one or more than one affirmation should be used is entirely an individual choice. Each chosen affirmation should induce introspection and self-enlightenment or awareness of Self. In this journey there are no restrictive rules and regulations because the inner freedom of Man reigns supreme.

As an example, three affirmations are compiled here to trigger introspection and self-awareness:

- Awareness of our "Physical" identity.
- Awareness of "Teacher" in the form of knowledge and inquiry.
- Awareness of "Universal Energy (UE)", our deeper identity.

The time devoted for introspection on the morning affirmations listed above may vary depending upon the mood of the moment. The length of time is not an important issue here. Some introspective thoughts on each of the above affirmations are listed below:

Awareness of our “Physical” identity:

Our physical body represents our tangible identity. Life cycle of human includes conception, birth, life span, and subsequently death. Human body is essentially “Matter” and therefore it perishes. After death, human body reverts back to its five basic building blocks namely space/ether, air/gas, earth, fire and water. Every matter, animate as well as inanimate, is identical in this respect.

Awareness of “Teacher” in the form of knowledge and inquiry:

Teacher is a source that guides us from ignorance to knowledge of self and our universal identity. We gain knowledge through three different sources, which include:

The spoken words of self-enlightened Masters,
The written words in books of knowledge, and
The personal experiences of life.

Each one of the sources listed above should be respectfully considered a Teacher, and constant guide. These three sources represent Trinity, like three major rivers that merge together and then form a single stream and ultimately merge in the sea of consciousness. Consequently Teacher is not necessarily a person, and message of a Teacher is not necessarily communicated only in spoken or written word(s). Following is a short list of diverse sources that cumulatively contribute to our comprehension of the universe in which we live:

- During the first nine months from conception (fertilization of an egg) to birth of a human, mother’s womb communicates a sense of effortless existence to the fetus (the unborn child). Therefore the womb may be considered as the Teacher during our fetus stage.
- During the first nine months after birth, mother’s touch and constant attention gives the infant awareness of unconditional love, an ever-present reliable caretaker and friend.
- Vibrations of Nature reflecting as thunder of clouds, lightening, whistling winds, snow-clad mountain, waterfall, flora and fauna give a sense of how we fit in the larger scheme of Mother Nature.
- Sight of the deep blue sky, moon, sun, planets, and the sea of stars communicated a sense of awe to cave men (our ancestors) and still continue to give a sense of awe in exploring the planets, galaxies and beyond.

Each one of these sources is a Teacher that gives us a vibrational sense about our relative place and purpose in the Universe that we live in.

Awareness of “Universal Energy (UE)”, our deeper identity:

UE is our intangible deeper identity. Buddha suggested that it manifests in us as our breath. Sanskrit language uses a word “Urja” that comes close to connote the concept of the word Universal Energy (UE) that is envisioned here. Other languages may have similar equivalent words. Man has humbly

tried to invoke UE through ages by clasping both hands together, which is invariably a gesture in total submission. Listed below are some vibrations about UE that may surface in consciousness during morning affirmations. Some aspects of UE that are envisioned here are:

- UE is eternal in nature, which implies that it is without an end, and therefore it is also without a beginning (Vedanta philosophy).
- UE is formless, seamless and all pervading energy. Concepts of male or female gender do not apply to it. Therefore it seems difficult for the human mind to comprehend its very nature; and yet its presence can be sensed through innumerable mediums. A select few mediums are listed below in an effort to understand the subtle nature of UE:
- UE expresses itself through the medium of a Mother. In the interactions with its own mother, each infant senses a subtle quality of love that has no parallel. Infant of every living creature has a mother to experience this subtle and holistic quality of love.
- UE expresses itself through the fusion of a male and female, both of which are essential elements in the evolution of every living species (including humans).
- UE expresses itself through the intriguing phases of evolution including conception, birth, life cycle and death of each living species.
- UE expresses itself through individuals that are fearless and sublimate their ego in order to lead life within an ideal framework of moral and ethical standards. Such individuals rise to a higher level of consciousness in the realm of UE and are revered as the Self-enlightened Masters.
- UE has its own built-in Intelligence, which is the cause of each and every phenomenon that is occurring in the human body, as well as the entire Universe. The built-in Intelligence “Effortlessly” manages the entire Universe and its innumerable balancing acts. A Man on the other hand, claiming to be the smartest living species on Earth, constantly struggles to maintain individual balance.

Only after comprehending the deeper meaning of each of the above affirmations through introspection, reality of universal Truth(s) surfaces in human consciousness. The Truth(s) is about the real nature of our own self and UE, and the non-duality between the two. This is a road map, which has been consistently offered by Self-enlightened Masters through entire history of mankind and even centuries before the dawn of the Common Era (1 A.D.). Once the reality of the universal Truth(s) dawns in our consciousness, we become aware that every living cell of our very being has always been aware of it. Out of these realizations stems a real sense of bliss, which is of a permanent nature. The Self-enlightened Masters further allude that this bliss only keeps on increasing without any outer limits. A Self-enlightened Master effortlessly radiates an aura of universal wisdom that naturally attracts other individuals in pursuit of their own self-enlightenment.

Following is a prayer based on the above affirmations:

Oh!
Universal Energy, my Source, please bless me
So that I may attain a state of blissful consciousness,
In which there is no further Need.

It is entirely up to an individual's choice and commitment to carefully choose and identify some daily morning affirmations of personal choice that are conducive for introspection. Gradually, each chosen

morning affirmation prompts further introspection. This is an inward journey on your own initiative in which you are alone but not lonely. The journey continues until you find your own real Self.

My Red Plastic Cup and Frugality



At home, I have a plastic cup, which has an attractive deep red color on the outside and white inside. This plastic cup is slightly larger than the usual glass that I would use for drinking water.

I bought this red plastic cup in a store called Target in Evansville, Indiana. The store had an after Christmas sale and I was merely browsing without anything specific in mind. Walking through the aisle where they had Christmas cards on sale offering 50% off, I noticed this six-pack of attractive plastic cups also on 50% sale price.

We were expecting company on New Years Eve at our home in Addison, Illinois, so I thought that these cups would be useful to serve some soft drinks. I really liked the colorful festive appearance of these plastic cups. I grabbed one of the cups in my palm and instantly liked its comfortable grip. But most of all, before I had started admiring these interesting features, I had already fallen in love with the attractive discounted price. The cost of the six-pack was 90 cents. I quickly calculated in my mind that each plastic cup was going to cost me only 15 cents. Considering 1994 prices, that was a great bargain. Besides, the plastic cups were the large 16-ounce size and were offered in three different attractive colors including bright Red, Yellow, and Blue. All of them were white inside. I bought several six-packs in each color. My bargain hunting was a successful and enjoyable mission.

On New Year's Eve, we had our party at home for welcoming the arrival of the New Year at midnight. That evening we used the attractive plastic cups to serve soft drinks including Coke, Pepsi, and water. The wine, beer, scotch, and Champaign were served in crystal clear glasses because these drinks don't seem to taste as good in opaque plastic cups! After the party was over, I carefully saved several red plastic cups that I had personally used during that evening. I was going to use them to drink water starting from the New Year. Drinking plain water had become my habitual ritual. A few years ago, I had accepted a recommendation that our human body requires the daily intake of approximately six glasses of water. Drinks such as tea, fruit juice, or soft drinks are not to be counted as water. Although I had started following this advice of drinking adequate amount of water a few years ago, it had not really become an ingrained habit. As a result, I would often forget to drink the recommended six glasses of water. Six glasses of water is a lot of water to pour down your throat. You are really never that thirsty in normal day-to-day life. Since you do not get thirsty, it is easy to forget to drink water daily as recommended. It is especially so during winter months.

However, I was convinced of the reasons for drinking copious amounts of water during the day and the accompanying benefits to the human body. But, I did not want to float in the water that I would drink. Therefore I kept on thinking of finding an easy way to remember drinking water more than I cared to. I was also least interested in becoming paranoid about following this recommendation. So I had struck a deal with myself that I would drink more water than I had normally done.

At home, I started using this large 16-ounce red plastic cup to drink water. Because of its slightly large size, I did not have to refill it too often. Lazy me! Placed on the dining table, the Red plastic cup would constantly stare at me whenever I walked by the dining table.

During the day, we spend lot of time in the kitchen and around the family dining table for numerous interesting activities such as eating, cooking, baking, reading, writing bills, and talking on the telephone. Most of the time, we drag our visiting friends to the kitchen to sit them down around the dining table to talk or just shoot bull. The kitchen area extends into the family room, which has the all-entertaining TV. All of these activities add up to a lot of time spent around the dining table during the course of a day.

This red plastic cup sitting on the dining table catches my eye effortlessly during the day reminding me to drink water and coaxing me to drink more of it. Thanks to the consistent reminders, I am getting into the habit of drinking more water. Throughout the day, I tend to sip-sip-sip water, more than I desire, allowing for reasonable intervals in-between. As a result, I tend to get invitations to the urinal more often than I care to! But gradually the frequencies of both operations have normalized as the body got used to accepting and holding more water.

Whenever I am at home, I am drinking water from the same red plastic cup day in and day out. I have used this single red plastic cup every day for past six months. It still looks as good as new. However, this red plastic cup made of inexpensive polystyrene plastic is supposed to be a disposable cup. You drink out of it once and trash it. Some choose to crush it in their palm after finishing the drink and then toss it in the garbage can.

My frugality prevents me from throwing away or trashing this plastic cup after my first encounter with it. Having used it only once, I cannot crush it in my palm nor trash it. After emptying the water from the plastic cup into my stomach, I rinse and refill it with fresh water and rest it back on the dining table. It sits in full view, constantly reminding me of you-know-what! After six months, and this is not an exaggeration, the red plastic cup still looks attractive and clean. It has no dents, scratches or cuts. It is fully re-usable for me. Yes, it has cost me only 15 cents. I admit that I am frugal, but I do not apologize for it.

My frugality is an expression of my dislike for waste and wasteful habits since childhood. It may also be a reflection of my childhood during which I did not have access to such disposable and pretty articles. Reflecting back on my childhood and teenage era in India, I feel fortunate that I never thought of myself as poor or deprived. We were an average middle class family and we did not have to apologize for it to anybody. There was enough love, affection, attention, and warmth within the family and surrounding environment. Absence of disposable products such as plastic cups or similar articles did not even occur as a concept of poverty. I felt blessed with the feeling of total acceptance within the framework of my total environment for which I am eternally thankful.

Now as a grown up adult and with a much broader and varied experience with life, I find a little different meaning in this attractive and disposable red plastic cup. The 15-cents cost of this disposable cup represents the price and possibility of a full or partial meal for an impoverished hungry person somewhere in the underdeveloped or developing world. Poverty is when hope eludes you constantly. That impoverished person is in such a condition of existence that even the source of the next meal is not known. Although I am a human being just like him, I cannot even begin to feel or understand his hunger and emotional plane simply because I have never been so deprived as him. Even if I decided to fast voluntarily for one or two days, I cannot even begin to sense how one feels when even the next

meal is not assured, and the meal next to that is beyond thought because pangs of the immediate hunger rule your entire consciousness. However, I need to be able to connect with “Him” somehow to feel his hunger, anguish, suffering, and to understand what kind of hope keeps him going. It is my need to know and my frugality expressed through the red plastic cup may enable me to connect with “Him” in a silent way.

That impoverished Man could be an infant, a child, a boy, a girl, an adult man or woman. Since the red plastic cup represents the cost of a partial or full meal for that needy person in my mind, I cannot crush the red plastic cup in my palm and trash it. Each time when I reuse the red plastic cup, my mind tries to get in touch with the hungry Man and his emotions. It is not a guilt trip for me in any sense. Reusing the same plastic cup, again and again, is a form of prayer that helps bring a new dimension to my thought process in comprehending human life in its nascent form.

On Becoming a Brahmin

I was born in a Brahmin family
Therefore, I am branded a Brahmin.
But that does not make me a Brahmin,
I do not even know my Vedic genealogy.

My Vedic genealogy could tell me technically
Which lineage I have descended from.
That knowledge may make me a literate Brahmin
But that does not tell me, who I really am?

As I grew up in a Brahmin family traditions,
I have witnessed Hindu rights and rituals,
And comprehended what my religion is,
But all that has not revealed my real identity.

As I grew up and matured,
Rituals gradually gave way to thoughts,
And thoughts to introspection,
To learn further about my real identity.

Career seeking was easy for me,
Because I just followed other's foot steps.
My career just happened to me,
In absence of a real plan or vision.

I always toiled hard, it seemed
To learn what I did not know,
In search of the undefined success,
That always paced ahead of me.

But then, one day at 6 AM at age sixty
When I was preparing to go to the hospital
For my scheduled heart by-pass surgery,
My entire life span stood still in front of me.

Seemingly, I glimpsed at my entire life
Without any passion nor disdain,
The entire lifespan appeared like a flash,
And all the sixty years rolled up into nothing.

For that moment, I felt detached from life
Neither in pain, sorrow, nor joy.
It was just a feeling of total immunity
To all the existing forces around.

All of a sudden, whole life seemed to mean
A whole lot as well as nothing simultaneously,
Not in an expression of any joy nor desperation,
But simply expressing itself through a unique vibration.

Through that unique vibration arose a quest,
A deeper desire to sense my very identity,
In the greater mass and time of this universe
In which an entire human life seemed just a tiny moment.

This unique vibration, it now seems, is an outgrowth
Not of any particular event or a moment.
It is like a seed, which germinated very slowly,
Starting at a point unknown in the consciousness of life.

This unique vibration does not generate any sound or word,
And yet it communicates a message undisputedly,
That self-enlightenment is a frame of mind and vibration
For each individual to connect with creation itself.

Brahmin is not a caste,
It is a frame of searching mind
Aspiring to become the ideal Man
With total harmony within and without.

Our Buffalo



I did not know our buffalo's ancestral heritage. But we had heard that she was a Kathiawadi breed. Kathiawad (Cutch) is the peninsula jutting out in the central West Coast of India. A healthy Kathiawadi buffalo was known to yield copious amounts of milk. In various parts of India there are different breeds of buffalo and each breed has some distinctive features including the shape of their horns. In a flock of buffaloes, it was easy for me to spot our buffalo because of the typical appearance of her medium sized curved horns and her healthy broad body structure. She stood out as a well bred and fed buffalo.

The time period was 1940 to 1945. This is the period during which I was very much aware of our buffalo's presence in our maternal grandfather's bungalow in Dhantoli, Nagpur, India. During this period, I was staying with my maternal grandparents along with my four siblings and a maternal uncle. The resident population of this bungalow was eight people, which included our grandparents, five siblings, and a maternal uncle. The actual count including a cook, who did not stay at the bungalow, was nine. The cook prepared daily meals including lunch and dinner and ate both of his meals at our bungalow. This was probably our grandmother's strategy to insure that the cook prepare tasty meals!

Maintaining a buffalo in the premises as a source of milk was an economic necessity. The daily supply of milk from the buffalo provided adequate supply of nutritious milk and its derivative products such as yogurt, fresh churned butter, buttermilk and ghee. The ghee prepared from the home made butter does not become rancid at ambient temperatures for several months.

A tin-shade was provided for the buffalo to protect her from sun and rain. At home, her food primarily consisted of chopped up dry corn stalks and a dense oil cake procured from local oil mills. The oil mills extracted oil from cottonseeds using the crushers and sold the residual dense cake for use as fodder for animals. Besides eating this food in her tin-shade, our buffalo went out daily to nearby green pastures accompanied by Raut.

Raut worked as a servant in our grandfather's house. He stayed in the outhouse along with his wife and three daughters. Raut's primary responsibilities were to take care of the garden and the buffalo. He fed the buffalo and milked her twice a day, and took her to the green pastures for 6-8 hours daily. Since they spent so much time together during a day, our buffalo fondly responded to Raut's attention and presence. Each day it was a common and pleasant scene to watch Raut walk the buffalo to the pasture

in the morning and then return in the evening. In the morning the buffalo looked eager to walk out of the gate and in the evening she was happy to return to her tin-shade. Raut would often pat her on the back and she would wag her tail acknowledging his touch and attention. Raut had assisted her a couple of times to deliver her babies. During the long waiting time for her baby buffalo to be born, Raut would be patiently present nearby. Raut and our buffalo seemed to be happily bonded.

One evening, our buffalo returned home from the grazing grounds with Raut. On this day she seemed slower on her feet and Raut had already noticed it while returning home. After settling down in her tin-shade, she did not seem eager to eat or drink anything that Raut offered her. Gradually she squatted down stretching her feet awkwardly and her neck seemed to stretch backwards as if she was gasping for breath. Soon a foamy substance was oozing out of her mouth. Raut knew something was terribly wrong with her and he started petting her and stroking her stomach. In those years, there were no Veterinarians nearby. Raut was our buffalo's prime caretaker. Our grandfather who was a retired physician and surgeon guessed that it might be a case of food poisoning.

The huge body of our buffalo lay motionless and her eyes seemed oblivious to the commotion surrounding her. She was not even wagging her tail. Raut stood dazed near by. All of us felt so helpless. Around midnight, our buffalo was dead. It was like losing one of our family members.

Next day, I woke up early in the morning and went straight to the tin-shade where our buffalo lay motionless. Raut was still by her side. Then I heard somebody at the front gate trying to get my attention. I walked up to the gate and saw a tall dark complexioned man. He said, "We heard that your buffalo has died". I was surprised to hear him say that because we hadn't informed anybody so far about the death of our buffalo. Then the man said, "We can arrange to take the dead buffalo away". Although I was only thirteen-year-old at that time, I had an instantaneous hunch that this was the man who has poisoned our buffalo. A cold streak of chill ran down my spine. Along with it, I got very angry and upset. I had realized beyond any doubt that I was looking at the actual murderer of our buffalo. I needed no proof because his face and body language said it all. I looked sternly at the man standing across the gate and simply walked away from him in disgust without uttering any word.

At the age of thirteen it was a shocking realization that a man would intentionally poison a healthy and innocent buffalo to get hold of her skin. A real and ugly side of humanity had just unfolded in front of me.

Perception of Sounds and Words

Vocal cord is used by Man to make sounds to communicate and express feelings. Spoken word is a modulated vibration of sound(s). Animals, birds and other living creatures also produce various sounds to express themselves. Each listener in the kingdom of Nature may interpret the same sounds differently. A tiny cricket may produce a high pitch sound as a mating call, but the same sound and pitch gives headache to a human listener. Before there was any language amongst primal humans, only modulated sounds and body gestures may have been the means of communication, just as an infant tries to communicate with adults.

Absolutely still air does not make any sound. Only the movement of air and its vibration generates a sound. That is how we are able to speak, sing, shout or whistle. The loudspeaker system propagates sound waves based on the same principle. Gusty winds during a storm produce whistling sounds especially on encountering a tunneling effect between two large objects such as tall buildings. Winds ruffle tree leaves and produce yet another kind of sound. In a similar sense, still water is calm and quiet, but moving waters make different sounds. Water coming down from clouds as rain, or flowing down the cliff as a water-fall, or raging as a flooded river produces a wide variety of sounds. Lightening and thunder produce distinctive sounds. Sea waves lapping against the shore induce hypnotic mood. All of these sounds manifest as the language of Nature.

We had a Parrot in our house for thirteen years, during which I grew from four to seventeen years of age. We called him “Mithoo” and he responded to that name. A large size wire cage with a swing inside it was his private residence. Two small bowls were placed inside the cage for his water and food respectively. However, Mithoo chose to stay out of his cage most of the time during the day light hours. For his safety, we restricted his movements within the four walls of our house. Mithoo enjoyed sitting on horizontal rods of mosquito curtains, on top of his own cage, and various other airy spots within the house. Each time that we ate a meal, Mithoo loved frolicking on the top of the dining table so that he could get our attention and taste some food from our dishes as well. A raw, green and hot chili pepper was his favorite snack. Over the years, Mithoo had mimicked and acquired many of our sounds and words with which he was able to communicate with us. Using those sounds coupled with his body movements, he could express that he wanted food to eat, that he was happy, and in some instances he expressed that he wanted to return to the privacy of his cage. We could tell that he always enjoyed our attention. Mithoo communicated with us effectively in his parrot language that continued to evolve constantly. One day while my sister, Sarojini, was studying in the outside open patio; Mithoo took the liberty of stepping out on the lawn to frolic around. He had never stepped out of the house like that before. A cat came out of nowhere and swooped on Mithoo swinging her paw across Mithoo. There was an audible flutter of wings and a squeaky sound that attracted Sarojini’s attention. She watched in awe the brief skirmish in which Mithoo had no chance. The cat ran away leaving Mithoo dead on the spot. Mithoo was our first and immediate family member that had died. His cute ways of communicating with us live on in our memory.



In our house in Addison, Illinois, we have two cats that have been with us since 1991. Tori is the bobcat and Ameera is the female. Both of them were barely two weeks old when they were brought home as birthday gift for our eldest son, Deepak. It was the birthday present for Deepak from his siblings Vikas and Sagar, our second and third sons respectively. Initially during the first few years, neither of the cats made even a “Meow” sound. They seemed to be quiet cats walking around the house doing their thing and we tried to communicate with them in English. They did not seem to have a clue to what we were saying and did not even respond to their own names that we had bestowed upon them. As long as they received their daily food, water, and a clean litter box to do their jobs, they seemed to have no need to communicate with us. Over a period of time, we had to earn their respect to draw their attention towards us. They did not care to know our individual names because they could probably tell us apart from our body smell and our gibberish language. Progressively they learnt on their own to modulate their meow sound in varying lengths and pitches to communicate with us. Now we seem to understand what they are trying to say. Every day we interpret their meow or mow sounds to understand what they want. When they are thirsty or hungry, they meow and prompt us to walk towards their water and food trays. Another kind of meow tone tells us that they want to go out of the house for fresh air. When they return and want to come inside the house, in addition to the meow sound they scratch the glass-paned door from outside in order to get our attention. If they had to wait outside the closed door too long, their body language indicated that they were not happy with us, and therefore now they want to be petted and hugged. In the absence of any real language between the cats and us, we still have a very comfortable way of communicating with each other for the rest of our lives. The interactive language of communication between the cats and us is various sounds complemented with body language. Although it is all gibberish, specific sounds communicate specific messages. It is the language of association and free interaction.



We can visualize life of our human ancestors in the caveman era. At that time, there was no language and consequently no words. In order to communicate with each other, Man may have mimicked the sounds of Nature and then gradually gave meaning to the sounds. Modulated and manipulated sounds became words. Out of it all, spoken language may have evolved. This may be the biography of a

spoken language. In addition, Man used arts, crafts, and musical sounds to complement or augment the communication process. Gradually the spoken language had to be captured in alphabets, words, and written language. Grammar gave organized structure to the language. Answer to the obvious question as to how long did this process take is left to the imagination and interest of individual reader.

Fortunately, Man has been endowed with a brain, which has been skillfully utilized to develop spoken as well as written languages. Gradually, technology has facilitated increased interactions amongst people of diverse cultures. Translation of one language into another has enhanced communications between diverse cultures. At the General Assembly of United Nation's headquarters in New York city, individual speakers address a meeting in their own national language and the proceedings are simultaneously translated in several languages enabling active participation of people speaking different languages.

When you hear a language being spoken and you have no clue to what is being said, it sounds like a few pebbles shaken vigorously in a metal container. It can give you a real headache if you have to listen to those sounds for any extended period of time. However, if you can decipher and understand the same sounds, you consider it a friendly language.

Language is primarily for communication and sharing of thoughts. One common language amongst a group of people makes communication simple. Where as, two or more different languages trigger misunderstandings and chaos amongst the same group of people. To complicate matters further, individuals use a non-verbal language, which is sometimes referred to as body language. The coexistence of multi-ethnic societies of the modern world displays all facets of its complex ramifications.

One common language for the entire world remains an idealistic dream even in the twenty-first century, and may remain so for centuries to come. India has 13-14 states in which each state has a different official language. Hindi, which is one of the regional languages, has been acknowledged as the official national language. Yet in daily life, the national Hindi language is not spoken by almost 50 percent (!) of the population. More than 100 languages in various permutations and combinations of the 13-14 major languages are spoken in rural India. Amusingly enough, the English language serves as the interconnecting common language amongst educated Indians.

Wide use of computers has enabled people from diverse cultures around the world to communicate in a common English language; however it has made only a small dent in the idealistic dream of having one common world language. Even computers have succumbed to the pressure of offering their services through other languages. Word processing capability is now available in numerous languages. In the absence of a universal language, a good knowledge of more than one language is invariably an asset in advancing inter-personal communications.

In a language of your choice, some words in particular are fascinating because their meaning and perception changes and evolves in your own mind over the years. Perception of some words changes as individual life experiences and awareness changes. A Man gives power to a certain word and also has the capacity to diffuse it because often word is a thought and its vibration.

In the context of modern times, there are some words that seem to divide humanity simply because their perception or interpretation varies from individual to individual. Some examples of such words that are commonly verbalized are capitalism, socialism, jihad, freedom fighter, god, religion, spirituality

and several other that seem to polarize humanity. Such words are not tangible objects that can be held in hand for visual inspection and hence their perceptions change from one individual to another. The net result is gross misunderstandings amongst people of different ethnicity that speak different languages.

As a simple example, the word “Spirituality” is often used in conversations in referring to a person. There is no realistic method to assess the level of an individual’s spirituality. How can something be gauged that cannot even be clearly defined? Therefore, it is quite presumptuous for one person to assess or comment on the spiritual level of another person. Only an individual can assess his/her own level of consciousness in relationship to the cliché called spirituality. Spirituality of a person, in one context, may have nothing to do with religious faith. Spirituality is manifestation and expression of an individual’s level and state of consciousness.

Spirituality is a vibration that is mutually shared between two living beings. Even a parrot, cat, dog and other living creatures can sense the presence or lack of the vibration of spirituality. The deeper meaning of a word evolves out of individual experiences and consciousness. Therefore, the meaning or comprehension of the word “Spirituality” varies from individual to individual.

Sounds may become words, but neither can be effective for expressing the real essence of life, which is in the form of a vibration. The Source of this vibration is the universal rhythm that constantly guides us.

Every individual transitions through various levels of awareness or consciousness during an entire lifetime. Deep waters are naturally calm. In remote areas of world, there are deep lakes with water so still, clear, sky-blue and pure that the bottom of the lake is clearly visible. Man longs to see such a sight. In a similar sense, Man also thirsts for the clarity of his own consciousness and awareness. Perception of sounds and words constantly challenge the dynamics of Man’s awareness.

Receiving and Giving

One day my wife, Usha, made a casual remark by saying that “It is more difficult to receive gracefully than to give”. It took some time for the thought to sink-in. The initial and natural reaction was to judge others for their habits of receiving and giving. It was so easy and effortless to find faults of others. However, I did not have to look too far because I saw in myself a poor giver and a not-so-graceful receiver. In simpler and honest words, it was easier for me to receive than to give. My close friends or relatives may not have noticed these traits in me. But now I was noticing it when I was asking a serious question of myself and answering it very honestly. I realized that in this aspect, I could have fooled the world all the time, but I could not fool myself now, not even for a moment. In contrast, I had observed over a quarter century that Usha had always been a very good giver as well as a graceful receiver. There was spontaneity about her actions in giving as well as in receiving that could be sensed. Our three sons Deepak, Vikas and Sagar also display that spontaneity and have turned out to be good givers as well as good receivers. In the meantime, I have managed to upgrade myself considerably with conscious effort. After all, a man is known by the company he keeps!

Life offers learning opportunities on a daily basis. Willingness in receiving and hesitancy in giving are common traits. Generally, people with such traits tend to give a noodle-like handshake, as if they are trying to hold back their feelings. Unwilling or hesitant givers have a tendency towards constipative stomach because they tend to hold back their emotions as well as their material goods. Constipated mind generally promotes constipated stomach. Recognize that the root cause of most diseases is in the mind. The acts of “giving” and “receiving” are primarily about sharing of emotions and enjoying the process.

Children naturally love to receive complements and gifts. Generally, they part with their gifts only when they don't need them any more. This is the normal pattern of receiving and giving during childhood. However, when a child willingly parts with precious gift or possession, adults complement the child with radiant smiles. A child remembers and appreciates sincere complements from adults for a long time. Sincere complements have an enduring quality that lasts through lifetime for the receiver as well as the giver.

A grateful receiver is invariably a graceful giver. In a sense, receiving and giving is like a free flow of energy, which should not be restrictive in either direction. Both of these acts entertained without expecting any personal gains in return give life a self-enriching dimension.

Giving financial assistance to the needy and deserving people is commendable. Giving the same aid unconditionally transforms it into a noble act of charity and sharing. However, charitable giving is not limited or restricted only to offering money or material goods. Wishing well and praying for another person is another good form of charity. Committing personal time and energy for helping others, understanding and sharing emotional pain of others are some of the other forms of charitable acts of giving and sharing. It is enlightening to encounter people in our own lifetime, who have abundantly demonstrated the noble virtues of giving and sharing freely.

In a well-organized effort Mr. Jim Carter, ex-president of the U.S.A, offers his personal labor for erecting housing for the deserving needy who help themselves. He also assists in ensuring fair

elections in countries around the world that lack skills and resources for effective self-governance. Bill Clinton, ex U.S. President, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, Billionaire Warren Buffet, Nelson Mandela, and innumerable others have chartered their own paths for uplifting the needy. For almost sixty years, Mother Theresa committed her energies to ensure human dignity for the poor and dying in the streets of Calcutta. Martin Luther King served his fellow men to claim their own rights and dignity in society. A billionaire in Argentina fills a large back pack with snacks in the evening and personally walks through the large underground gutters of the city to feed the young urchins living there. He offers the urchins rays of hope and love for a better life. In the USA, a young billionaire who inherited wealth from his father's oil company chose to become a school teacher for under privileged children in the slums of New York City.

It is often self-enlightening to observe and recall people in our own life's encounter that have given and shared freely. Late Anna Masoji, retired Principal of Hislop College and a good friend of ours in Nagpur, India, picked up helpless injured dogs and cats from city streets and nursed them back to health in her own home. Anna constantly hosted three to eight such adopted pets in her home over a period of fifty years. She treated them all as her family. My mother-in-law, Bhabi, always offered food to a cow that frequently visited her doorsteps in Kalkaji, New Delhi. My grandfather, Dr. P. G. Nakhare, personally fed our family dog named Moti, pieces of Roti (Wheat flour Tortilla) moistened in milk every day at noon and night. After our meals, my grandfather sat on the patio's lower steps close to Moti and patiently fed him one moistened piece of Roti at a time. Grandfather sat on the steps until the dog had completely finished the last piece of Roti. Moti wagged his tail with an expression of contentment and gratefulness as he finished eating and walked away. My grandmother seemed envious of the dog because he was receiving so much attention from my grandfather! During his twenty-one years of retirement life, my Grandfather offered free medical treatment to any and everybody that came to him. His only child, my mother, followed her father's footsteps by offering Homeopathic medicines free of charge, over a period of forty years, to treat any body who sought her help. Every mother is a selfless giver for her infant. A Man that does not notice and feel mother's love is emotionally blind and a freak of Nature. This is a short list of sincere givers that I have noticed in my life. Each reader of this composition will have an individual list of such people who are the real givers. This list becomes longer and longer as one becomes more and more aware of these precious jewels of humanity amongst us. Such individuals give and keep on giving relentlessly, empowering the recipients and enriching their own selves in the process. Sincerely giving and graciously receiving is a natural way of saying "Thank You" without even uttering a word.

It is not what you receive, but how graciously you receive that makes the difference. It is not what you give, but how freely you offer and share that makes the difference. When gifts are exchanged with mutual respect and love, the hearts of the receiver as well as the giver feel enriched. The more you give freely, the more you receive automatically. Nobody has ever become poor by giving charity. Poverty of mind and heart, in receiving and giving, leads to emotional bankruptcy, which is the ultimate form of poverty.

The selfless givers and graceful receivers seem to radiate a simple message to humanity:

If you are feeling sad, let us share your sadness together.
If you want to be happy, let us be happy together.

Revelation

This composition dwells primarily on two words, Revelation and Sakshatkar. Revelation is an English word and Sakshatkar is a Sanskrit word. Both words are generally used with a similar religious connotation. For a casual translator or interpreter, the two words may seem to be close synonyms, but they are not. Each one of these words reflects a different meaning and dimension due to cultural and philosophical perspectives.

According to Webster's English Dictionary:

"Revelation is something that is revealed by God to Man. It is an act of revealing divine truth. It implies an act of revealing to view or making known, implying an enlightening or astonishing disclosure".

Thesaurus Dictionary offers several synonyms for the word revelation such as disclosure, divine manifestation, prophecy, and sign from heaven. The definitions offered by both dictionaries mentioned above have restrictive and skewed religious connotations.

The words such as revelation, divine, and God seem intertwined in common usage. In particular, the word "God" seems to have different connotations and interpretations in different religious philosophies, and it appears as if each religion is sounding off a different "God".

Three different places including Mt. Sinai, Jerusalem, and Mecca that are revered as holy places by Jews, Christians, and the Muslims respectively are located on a relatively tiny real-estate when viewed on a world map. The initial core messages of each one of these three different religious philosophies seem to have been communicated in three different languages, each one representing separate cultural roots.

Historical events are described by modern historians in terms of the Common Era (CE) or Before the Common Era (BCE). 1 AD and onwards is the Common Era.

History ascribes the life years of Moses 1500 - 1350 BCE and Jesus 1 – 33 CE. These two individuals lived approximately 1500 years apart and in all probability spoke two different languages (www.sacredtexts.com). Moses spoke ancient Egyptian-Arabic and Jesus spoke Hebrew and a form of Arabic prevalent in his time. In the following years and centuries, their original philosophical messages have been communicated, interpreted and translated in different languages and emerging derivative languages around the world.

Reportedly the Old Testament was "Revealed" to Moses during 1500-1350 BCE by God. The second half, The New Testament, was reportedly "Revealed" to Jesus during 1-33 CE also by God. Note that the word "Revealed" is emphasized in the Testaments to indicate what God revealed to Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Yesu). In a similar context it is stated that Muhammad received his Revelation from God (Allah) during 570-632 CE. It appears that the under current of their religious/philosophical concepts have a common denominator. All three seem to share or use a common theme "Revelation by God" in one sense or another. Yet they passionately find reasons to disagree with each other.

The comprehension of the word Revelation, and the phrase “Revelation by or from God” seems to have different implications in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Consequently, the Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship independently in their respective places of worship, and seem to address God at different levels of consciousness. The differences in their prevalent opinions and consciousness about God and Revelation are clearly evident through centuries including the twenty-first century. In absence of common ground, peace accords amongst them have been made and renewed over and over with little progress to date.

An independent and neutral observer naturally wonders in which language did God communicate with the three separate Prophets (Moses, Jesus and Mohammad) since they lived a few centuries apart from each other and spoke different languages? Moses spoke ancient Egyptian-Arabic and Jesus spoke Hebrew and a form of Arabic prevalent in his time. Judea/Jerusalem is where Jesus of Nazareth preached his religious and philosophical message. Jesus is described as the Hebrew-born Messiah. At that time, the potential audiences of Jesus probably understood and spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. Aramaic was the language of first century Judea. Muhammad probably spoke a type of Arabic which was not written. Classical Arabic was the language of the Quran which was perfected in the late 8 CE. Classic Arabic was injected with many words from other languages including Persian and can be very confusing.

Translation of one language into another invariably bears the risk of misinterpretations and misunderstandings just as the photocopy of an original canvas painting loses some texture and beauty of the original. Any subsequent photocopy of a photocopy loses still some more charm and spirit of the original painting on canvas. In a similar manner, distortions of words, spoken or written, and their interpretations occur in translations. Therefore linguists and translators bear a moral responsibility for maintaining the original spirit of a message, which may be beneficial for mankind. As a simple example, different spoken and written narrations of the birth of Jesus by different people have raised ambiguities over the centuries. Following are some statements that have been made in different languages and with different connotations:

- A baby boy was born to a young girl.
- Mary married Joseph and they moved to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. But Mary is Virgin Mother of Jesus!
- To Virgin Mary was born a son called Jesus.
- The baby boy was an Immaculate Conception of a virgin.

The essential life message of Jesus is more important than the historical affirmations of his birth. A listener and reader has to take responsibility for introspecting on the precious message of the messenger.

A Prophet and a Self-enlightened Master:

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam seem to have a common denominator in their philosophical roots. All three stress on the terms “The word of God”, “Prophet” and “Messiah” in similar context but in different languages. On the other hand, it is informative and enlightening to look at the religious philosophies of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism that were initiated and have evolved on the Indian sub-continent. No single individual is credited or has claimed credit for these religious philosophies. Cumulative contributions of several Self-enlightened Masters have enriched their

respective religious philosophies. These philosophical thoughts are centered on self-enlightenment and universal consciousness. The oriental philosophies including Shinto and Tao also refer to their Self-enlightened Masters. Consequently an important difference surfaces between the Prophet driven religious philosophies and those guided by the joint consciousness of the Self-enlightened Masters.

The essential difference between the two philosophical approaches may be simply stated:

“Where as Prophets claim to Reveal the Word of God, the Self-enlightened Masters guide in unraveling the mysteries of universal consciousness. Therefore the word Revelation seems to have different connotations in the two essentially different philosophical approaches”.

Language is merely an instrument for expressing, communicating, preserving, and sharing human thoughts. The essence of a quality writing labeled as an “Epic” normally addresses mankind in its totality, and is not restricted to just one group of people, civilization or a geographical area. When the universality of a philosophical message enriches mankind, the message becomes more important than the messenger. Then if the name of the messenger is removed, the entire message does not collapse. Revelation of the spirit of a truly universal message can only be absorbed in the inner consciousness of an individual.

Revelation in English and Sanskrit:

The English word Revelation has a close synonym in Sanskrit as well as Marathi language (my mother tongue) and that word is “Sakshatkar”. In November 2003, my nephew, Ashwin Surendra Deo, casually asked me a question during breakfast at his residence in Colaba, Mumbai, India. He asked, what is the meaning of the word Sakshatkar in Marathi language? Since Ashwin communicates fluently in English, Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi (his mother tongue), he was aware that the same word connotes different meaning in different languages and cultural backgrounds. Each language does have a different cultural stance. Ashwin’s question became the reason for writing this composition. At that time, my brief response to Ashwin’s question was that in Marathi, the word Sakshatkar seems to communicate two different meanings. At an emotional or devotional level of consciousness, Sakshatkar implies that God reveals himself to the devotee, or the devotee sees God in his presence. On the other hand a philosophical mind may choose to use the word Sakshatkar to imply a convincing answer that condenses after conscious search of God as a principle and not as a physical entity.

One of our close friends, Dr. Mrs. Pramila Gokhale who lives in Pune, India is a scholar in Sanskrit as well as Marathi language. I approached her for a clearer understanding of the word Sakshatkar. She explained that Sakshatkar is a composite of three separate words:

Saakshaat + Aaksha + Kaar = Sakshatkar

The first component word Saakshaat implies seeing something in front of eyes or with eyes. It is perception by conception at the physical level. The second component Aaksha implies the eyes. And the last component Kaar implies “To occur”. Thus the composite word Sakshatkar implies or connotes something that is perceived through conception at the physical level – said Dr. Mrs. Gokhale

Emotional Vs Logical Mind:

Broadly stated, a person is predominantly either emotional or logical. It is kiddingly said that an emotional guy thinks with his heart and the logical one thinks with the head. In between the two lies the whole spectrum of humanity.

For a predominantly emotional person, one implication of the word Sakshatkar may be that a sincere devotee who believes and worships his personal God with intense devotion, sees God (as revelation) in the form that he worships. This Man usually imagines God in his own image. In contrast, a predominantly logical and scientific mind may perceive God as an eternal and unchangeable principle or Truth. For his logical mind, the word Sakshatkar may mean “Realization of an undeniable principle that stands on its own”. For an emotional individual, the words $E = MC^2$ don't mean a thing, where as for the Physicist, Dr. Albert Einstein, it revealed important secrets of the universe. After conscious search, when a true solution or answer surfaces in absence of any doubt – that connotes a sakshatkar.

In the spectacular movie Ten Commandments (1956), Moses is shown in seclusion at the top of Mount Sinai where he became a witness and receiver of the divine inscriptions of Ten Commandments. According to the movie and Biblical interpretations, the Ten Commandments are a list of religious and moral imperatives, which were handed over by “God” to Moses on Mount Sinai. Followers of Moses seem to believe that on Mount Sinai, God entered into a special and unique covenant relationship with the nation of Israel. The Ten Commandments were the specific words of the covenant written on the Tablets of Stone. After reading numerous web pages on the Internet, and adding up all experiences and observations of life, some obvious and simple questions arise in the mind of an independent thinker in the context of twenty-first century:

- What is the form of God that discloses his message etched on stone tablets?
- What was the original written language that God used to communicate the ten religious and moral imperatives?

Followers of Moses sincerely believe that Moses had a Revelation by God. Some tend to use the word Miracle to describe the interaction of God with Moses on Mount Sinai. Although the wisdom communicated through “The Ten Commandments” is universally acceptable, skeptics may have their reservations about use of the words Revelation, God, and Miracle to describe the experience of Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Skeptics often come up with questions or objections for an endless debate. The believers and the non-believers draw their battle lines:

- Does God favor one nation over another or one group of people over another (The chosen people!).
- If it does, then what is the difference between a God and a Politician?
- How does God reveal himself?
- Is God a male or a female?

These obvious questions open up Pandora's Box! This is not an effort to take sides, but just an honest effort to question our own awareness and sanity. Wisdom prompts that we should not disregard or underestimate the power of complete devotional surrender to an idol or an idea.

Siddhartha, was a crown prince who lived in India around 500 BCE. He was married and had some children. Instead of ascending to his father's throne as a king, he had set out in the recluse of the forest as an ascetic to explore and understand the truths about the reality of life, its very existence, and its relationship to the universe around him. Eventually, in the recluse of his inner consciousness, he comprehended Arya Satya (Primal Truths) embodying the reality of existence. Armed with this self-assisted knowledge, he was able to get rid of all of the internal fires or negative energies of life such as anger, lust, greed, fear and replace them with positive energies such as equanimity and compassion towards all beings. With the supreme benefits of his internal experience, there was no residual need left for Siddhartha to discover anything else regarding life. Since then Siddhartha has been acknowledged by people as the Buddha. The word Buddha implies "The knowledgeable one" or the "Self-enlightened Master". In this process, Siddhartha's Revelation or Sakshatkar was that of universal Truth(s), which enabled him to experience eternal Bliss. Siddhartha himself did not claim that God revealed anything to him, nor did he claim that he was a messenger of God or Son of God. He had no interest in being identified as a Prophet or Messiah either. His universal message and wisdom has sparked the imagination and devotion of millions over the centuries. Siddhartha taught his willing students the Vipashana techniques of meditation that had helped him attain Self-enlightenment and the state of eternal bliss, which has been identified as Nirvana. Siddhartha assured that each human being has the same capacity to attain eternal bliss through his own disciplined efforts. Naturally, the words such as God or Revelation by God do not appear in Buddha's vocabulary. His meditation technique is experienced without the use of any word. In his meditation technique you ride on the rhythm of your own breath.

Children always enjoy reading and listening to engaging stories. Some stories such as those narrated by Hans Christian Andersen, AESOP's fables, and others are universal in appeal. Innocence of childhood adds a pleasurable dimension to their enjoyment of the stories. A good story skillfully narrated to children has the potential to make a life-long impression. A good story, whether it is a fact or fiction, generally conveys good values. Naturally such stories are passed on from generation to generation in all cultures. These stories reveal glimpses of realities of life to children.

The Hindu philosophies of Vedanta and Upanishads pursue Logic over a purely devotional path in realization of universal Truths that stand on their own weight. Consequently in this approach, the word Revelation may imply the realization of universal Truth(s).

Dimensions of Dreams:

Some look at dreams as manifestation of the mind and nothing more. Some experience dreams differently. There are real life instances in which a dream may have no logical explanation, but it goes on to change or unfold life's hidden possibilities and dimensions. Sometimes the word Revelation is used to describe an exceptional dream.

Following is the real life story of Miss Hanna Maria (Mittzi), who was born in Austria in 1931. Unfortunately she had lost her mother early in childhood. Her father, a career diplomat, was transferred to Colombia, South America as Austria's ambassador. Mittzi moved with her father and continued her education in Colombian schools. As a youngster, she quickly picked up local Spanish language and felt quite at home in Colombia. This story is about recurring dreams that Mittzi saw as she was growing up in Colombia.

Mittzi remembers and narrates a recurring theme of dream over years in which she had seen a kind old man with short hair and beard wearing very simple clothes. Mittzi had never seen this type of man in her real life, and kept on wondering because of the recurring nature of her dream. One day she shared her dream about this old and kind looking man with a close friend Frank Schneider. Frank was born in Germany and had lived in Colombia for sometime. Both Mittzi and Frank spoke German and Spanish very well and they had gradually become very close friends.

One day in her dream, Mittzi saw herself walking with Frank along the banks of a river. It was a broad river but the waters did not appear to be deep. On the opposite bank of the river, Mittzi sighted the same old bearded man sitting calmly in a relaxed posture. Mittzi expressed her desire to cross the river to meet the old man. Frank agreed hesitantly and both of them started crossing the river in which the water level seemed to be only knee deep. After walking half way through the river, Frank excused himself and returned to the bank asking Mittzi to go ahead and meet the man sitting on the opposite bank. Mittzi continued to walk alone through the shallow waters. After reaching the opposite bank of river, Mittzi saw that the kind old man was smiling at her very affectionately. In a soft voice he asked Mittzi to come and sit by his side. It was a very pleasant dream for Mittzi because she remembered meeting the same old man earlier.

Later during one summer, Mittzi and Frank took a vacation trip to Spain. While in Madrid one day, they ate lunch and then decided to stroll through the market for window-shopping. Since both Mittzi and Frank have been voracious book readers, they chose to walk around bookstores. There was one store that attracted Mittzi's attention. Inside the large glass display window Mittzi spotted a book, which had photograph of an old man on the front cover. Mittzi blinked her eyes and looked at the book cover again through the glass window. She said to herself, my God this is the same man I keep on seeing in my dreams. Excited, she called Frank who was looking at other books of his interest. Mittzi asked Frank to look at the picture on the book cover and told him that this is the man that she has been seeing repeatedly in her dreams. Frank chuckled and commented that all of these saintly persons look alike because they all wear similar clothes, have short hair and beard. Mittzi exclaimed, "Frank no! I am sure this is the man I see in my dreams". Frank asked, "How could you be so sure. I just told you that they all look alike". But as Frank looked into Mittzi's eyes, he knew that Mittzi had no doubts in her mind. So they bought the book and promptly returned to their hotel room. Once inside the hotel room, Mittzi read the entire book from the front cover to the back cover.

From the book, Mittzi and Frank learnt that the saintly man's name was Raman Maharshi and that his ashram (place of residence) was in Arunachalam (a part of Tiruvannamalai) in southern part of India. And they also found out from the book that Raman Maharshi had died a few decades earlier; however his ashram has continued to communicate his wisdom to willing disciples of any color, creed or nationality. After returning to Colombia from the vacation in Spain, Mittzi started making her plans to visit Raman Maharshi's ashram in Arunachalam, India. During her first visit to the ashram, she stayed there for several months to learn as much as she could about Raman Maharshi and his spiritual message. In the following twenty-four years, Mittzi has visited the ashram at Arunachalam several times. She often travels there alone and enjoys staying at the ashram where she finds emotional peace.

For a few years Mittzi and Frank were living in Sanford, Florida, USA where Frank worked as Export Sales Manager for Herson Manufacturing Co. It was here that I met Frank for the first time on Sunday, 18th October 1999. Frank and I had scheduled our business meeting for Monday, 19th October 1999. Frank had invited me for Sunday lunch. He picked me up at the hotel at noon and we

drove to a restaurant nearby. It was a sunny and warm day, and soon after settling in our restaurant chairs, we ordered chilled beer. After exchanging formalities of introducing ourselves, we somehow started talking about Frank's interests in spiritual aspects of life. It was here that Frank provided a glimpse into his personal life. He was born in Germany and subsequently moved to Colombia. There he met Mittzi. Both of them quickly became good friends. As we sipped our cold beer, Frank went on to describe Mittzi's repetitive dream Revelations of Raman Maharshi which had prompted her multiple visits to the ashram in Arunachalam, India. I told Frank that coincidentally I have personally met Raman Maharshi at his Ashram in Arunachalam in 1940. The Sunday lunch and the interesting conversation with Frank lasted 3 to 4 hours and we did not talk anything about our next day's business meeting. At the end of the long lunch, Frank invited me to his residence to meet Mittzi.

As we entered Frank's residence, I was greeted and warmly welcomed by Mittzi. Inside the house, I could not help but notice small statues and photographs of Raman Maharshi that Mittzi had gathered over the past several years. When I narrated to Mittzi my personal meeting with Raman Maharshi in Arunachalam during 1940, all three of us felt a special common bond. After an hour, as I was departing for my hotel, I thanked Mittzi and Frank for their warm hospitality. Mittzi whispered gently that she was hoping to make another trip to Arunachalam ashram as soon as she can afford to buy the air ticket. She had her palms clasped together as if in prayers. What I had heard and sensed all of that afternoon gave me a feeling that I was encountering pleasant coincidences of life. Throughout that evening, I kept on wondering about the phenomenon of Mittzi repeatedly seeing Raman Maharshi in her dreams. Commenting on such a dream, a traditional Hindu would say that Mittzi had Sakshatkar (Revelation) of Raman Maharshi. It implies that Raman Maharshi was blessing and enlightening Mittzi with his presence in her dream. Such incidences are commonly described in Indian conversations. For Mittzi, the Revelation of Raman Maharshi in her dream has been a grand and joyful experience that changed her.

We keep on hearing stories in which a person such as Mittzi sees somebody in dreams and follows up on it. Such stories and happy coincidences are awe-inspiring at our own level of consciousness. And we wonder if Mittzi's experience should be ascribed the label of Sakshatkar or Revelation or an experience in an unknown dimension?

Real life incidents such as Mittzi's reported above are not uncommon and are reported from different parts of the world. Each story has a local shade of narration. Behind each one of these real stories, there is an awe-inspiring experience for the individual. In religious expression, it may be referred to as a Sakshatkar or Revelation. In philosophical terms it may be interpreted as an experience at an individual level of consciousness. Such an experience for the individual is so enriching that a religious, philosophical or scientific explanation for it is irrelevant and unnecessary. It is the enriching experience that is most relevant and meaningful.

My friend Sami:

My good friend Dr. Sami Shama was born in Egypt and studied in USA to obtain his Doctorate in Chemical Engineering. Subsequently he became a naturalized American citizen. He was my colleague while we worked at Wilson Sporting Goods Company in River Grove, Illinois. After retirement he and his wife Mary lived in Lombard, Illinois. As a child, Sami was raised in Muslim religious discipline, which he continued to follow with devotion until his death in October 2003. He was a devoted scientist. Mary has been raised in Christian faith. Three month before Sami succumbed to his cancer, he had mentioned to me that he has voluntarily terminated all medical treatment because he was not

interested in simply prolonging life. He did continue to use the painkillers to keep himself reasonably comfortable.

On the day of my visit at 5 PM, Sami was in good spirits and mood to chat over a cup of tea. During that conversation, we talked about his and Mary's comprehension of the word Revelation. Sami interpreted the word Revelation as "An assisted discovery". He said that as a scientist you work intensely to resolve a technical problem and examine the issues from several angles simultaneously. Finally as a result of intense scrutiny and efforts, a convincing solution or answer appears; and that Sami said may be termed as a Revelation. Sami further emphasized that this meaning of Revelation or assisted discovery applies to all walks of life including scientific, philosophical and spiritual pursuits. We ended our long two-hour friendly chat because Sami was feeling tired. Sami asked me to put his opinion in the composition that I was planning to write entitled "Revelation". Three weeks later, I and my wife Usha visited Sami and Mary at their residence because we were leaving for India for an extended visit. As I hugged Sami to say goodbye, I felt intuitively that we would not be able to see each other again. Possibly Sami also had the same feeling and was sharing it with us in his momentary silence. His eyes and lips gently smiled. Barely two months later, the cancer claimed Sami; he died at peace with himself.

Concluding Remarks:

A clearer and deeper meaning of words such as Revelation and Sakshatkar evolves gradually out of progressive individual life experiences. During an entire lifetime, each one of us progresses or transitions through various levels of consciousness rediscovering ourselves. The real essence of a word such as Revelation is in the form of a vibration. The source of this vibration is the universal rhythm that constantly guides us.

Shit Happens

The expression “shit” is as American as denim-jeans and apple-pie. After reading the title of the book, God’s Debris by Scott Adams, it was tempting to mischievously translate the title as Holy-Shit, which is also a common American expression. However, kidding apart, the book God’s Debris is a very creative and refreshing piece of writing. The American slang word “shit” is now imitated and used all around the world. This composition is not about shit per say, but it is about how we deal with it. Shit is universal.

An infant is lying on hameerai back and happily moving his arms and legs in the air. It is a joyful scene for members of the family. Some stop by the infant for a moment to wave a hand or say hi in gibberish sounds. The infant wiggles its body and flashes an expressive smile in response. The infant’s mother is somewhere close, busy doing her chores but her ears are constantly tuned to the infant’s voice and sounds. The infant is happy for the moment and is not in need of any help or food.

Now a time has come and the infant craps (shits) effortlessly without any concern whether the outlet is facing the bare floor or the inside surface of a fancy diaper. Somebody close by sees, hears or smells it and pronounces “the baby has done it”. As far as the infant is concerned, it has effortlessly released the abdominal pressure. Usually in such a common situation, only the mother working around the corner approaches and cleans up the baby. She also cleans up the floor and the diaper. A mother does this chore almost instinctively. The same chore feels like a lot of work for any other member of the family. Shit happens to an infant often, but usually only one person amongst many in the same family seems to take care of it willingly and effortlessly.

Open sewage handling system in Nagpur (India):

I have witnessed an open sewage handling system during my school and college years in Nagpur until 1952. Nagpur was a city of approx. 10,00,000. At the point of its origin in a private latrine, shit dropped by sheer gravity into an open steel pan approx. 18-in wide x 24-in long x 12-in deep, with steel handles. The steel pan was manually removed on a daily basis by a person identified commonly as Mhaitar. Routinely the Mhaitar came once a day around noontime. He had access to the steel pan through a small back door of the latrine. The Mhaitar would manually empty the shit from the steel pan with a steel spatula and transfer it to a larger open bucket, which would be manually transported by him for emptying into a 500-gallon cylindrical tank. The large tank was horizontally mounted on a bullock cart that would carry the shit in bulk to a municipal disposal system. I never had the curiosity at that age to find out how the municipality handled the raw sewage for further processing and ultimate disposal. It was nauseating enough to see the partial handling system that was witnessed on a daily basis. This composition is more about the Mhaitar and social aspects of his job.

Who is a Mhaitar?

Mhaitar was a word ascribed to the person who manually removed and transported shit from the latrine. Invariably this manual work was pursued as a life long career through generations and the community that performed this work was identified as Mhaitar caste or community. They were invariably paid a relatively low wage and as a result they also stayed illiterate through generations. Since

this manual shit collecting and disposal system had been practiced in India for centuries, the term Mhaitar had come to imply an unclean person. Adding to the economic deprivation and emotional wounds, Mhaitar has also been classified by the Indian society as an untouchable.

Who is the real untouchable? Is it the one who provides an essential shit removal service out of sheer financial necessity or the one who treats another human as less than a human and a lower caste untouchable?

Our Mhaitar:

While I lived in Nagpur during my school and university education, we had the same Mhaitar performing the manual shit removal work on a daily basis. He transported our family's daily shit output. He had a pleasant and ever smiling demeanor. Luckily India has several festivals which means better than average daily food is cooked at home including delicious sweets. Traditionally, some of the left over food was passed on to the Mhaitar on the following day. Our Mhaitar was fully aware of this tradition and did not need an invitation to come and receive his share of the leftovers.

Mhaitar would always enter our premises from the rear door of the compound to receive the food. He would humbly walk up to a certain point, which was approx. 30 feet from the house. He seemed to know the unwritten social protocol to be followed. Upon sighting him, our maid named Devaki would announce his arrival to our grandmother. The package of leftover food wrapped in a newspaper or banana leaf was handed over to Mhaitar by Devaki. While passing on the food package to the Mhaitar, Devaki would appear cautious in not touching Mhaitar's hands. She gently dropped the food package in Mhaitar's stretched out hands. Mhaitar would receive the food-gift smilingly with humility and an expression of gratitude. Then with a gentle bow he departed.

The cautious movements of Devaki while transferring the food package to Mhaitar's hands was a reflection of her sensitivity to the cast system. Devaki belonged to a Raut community, which was supposedly a higher cast than Mhaitar's untouchable cast. Devaki was close to my age. At that time, I would have probably interacted with Mhaitar the same way that Devaki did. Then in 1956 I left Nagpur, my hometown, to pursue my career in Baroda and subsequently to USA.

After a gap of five years, I returned to Nagpur for an extended stay of two months. Devaki was still working in our house. It was Diwali festival time. As usual, our Mhaitar appeared on the appropriate day to receive his Diwali food gift. Coincidentally, I was present when Mhaitar arrived. I was happy to see his good old friendly face once again. I had seen him on such occasions since my childhood. Mhaitar looked at me with a surprise since he hadn't seen me for a long time. We greeted each other with a spontaneous smile, and I asked him how have you been? He flashed a gentle smile with traditionally folded hands.

Devaki brought out the food package for Mhaitar. Instinctively, I asked Devaki to hand over the package to me because I just felt like offering the food package to Mhaitar with my own hands. As I approached our Mhaitar, I noticed a twinkle in Mhaitar's smiling eyes. He did not expect me to be handing over the food package to him because socially I was a Brahmin and he was a Mhaitar (untouchable). I lowered the food package gently in his palms and then touched his hands gently from underneath with both of my palms. I felt a surge of nascent joy rushing through my whole being as Mhaitar looked strangely at me. As I gently touched Mhaitar's hands while looking into his eyes, I was silently apologizing to him for the years of emotional neglect towards his feelings. I was also thanking

him silently for the grace and smile with which he had always received our food-gift although it was a leftover. For a moment, both of us eyed each other in silent mutual adoration and respect. No word was spoken between us, but we communicated a whole lot in that brief encounter. Happy and self-enriching memory of that brief encounter has been permanently etched in my consciousness.

I never knew our Mhaitar's name. I feel sad that I never asked him. Today, five decades later, as I remember him fondly and writing about him, I want the privilege of giving him a name. His name is "Om". I name him so because he has become a piece and parcel of my conscious awakening ever since he graciously accepted the food package from me.

Gradually the raw sewage handling system in Nagpur has changed for the better. In the process, the Mhaitar community lost their traditional job. All they had learnt and knew for several generations was "how to remove and transport raw shit". In such situations, change is certainly a blessing in disguise.

Words such as Mhaitar, Shudra (lower cast), Heathen are symbolic of the derogatory attitudes of Men. After personally witnessing seven decades of human behavior globally, it is apparent that the above mentioned derogatory and self-poisoning attitudes are equally prevalent all over the world under various camouflaging labels even in the twenty first century. That does not justify it.

Sooner or later, derogatory attitude towards other individual, which is a form of aggression, generates a sense of guilt in the aggressor. In such situations, both sides are negatively affected. Some acts of aggression may be recent and some may have been committed against individuals that have passed away. The pain of guilt felt and suppressed by the aggressor over a long period of time is self-destructive. In such situations apologizing by just saying, "I am really sorry" is inadequate to set yourself free of the guilt. A sincere apology comes from the heart in the form of a positive vibration, which is symbolic of forgiving the aggressor and empathizing with the victim of aggression. In the process, both sides are set free. Shit happens all the time in different ways, and ultimately individual sensitivity, awareness, and the power of sincere forgiveness resolve it harmoniously.

Advanced technologies enable the Astronauts in space capsules recycle their human waste and get drinking water out of it! Neither our Jamadar nor the society that he served had access to this closed-loop shit handling and processing technology at that time. However, that is never an excuse for the derogatory attitudes.

Social shit is not easily processed or resolved because it is made of stuff like "Ego" that does not dissolve easily. Effective solutions generally seem to emerge out of social awareness in which individuals take full responsibility and initiatives.

Soul of Mumbai's Sidewalks



Mumbai is a large metropolis on the West Coast of India. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is bustling and throbbing with the energy of 13 to 15 million people. While driving through the city, it is not easy to tell where the city limits end and the sprawling suburbs begin. The city sits on a peninsula that jets out of the main land like New York City's Manhattan area. The sprawling suburbs extend out in the Northeast direction and into the main land. Mumbai has been the financial capital of India ever since the Indian subcontinent was consolidated as one country under the British rule. For

this and several other reasons, Mumbai has always been a crowded place and there has been a perpetually growing need for efficient mass transit systems to move people and goods. Current map of Mumbai and its sprawling suburbs reveals several arteries in the form of train tracks, high ways, major and minor streets, and boat ferries for moving people and goods. A new project promises that Hovercrafts will soon be deployed to complement existing people transportation systems. Using these arteries, people try their best to move around efficiently in local electric trains, single and double-decker buses, automobiles, trucks, vans, taxis (cabs), motorized three-wheel rickshaws, motor bikes, scooters, bicycles, and small ferryboats. Some people just walk when the commuting distances are small. For some people, walking is the only affordable way to commute. The local trains that move people from far flung suburbs for daily work to Mumbai and back to suburbs are so over-crowded during work hours, that it makes ticketless travel possible for those who cannot afford to buy a ticket. Despite the high frequency, the local trains maintain an excellent on-time schedule. Mumbai sports a very dense population per square mile area, and there is clear evidence of people representing a very broad spectrum of economic strata. A business executive could be commuting to work in an air-conditioned and chauffeur driven automobile, whereas on the same busy road a laborer could be seen transporting a large steel cabinet on top of an open bed cart with two wheels and pulled by two hands. This cart-man invariably carries a cotton cloth on his shoulder to wipe his sweat, and may be bare footed. Mumbai's resident population is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual within the framework of Indian society. The real spice of Mumbai is in the variety of life it offers. In it you will find whatever you are looking for including wealth, filth, beauty, ugliness, skyscrapers, slums and other surprises.

Leisurely moving through Mumbai's vast network of roads, it is interesting to observe how large highways carrying faster traffic merge into city's roads. The city roads in turn feed into yet smaller alleys with multiple branches. Ask a local guy for directions and you get interesting responses. One shakes his head and tells you that he is new in the city or he is too busy to answer your question. The next man promptly gives you directions and you find out later that his directions were totally wrong. The third man could go out of his way and accompany you up to the doorsteps of the address that you were looking for. If you try to offer a tip in appreciation, he may feel insulted or mention politely that the tip is not necessary.

Some roads in Mumbai, which form the major arteries, are wide ranging in width from 30 to 80 feet. Invariably most of these wide arterial roads have wide sidewalks on either side. The sidewalks on either side of roads are commonly referred to in Mumbai as footpaths. Each footpath may range in width from 8 to 15 feet and is generally paved with stones or cement. Pedestrians prefer to use these footpaths as they go about doing their daily work activities. At frequent intervals along the footpaths, there are bus stops. At the bus stop sign, there is usually a small enclosure with a light roof provided for protection of bus riders against rain or sun. When the Monsoons rain in Mumbai, it seems like water pours from the sky. During office or business hours the footpaths look busy; commuters are waiting in line for their bus and others are just walking to their destination. During the morning hours, each individual's face reflects a concern for reaching their respective destination. Along the footpath, several small hawkers set up their wares within easy sight of the commuters and pedestrians. Most of the hawkers are illegally occupying the space. Sometimes a city cop takes objection to their illegal occupancy on the footpath, which is city property. An earlier unpaid bribe may be the reason for the cop's attention. The hawker, who cannot afford the pay off, tries to appeal for leniency from the cop. If pushed too far by the cop, the hawker bundles up his small establishment and moves on to another nearby location, which may be out of jurisdiction of the same cop. As a neutral observer, you can clearly see the cat and mouse game of the cop and the hawker. In some cases, the hawker is under the protection of a precinct captain or a locally influential political party. This is a very familiar game in

most large metropolitan cities of the world and it is played with intrinsic cultural variations. Money extracted through such channels seems to be an efficient lubricator of political and administrative machinery.

In midst of the enormous movement of people on the footpath of Mumbai, my eyes caught glimpse of a singular young boy who appeared in his late teens. He stood still resting against a brick wall, his right foot perched on a stone in front of him and his hands were leisurely crossed across his chest. The tall and wide wall against which he was resting was painted in eggshell color. Large colorful posters were pasted all over its surface facing the traffic. The posters included larger than life pictures of Bollywood movie stars acting in current movies running in theaters. In addition, several other colorful posters were advertising wide range of products and services. The young boy seemed to be standing idly in one spot because he probably had no destination to go to or return to. From his neutral and careless expression, it seemed as if he came from nowhere and he was not planning to go anywhere. He was idly looking at the world moving around him. From his overall appearance, he looked quite poor but he was not a beggar. He did not seem to be concerned about himself or the time of the day. His eyes had a very gentle and relaxed expression. Everything around him seemed to be irrelevant to him. I admired his restful composure with a pinch of envy. I tried in vain to put myself in his shoes to look at the world from his perspective. But he was not wearing any shoes.

Each person treading the Mumbai footpath appears busy and seems to have a purpose for which he/she is walking and moving from one place to another. Especially during the period of 6 AM to 10 PM, there are lots of people on the footpaths that seem to be in constant motion. At night it is not uncommon to see some homeless people sleeping on the same footpaths along with their meager belongings by their side. The footpaths of Mumbai probably never feel lonely.

It was 6 PM when we reached the hospital in Mahimm, a suburb of Mumbai. My wife Usha and I were riding in our nephew Lalit's car since he had a 6 PM appointment at the hospital. After reaching the hospital, Usha and I hired a cab to proceed to the Bombay Central Railway Station to catch the Lok-Shakti train, which was scheduled to depart at 7:30 PM for Ahmedabad. Lalit had cautioned us that considering the evening traffic, it might take 30-50 minutes to reach the railway station. As our cab headed for the railway station from the hospital, all major and minor roads seemed to be flooded with the commuters trying to return home. Usha and I were enjoying the privilege of sitting leisurely in the back seat of the cab and watch the Mumbai evening traffic. The sun was dipping towards the western horizon behind us with a golden hue. We left the driving entirely to the cab driver. I remembered the slogan that Greyhound Bus Company used "Enjoy the ride and leave the driving to us".

The evening commuters in Mumbai seemed to be using every possible mode of transportation. They were either riding a bus, driving in their personal cars, riding on their two wheel motorbikes and scooters or simply walking. The extraordinarily large variety of people's faces and clothing that is visible in Mumbai is a grand experience for an inquisitive onlooker. I felt that the commuter's faces were more lit up now because they were returning home. The same faces in the morning hours when they were headed for work seemed to reflect overall concerns about life. In the evening traffic, the whole environment seemed to be charged with positive energy of homing birds. Our cab driver looked quite busy skillfully and patiently maneuvering the cab through the evening traffic. Sometimes the cab just couldn't move because nothing else could move in the stalled vehicular traffic, only pedestrians were moving constantly. Even a millionaire sitting in a fancy Mercedes car, if caught in this traffic, will have to commute at the speed as our cab.



As our cab meandered through the crowded streets of Mumbai towards the railway station, our eyes were picking up impressions of the footpaths on either side of the road. The paved footpaths that we were observing seemed to be 10-12 feet wide. Hidden behind the heavy pedestrian traffic on the footpath and yet clearly visible were clusters of small and temporary dwellings of the homeless. The dwellings seemed temporary because their structure was fabricated using a composite of bamboo supports covered with tin and plastic sheets. And it is easy to guess that these are unauthorized structures breaking every conceivable Mumbai city ordinance. But this is their “Home” even if somebody chooses to call its inhabitants homeless.

The dwellings have their backs against the rear end of the footpath, which is usually a wall of either brick, stone or cement-concrete. Entrance to the ingeniously fabricated dwelling was either in the front or on the side. The residents inside this dwelling could be a family ranging from 2 to 5 people. In most cases, the dwelling may just be a one-room enclosure with a plastic/tin roof. The small dwelling serves as a kitchen, a space to relax during daytime and later at night be converted into a space to sleep. There is no furniture of any kind in that space. I am sure that the inhabitants of these dwellings do not bother about our choice of nomenclature for describing their living space, which is home to them. Mumbai’s weather is mostly warm and humid throughout the year and therefore permits male folks to sleep outside under the star lit sky. During the wet Monsoon season, these God’s children have to figure out some alternate arrangements to sleep at night. They have to be creative because they have no other choice.

Our cab was weaving its way through the traffic at speed of barely one mile per hour. Consequently, we had plenty of time to observe the people living in their dwellings along the footpath. Life of the inhabitants in and around the dwellings seemed to be going on in a leisurely fashion, undisturbed by the heavy traffic on the footpath. Nobody was rushing in or out of the dwellings. Little children, some barely clothed, were merrily playing in small groups. Some of them smiled and giggled playfully chasing each other, and seemed to be enjoying their little world. There were no toys in their hands but they seemed to be having sheer simple fun. Teen aged boys and girls hanging around the dwellings seemed more conscious of themselves. They were smartly dressed within their means. Their faces and body language reflected enthusiasm and hope for life. Some adult women seemed busy with their household chores. Adult men seemed to be far lesser in number in and around the dwellings, probably because they were busy working somewhere else to earn daily wages. Outside the dwelling, some old folks having pruned looks seemed to be just sitting and watching movements of the world around

them. What were they thinking about is anybody's guess. Each small dwelling along the footpath just seemed to be a world of its own and moving on at an easy pace. Demeanor of each individual was a reflection of their right to live within their means. There was an aura of hope for the future on their faces.

In the mean time, the Sun was gradually setting on the western horizon. The setting sun's golden rays tangentially kissed the ocean waves that were lapping rhythmically against the sandy beach. The sun's rays seemed to enjoy a playful game of reflection with the alternating ocean waves, our eyes, and mesmerized our consciousness.

Our cab was getting closer to the Bombay Central railway station. While still riding the cab, I was tempted to make a generalized observation and share it with Usha. I remarked that the homeless people we see in large cities of USA such as Chicago, New York or Los Angeles seem to have given up on life. Many of them seem to be on drugs or alcohol trying to drown themselves in their environment. Their faces reflect absence of hope. The homeless on Mumbai's footpath must face each day as it presents itself; and yet their faces reflect glimmer of hope. That's when Usha remarked philosophically "That's because Mumbai's homeless have not lost their soul". The soul of Mumbai's sidewalks seemed to be alive and vibrant.

Spirit of Bailadila



It was summer vacation of 1944. All of us five siblings ranging in age from ten to twenty were visiting our parents in Dantewada where our father had been posted a few months earlier. This was our first visit to Dantewada, which was a small district place in Bastar State, India. During the school season, we lived in Nagpur with our maternal grandparents.

We found Dantewada a refreshingly different and small rural place as compared to Nagpur, which had the aura of a capital city with large buildings for offices, colleges, schools, and residential housing. We had traveled from Nagpur to Raipur by train and then from Raipur to Jagdalpur, capital city of Bastar State, by bus. For the further travel to Dantewada, there was no bus service. Therefore our parents had arranged car transportation for us from Jagdalpur to Dantewada.

Dantewada was a very small and quiet town situated at the junction of two rivers Shankhini and Dankini. There was no electricity and any physical movement within Dantewada was possible only on a bicycle or on foot. Goods were carried by the native people on their head, hung from either end of a bamboo stick balanced across the shoulder, or in bullock carts. In absence of electricity, there was no radio and the evening was lighted up with kerosene lamps. Naturally, dinner was by the pleasant light of oil lamps. During most evenings, all of us walked across the river to enjoy the beauty of thick forests in which we would enjoy picking ripe fruits and berries including Mango, Jamun, Chironji, and others. An open-air market was held every Thursday under the shade of mango grove. The market was an eventful affair in which native inhabitants from surrounding villages brought their wares, fruits and vegetable produce for sale. The market was simply a happy social affair, which was abundantly evident from the cheerful and happy faces of all participants. Life in Dantewada was as simple as it could be, which can only be comprehended by living in such an environment.

One day our father proposed that the whole family take a trip to Bailadila mountain. Bailadila was so named because its shape resembled the hump of an ox. In local language Baila meant an ox and Dila a hump. At the top of Bailadila was a guesthouse which was available for us to stay during the visit. The Forest Department of the state maintained the guesthouse.

The trip was going to be an overnight bullock cart ride from Dantewada to Karle, a small village at the foot of Bailadila. Then trekking up the mountain on foot from Karle. A caravan of three bullock carts was chartered for the family trip. Although the distance between Dantewada and Karle was barely 20 miles, it would take an overnight journey to cover that distance in a bullock cart moving at 2 miles/hr. Because of the hot summer weather, the bullock cart journey was scheduled to start after sunset. Each cart had a cot laid on its flat bed. A thin mattress was placed on top of the cot to ensure a comfortable ride. The entire caravan moved along the side of the road with a guide walking in front of the caravan and holding a lantern. In absence of electricity, the guide and the lantern light would steer the caravan

along the dirt road winding through thick forest of Sal, Teak, Tendu, Kadam, and other lush green trees. Each cart had a cart driver sitting at the front of bullock cart. His seat was perched between the rear end of the bulls. The cart driver would communicate with the pair of bulls by patting them on the back or twisting their tails. He also talked to the bulls in gibberish language to help keep up their spirits and the speed of travel. As the bullock carts slowly moved along the winding road in the darkness of night, the multiplicity of sounds of numerous forest creatures created a sense of awe and wonder about the Nature surrounding us. The stars seemed to twinkle brighter in the dark blue-sky overhead. A soothing gentle breeze accompanied us all along. The guide walking with a lantern in front of the caravan could not take short naps like us because he had a job to do. It was difficult to judge whether the bulls followed the guide's steps or he conformed to their steps.

Finally, in the early hours of the morning before dawn, we reached the village of Karle, our interim destination at the foot of Bailadila. The bullock carts were parked under a thick Mango grove and the bulls relieved from their respective carts. Since it was still dark, the cart drivers and the guide were asked to rest. We continued to rest in the carts lying on our cots. We could not sleep but felt like resting. As we lay on our cots, we would hear the sound of ripe Mango fruits fall freely on the dry leaves underneath. We anticipated picking the ripe Mangoes on the ground after sunrise.

After dawn two of the cart drivers had already arranged for our morning tea with the help of Mukhiya, the village chief. This village and the surrounding territory were under the jurisdiction of our father's official responsibilities. The Mukhiya was aware of our plans to go up the Bailadila mountain and stay in the guesthouse at its top for a few days.

Our resting-place for the morning was the Mango grove. There was a hut called Gudi in the Mango grove, which was normally used by a visiting official for his work and rest. Except for a few huts, there were no brick buildings in sight. The Mukhiya had arranged for fresh eggs, milk, and fruits for breakfast. While our mother got busy in preparation of breakfast, we siblings wandered around picking ripe Mangoes lying on the ground.

The plan was to start walking up the mountain after breakfast. The bullock carts would carry our luggage forward ahead of us. At that time there was a dirt tract suitable only for bullock carts and possibly a Jeep for going up to the guesthouse at the mountaintop.

Anticipating a few hours of trekking to reach the top, all of us started the ascent soon after breakfast. From the very beginning of the walk, there was an invigorating feeling because the whole area was full of lush green forest and chirping birds. We followed a foot track that closely meandered along a brook of crystal clear water rushing down the mountain. The brook's water was surprisingly cold in spite of the summer temperatures. As we continued our ascent, we enjoyed refreshing ourselves at frequent intervals by wetting our feet, hands and face with the cold water of the brook. We even drank the cold water directly from the brook by holding our two palms together. Adding to the fun of climbing, we carried with us some light snacks prepared by our mother.

As we climbed up the mountain, we frequently noticed chunks of rocks, large and small, that had a metallic shine to them. A reddish rust color soil adhered to the rocks. Even the small pieces of rocks felt abnormally heavy as we picked them out of sheer curiosity. Because of the weighty feel of the rocks, we guessed that the rocks might have high metallic content. The shine of the rocks looked more like dark gray steel. That was the end of our curiosity about the heavy rocks at that time as we continued to enjoy and soak up the beauty of Nature all around us.

After a few hours of leisurely trekking, the plateau along the top of the mountain revealed that we were in the midst of a sprawling mountain range. As the guide steered us towards the guesthouse, we noticed to our great surprise an orchard full of apple, pear and guava trees. This was an orchard maintained by the Forest Department. The gardener on site allowed us free access to the fruit laden trees. Until then I had never seen fruit bearing apple and pear trees. At Nagpur, where we were attending school, apples and pears were available at high prices because they were transported from far away Kashmir and northern parts of India. After eating some apples and pears plucked directly from the trees, we headed towards the guesthouse in sight a few miles away.

The guesthouse was a stand-alone brick building and the only building in sight. Attached to the main building was a kitchen facility and a small living quarter. After a brief rest and lunch at the guesthouse, we stepped out to further explore the beautiful surroundings. In the abundantly growing grass on the grounds, we noticed a few Porcupine spears lying on the ground and picked them up out of sheer curiosity. We were told that the Porcupine ejects these spears out of its skin to defend itself. Within a few minutes of walk, we came across a 20-ft wide stream with slow flowing water that was knee deep and chill cold. The water of the stream was so clear that we could see the smooth pebbles at its bottom. Bordering on both sides of the stream were plenty of thick green bushes and trees. This was all virgin Nature land, untouched by Man, and it felt invigorating as well as blessed to be standing in the midst of its ambience. The rest of the day was spent in relaxing and chatting at the guesthouse. For the following morning, we planned a trekking trip to explore the surrounding mountain ranges accompanied by a local guide.

After an early breakfast at the guesthouse, we stepped out to further explore the wondrous Nature all around us. Lead by the guide in front, we soon found ourselves walking through tall and thick grass. In absence of any foot tracks, we had to push the grass out of our way with both hands. In many places the grass was taller than six feet, which scared me to linger at the rear end of the group. Since I was only twelve-years old at the time, I remember my fear of being snatched up by a tiger perched behind the tall grass. The virgin terrain presented Nature's beauty at its best. It was an experience that soaked up in our consciousness. Around noon, our father instructed the guide to start trekking back towards the guesthouse. In the mean time the resident cook at the guesthouse, addressed as Khansama, had cooked up a delicious lunch for us. The zeal with which he fed us each meal was heart warming.

We stayed at the guesthouse for two more days following a similar pattern of trekking each day and exploring the mountain range around the guesthouse. The smells, simple pleasures, and aura of Bailadila that each one of us had soaked up during this first visit to Bailadila coaxed us to revisit Bailadila during the following summer vacations. In every visit to Karle and Bailadila, we relished the hospitality and warmth of the simple native people who smiled, giggled and laughed spontaneously.

Our last visit to Karle and Bailadila was during the summer vacation of 1945. I sat myself down to write about those happy memories in June 2011. During the intervening 66 years, the onslaught of time must have changed the faces of Dantewada township, village of Karle, Bailadila mountain range, Shankhini and Dankini rivers and above all the faces of the native inhabitants. There have been other exterior changes that may have cast their shadows as well.

In 1945, the Second World War ended. In 1947, India secured independence from the British rule. Bastar State, which was a virtual autonomous princely state within the framework of British rule of India, had to secede to the Indian union. India launched its successive five-year plans for industrializing

its economy. The borders of states within India were changed and exchanged; and some entirely new states were formed. One of the new states named Chattisgarh now includes the entire Bastar State including the Dantewada-Bailadila region.

The heavy rocks and stones with metallic shine that we had noticed out of simple curiosity while climbing Bailadila, turned out to be the surface evidence of extensive iron ore deposits. Naturally, an iron ore mining and ore transportation hub sprouted in and around the Bailadila mountain range.

In 1955-56 Prof. Eumura of Japanese Steel Mills Association, studying the memories of Geological Survey of India (GSI), drew the attention of the Japanese Steel Mills to the richness of the vast deposits of iron ore and its proximity to the Eastern Coast of India. Later an agreement was signed with the Japanese Steel Mills in 1960.

In view of the urgency of assessment of the rich mineral potentialities of this region, a separate circle of Geological Survey of India (GSI) was formed in December, 1958, and in the same year the Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) was assigned the job of detailed proving of some of these deposits.

The National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) stepped in the area in the latter half of 1961 and since then it is actively engaged in extraction, development and exploration of many deposits of the ranges. The project report submitted by NMDC was approved in 1964 and the Mine Plant was inaugurated in November 1968. A new train tract was laid connecting Bailadila mines to Vaizagpatnam port on the Bay of Bengal to transport the iron ore for shipment.

As expected, the Shankhini and Dankini rivers that once flowed with crystal clear waters are now washing and transporting the scourge of modern indiscriminate pace of industrialization. These two polluted rivers merge at Dantewada and subsequently feed into the Indravati river.

I Googled for current information on Bailadila and came across an article written in December 31, 2006 by an international reporter Ms. Maureen Nandini Mitra. The title of her article, which appeared in Down to Earth magazine, is “ Rivers Shankhini and Duankini in Chattisgarh run Dirty”. Ms. Maureen Mitra wrote:

“No chocolate this”

Near its source at Kirandul, river Shankhini introduced me to a whole new definition of bad. The closest I can come to describing what it looks like here is part viscous bog and part a molten brown liquid that resembles something straight out of Willy Wonka's scrumptious chocolate factory but is sure to taste quite the opposite. No, I didn't attempt to taste. These waters, I wouldn't recommend dipping a toe in, let alone taking a drink from it. Yet people from about 100 villages on the banks of the rivers use it for most of their daily needs”.

The innocence of the native inhabitants who live in the area has been robbed. It was not their choice. The Spirit of Bailadila has been tarnished for those who have experienced its natural exuberance before the indiscriminate mining of the iron ores began.

Rush to industrialization in the quest for material prosperity and an elusive sense of happiness often creates emotional and ecological imbalances for which humanity seems to pay a heavy toll over a prolonged period of time. But that is not the end of Bailadila and its spirit.

Timeless Bailadila stands firmly in its own place, not judging but simply witnessing the inevitable change. Bailadila will continue to freely share its beauty with future generations that will relish it with a perspective of their own.

However, today I feel like a lonely witness to the earlier innocence and beauty of Bailadila mountain, Shankhini and Dankini rivers, and the native inhabitants of the region who lived in harmony with Nature displaying regal balance and self acceptance.

Sunset



I have often adored the sunset
That lit up the western horizon
With intermingled shades of vibrant colors
Giving a golden lining to the clouds afloat
While pleasant breeze brushed the skin.

Watching the sunset from the top of a hill,
Or admiring it from the sea shore,
Often brought on a mix of emotions
That were felt but often not expressed.

As the sun gradually descends down the horizon,
Like a child playing hide and seek across the tabletop.
Freezing our gaze on the setting sun,
Until the upper crown of the sun disappears,
Promising to return again in the morning,
To light up the eastern horizon and new hopes.

As the sun is setting
On the western horizon of my life,
My mind begins to sense the fading light.
I can see the sky and its vast expanse,
But not the twinkling stars in its space.
My emotions stretch out seeking support,
Hoping for a guiding touch through impending darkness.

And I wonder,
Will the darkness challenge my faith,
Or will it continue to reinforce it?
That everything happens for the good,
And whatever happens has a reason.
It is for us to experience our faith,
And not intellectualize or challenge it.

Each night passes, yielding space to dawn.
A cock loudly announces kukooch-koo.
Chirping birds from their nests affirm,
That another dawn has arrived
To offer rays of hope and new life.

The Banyan Tree



Native to India and South East Asia, the majestic Banyan tree reportedly has a life span of a few centuries. It grows wild and its shade often serves as gathering area for public events in native villages.

Ever since childhood I had seen Banyan trees from a close distance because there was one Banyan inside our fence and another one out side the fence just 300 feet away. I had also noticed tall samplings of Banyan that were planted by the state’s Forest Department along avenues and highways. Its dense dark green cluster of leaves retains its color throughout the year in Indian tropical weather. A large sprawling Banyan provides cool and comfortable shade even in the hot summer temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit. During childhood, unusually large natural objects such as an old Banyan or an elephant draw attention out of sheer curiosity and awe.

When I was growing up as a child, until I was eight (1932-1940), I lived in Jagdalpur, Bastar State, India. At that time, the entire state of Bastar was blessed with plentiful rains along with lush green flora and fauna. We lived in a cute, single story, spacious, independently standing bungalow. My father was Principal of Grigson High School in Jagdalpur and this house, located within the school premises, was offered to him as the Principal’s residence. The building complex of Grigson High School spread over a couple of acres.

Our bungalow sat in the middle of a large rectangular plot leaving plenty of space for landscaping all around it. Our garden was always full of seasonal flowers that attracted variety of beautiful butterflies and chirping birds all year round. The two magnificent Banyans, one inside our fence and the other one outside the fence, provided plenty of cool shade to play underneath.

The Banyan outside of our fence was older and its trunk was almost four times larger. This older Banyan had interesting looking aerial roots growing out from its major branches and coming down towards the ground. We called these aerial roots as “shoots”. Several shoots of varying diameter were long and close to touching the ground, but none had touched the ground as yet. We would hang on a thinner shoot and try to swing with it as far as we could, pretending to be Tarzan. The thicker shoots were rigid and unsuitable for swinging; therefore we climbed on them as monkeys do. Bottom end of some thick shoots seemed eager to touch the ground. We were told that each shoot eventually touches the ground and develops its own roots, giving the appearance of an independent tree trunk.

In this majestic natural growth, the mother Banyan tree retains its central identity, and continues to grow its shoots (aerial roots). Eventually, each shoot headed downwards from the branches touches the ground, anchors its own roots and grows into a seemingly independent Banyan. Each one of the

seemingly independent Banyan remains harmoniously connected to the mother Banyan tree and to each other. The same juice flows through the entire single tree complex.

For this composition, the mother Banyan tree is symbolic of the Source of philosophical thought of mankind. Each shoot (aerial root) stemming from its branches symbolizes a distinctive school of philosophical thought. Each shoot, stemming out at different point of time, is headed towards Earth and is in various stages of grounding. Intentionally or unintentionally, each shoot or philosophical school of thought gets branded under the name of a religion such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Sikh, Bahai, and others. Gradually each religion gets grounded, develops its own roots, and gives an impression of a seemingly independent tree. However, each shoot remains connected to the mother Banyan's branches and consequently the same juice flows through the entire single tree complex. Some shoots approaching the Earth look very thick and old, but never seem to get grounded. As children, we did not enjoy swinging or climbing on them!

Different religions of the world have a chronological order of origin, but each one is in different stages of grounding. The same juice flowing through each one of them is symbolic of an under current of self-enriching philosophy of life for humanity. Eventually, each religion and its philosophical school of thought has to realize and recognize its connection with the mother Banyan tree if it wants to get grounded.

Philosophically, there is only one universal mother Banyan tree that never dies and consequently it was never born. It is eternal. Shoots (aerial roots) keep on emerging from its branches. No single shoot (aerial root) can claim sole ownership of the universal mother Banyan tree. The names and origins of various shoots, which are symbolic of religious school of thoughts, are identified below by their approximate period of origin (www.sacred-texts.com/time/origine.htm):

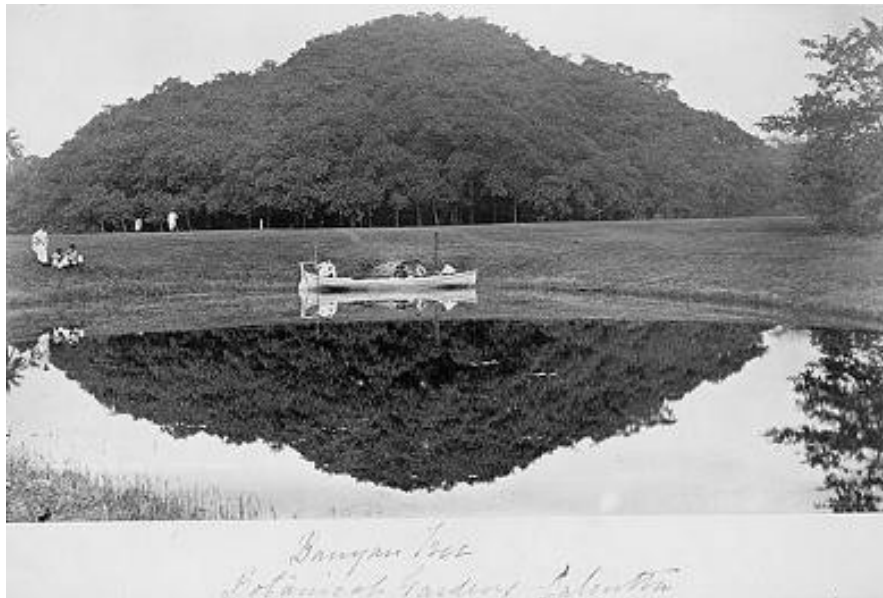
- Hinduism – 8000* BCE + (Before Common Era)
- Judaism – 1000 BCE +
- Jainism - 600 BCE
- Confucius - 600 BCE
- Tao - 600 BCE
- Zoroastrian - 600 BCE
- Buddhism – 500 BCE
- Shintoism - 100 CE (Common Era)
- Christianity - 100 CE.
- Islam - 600 CE
- Sufism – 800 CE
- Sikh – 1500 CE
- Bahai - 1900 CE

* Astrological dating researched and published by Dr. P. V. Vartak (www.hindunet.org)

Realize that newer shoots (aerial roots) will continue to emerge from the universal mother Banyan tree. The universal mother Banyan tree shall continue to provide life sustaining nutritive juices to each one of its shoots (aerial roots) irrespective of their time of origin in the future.

It is also important to realize that the universal mother Banyan tree, symbolizing the universal philosophy or consciousness of mankind, has always existed even prior to the era established by the so-called religions of the world. The terminology BCE used to stand for Before Christ Era, however it has been now modified as Before Common Era. The ancient philosophies of mankind existed without a written word long before language became prevalent for expressing thoughts. The real time when the universal mother Banyan tree germinated may remain unknown and it is better that it remain so.

As we played under the large Banyan at the age of six to eight, we noticed only the shoots (aerial roots) originating and descending from the large branches of the Banyan. We swung on them happily pretending to be Tarzan and climbed on them as monkeys do. Six decades later goggled information on the Internet revealed additional information about a Banyan. At the time of a Banyan's germination, its root sends shoots deep into the ground, sprouting other roots, which, in turn produce multiple trunks and create the appearance of several trees twisted together (www.ftg.org).



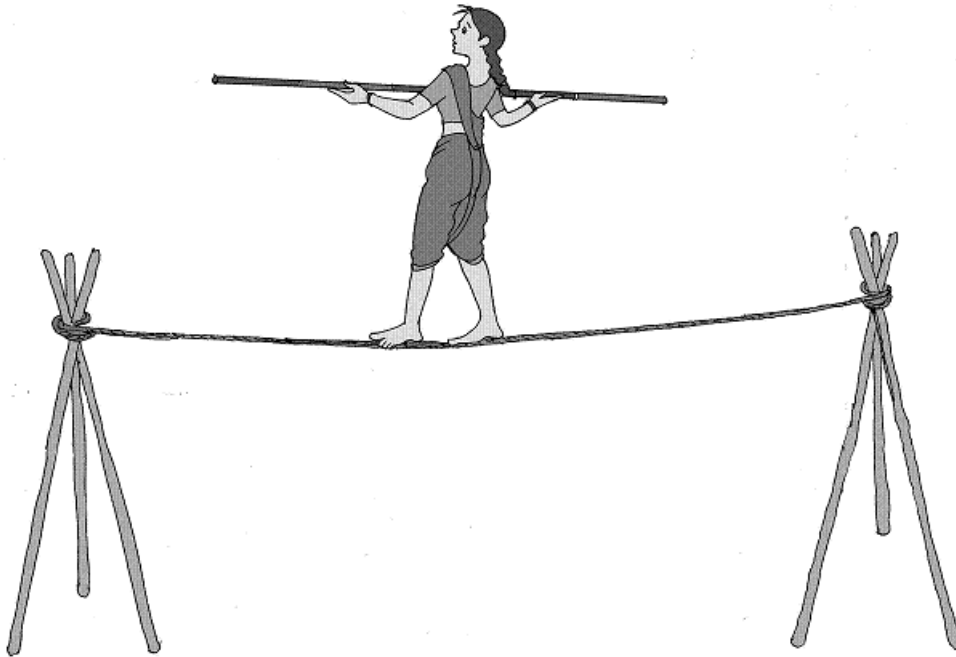
In the Calcutta (Kolkotta) Botanical Garden, there is a single expansive Banyan tree that spans four acres in a tangle of branches, roots, and intertwined trunks. It has the appearance of a knotty group of many individual trees, but it is just a single expansive tree. It is the largest known Banyan in the world ([www. Kelly's redbeet.com](http://www.Kelly'sredbeet.com)). A tourist information plaque posted on the tree in Calcutta Botanical Garden indicates that the Banyan is 240 years old and its prop roots number 2,800.

The picture of the Banyan in Calcutta Botanical Garden, which is a single tree jungle, gives the appearance of an old-fashioned joint family of prop roots and aerial roots living together harmoniously.

Cool shade offered by a majestic Banyan would always offer comfort and solace to anybody that seeks it.



The High Wire Balancing Act



Sketch - Courtesy Abhay Purandare

The school was in regular session. I was ten and studying in fifth grade at the Sule High School in Dhantoli, Nagpur. Our class teacher, Mr. Bidkar, was a very friendly and entertaining teacher. A chubby man with very pleasant demeanor, he had the knack of making students enjoy attending school.

One day during our noon recess time, we heard the sound of drums in an alley behind the school, which was a residential area. The sound of the drums was familiar. It sounded like some kind of outdoor entertainment was in progress. Naturally my friends and me walked over to the back alley and discovered that a sizeable crowd had gathered around a team of six people that was performing and displaying their acrobatic skills in open air. It seemed like a Dombari (Gypsy) family, which included the husband, wife, and four children ranging in age from six to fourteen. Amongst the children, the oldest was a girl, then two boys and the youngest was a barely six year old cute girl. Using both hands, the Man of the family was playing a drum, which was horizontally hung in front of him with a band across his neck. The beat of his drum seemed to change according to the acrobatic performance. Each one of the children was performing wide variety of remarkable acrobatic feats. The mother of the children was quietly providing a supporting and coordinating role very efficiently.

The oldest girl then appeared to get ready for her walk on the tight rope, which was tied between two crossed poles. Maintaining the tension of the rope, the cross poles were tied to steel stumps anchored in the ground, just like a camping tent is tied down. It was a very simple and functional setup for an open-air performance. With her hair tied in a single braid and wearing trim clothing that seemed very

suitable for any acrobatic performance, she appeared slim, graceful and pleasantly confident. Her father set the tone of the drum to announce the beginning of the ropewalk.

With great agility the girl climbed up a small ladder to one end of the tight rope. With great poise she held a stick with both hands in front of her as she gently stepped on to the rope. The drummer changed the beat to match the mood of the moment. The crowd watched intently. As I watched with awe the flawless execution of her graceful performance, I could not help but remind myself that she was quite close to my age. She had acquired a remarkable degree of emotional and physical balance that I had not even thought of as possible at such a young age. Besides, she was supporting her family in a cooperative effort to earn a living.

At school, I had just learnt my first lesson, a four liner, in reading English.

I am a boy.

You are a boy.

We are boys.

As compared to the gypsy girl's walk on the tight rope that I had witnessed in the alley behind the school, this English lesson was no balancing act!

Most of us have been to a circus in childhood. Some of us have been to a circus half a dozen times prior to reaching the age of 16. I am one of them. Six decades later, I still enjoy going to a circus because the little boy in me just loves a circus. In childhood, the smell of circus grounds and the special music played by the circus band for each performance always sparked a mood of excitement. The masked clowns (we called them jokers) with their wise cracks also set the tone for fun time. The live elephants, tigers, horses, bears, monkeys, dogs performed acts beyond expectations. Various acrobatic skills displayed by men, women and relatively young kids held the audience in awe of their accomplishments. For the duration of the show, the huge circus tent seemed to be a universe of its own. The circus tent was invariably pitched in spacious ground, and the arrival of the circus in town was always well advertised in advance, stirring up excitement.

The ease with which the men, women, and clowns performed various acrobatic acts made it all look so simple and easy. When I returned home from the circus and tried to perform the same tricky acts, my crashing to the ground within a few seconds was assured.

Towards the end of the show, the high wire act always attracted my special attention. With wide-open eyes, I would watch the tight wire rope that spanned from the tops of one high post to the other. Leaning against each post, there was a tall ladder for climbing up. My eyes wanted to make sure that a safety net was in place and that it was wide enough to catch a performer just in case! Then I would wait eagerly for the high wire act to begin. No matter how many times I had watched the same act before, the excitement at its beginning was always the same.

Each high wire performer looked trim, confident, and wore a pleasant demeanor. At the beginning of the performance, they filed one by one on the ground and bowed gracefully to the audience. Each one of them wore well-tailored fancy clothes. Some clothes had sparkles on them, which reflected the floodlights focused on them giving each one of them an aura of a great star performer.



At the beginning of the high wire walking act, usually one or two performers climbed up to the top of the ladder and stood on the small stepping platform, which was located at the level of the high strung rope. Then the first performer would touch the tight rope with his toe to check its tension. It was a quick but careful check. It seemed as if the performer's toe was connected to an efficient calibrating machine in his mind, which checked the tension of the rope. Then the act was about to begin and suddenly the whole audience dropped its conversation level to almost zero decibel level; and so did the circus band. The performer usually had a balancing pole in hands, which was held horizontally in front at stomach level. Just as the acrobat set his first toe on the wire rope, a gentle music played by circus band set the tone for the balancing act to begin.

As soon as the acrobat's second toe touched the wire rope, you could tell that the real balancing act had begun. The acrobat looked totally focused on carefully placing each step in front of the other with a measured and graceful movement. For the acrobat's safety, I would pray that no body make an unnecessary sound to distract the acrobat's concentration. I could even hear the changed rhythm of my pounding heart. Then suddenly, the circus clown cracked a joke reminding the high wire walker that there is a safety net underneath, just in case! The disciplined high wire ropewalker seemed unperturbed and gracefully continued to execute the high wire walking and balancing act.

From the very first step of getting on the wire rope to the last step to get off it at the other end, the ropewalker seemed totally focused on every little body movement at every moment. Even a slight mental distraction was enough to lose balance and take a fall. Just like the disciplined high wire ropewalker, we need to maintain balance throughout life and try to make our exit equally graceful. Life is a high wire walking and balancing act with an opportunity to perform.



The Enemy Resides Within

I lived the first ten years of my life (1932-1942) in Jagdalpur, Bastar State, India where I saw the local tribal, called “Muryas”, smile with such spontaneity, innocence, and grace that I have not witnessed anywhere else to date. For me, that period of life has become the Twilight Zone, a total disconnect with the present twenty-first century world.

Seeing the wide world with my own eyes was my cherished dream ever since my high school years (1942-48). During that period I was attending Hadas High School in Nagpur, India. Reading newspapers, listening to the radio (there was no television in those years), and watching newsreels at movie theaters did not quench my personal desire to see, smell, and touch the wider world that I lived in. My geography teacher, Mr. M. R. Bhide, had taught geography with such flavor and passionate ease that I had fallen in love with the world that I had not yet seen or experienced.

I have lived the first twenty-five years of my life in India until 1957 and subsequent 50+ years in USA until now. That has made it easy for me to sense that the Indian subcontinent and the American continent including the USA are home to a very broad spectrum of humanity with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Diversity presents opportunities and challenges for any society as much as it allows order and chaos to coexist. Politicians thrive on discord as much as an average citizen cherishes order and stability.

I traveled by Grey Hound Bus from New York City to Oxford, Mississippi in January 1958. I had arrived from India in Hoboken, New Jersey by ship just two days ago, and headed for the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) at Oxford, Mississippi. The bus passed through Philadelphia and subsequently through some southern states including Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee. It was a long bus journey and whenever the bus stopped for a break, I would get down to stretch my feet and walk in and around the bus station. In each bus station’s facility, I noticed that there were always two separate waiting rooms, which were clearly labeled “Only-for-Whites”, and “Only-for-Blacks”. I wondered where should a Brownie like me sit to relax without offending either the Whites or the Blacks! After reaching Oxford, Mississippi, I started living in the college dormitory to attend the Graduate School at Ole’ Miss. Sometimes on Sundays we would walk to the small Oxford township for breakfast or lunch. The religious church going folks were also there after attending the morning church services. The white folks worshipped in their exclusive church and the black folks would attend their own black-church. Never the twain attended the same church together. They never sat in the same cafeteria to eat food either. However, the black and white keys on a piano had to be played together to sing gospel music.

Witnessing the separation of Man and Man in America with my own eyes, and reading about it in newspapers in India was a new experience and a mind opener for me. Earlier in India, ever since my childhood, I had already witnessed separation of Man and Man under the pretence of Touchable and Untouchable or Higher cast and Lower cast. I had heard in childhood that people are the same all over the world. Yes, now I had witnessed that they are the same when it comes to separating Man from Man. I realized now that only the labels change around the world.

Later in 1963 at the age of 31, I traveled around the world for six months. I was a bachelor at that time. In that entire travel I was alone, but never lonely because I had a constant companion called

Curiosity. I traveled by using airlines, trains, boats, ferries, and buses circling the globe from Chicago to Chicago, visiting 18 countries in the process. My sole purpose of circling the globe at that time was to see different lands and meet a variety of people. I was realizing my cherished dream carried over from high school years. I was simply curious to know the life styles, food habits, traditions, and perspective on life of various people around the globe. Although my high school teacher, Mr. Bhide, may not have traveled more than 400 miles from his hometown Nagpur, he could teach world geography with such clarity, flair and interest as if he had visited every country around the world. Along with the knowledge of continents, oceans, latitudes and longitudes on the globe, Mr. Bhide had made us aware of the flora and fauna, prominent rivers and mountain ranges, seasonal weather patterns, crops, major cities, major exports and imports of countries, and racial origins of inhabitants. I could boast of knowing the name of the capital city of each country at that time. Needless to say that Geography was my most favorite subject in High School.

Traveling around the world as a bachelor had its own perks – most bachelors are aware of those perks. It was truly a care free travel period during which I was thoroughly enjoying every day and soaking up my varied experiences like a sponge. After six months of travelling, I returned to Chicago - flat broke. I had planned it that way. The last lap of my around-the-world travel was a direct flight from Tokyo to Anchorage, Alaska and then to Chicago. By that time I was so broke that I had to call my brother, Sudhakar, in Chicago to pick me up at Chicago's O'Hare airport. It never felt so good at the end of that trip although I was totally broke. The ultimate personal satisfaction derived out of it was priceless and precious. It was the best investment of time and money for me. I was relaxed at the end of the trip because I was returning to my job at Tee-Pak Inc., in Danville, IL. Dr. George A. Kruder, my boss and R. & D Director, had graciously granted me a leave of absence for my cherished around-the-world trip.

By this time, the world had become better aware of the new divides between Man and Man under the labels of India-Pakistan, Bangladesh-Pakistan, China-Taiwan, Israel-Palestine, North Korea-South-Korea, North Vietnam-South Vietnam, and scores of other identities. Then there have been the not so new, so-called religious and philosophical divides such as Sunni-Shea, Catholic-Protestant, Hindu-Muslim, Hutu-Tutsi, Christian-Muslim, Jew-Muslim, Shea-Bahai, Gnats-Jew, Fundamentalist-Reformist, and scores of others that tend to divided Man and Man. This pattern has been the traditional history of mankind since times immemorial.

My checkered personal background has given me an individual perspective on characteristics of various countries and its people that I have had the opportunity to observe at close range. My observations and perspectives on a select few countries are offered below with malice towards none and without any effort to be politically correct.

AMERICA:

A land of Cowboys, Yankees, and Rebels. **M**an's most progressive social experiment to date. **E**very individual has responsible freedom to live and express. **R**ights of each citizen are reasonably assured and guarded. **I**magination and innovation helped land American on the Moon. **C**ulture is home grown Yankee-Doodle-Dandy. **A** country of diverse ethnicity, constantly challenging itself.

INDIA:

Inundated with a billion+ people and their aspirations. **N**ation of philosophers, hypocrites, and contradictions. **D**ivided in separate states on the basis of regional language. **I**nspired and challenged with diverse beliefs, religions, and rituals. **A** land of insight in individual and universal consciousness.

CHINA:

Confined to socialism with sprinkling of capitalism. **H**ome for a billion+ people in social transition. **I**ndigenous civilization with a slanted vision. **N**ew and old with vast contradictions and aspirations. **A** nation hell-bent on catching up with the Jones.

JAPAN:

Juggling on an island nation for supremacy. **A**natomy of robotic workaholics. **P**erennial pursuit of quality and perfection. **A**greeable to change after changing others. **N**o dream too large and none too small.

ENGLAND :

Empire redefined. **N**ever did the sun set on the old Empire. **G**ifted the sport of cricket to its willing fans. **L**arge island nation with ruffled waters on all sides. **A** country that speaks its own English tongue. **N**ew challenges are inevitable, but expected and met. **D**emocratic governance with Kingman-ship.

Young people of twenty-first century make a legitimate observation that most countries in the modern world that are boastful of their ancient cultures are generally economically poor or developing. Many of them harbor extreme traditional fundamentalism, autocratic or bureaucratic rule of law, and resist liberalism.

The U.S.A. with its constitutional history of approximately 230 years and a blend of diverse cultures in its population has demonstrated unparalleled material prosperity. Although it is comparatively a young country, it has the longest tradition of progressive democratic governance, which may be rated as one of the best social experiment to date. However, no system is ever perfect.

During the second half of the twentieth-century, several other nations, besides U.S.A., have demonstrated mature fiscal management and earned a respectable standard of living for their citizens while operating within their own framework of governance, which generally embraces a progressive liberal approach.

History and age-old wisdom subtly reminds us that material prosperity has a natural built-in cycle of indulgence. Excessive indulgence progressively leads to emotional and moral bankruptcy, which is the ultimate form of poverty. This ultimate form of poverty ensures the eventual downfall of Man. Each and every Man, dynasty, nation, and civilization fall prey to it in due course of time. It is the universal law or principle. The forces of outside enemies did not destroy world's major old civilizations. Each one of them self-destructed themselves through "Self-indulgence" which was a result of their material prosperity. Rome was not built in a day, nor was it destroyed in a day. The same will hold true for the current civilization and all those to follow. The real enemy of Man always resides within.

At the beginning of twenty-first-century, major industrialized and materially prosperous nations of the world identify their real enemy as Terrorism. In reality, their real enemy is self-indulgence and its shadow is visible as greed. In contrast, a self proclaimed Terrorist's real enemy is Anger, and its shadow is self-doubt.

Look no further because self-indulgence, greed, anger, and self-doubt are the real enemies that reside within each one of us. Eradication of these enemies from within lays the firm foundation for homeland-security and meaningful peace.

The Torch Brigade

It was the evening of August 14, 1947. The sun of British rule over India was gradually setting in the western skies and therefore it was a historic occasion for Indians. My hometown, Nagpur, was warming up to celebrate the dawn of the first Indian Independence Day. At midnight, India was officially becoming Independent. To celebrate the occasion, several school students had gathered together on Patwardhan High School's play grounds in Dhantoli. Bordering on the North side of the playground was the narrow river stream called Nag nadi (Nag River). City streets bordered the other three sides of the grounds. The large playground was commonly used for soccer or cricket games and occasionally for holding social and political open-air assemblies. Across the street was Hadas High School where I had studied since sixth grade. I had often played Soccer and Cricket on these Patwardhan High School grounds after school hours.

For the celebrations of this special 14th August evening, a large raised platform fabricated from bamboo and wood had been erected and decorated with colorful fabrics and banners. In anticipation of a large crowd, several loudspeakers were mounted on tall poles.

A group of select students picked from different high schools had lined up in an orderly fashion in front of the decorated platform to perform a torch drill at midnight. We called it the "Torch Brigade". I was 15- years old and felt lucky as well as proud to be a part of the Torch Brigade. The open-air atmosphere was charged with tremendous excitement and optimism. Each student participant of the Torch Brigade was happy and proud to be holding two torches, which were to be ignited at midnight. The tip of each torch was wrapped with cotton fabric, which was to be dipped in a mixture of vegetable and kerosene oil just before igniting. At midnight, we were going to perform a well rehearsed torch drill. In the entire celebration of the first Independence Day of India, it was the torch drill that I was really excited about. I did not quite comprehend what the word Independence really meant for the country and me. I had heard that the British were still going to stay around for some more time to oversee the complete transition of power. That was confusing enough for my age since politics was an irrelevant topic.

The evening function sort of started around 9 PM in the well lit open grounds. It was pleasant fall weather with a clear blue sky. All torchbearers were patiently standing in an impressive formation in front of the colorful podium. Some invited guests and prominent members of the community were seated on the podium. They were dressed in white khadi clothes. The word khadi refers to a cloth that is woven from hand-spun cotton on a handloom (manually operated loom). Wearing white khadi clothes was to make a political statement of that time because it implied self-reliance for Indians. Mahatma Gandhi had propagated the idea of using handspun cotton thread and hand-woven cloth to replace imports of cloth manufactured in British factories. It was Gandhi's masterstroke of an economic warfare waged against the British rule in India. The standardized khadi clothing adopted for freedom fighters during that time period included an all white khadi kurta, pajama, short jacket, and cap. Some of those guests sitting on the podium looked smart in those nationalist clothes, but the others looked quite clumsy-at-ease. We, the high school students participating in the Torch Brigade, wore a simple white shirt tucked in khaki shorts, and shoes or sandals with white socks.

As the evening progressed towards midnight, each person sitting on the podium seemed to have a chance to speak individually on the mike. They were all talking about how important this day was to India and each Indian. They talked about the sacrifices made by the freedom fighters over the period of a century to gain independence for India. I was not interested in the long chain of speeches. I was just thoroughly enjoying the enthusiasm in the air and itching to perform the torch drill, which was scheduled for midnight. The upbeat mood of the evening did arouse a passion of patriotism in my heart. That evening, it seemed that my barrel chest had enlarged like the Incredible Hulk's. I stood there patiently holding the torches and feeling very proud of occupying a position in the very front row of the Torch Brigade formation. Proud as a peacock, I felt as if everybody's eyes were focused on me, especially the eyes of my siblings, and friends that were present in the audience. In the meantime, the politicians seated on the podium kept on delivering speeches, one after another.

Exactly at midnight, a small group of people standing on the podium started singing the Indian National Anthem (Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka Jaya He, Bharat Bhagya Vidhata). As soon as their chorus poured out of the loudspeakers, the entire mass of people present instantly joined in. The air was filled with an excitement that seemed infectious and raised everybody's heartbeat. All hearts throbbed to the exciting beat of the moment. That instantaneous gush of excitement cannot be described in words. Immediately after the national anthem, the cloth wrapped tips of our torches were dipped in the oil and ignited. A gush of high-energy blood seemed to rush through my veins. The eagerly awaited moment of our torch drill performance had arrived. With pride and a blown up chest, I performed the coordinated torch drill from my privileged position in the front row. That entire evening of 14th August 1947 has stayed in my mind as alive today as it was on that midnight. 15th August 1947 was celebrated in India as the first Independence Day, which was declared as a national holiday. From my perspective as a teenager on that day, the midnight celebration simply meant transition from one exciting day to another.

Three years later, on 26 January 1950, the new Constitution of India came into force and India declared itself a Free Republic. The sun of the British Empire's rule over India had finally set completely on India's western horizon. However, in this brief period between 15 Aug 1947 and 26 Jan 1950, the majestic map of India witnessed itself split into two nations namely India and Pakistan. The map of the new national borders looked like it had caught fire and the fire was put out in a hurry. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the champions of India's Independence struggle, was assassinated on 31st January 1948. As the two new nations grappled with their newly won independence from British rule, approximately fifteen million innocent people were uprooted and displaced from their rightful homes. The cultural divide and forced immigration over which individuals felt that they did not have much choice or control, raised tensions resulting in the massacre of approximately one million innocent lives on the troubled Indian sub-continent. The politicians on both sides of the new borders moved on with their agenda.

Sixty years later in 2007, as India celebrated its 60th Independence Anniversary, I found myself pondering on India's first Independence day of 15th August, 1947 and the Torch Brigade that I had actively participated in. This time it was with mixed feelings for reasons more than one. In the sixty years that have rolled by, India has moved on and so has every one else. As the exciting memory of the Torch Brigade lingers on for me, it is now subdued with the memory of the aftermath massacre and displacement of millions of innocent lives on both sides of the India-Pakistan border. The pain experienced by the innocent victims that bore the brunt of change is carried forward by their survivors. The spilled blood and anger tries to reason and find answers to questions that cannot even find words

to express. In the midst of the lingering memories of the Torch Brigade, and the ongoing human conflicts, hopes for a better tomorrow surface and give meaning to life.

The Way He Said It

Mr. N. S. Hadas was a slim and short stature man who always stood seven feet tall. He walked briskly upright, held his head high and always carried a gracious demeanor. His black rimmed glasses and a well-modulated deep voice gave him a scholarly look. Educating young minds seemed to be his life passion. His every grain broadcasted that he was a teacher who sincerely loved his students for the opportunities they offered him to practice his passion for imparting education and discipline.

I did not know much of his background except that he was a teacher at Sule High School in Dhantoli, Nagpur during the early 1940's. Although I studied at the same school for my 5th grade, I had not noticed him primarily because he did not teach our class. Later, what I heard about him was that with his passion for teaching and a burning desire to start his own school, he had resigned his job at Sule High School. He was the first teacher that we knew that had taken such a bold step. In pursuit of his dream, he rented a residential building in Dhantoli area to start his own school. A small section of the building was to be his residence and the remaining rooms enabled him to start the 5th, 6th, and 7th grade classes. Teachers were hired to teach these three grade classes. Thus, an ambitious entrepreneur teacher with a mission and zeal to teach started his own Hadas High School around 1942, Mr. Hadas was married and had two daughters.

I was admitted to the 7th grade in Hadas High School. There were approximately 40 students in my class. Across from the school premises was a large playground, which belonged to Patwardhan High School. However, we had full access to this ground for playing games including soccer and cricket.

Not too far from the starter school facility, a much larger residential building was soon leased that permitted extending the classes up to the final 11th grade. The higher grades were added very quickly to the school, which enabled me to continue attending the same school until completion of my High School in 1948. The teachers that Mr. Hadas hired for various grade levels seemed to share his spirit of educating young minds. During these years, the students at Hadas High School developed adoration and admiration for Mr. Hadas as a disciplinarian and also as a friend. He was every inch the Principle and soul of Hadas High School.

One day during the noon recess at school, six of us were casually standing and chatting away by the side of the Principle's office. Mr. Hadas was returning to school after lunch. He always walked home for his lunch. As he approached us, we sensed that his steps had suddenly slowed down. He stopped close to us and stretched out his arms across the shoulders of two of us. I was one of the two. That surprised us. He flashed a friendly smile, paused briefly for a moment and then addressing all of us asked,

“How long have you been standing here?”

Puzzled with his question, we politely answered,

“For the past 15 minutes, Sir.”

Then he gently turned his eyes towards a round shaped fishpond in the garden, which was barely 10 feet away from us, and asked,

“Did any of you see or hear the water overflowing from the fishpond?”

All of us looked at the two feet high and six feet round fishpond and saw the water generously overflowing from the fishpond. The overflowing water was headed towards the school's front

entrance. All of us were fully aware of the fishpond with a water fountain at its center. At the lower end of the fountainhead was a knob for opening or closing the tap. Sheepishly we looked at the fountainhead, which was wide open and the water was over flowing freely.

After making sure that all of us had noticed the fishpond with overflowing water, Mr. Hadas gently suggested, “It is a good habit not to waste any resource, including this water.” Without waiting for any more words from him, one of us rushed to the fishpond and turned off the tap. Then, Mr. Hadas walked away from us with a mischievous friendly smile and headed for his office.

On another occasion, we had approached Mr. Hadas on Friday for permission to abstain from school on Saturday in order to go to Wardha for watching famous politicians who had assembled there for an important meeting of the All India Congress Committee (AICC). The names of politicians included Mahatma Gandhi, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sardar Patel, and several others. In those days, Saturday was only half-day at school. We were almost sure that Mr. Hadas would allow us to go to Wardha on Saturday to watch the famous politicians. Wardha was only an hour train ride from Nagpur. After patiently listening to our eager request, Mr. Hadas firmly denied our request and then softly suggested: “Your job right now is studying and not run around chasing politicians or for that matter anybody else”. His message was heard loud and clear. Next day, all classes had full attendance.

There were several other occasions when his guidance at school seemed strict at that moment. But the way he said, what he said, made a lasting impact. The undercurrent of his love and dedication for us was fully transparent.

The way Mr. Hadas commented on the water overflowing from the fish-pond in our school’s garden has subconsciously enhanced my respect and awareness for every resource that I have consumed and enjoyed on a daily basis since then.

Maybe, this is my way of remembering and paying a heart felt tribute to Mr. N. S. Hadas, Principle, and his team of teachers at Hadas High School, which included Mr. G. T. Parande, Mr. Khati, Mr. R. D. Mhaskar, Mr. M. R. Bhide, Mr. S. G. Kashikar, and Mr. Sahasrabudhe. These names may not be relevant to the readers of this composition, but the spirit with which they taught us to empower ourselves has a deeper meaning.

This composition is also a tribute to each and every sincere teacher we encounter in life.



About the Author

Born on 4th December 1932 in Nagpur, India, Mr. Suresh M. Deo has lived his first twenty-five years in India and the latter fifty+ years in U.S.A. For Suresh, the passion for writing stems out of a simple desire to better understand “That” which was previously taken for granted, or presumed to have been understood. Writing is about giving a thought some meaning at our own level of consciousness and therefore offers silent opportunities to rejuvenate self in the dynamics of an ever-changing environment.

Suresh has Bachelor’s degrees in Science and Chemical Engineering from Nagpur University, Nagpur, India and a Master’s in Chemical Engineering from University of Mississippi (Ole'-Miss), Oxford, Mississippi, U.S.A. Traveling around the world over a period of six-months, at the age of thirty, has been one of life’s most rewarding experiences for Suresh. It offered opportunities to experience the commonalities amongst people of diverse nationalities and cultures. Commonalities surfaced in the aspirations, frustrations, and bewildering fears of the unknown in life.

Suresh has worked in several facets of the American Plastics and Composites industry for forty years. Suresh’s wife Usha has a Master’s degree in History from the University of Delhi and a Master’s degree in Psychology from George Williams College, Downers Grove, Illinois, U.S.A. She worked for the State of Illinois as a Mental Health Counselor at the Crisis Center in Lombard, Illinois. Subsequent to retirement in 2001, both of them are enjoying traveling and indulging in their respective hobbies. During the summer months they live in their home in Addison, Illinois and during the winter months in Pune, India.

Suresh and Usha have three sons Deepak, Vikas and Sagar. Names of the three sons symbolize an oil lamp emitting soft light, progressive self-enlightenment, and sea of consciousness respectively. All three sons were born in Illinois, U.S.A. and now live and work in the Chicago area.