

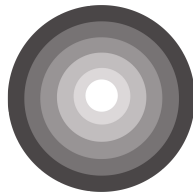
JEEVANSAR KATHAMRUT

NECTAREAN STORIES TO GLEAN
THE ESSENCE OF LIFE



SHIRIN VENKATRAMANI

JEEVANSAR KATHAMRUT

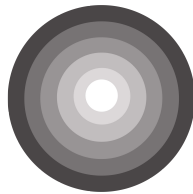


Inner Search Foundation

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Dedication



To my mother, Dr, Damayantie Doongaji M.A.
(Sanskrit) LLB. Ph.D., verily an embodiment of
Goddess Saraswati.

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FROM THE AUTHOR...

Hari Om!

Beloved Guru, make me a channel of thy speech so that I may bring the light of knowledge in the lives of all who seek it. May these stories guide and bring joy and relief to them.

Mauni Amawasya 8.2.16

Oftentimes, stories from the great epics, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* are told to us at home, sometimes to entertain, sometimes to bring home a practical code of conduct. A genuine desire to have a reference book that gives direction to right conduct, a book that contains the wisdom of the sages and stories from the scriptures, which elucidated tenets that are useful in daily life, was expressed by many young people.

In my practice as a Gynaecologist and Obstetrician, there have been moments of intense stress. It is only in this field of medicine that healthy young women come to become happy mothers; but their journey to motherhood is sometimes fraught with complications. They carry little bundles of joy in their wombs; with not always happy endings.

Sometimes, women are unable to conceive. At other times, women experiencing menopause feel lost and disturbed. Being in the teaching profession as well, I train residents who are sensitive to all these events, and even *they* need emotional support. Besides, bringing home some salient features of clinical significance also requires us to tell them

case stories! The residents wanted to make YouTube videos. Perhaps that is the order of the day and maybe we will.

The modern generation would gain immensely by referring to such a book to help them bring up radiant and joyful children, to help guide them when something goes wrong, to help them unravel the secrets of joyful living in story form without cumbersome reading. Thus, this book came to be written.

As the theme developed, I realised that it would be a useful eye-opener for one and all. It seemed as though a book like this was the need of the hour.

FOREWORD

As I came to know about Dr. Shirin and her book “Jeevansar Kathamrut” I found her approach simple, straightforward and logical.

All stories of spiritual giant like Raja Janak in first part of this book make us to think about the goal of life. we want something which gives us permanent peace and happiness, not temporary.

“All the objects in this world which are very near and dear to my heart are subject to change, decay and separation, I cannot avoid it.”

—Lord Buddhadev

Process of detachment from different objects of the world, brings mind into balance, equipoise and peace, which is our ultimate goal. Modern students of science must be able to digest this highest scientific truth as described by Lord Buddhadev and emphasized through different stories of Raja Janak.

Second part of this books are all tips and tricks for spiritual life by different saints. These are all practical tips highly useful to all readers. It reminds me of Swami Vivekananda’s definition of religion- “here and now.”

“I do not believe in that religion which says, I will give you peace and happiness in heaven, I believe in that religion which says I will give you peace and happiness here and now.”

—Swami Vivekananda

“Here and now” is the practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda, which is aptly highlighted by Dr. Shirin in second and especially the third part of this book. Third part of this book deals with application of spiritual truths in author’s own life. That is really inspiring to all readers!

I came to know about Dr. Shirin and her work only recently from her colleague Dr. Amit. Dr. Shirin is highly scientific in her approach and has got good intellectual conviction on various spiritual topics. She believes in practice of these spiritual principles, and this is the most wonderful thing. Her ceaseless efforts in transforming youths of this country in positive direction, through either her residents training programme or patient awareness meets deserves praise. This book is an extension of her untiring work and her love for the nation.

I am sure this absolutely straightforward discussion, in a very simple way with lucid language of ‘Jeevansar Kathamrut’ will fill the hearts of readers with joy and happiness. May this book inspire the readers to transform their lives in constructive way, may everyone have peace and happiness today and forever.

Spiritual science is not just ‘information technology’ but is ‘transformation technology’ – this fact is being demonstrated to all readers through this book. And I am glad about it.

May you all have the choicest blessings of Shriramkrishna, Holymother Shardadevi and Swami Vivekananda is my constant prayer.

With love and blessings

Swami Amartyananda

Ramkrishna Mission

Port Blair

Author: Effective Life Management.

PREFACE

The love for stories, is ***universal***. It has no boundaries of age, creed, geography or even, time! Many a time, one feels “if only I knew this earlier,” for we spend many years gathering experience to face challenges and sometimes just daily living, the secret of which eludes us. Someone has aptly stated, ‘experience is the comb life offers after we have gone bald!’ So why not learn from what the sages have to say? Why not learn from others’ experiences? Why not learn in advance?

Several dilemmas come to us in life and one wonders whether everything is pre-determined or do I have a free will? How can I act, if I do not expect the fruit of my action? What is happiness? If all is temporary, what joy is there in life? What is the meaning of life? All these and other questions have already been answered by the great sages – we need only to glean them from the stories told, to make our path clear. This book hopes to throw light on such eternal questions not through dogma, research or high level philosophy, but through simple stories.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section has stories from the ancient scriptures. It focuses on the stories of Raja Janaka, for the primary question in the minds of most people is how to attain that equanimity and serenity while living in the world. It is all very well for monks and *sadhus* dwelling in the Himalayas and anyway, such renunciation is not possible for all.

The second section has stories told by various Gurus in their talks, which bring home a point about practice in daily life. The third section has personal case stories where the principles of scriptures were applied

to demonstrate that it is possible to use those truths in daily life. Not only are these tenets practical, they also support us and help us live a simpler, happier life with utter abandon.

It is thus that the title is chosen – *Jeevansar Kathamrut* – nectar-like stories to glean the essence of life.

The truth expounded by our sages is indeed practical, and as you read, you will realise what is amply clear to the author – that only action and not the fruit thereof is in our hands. Therefore, I humbly lay any fruit that might come of this action first at the feet of the Guru and then at the feet of all readers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For me personally, the most pleasant task, if it be called as such, is to acknowledge the effort of all those who have helped in bringing this work to completion.

First and foremost I would like to thank my dear daughter in law Dr. Tanvi Venkatramani, for it is at her behest this book was written. She listened attentively to many a story and felt it would be a good legacy for her children! All members of my dear family have also always supported me in every endeavor and am deeply grateful to each one.

I am indebted to Dr. Amit Dixit my colleague for introducing me to Swami Amartyananda of our beloved Ramakrishna Mission, who kindly consented to write the foreword. I am deeply grateful to him.

The team at Inner Search Foundation has been extremely efficient and cooperative. They have indeed done their best. Would like to specially mention Mr. Nirmal Pradeep with whom, I have interacted the most.

And last but not the least a dear friend who primarily corrected the manuscript. To my discomfiture he has forbidden me from giving his name.

Dear readers hope you enjoy this book and find it useful in daily life. May Guru and God bless us all.

Dr. Shirin Venkatramani

14.9.17

SECTION I
STORIES FROM THE EPICS

ARJUNA

One of the greatest heroes of the *Mahabharata* was Arjuna. He was the younger brother of Yudhishtira. Arjuna was particularly skilled in archery. In fact there was no one in the world who could match his prowess, except perhaps Ekalavya. His cousin, Duryodhana, was extremely jealous of him and could not stand the affection and appreciation their Guru Dronacharya showered on Arjuna.

One day, within hearing distance of his Guru Dronacharya, Duryodhana talked about the preferential treatment that Arjuna received. Dronacharya, however, did not react but organised an archery competition between the princes the very next day. He fixed a wooden bird on a high branch of a tree which reflected onto a pond below. They were to strike the eye of the bird and bring it down, while looking only at the reflection of the bird.

He first called Yudhishtira, the eldest, who humbly came forward. He was instructed to take aim but not shoot. Then he was asked, *what did he see?* Yudhishtira replied that he could see his Guru, the tree and a bird in one of the branches of the tree. Dronacharya asked him to lay down his bow and not shoot.

He next invited Duryodhana, the second eldest prince, who zealously rushed forward as if he had already proven his worth! While taking aim, Dronacharya stopped him and asked what he saw. Duryodhana replied, “Why sir, I can see the tree, the sky, the bird and your reflection in the pond.” Dronacharya directed him to lay down his bow too. Angrily, Duryodhana stomped back to his place.

Dronacharya then called forth his son Ashwathama, who was also his student. When Ashwathama was asked what he saw, Ashwathama replied that he could see only the bird. When asked again, he still said, “No sir, the bird only.” Dronacharya asked him to lay down the bow as well.



He then asked his star student Arjuna to come forth. Humbly bowing to the Guru, Arjuna came forward. When he took aim, he was asked what he saw. Still looking intently at the reflection, he replied, “The eye of the bird.” Dronacharya ordered him, “Shoot.” And down came the bird with just the one arrow. Dronacharya consoled his son, saying that maybe he could have got the bird down, but then, he may not have as well!

When one is so focused as to exclude everything else but the goal in view, victory is a foregone conclusion. The bull’s eye is all that you need to see and even the dial should be out of focus. Concentration and attention are to be practised with dedication and humility.

The word yoga means ‘to join.’ Here, one is so completely united with the focus of attention that one becomes a yogi. Thus, in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter II, when Arjuna is told as to why he should fight, Shri Krishna says (Shloka 50):

*Budhiyukto jagatih ubhe Sukrutadushkrute,
Tasmadyogaya yunjyasva yogah karmasu kaushalam.*

(One endowed with wisdom relinquishes here both the good deeds as well as the bad ones. Therefore, be directed to yoga; yoga is skilfulness in action.)

EKLAVYA

There was a tribal chieftain whose son Ekalavya wanted to be a great archer like Arjun. He knew that this would not be possible until he had Guru Dronacharya as his teacher. So with great humility and hope, he went to the Guru's ashram and begged to be taught. Dronacharya was vexed. He said, "You belong to the *shudra* (low) caste and hence I cannot teach you. Besides, there can be no greater archer than Arjuna and I have given him my word that I shall not train anyone else who may surpass him."

Disappointed, Ekalavya went away to the forest. There he made a mud statue of Dronacharya, bowed before the Guru and kept practising the art of archery.

One day, while he was practising, he was distracted by a dog that was creating a nuisance by barking incessantly. Ekalavya neatly shot seven arrows into the dog's mouth, which kept it open but did not hurt even the tongue. This dog was roaming around the forest in this manner, with its mouth wide open. It was spotted by Dronacharya who had brought the princes there for field practice that morning. He observed the very perfect placement of the arrows and was surprised to see Ekalavya there. When asked by Guru Dronacharya, "Who taught you this art?" Ekalavya replied that it was none other than the great Guru Dronacharya himself. He forthwith set out to show him the statue that he had made of Dronacharya. Humble Ekalavya prostrated himself before the Guru.



The Guru was not pleased since he had given his word to Arjuna that no one would ever surpass him. Dronacharya asked the boy for *guru dakshina* (a payment in money or kind, given to the teacher as a mark of respect). This filled Ekalavya with great joy as he felt accepted by the Guru. He asked, *what might he pay?* Heartlessly, Dronacharya asked him for the thumb of his right hand so that he may no longer be able to string the bow. Ekalavya, without hesitation, cut off his right thumb and surrendered it at his Guru's feet. Dronacharya blessed him that he would never be forgotten and would be considered equal to Arjuna in archery forever. And so it is.

Whenever a mention is made of Arjuna's prowess with the bow, Ekalavya is also mentioned.

This is an example of supreme Guru Bhakti. It is indeed rare to meet such a being as Ekalavya. Yet it is possible!

It is said that there are three categories of disciples:

1. *Adham: Those that just come and listen to the Guru but do not follow his teachings.*
 2. *Madhyam: Those that listen and practice when they have the mood or time.*
 3. *Uttam: Those that follow instantly, the bidding of their Guru (Your wish is my command, beloved Guru).*
- Rare indeed is the last category and we must all strive to be so.*

GANDHARI

Gandhari was the daughter of King Subala, the king of Gandhar (present day West Pakistan and Afghanistan). She was named thus to honour the land. She is also supposed to be the reincarnation of Mati (the Goddess of Intelligence).

She was both virtuous and beautiful. Bheeshma arranged her marriage with Dhritarashtra. When she came to know that her husband was blind, she tied a strip of cloth around her own eyes and decided to live blindfolded for the rest of her life. It was a great penance that she undertook and this bestowed exceptional powers upon her. She is known as the epitome of being a *pativrata* (loyal to husband).



Her brother Shakuni was enraged that Gandhar had been humiliated. All his brothers had been killed by the Hastinapur rulers and his precious sister had been offered to a blind man, who was never going to rule Hastinapur. He quietly vowed that he would see to the destruction of the Kuru clan, and this is exactly what he achieved.

Through her life, Gandhari saw many ups and downs but always upheld *dharma*. The great Sage Vyasa, was extremely pleased with her and granted her the boon that she would be the mother of a hundred sons! As it happened she conceived. Her pregnancy became intolerably long, during which time Kunti, the queen, and Madri the second wife of Pandu the ruler of Hastinapur, had already borne the Pandavas. Yudhishtira, being the first-born son, had been proclaimed the future king.

This filled Gandhari with jealousy and anger. She struck her abdomen with an iron rod. A mass of flesh was delivered, which Vyasa divided into a 101 parts and put into jars filled with ghee. From these were born 100 sons and one daughter, Duhsala Duryodhana was the first-born. At his birth, there were many ill omens. Bheeshma and Vyasa advised that he be killed but Gandhari and Dhritarashtra prevented this killing. The rest is history.

The war between the Pandavas and Kauravas became inevitable and Duryodhana came to take the blessings of his mother, who said, “Listen to my words, O fool. Where there is righteousness, there is victory.” (*Srunu mudha vachomyaham yato dharmastato jayah* – *Salya Parva*, 63.62.) Krishna again lauds Gandhari,



“O gracious lady, there is none comparable to you in the whole world.”
(Tat samam nasti loke sminnadya simantini shubhe – Salya Parva, 63.59.)

However, when approached by Duryodhana, her maternal instincts instructed him to appear before her completely naked so that she may empower him with the light in her eyes, so that no one could then kill him. Krishna overheard this and advised Duryodhana to cover his private parts even if he were to go before his mother. Accordingly, Gandhari removed the band from across her eyes and rested her eyes on Duryodhana. She rued the fact that he had covered some parts of his body and knew that, that would be the cause of his death. Thus, Bheema was able to hit the mace literally below the belt, and kill him during the war.

After the war, when all her sons had been killed and the Pandavas had won, she wept on the battlefield and wondered whether there is any grief that can surpass the grief of a mother who has lost her sons, irrespective of whether they deserved to die or not. The pain must necessarily have been the same for Draupadi, who had lost all her sons as well. No one was able to console Gandhari. She wept, “Leave me alone with these corpses.”

Whereupon, Krishna came to her and consoled her saying, “They are gone, why do you cling to their bodies?”

She replied, “You will never know the pain of a mother.”

Krishna replied, “A pain lasts only until another pain comes along!”

And she sobbed, “This pain is permanent!”

With that, she dismissed Him, cursing him, that his kingdom would be destroyed and that he would meet a lonely death in a forest; all of which came to pass.

When Krishna left, Gandhari suddenly felt a pang of hunger. The pang was such that she had never felt before, as though she had not eaten in many years! A little later, the aroma of a ripe mango overhead wafted to her nostrils. She tried to reach it but could not. So, she placed a stone,

climbed over it and tried again and again till she climbed over several stones to reach it. Finally, she got her hands to it and sat on the stones to eat it. Having satisfied her hunger, she noticed that the stones did not feel like stones at all. They felt like soft and wet lumps! Horrified, she realised that she had placed the dead bodies one over the other, to reach the mango and had sat on them! How could she have done this? Then the words of Shri Krishna came back to her, “A pain lasts only as long as another pain comes along.”

If only, her sons had shared their kingdom with their cousins! Why, were they so greedy? If only Draupadi had forgiven them, she too might have had all her sons alive! If only, she had brought up her sons on the path of *dharma*! If only, the wise Karna had instilled some of his generosity into his friend Duryodhana’s heart! If only, her brother Shakuni had not plotted so cruelly and effectively to ruin the Kuru clan! And there were a myriad ‘if only’s.’

And yet she knew after having heard the ‘SONG DIVINE’ (*Bhagavad Gita*) that victory would rest with the side that had *dharma* to uphold it. Arjuna was fortunate, that as the disciple of Shri Krishna, he was initiated into esoteric wisdom right on the battlefield. She had listened intently as Sanjay related whatever happened on the battlefield to Dhritarashtra and her.

What is dharma? That is our eternal question. Dharma is that which makes man different from the beast. Dharma is that which makes man divine. Dharma is that which helps the needy. Dharma is that which forgives. Dharma is that which shares and does not dominate. So long as we refuse to forgive, refuse to share and refuse to help others, wars will happen and there will be no peace. Vyasa raises both his hands and pleads: “Follow dharma, for then, peace will be yours!”

HANUMAN



Shri Hanuman is worshipped as the greatest devotee of Shri Rama. Whenever anyone talks of devotion, the first name that comes to mind, is that of Shri Hanuman. In fact, all those who choose to walk the path of devotion towards Self-realisation, invoke His blessings to help them reach their goal. He also bestows fearlessness, as he is a symbol of power and unshakeable faith in His beloved Shri Rama.

He is known by several names, one of which is Anjaneya, the son of Anjana who was an Apsara (celestial being). A sage had cursed her, that the moment she fell in love, she would get a monkey face. Morose and dejected she went to Brahmma and He found a way by which she could

cope with this curse. He suggested that she should take birth on earth and do intense penance. Thus, she came to earth and started intense penance to Shiva and prayed that he be born to her as a son.

Once when she was in the forest, she happened to look at a man from a distance. He had broad shoulders and seemed immensely powerful. She fell in love with him the moment he looked at her. In her anxiety that he may see her face which now looked like that of a monkey, she covered it with both palms and got up to run from there. He however, held her hand and asked her to remove her palms from her face. She replied that she could not do so, as she had a monkey face. He responded by saying that he would make his own face look like that of a monkey too. That very instant, she removed her palms from her face and looked at him. He was Kesari, the son of Rahu and king of a mountain called Sumeru.

King Dasharatha was conducting a *yagna* in the hope of getting a child, at the end of which he received a bowl of *kheer* (rice pudding) as *prasad*, which was duly given to his three wives Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi. They bore four sons, Rama, a set of twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna, and Bharat respectively. A bit of this *kheer* was wafted over by Vayu, the God of Air, to the outstretched palms of Anjana while she was performing penance in front of the *Pindi* (symbol of Shiva). It is said that thus, Vayu became the Godfather of Hanuman, and Shiva manifested himself as the son of Anjana – as the beloved Hanuman. She was thus doubly blessed. This absolved her of the curse too and she could return to her abode in the heavens.

Hanuman was blessed by his Godfather that he would have speed greater than the wind. He could become as small as a mosquito or as large as a mountain, and had many other powers bestowed on Him by various Gods.

Shri Hanuman at once became devoted to Shri Rama and it was his undaunted faith that actually helped Shri Rama to build a bridge across the ocean to Lanka, so that the monkey army could cross. He threw

boulders into the ocean invoking the name of Shri Rama and the boulders floated. Little squirrels rolled in the sand and dusted themselves on the boulders. Looking at this seemingly futile attempt to help, some monkeys laughed. Shri Rama merely took the squirrels onto his palm and stroked their backs. This is said to be the cause of the bands on their backs.

The whole of the *Ramayana* is replete with innumerable stories of Shri Hanuman's role in the battle against Ravana, but here are two stories which exemplify his love for Shri Rama.

Once, when Hanuman saw Sita fill the parting in her hair with *sindoor* (vermillion powder that married women use), he asked her why she did that. Sita replied, "It is a prayer I do every day, for the well-being of my husband and his long life." At this, Hanuman got himself a bucket of the powder and covered his entire body with it, praying for the long life of his beloved Shri Rama. He is therefore known as Bajrangbali or the one who is red in colour.

When Shri Rama returned to Ayodhya after the war and was honouring all those who had helped him, Hanumanji sat quietly in a corner taking his name. Sita noticed him, removed a precious pearl necklace from around her neck and put it round his. Hanumanji removed the necklace and pulling out each pearl, broke it to look at its inside. Sita was appalled. She asked what he was doing. Hanumanji simply replied, "Looking for Shri Rama." He added to this saying that since none of the pearls contained Shri Rama, they were useless to him. At this, even Sita felt that he was carrying his devotion too far. She asked him, *what was he trying to prove?* Whereupon, he tore open his chest and to the wonder of all, they could see Rama and Sita seated in his heart. Shri Rama embraced him and said that Hanumanji was as dear to him as his brother Bharat, and asked whether he would accompany Shri Rama to *Vaikuntha* (the abode of Shri Vishnu whose incarnation Shri Rama was). Shri Hanuman enquired if his beloved Rama would be there. Rama told him that in Vaikuntha, he would reside as Vishnu. Shri Hanuman immediately refused to accompany him.



Shri Rama then blessed him that he would be *Chiranjeevi*, that is, one who never dies; and that wherever Shri Rama's name would be taken, he would be present.

True devotion annihilates the EGO and all that remains is the Beloved. The life of Shri Hanuman exemplifies that, so much so that, the Lord is unable to achieve what the devotee does easily.

Being a *Chiranjeevi*, he is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*, as he is one of the seven *Chiranjeevis* (blessed to live eternally in flesh and blood) in Indian mythology. A *mantra*, which goes thus:

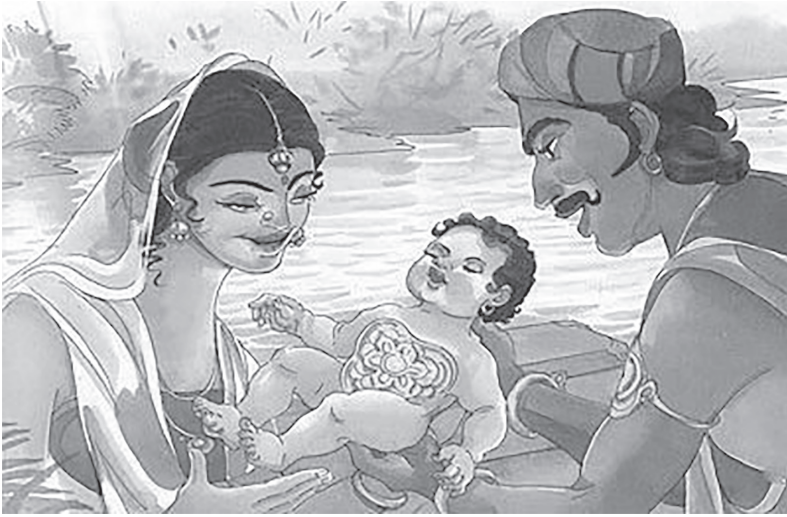
Ashwathama, Balir, Vyasaha Hanumanthra Vibheeshanaha Kripa Parasuramas cha Saptaithey Chiranjeevinaha Om namah Shivay is recited to bestow long life. According to some authorities, Markandeya, a great devotee of Shiva, is also one of the *Chiranjeevis*. But his name does not appear in the *mantra*.

A story goes that during their exile, Bheema, one of the Pandavas (also the son of the Wind God Vayu) came across a monkey who obstructed his path. Bheema made a polite request to the monkey to move out of the way. The monkey responded that he was too old to move and asked if Bheema would be so kind as to lift his tail and move it out of the way. Bheema was one of the most physically-powerful Pandavas. He tried to lift the tail, but he found it an impossible task, as the tail was extremely heavy. He then realised that this was no ordinary monkey and bowed before him.

Hanumanji revealed himself and explained that they were brothers, albeit born aeons apart! Hanumanji blessed Bheema with great power and wisdom.

Bheema thought, after all this is a monkey. I can remove him from my path easily. To his amazement, he found that he could not move the tail even by a millimetre. Thus, one learns never to underestimate the power of another. One needs to be humble and open to the infinite possibilities which might present themselves at different times in life.

KARNA



Karna was the first-born of Kunti. He was the son of the Sun God and was born with a natural armour which no arrow could ever pierce. Karna was well-known for his generosity. He never refused anyone who asked him for something, should it be in his power to do so. As he was born out of wedlock, Kunti never acknowledged him and thus, he happened to be on the side of Duryodhana during the *Mahabharata* war; even though he was the brother of the Pandavas.

Arjuna once asked Krishna, “Lord, why do people consider Karna more generous than Yudhishtira? Neither has ever refused whatever has been asked for, nor whoever has asked. So why is Karna considered greater than Yudhishtira.”

The Lord said with a smile, “Come, I’ll show you why!”

Disguised as brahmins, they first went to Yudhishtira's court and asked for sandalwood sticks to conduct a 'yagna.' The king immediately sent his soldiers to all parts of his kingdom in search of sandalwood sticks. It was monsoon, the trees were all wet and the soldiers returned with wet sandalwood pieces. The yagna was not possible with the wet sticks.

Krishna and Arjuna proceeded to Karna's court next and asked for the same. Karna thought for a while and said, "It's been raining for several days now. It will be impossible to collect dry sandalwood sticks. But there is a way. Please wait for a while."

Saying this, Karna proceeded to chop and cut down the doors and windows of the court which were made of sandalwood. After breaking them into pieces, he gifted the dry sandalwood sticks to the brahmins to conduct the 'yagna.'

They accepted the offerings and went back. On their way back, Krishna asked Arjuna, "Do you realise the difference between the two, Arjun? Had we asked Yudhishtira to give his doors and windows to us to conduct a yagna, he would have given them to us without a second thought. But he did not think of it himself. We did not ask Karna either. Yudhishtira gave because that was his dharma. Karna gave because he loves to give. That is the difference between the two and that is why Karna is considered greater. Whatever work one does, becomes nobler when done with love."

We can work with different attitudes. You can work because someone asks you to, or as a duty or as your dharma, or as Karna did, out of love for doing the job. Whatever work you do, love it, enjoy the work.

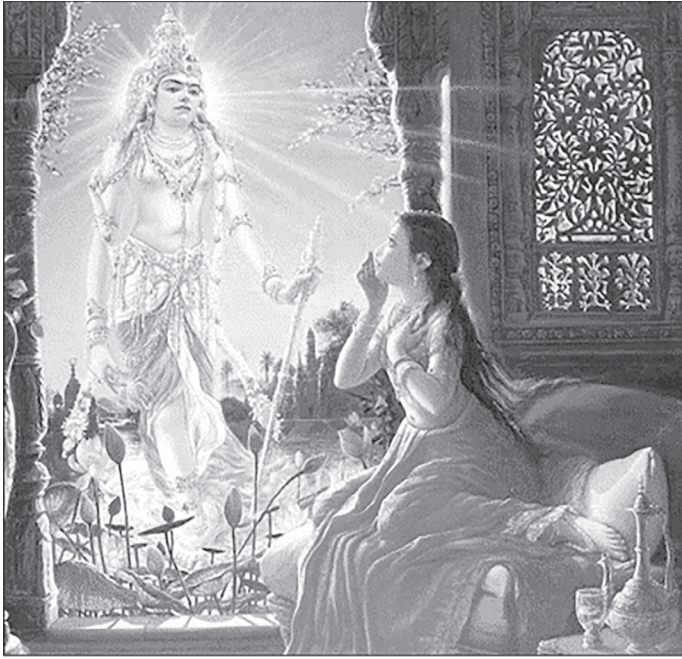
KUNTI

The Yadav chief, Shursen, had a daughter who he named Pritha. He also had a son Vasudev, the father of Shri Krishna. One day, Pritha was asked by her father to accompany him as he was going to meet his cousin, the King of Bhoja. Shursen had promised Kuntibhoj, the King of Bhoja, that Pritha would be given to Kuntibhoj, as he was childless and they both were also very close friends. Pritha had not known this.

She however, adjusted to her new home. Kuntibhoj named her Kunti. She grew up to be a pious young girl who was extremely good-looking too. It so happened that Durvasa, the well-known, ill-tempered sage visited the kingdom of Bhoja and Kuntibhoj assigned Kunti to serve him. The sage was pleased with her service and he gave her a *mantra*, which she could use to invoke any God for an offspring. He granted this boon, as he must have foreseen that she would require it. Out of sheer curiosity she wanted to test the efficacy of the boon and invoked Surya (Sun God), who manifested before her. Terrified, as she was not married at the time, she begged Surya to return. However, the *mantra* could not be revoked.

Consequently, she had a baby boy, Karna, whom she placed in a basket and set it afloat on the river. He was picked up by a charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha, and was lovingly brought up by them.

Soon Kuntibhoj arranged her *Swayamwar* (a gathering in which a girl can choose a husband). Kunti chose to marry Pandu, the Crown Prince of Hastinapur. She became queen even though Pandu was not the eldest son. The older son was Dhritarashtra, but because he was born blind and a nation cannot have a blind king, Pandu was entrusted the throne. Dhritarashtra's wife



Princess Kunti summons Lord Surya

was Gandhari, who had tied a strip of cloth across her own eyes, so that she could empathise with her husband. Both these women are considered to be the matriarchs of the *Mahabharata*, the greatest epic ever written.

In the ancient times, women held a place of high esteem in the Rig Veda. There is also a mention of Maitreyi, the wife of Sage Yagnavalkya, and their conversation on esoteric wisdom.

Pandu was King of Hastinapur. He had also married Madri, a beautiful princess of Madra, in order to secure the vassalage of that kingdom. Once, while hunting in the forest, Pandu mistook Rishi Kindama to be a deer and killed him while the Rishi was with his wife. The sage pronounced a curse on the king, that the moment he entered a conjugal relationship, Pandu would die.

On hearing this, Pandu asked Kunti to immediately invoke the Gods and bear children so that he may not die without an heir. Kunti first invoked the Deity of Dharma. Yudhishtira the eldest, was the son of

Dharma, and his life exemplified this. The next deity she invoked was Vayu (wind). Bheema was the son of Vayu and accordingly had speed and power at his command. Kunti then invoked Indra (Lord of Heaven and Rain) and thus, Arjuna the greatest archer in the world and the one who had conquered sleep came into being. She then gave the *mantra* to Madri who invoked the Ashwin Kumars and she bore the handsome twins, Nakula and Sahadeva. These were the five brothers whom Kunti raised as sons.

It so happened, that Pandu could not resist Madri and approached her. He instantly met his fate and died. A distraught Madri jumped into the funeral pyre. Kunti was also inclined to do the same. However, she was not allowed to do so since she now had the responsibility of bringing up the children. Suddenly, she became subservient to Gandhari who now became queen, as Dhritarashtra was made the interim king.

As Kunti strived to bring up her children like princes, every day was an uphill task for her. Oftentimes sorrow enveloped her. The jealousy of Duryodhana (Dhritarashtra's first-born) reached outrageous proportions. So much so that he even plotted to kill each and every Pandava. Vidura, the brother of Pandu and Dhritarashtra, helped in making their escape possible.

One of the greatest misfortunes Kunti faced was that her daughter-in-law, Draupadi, was debased by Duryodhana and his brothers right in front of her own eyes. Her sons had to bear exile for 13 years. Despite begging her nephew Krishna, she could not bear enough influence to avert war. During the war, she had to acknowledge her first-born Karna, and tell him the truth about his birth, so as to prevent the defeat of the Pandavas. Even with her elder sister-in-law, she had to have a strange relationship where both their progeny were at war with each other. Then at the end of the war, all her grandchildren were slain by Ashwathama, the son of Dronacharya. There was no end to her woes through her life and Kunti was famed for her misfortune. She never lamented. She never

complained. In fact, it is believed that she begged Shri Krishna to bestow His grace on her and let only misfortune befall her, lest she forget Him. Hers was a life of total dedication and sacrifice.

In the *Srimad Bhagvatam*, 1.8.42 Kunti says, ‘*Tvayi me nanya-visaya, matirmadhu-pate sakrit, ratimudvahadatadaddha, gangevaughamu danvati...*’ (My sweet Lord, as the River Ganges forever flows into the sea without hindrance, let my attraction be constantly drawn to you without being diverted to anything else. – Radhanath Swami, *The Journey Home*.)

When one contemplates the lives of such figures as Kunti, one realises the truth in what Kabir has said in one of his couplets, “Dukh mein sab sumiran kare Sukh mein kare no koi, Sukh meinjo sumiran kare to dukh kahe ko hoi?” Meaning, one remembers the Lord in sorrow, never in joy. If we remembered Him in joy, what cause would there be for sorrow?

On reflection, one understands the deeper meaning, that if remembering the Lord itself is your only joy, then what difference does it make if there be sorrow or joy in the outside world? Kunti knew this. She is a beacon light of faith, and has shown the way to never lose heart and how to get one’s true priorities right.

NARADA



Narada is the celestial devotee who roams the three worlds singing praises of the Lord, carrying the musical instrument, the veena. It so happened one day, that he was passing by the palace of Shri Hanuman, the greatest devotee of Shri Rama. Ketari, the mother of Shri Hanuman heard him and asked her son to go and receive the blessings of Narada. Shri Hanuman found the great devotee singing under a tree. He prostrated himself before

Narada and as he was getting up, Narada invited him to ask for a boon. Shri Hanuman said that he lacked nothing and may Narada be so kind as to grant him whatever he felt Hanuman lacked? Narada then blessed Shri Hanuman, saying, “May you always be able to sing the glory of the Lord whom you so dearly love.” He then got up to leave. However, Shri Hanuman insisted that now that Narada had blessed him with this boon, his ability should therefore be greater than that of Narada himself. He requested Narada to kindly sit and listen to him to confirm that indeed it was so! Narada agreed and sat upon a rock to listen, placing his veena next to him. Shri Hanuman sang with such devotion that the rock melted.

It was getting late. Narada requested Shri Hanuman to stop singing. Shri Hanuman enquired, “Are you sure, sir, that I should stop singing?” Narada pleaded, “Yes, I must be on my way.” Upon this, Shri Hanuman stopped singing. As soon as he did so, the rock solidified, encasing the veena in it.

Now Narada could not leave without his veena and begged Shri Hanuman to melt the rock by singing again, so that he may retrieve it. Contrary to this request Shri Hanuman, the monkey, ran into his palace with Narada chasing after him until Ketari intervened and ordered Shri Hanuman to sing. Once again, as he sang, the rock melted and Narada retrieved the veena and took their leave. Ketari was most vexed by her son’s silly behaviour and chided Shri Hanuman. Upon which Shri Hanuman explained that he had done so in order to get Narada to go through each room of their palace and thus bless the entire place.

The one who sings the praises of the Lord is only overwhelmed when another can do the same and blessings flow through him. If our home is thus consecrated by the feet of holy ones, we do not need to go on any pilgrimage. Our home itself becomes a holy place and the ambience becomes one of peace and joy.

Once, when Narada was feeling happy that not a single breath of his was going without chanting the Lord’s name, Shri Vishnu, the Lord

whom Narada worshipped, decided to test him. He asked Narada to take a bowl filled with oil, circumambulate the earth and return without a single drop spilling. Eager to do the bidding of the Lord, Narada went off with the bowl and returned in the evening without spilling a single drop, feeling really happy that he had done what the Lord had asked him to do. The Lord then instructed him to visit and observe Jagga Das, a farmer in a small remote village. Immediately, Narada left to observe the activities of Jagga Das.

He saw that Jagga Das woke up early, briefly took the name of the Lord and proceeded to plough the fields, look after the children, shop and do the myriad daily chores of a householder. Late at night, just before retiring, he once again took Shri Vishnu's name and lay down to rest. Narada felt disappointed that the Lord had sent him to observe this man who took the name of the Lord just twice in a day!

When he returned, he reported what he had seen, and humbly he asked the Lord as to why he had been sent to Jagga Das? Shri Vishnu put this question to Narada, "How many times did you remember my name when you took the bowl of oil around the earth?" Narada had to confess, "Not even once. I had to ensure that not even a drop of oil fell on the ground." Shri Vishnu explained, "Jagga Das found time to think of me twice while he was juggling his roles in *sansar*. Struggling in the mundane world is far more strenuous than carrying a bowl filled with oil, circumambulating the earth and not spilling a single drop!"

We should of course, try to remember the Lord with every breath like Narada did. But at least, let's not forget to remember Him on waking and thank Him at bedtime; like how the simple Jagga Das did.

Once, when Shri Lakshmi, the beloved consort of Lord Vishnu was pressing the feet of the Lord with her soft, gentle hands, Narada who was looking on wondered who might be the greatest devotee of the Lord. Exactly at that moment, the Lord started rolling with pain in His abdomen. No one was able to relieve Him of pain. Every attendant was

called but to no avail. Totally distraught, Shri Lakshmi asked the Lord to recommend the remedy Himself. The Lord said, "Only the dust of the feet of my devotee, mixed with water can relieve my pain." Whereupon, Narada, requested Shri Lakshmi, to give a bit of the dust of her own feet to the Lord. She exclaimed, "How can I? I am His wife. A wife can never be so impudent as to offer the dust of her feet to her husband." In turn, she asked Narada to give a little dust of his feet. Shocked by this request, Narada responded, "But that is preposterous, I am merely a humble servant of the Lord!" On the other hand as soon as the *gopis* heard of the Lord's discomfort, they ran to the Lord with a pinch of the dust from their feet crying, "Even if we roll in hell till eternity for this, so as to relieve the discomfort of our Lord, we are totally prepared for that fate!" Narada got his answer.

That is devotion! Thus, there are three levels of devotion: adham/madhyam/uttam.

Adham is the devotee who does not follow the instruction of the Guru and goes on procrastinating.

Madhyam is the one who follows the instructions, all in his own time.

Uttam is the one who instantly responds; not once thinking of the consequences of that action. There is no latent period at all.

We should all aim at being Uttam.

Similarly, there are three types of friends.

Mitra, is one you meet during the day, wish him and pass by.

Bandhu, is one you sit and spend time with and share tales of joy and sorrow.

Sakha, is one who senses your mood and responds before you can even begin to explain! He knows. In our culture, every relationship is given a form, thus one may worship the Lord as a beloved, as a father or friend. He is indeed our Sakha and needs to be told nothing!

PRAHLADA

Hiranyakashyapu was a demoniacal king who had been granted a boon after great penance, that he could not be killed by man or beast, in the day or at night, indoors or outdoors, on land or at sea, and so he thought that he was immortal. His wife Kayadu, while carrying their son, Prahlada, left the court of her husband and spent her days at the Ashram of Sage Narada, who was a devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Consequently, Prahalada also became a devout worshipper of Vishnu. His father Hiranyakashyapu could not tolerate this and wanted to prove that he was invincible. Several times Hiranyakashyapu tried to kill Prahalada but each time he escaped. On one notable occasion, he was placed on a pyre, in the lap of Holika (sister of Hiranyakashyapu) who had a boon that fire would not burn her.



However, it was she who got burnt to ashes and Prahalada survived. This is the story behind the festival of Holi, celebrated throughout India usually in mid-March.

When Hiranyakashyapu asked Prahalada, “Where does your God reside?” Prahalada replied, “Everywhere!” and Hiranyakashyapu struck the pillar and asked, “Is he here too?” And Narasimha appeared from the pillar!

Finally, Hiranyakashyapu was killed by the half-man half-lion God Narasimha on the doorstep at dusk, by taking him on his lap and tearing him apart. Thus, he overcame the boon granted to Hiranyakashyapu, by killing him neither on land nor at sea; not in the day, not at night; neither inside nor outside; since he was neither man nor beast.



The *Bhagavad Purana*, a treatise, that describes the process of loving worship to Lord Vishnu, is ascribed to Prahalada.

Such is the power of influences in the womb!

Prahlada was associated with sages. It would seem that this happened just by chance and good fortune. But the fact is that it is the

mother that guides and nurtures. It is faith, which works miracles. We hear of cures from dreaded diseases everyday as a result of faith in a Guru, a religion, a healer or simply by prayer! It should be borne in mind that today, "science" accepts, what it terms the "placebo effect" and it agrees that the cure or relief maybe up to 40%! This proves that nearly half of the diseases vanish due to prayer or faith. It is equally true that if one does not have faith, medicine itself may cause horrendous side effects. Such side effects, that it actually precludes their use! So even if they were to work, irrespective of faith, they just might not!

We may not have such a dramatic experience as Prahlada did, but we are often left in a state of wonder when we try to explain synchronous occurrences. We wonder how a person whom we thought of a moment ago appears before us, and many such inexplicable events. These phenomena do not require science to prove or disprove; they are common experiences!

RAJA JANAKA

The kingdom of Videha was ruled by a dynasty named Janaka from the capital city of Mithila. In modern day Nepal, it is known as Janakpur. The name Mithila comes from a mythical king Miti, who was created from the body of his father King Nimi when he died without an heir. Miti took the title of Janaka as he was born from his father.

The most famous of the kings in this dynasty was Seeradhwaj; popularly known as Raja Janaka. He was particularly well-known for his wisdom and spiritual enlightenment. He was the prime example of a person living in the world and not being in it. He was a disciple of the great sages Yagnavalkya and Ashtavakra. These great sages would meet regularly at his court for elucidation of profound philosophical thought. He is mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* by Shri Krishna as the perfect example of a *Karma Yogi*. Even in the *Brihdaranyaka Upanishad*, there is a mention of this great Sage-king Janaka, who is given the title of 'Rishi' even though he is a king. As part of a sacrifice, when he was ploughing his fields, he found a baby girl who was named Janaki (*Sita*), daughter of Janaka. When it was time for her marriage, he imposed a condition that only the one who could string the ancient bow given to him by Shiva could wed his daughter. Shri Rama did this with ease. Raja Janaka gladly gave *Sita's* hand in marriage to Shri Rama, whom he admired and loved. He is thus an important historical figure in the *Ramayana*. He is also considered to be the Guru of Shukdev, the enlightened offspring of Sage Vyasa.

Story 1

One hot summer afternoon, Raja Janaka was taking a short nap when he dreamt that a neighbouring king had invaded his country with a large army and defeated him. He was allowed just a day to make his escape out of his country, barefooted, with almost no clothes. His was a vast land and even by sundown, he had not crossed over. He continued his weary journey, hungry and thirsty. No one was willing to offer him any food or drink for fear of the new king. The next morning, he found himself across the border and inside a dense forest. At some distance he spotted a small hut. With great difficulty, he barely made it to the hut and piteously begged for food and water. A frightened old lady came out and gave him a little *dhal*. She told him to cook it quickly, shutting the door in his face. In a last bid effort, he managed to light a fire and cook the *dhal* in an earthen pot that she had given him. He had barely managed to sit down to eat when two bulls rushed in from nowhere and dashed his pot to pieces. He could no longer bear this agony and sobbed loudly.

He was panting and sweating from exertion when his dear wife Sunaina gently woke him. As he opened his weary eyes, he saw himself lying on his grand bed with his wife gently fanning him! Still bewildered by his dream, all he could babble was, “Is this true? Or is that true?” He kept on repeating these words. His ministers, counsellors, *vaidyas* (doctors) could do nothing to help him. His Guru Ashtavakra was called. The Guru whispered something in Raja Janaka’s ears, “Neither is this true nor was that true. Anything that passes is unreal. Find within you that which is timeless and unchanging.” Raja Janaka became instantly enlightened.

The first story that I narrate above, set Raja Janaka free. He realised that all the events that occur in life PASS; whether pleasant

or unpleasant. He thus mastered equanimity. As one grows older, the fleeting nature of life comes home more and more. Life seems like a dream and one is left wondering what was real



about it? One also wonders as to what is the meaning of life.

Raja Janaka being the scholar and seeker that he was, grasped the subtleties that his subconscious mind had hinted to him through the experience of his vivid dream. The wise words of Ashtavakra, the Guru, shook him out of his confusion and he realised immediately that neither is the dream state nor the waking state of the mind real. It is the witness of all the three, including the deep sleep, THAT is the TRUTH. For us to arrive at this understanding is the meaning of life. But it should also be our sincere and burning desire to do so. The Guru always manifests when such a burning desire arises and he shows 'the way.'

Anything that passes must necessarily have a witness to observe its passing nature. This witness is the one that is constant. Hence, although our body changes, it is gradual. Whereas, we feel that we do not change. In fact, it is well-known scientifically that the body gets totally changed within a year. That element, which in fact does not change, is what we are! But we identify ourselves with our most fickle aspect and hence we are forever miserable. This body comes to an end in disease, old age and death.

Story 2

King Janaka was well-known for holding debates and discussions on the highest thought. During one such session, a certain Brahmin named Bandhin placed a condition that if he lost, he would do whatever the victor of the debate demanded and the same condition should apply to anyone who lost to him. As it happened, many a scholar fell prey to his most strange demand: that each of them be thrown into the sea.

In a far off ashram lived Kahola, the disciple of Uddalaka. He was very well-versed in the *shastras* and was an erudite scholar. His wife Sujata, daughter of Uddalaka, had heard about King Janaka and his great assemblies. She thought that they may be able to earn some money which would help bring up their son, if Kahola, her scholar husband would go to King Janaka's court too. She requested him to proceed to Mithila; not knowing what was in store for him. Kahola went at his wife's request and like his predecessors, was also thrown into the sea. Many years passed but no one could match or challenge Bandhin. Sujata was sad and dejected. Her only solace was her son, Ashtavakra. He had been so named as his body was deformed in eight places (but that is another story).

Ashtavakra grew up presuming that Kahola's Guru, Uddalaka, was his father. One fine day, while he was sitting in the lap of Uddalaka, Shwetaketu pulled him down from his lap, saying, "He is my father, not yours!" Ashtavakra was twelve then. He questioned his mother as to who his father was. And where was his father? Upon being told that Kahola was his father and that many years back, he had gone to Raja Janaka's court and that he had not returned, Ashtavakra set out forthwith to find his father. As he was approaching Mithila, a great procession was passing and the guards of Raja Janaka were clearing people out of the way saying, "Make way, the king is coming." Ashtavakra, however, stood his ground and did not move. Something in the boy's demeanour prevented the guards from pushing him aside. They just screamed at him. He merely responded by saying, "What kind of a king is this who does

not make way for women, children, aged and handicapped beings?” Raja Janaka heard this and stopped the security men. He then gave the right of way to Ashtavakra.

The following morning, as Ashtavakra reached the court, he was stopped at the gate by the guards. When asked why they were stopping him, they said that he was too young to proceed. To this he responded, “Wisdom is not judged by grey hair, I am well-versed in the scriptures and have come to challenge Bandhin.” While he made his way, the assembly of great scholars, ministers and counsellors, laughed out loud and long, as they could not see how this deformed child could pose a challenge to Bandhin. After they had stopped laughing, Ashtavakra laughed and laughed till tears rolled down his cheeks.

When he stopped, Raja Janaka asked him the cause of his laughter. To this he replied, “O Great King, you have here a merry company of cobblers! For as I walked in, they saw my skin and laughed! And you call them scholars?” The king was taken aback but still did not offer him a place of honour till he had satisfied himself that the young lad actually knew the scriptures and was not just any upstart.

Once the king felt satisfied, a seat of honour was prepared for Ashtavakra. The great Bandhin sat opposite him to challenge the young lad. The contest was set by Bandhin who said that they would compose verses based on numbers. They each fulfilled their part till they arrived at number thirteen. Thereafter, Bandhin could not complete his verse and Ashtavakra completed it for him instead.

Bandhin lost the contest. Ashtavakra was then asked as to what he would like to do to his opponent. He said that it was only fair that Bandhin meet the same fate as what the others had met at his hands in the past. At this, Bandhin revealed his own true identity as the son of Varuna, the God of the Oceans. He explained that Varuna had required these great scholars to conduct a sacrifice on the seabed. It had taken the past twelve years to complete the sacrifice.

Following this, the scholars were all brought back amidst much rejoicing. When Kahola found his son who had won him back, his joy knew no bounds!

This story shows Raja Janaka's earnestness in finding the truth and his respect for right conduct. There is a well-known saying that goes thus: Wise words should be heeded even if a child utters them. Ashtavakra was merely a child but he knew the Truth both experientially and theoretically; hence no one could ignore him. It is clear that neither age nor physical frame is evidence of Truth. The body maybe bent in eight different places, as was the case with Ashtavakra, however, the TRUTH shone forth in all its glory. That which is infinite, which is indefinable, which is eternal, Is.

Story 3

Yagnyavalkya was one of the most renowned sages. Raja Janaka often attended classes at his ashram and sometimes invited all participants to come to his palace. The sage was very fond of Raja Janaka and would ask him to sit right in front and taught him with great affection. This piqued the monks and other students, who felt neglected. Sage Yagnyavalkya understood this and one day by his own power, created a huge fire. Seeing the fire, an attendant immediately rushed in informing everyone that the palace was on fire and that the fire was devouring everything. All the students ran away trying to salvage their belongings and fearful of losing their lives. The sage however, did not move nor did his faithful disciple who sat listening to him intently. The sage then put out the magic fire. Sheepishly, the students realised how balanced and unmoved Raja Janaka had been, and that he truly deserved his Guru's attention.

Raja Janaka's conduct was exemplary in that his equanimity was not shaken even fractionally. He sat composed, awaiting the command of his Guru. To stay focused with trust in the Guru is the key to attaining

mental equipoise and balance in life. Often we get disturbed by what ‘appears’ to be a disaster and at a later point is proved to be only a minor disturbance. We even wonder why we ever gave in to such a psychological storm. It will do well to remember that appearances are deceptive and a little patience will reveal the truth.

Story 4

Nachiketa was a monk sent to Raja Janaka by his Guru, to learn dispassion. When he came to the palace, he was amazed to see the opulence and felt disgusted. Had it not been for his faith in his Guru, he would have left the place forthwith. Raja Janaka observed him and invited him to go through the grounds of the palace and the city. However, there would be one condition, that, Nachiketa should carry a bowl of oil full to the brim, and not spill even a single drop. One of the senior attendants accompanied Nachiketa and they walked through the many corridors, gardens and roads. In the evening, Raja Janaka met Nachiketa and asked, “How did you like the city? Did you enjoy the processions and festivities and the gardens?” The exhausted monk replied, “What procession? What gardens and what festivities? I did not see anything since my entire focus was on the bowl of oil, lest it got spilt.”

Raja Janaka then explained to the monk that his own focus was only the Brahman. And that The Brahman is all that he could see, no matter what he may be doing!

In this last story, although it seems very difficult to maintain our focus and still juggle worldly things, the same was quite easy for Raja Janaka. This is indeed the case with anyone who has seen through the mirage of material existence.

Raja Janaka dwelt in the peace and joy of his inner being. To him, action was effortless. This is because he was not concerned with its outcome.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter III, Shloka 17:

*Yastv atma-ratir eva syadatma – tryptascamanavah atmany eva ca
santustas tasya kaaryam na vidyate.*

*(But one who remains ecstatic within the Self; Self-illuminated and
fully-satisfied within the Self only; activities do not exist for him.)*

*The above shloka truly applies to Raja Janaka, as the activities did
not apply to him; meaning karma did not accrue as he operated from
the Inner Self.*

*The above stories are not just stories. These have exemplified Raja
Janaka's profound understanding of the truth and the way it helps in
practical life.*

RAJA PARIKSHIT

Raja Parikshit was the sole surviving descendent of the Pandavas. He was in the womb of Uttara, the wife of Abhimanyu, son of Arjun, the greatest archer of the time when, Abhimanyu was killed at war. By the end of the war, all the sons of the Pandavas were murdered by Ashwathama, son of Dronacharya, who wanted to annihilate the Pandavas. He wanted to avenge the death of his father Dronacharya, which was achieved by unfair means. He succeeded in killing them while they were asleep. However, Parikshit escaped, as he was in the womb. When this became known to Ashwathama, he sent a celestial weapon directed at the womb of Uttara. She, in turn, appealed to Shri Krishna who covered the foetus with a golden orb and thereby prevented the weapon from reaching the womb.

Parikshit became a great and good king. No one among his subjects was unhappy and no evil ever entered his kingdom due to his intense inner strength and righteous behaviour. However, inexorable TIME always brings about change and the Yuga was set to change to Kali Yuga. This it could not do while such a pure being ruled a kingdom. It so happened one day that while Raja Parikshit was inspecting the fields in his realm, he found a piteous, wailing cow. She was unable to stand because three of her legs had been severed. This sight immediately angered Parikshit and he asked the cow as to who had brought about this condition. She replied, “It is TIME called Kali who has broken three of my legs.”

The king could not bear to see the cow's state. He went in pursuit of Kali and gave hot chase – Kali could not escape the king. Cunning Kali quickly changed his stance and rushed back to clutch the feet of the righteous king, begging forgiveness and praying for residence in his kingdom. The king categorically declined. Kali symbolised corruption in thought, word and deed. He pleaded with the king that he should not hold the needle of time from changing and therefore should grant him just a small nook in his kingdom. Upon contemplating the words of Kali, Parikshit decided to grant Kali residence in gold, wine and women of ill-repute. It was extremely difficult for Kali to find this space, as all the subjects followed their king in morals and ethics. With great difficulty and manipulation, Kali managed to enter the thoughts of the goldsmith who made and designed the king's crown. A *little* pride entered the goldsmith's mind while appreciating his own workmanship. This happened to be the very crown that King Parikshit wore as he rode out to the forest. After riding for nearly a day, tired and thirsty, he reached the hermitage of Sage Sameeka who was meditating under a tree. The sage was oblivious to the world and hence did not rise to greet the king. The crown was still on the king's head and Kali managed to enter his mind. This resulted in a moment of unusual anger causing the king to flick a dead snake around the neck of the sage.

Shrungi, the son of the sage, came to know of this sacrilege and instantly cursed the king that he would meet his death by snakebite at the end of seven days. When the great Sage Sameeka returned to consciousness, he was appalled to discover what his son Shrungi had done. It was an irrevocable curse for which he chided his son. How could he curse so great a king for so small an offence? He instructed Shrungi to at least inform the king of the curse.



When Parikshit came to know of the curse, his immediate reaction was one of total acceptance and remorse. He wondered how he could have been so conceited as to have flicked a dead snake around the neck of the sage who was in transcendental meditation (*Samadhi*). He even felt that it was a fitting curse. Parikshit had absolutely no feeling of revenge or ideas of counter-cursing Shrungi, which he could have easily done, since he was himself a great *yogi*. Such a thought did not even cross his noble mind

Consequently, he handed over the kingdom to his son Janmajaya, and proceeded to the bank of the holy river, Ganga. Shukracharya, the son of Sage Vyasa who composed the *Shrimad Bhagavad*, fortuitously (this was

only apparently so as it was all a part of a grand design), happened to be passing that way. King Parikshit humbly prostrated himself before Sage Shukracharya and urged him to kindly expound the *Shrimad Bhagavad* while he awaited his death.

Thus, on the banks of the River Ganga, sat Sage Shukracharya and before him King Parikshit. They were also joined by a great assembly of *rishis* and celestial beings. Parikshit sat motionless, listened intently and asked questions, as Shukracharya recited the verses and explained them. No one, just no one could expound the *Shrimad Bhagavad* as Shukracharya did.

In seven days, the recitation of the holy gospel was completed. Soon after the completion, Takshak the king of the cobras came quietly and bit Parikshit who left his body easily, which instantly turned to ashes.

It is a beautiful story but it is not just a story. Once again, the influence of events and vibrations that affect the unborn are exemplified. The mother-to-be should be well-informed about these facts, which today have been scientifically proved. Swami Vivekanand has said that where science and scriptures detract, trust the scriptures. Time has indeed changed and corruption now resides everywhere.

The power of association is so great that even a great aspirant who strived all his life for the attainment of oneness with Shri Krishna, fell prey to the thoughts of a goldsmith. How much more difficult it must be for us to resist peer pressure and the influence of techno-gadgets, and the company that we keep. Indeed, it is so important to choose our friends, something which we can control, whilst we have no control over our blood relations.

Slight pride in the workmanship by the goldsmith affected the sensitive mind of the king, and just by the act of wearing the crown, pride entered his mind. How much more vigilant must we be, who are bombarded by the media and a million other influences that constantly

pull our attention away and lull us into unawareness? Later in the story, we will see how a slight lapse in awareness can create a cascade of disastrous events! At all times we must think, speak and act consciously.

We will also learn that NO ONE, JUST NO ONE, can ever stop TIME.

‘Kalaya tasmainamah!’

(O Time, I bow unto You. The wheel of change must turn.)

Finally, when we receive a wake up call that death is near, we need not fear! For, even a short time is enough, so long as, we are in the right company. The urgency itself will catapult us into knowing the truth. For this to happen though, we need a Guru and unflinching attention.

It is said that the Shrimad Bhagavad Purana should be read to the one who is awaiting death. This would enable the dying person to realise their eternal nature and turn their attention to the Lord, so as to be free of entanglement and the spell of this manifest, ever-changing play.

RAVANA

Ravana is well-known as the demon king of Lanka. He had ten heads and was killed by Shri Rama because he had abducted Shri Rama's wife Sita. Thus, he is the villain of the epic *Ramayana*.

Brahma had ten mind-born sons. Pulatsya was one of them. His sage son was Vishrava who was married to Ilavida. Their son was Kubera. He is also the God of wealth. Vishrava was also married to Kaseiki, daughter of Tataka and Sumali (the demon king). They had three sons – Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, and one daughter, Shurpanakha. Kubera inherited Lanka from his father Vishrava and although he shared the wealth and power with his half-brothers, Ravana revolted against Kubera and overthrew him to become the king of Lanka.

Ravana was intensely devoted to Shiva whom he admired. He did immense penance to please him. So much so, that he even cut his own head off, which grew back immediately by the divine grace of Shiva. This happened again and again for a total of ten times. Shiva, in turn, blessed him with infinite knowledge and thus, Ravana got ten heads. They represent the four Vedas and six *shastras*.

There is another version, which suggests that they represent all the weaknesses that a man suffers from, i.e. *Krodha* (anger), *Kama* (lust), *Lobha* (greed), *Moha* (delusion), *Mad* (arrogance), *Matsar* (jealousy), *Manas* (mind), *Chitta* (will), *Buddhi* (intellect) and *Ahankara* (Ego).

His name at birth was Dashgriva. The name Ravana was given to him by Lord Shiva. As I have narrated above, he was an ardent devotee of Shiva and desired to transport Mount Kailash, the abode of Shiva in the

Himalayas, to Lanka. When he tried to lift the mountain, Shiva just put his toe down and crushed Ravana's finger. His roar was such that Shiva named him Ravana (one who roars loudly). The immense power of Shiva enamoured Ravana so much that he composed the *Rudra Stotram* (prayer in verse) for Shiva. He is also credited with having designed the Rudra veena, which he played exquisitely. He converted one of his heads into the gourd, one arm as the beam and his nerves as the strings. He played this veena for his beloved Shiva.

Shri Rama needed to perform a *yagna* to seek the blessings of Shiva before he built the bridge to cross the ocean to Lanka. For this, he required a *purohit* (priest) and Ravana is credited to have officiated, for he was half-Brahmin and in fact, the grandson of Brahma. In many places like Lanka, Bali and Indonesia, Ravana is worshipped as the greatest devotee of Shiva.



At the end of the battle against Shri Rama, when Ravana lay dying on the battlefield, Shri Rama sent Lakshmana to him so that he could learn from Ravana how to rule; so vast was his knowledge!

Lakshmana went close to Ravana's head and requested Ravana to impart his knowledge to him. Ravana just rolled his heads and scowled at him. When Lakshmana retreated, Shri Rama advised Lakshmana that he should go back again, bowing before Ravana and sitting at his feet awaiting instructions.

Accordingly, this time, Lakshmana approached Ravana most humbly and requested, "Shri Ravana, would you kindly enlighten us regarding the tenets which will help us to rule wisely?"

Ravana turned to him and said, "I speak, even though your brother knows everything, but would like me to share my experience with you:

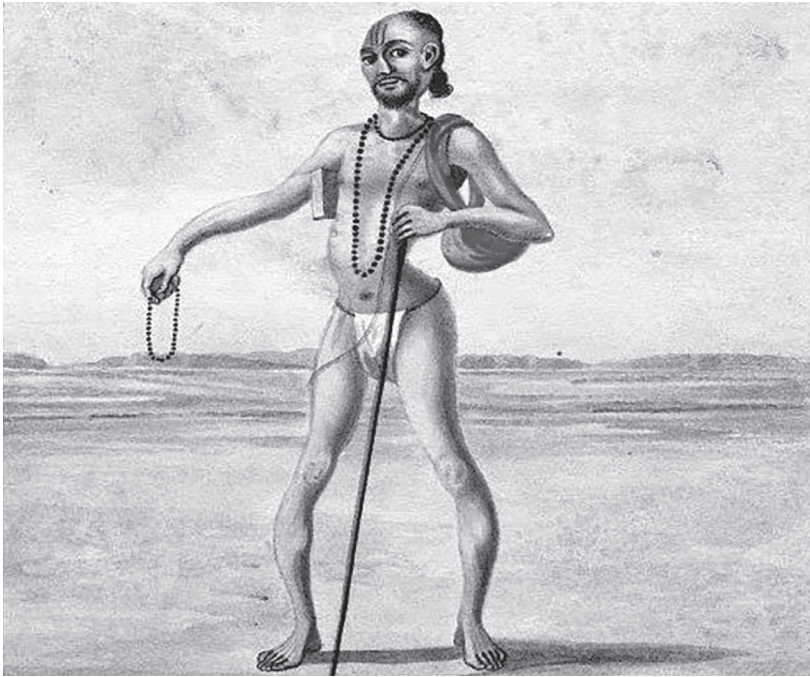
1. If you would like to do something good, do it immediately. Do not procrastinate. If you want to do something bad, procrastinate as much as possible, you might be saved from evil thoughts and action. I did exactly the reverse and such is my condition today.
2. Never antagonise your charioteer, your gatekeeper, your cook or your brother. They can harm you at any time.
3. Even if you are a winner do not think you will always win.
4. Always listen to and trust the minister who criticises you.
5. Never underestimate your enemy however small or powerless he may seem, as I did with Hanuman.
6. Destiny will bring what is in store for you. Never imagine you can outsmart your stars.
7. You may either love God or hate Him but do so intensely. It will bear fruit. Shri Rama had to incarnate to take my life.
8. Greed must be suppressed as soon as it raises its ugly head, if you wish to win glory.

9. Greed arises from attachment to the objects of the senses. If the senses are put in their proper place, they become windows to knowledge but if pursued, they become channels of contamination.”

Ravana said that he had learnt all this from bitter experience and before parting, he blessed Lakshmana.

SAGE ASHTAVAKRA

In the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata* there is the story of Ashtavakra told by Sage Lomasa to the Pandavas. The sage meets the Pandavas as they travel to the forest, having been banished for thirteen years by Duryodhana, after losing the game of dice against the Kauravas. Sage Lomasa tells King Yudhishtira that Kahola asked his son Ashtavakra to bathe in this great river, Samanga, when he won the debate in the court of Raja Janaka. Instantly, Ashtavakra was cured of his deformities.



Ashtavakra was known for his wisdom, truth and explicit exposition of true knowledge.

“A grey head does not make an elder; not by years, not by grey hairs, not by riches nor by relations did the seers make this law.

He who is great to us, is one who has learning.”

– *Wisdom of Ashtavakra*.

(Recommended reading – *Ashtavakra Gita*.)

Ashtavakra was born with eight deformities. The story is that his father Kahola was the disciple of the great Sage Uddalaka, the author of the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Uddalaka was so pleased with Kahola that he had his own daughter Sujata married to him. As per ancient belief, even today in India, a pregnant girl is made to listen to renditions of Vedic Chants and encouraged to read spiritual literature. Sujata would sit with Kahola *listening with rapt attention* to Uddalaka. One day, as Kahola was chanting, the foetus squirmed in the womb every time there was a mispronunciation. Kahola thought that this was arrogance on the part of the foetus and cursed him to be born deformed in eight places. This is what happened and he was therefore named Ashtavakra.

There is a story that Raja Janaka was once listening to a *pandit* who was reading a treatise which explained that realisation could be had within the short space of time required to step onto the other stirrup while mounting a horse. This made Janaka ask the *pandit* whether he (the *pandit*) could bring this about in his own case. The *pandit* confessed that this was not something that he could do! Janaka was vexed and commanded that the *pandit* be put into the dungeons. Because the *pandit* would not accept that the scriptures were making false claims, and he could not prove them right either. Other great scholars were similarly dealt with and soon, there were a great number of them in the dungeons.

At this time it so happened, that Ashtavakra was passing through the city of Mithila. He heard about the plight of the *pandits* and went to meet Raja Janaka. He said that he could prove the scriptures right. However, his first demand was that all the scholars be released from the dungeons.

He further told Janaka that this great secret could not be demonstrated in front of the court and therefore, they should meet in the forest the next day. Something in the demeanour of Ashtavakra made Raja Janaka trust him and so he did as he was bade.

The following morning when he presented himself in seclusion at the appointed place, Ashtavakra said, “You do realise that this makes you my disciple, and the Guru-disciple relationship is one of total surrender on the part of the disciple and total truthfulness on the part of the Guru?” Raja Janaka bowed his head, touched the Guru’s feet and affirmed that he surrendered totally. Even as he said this he was transfixed and just stood in front of his Guru. Ashtavakra quietly disappeared.

When the king did not return till sundown, his ministers got worried and a search party was sent into the forest. Janaka was found still standing in front of the hut of Ashtavakra. There was no sign of Ashtavakra. Somehow they managed to lift the king and bring him back to the palace.

The next morning, a diligent search was made for Ashtavakra, as the ministers felt that he had cast a spell on the king and only he could release it. Ashtavakra came and simply said, “Janaka! What is this?” Janaka immediately got up and prostrated himself before his Guru. Upon being instructed by the Guru, he went to the assembly and conducted the day’s duties as usual. Ashtavakra then came to the assembly and demonstrated the truth of the *shastras* by asking the king to climb a horse that was brought for that purpose and proclaimed that before he could mount the horse, Raja Janaka would be Self-realised!

Thus, in an instant, while his other foot was still in the air, the illusion of, “I am this body” was clearly seen by Raja Janaka no longer did the fear of suffering or death haunt him. For he now identified with the eternal principle within. Empowered thus, he ruled the kingdom wisely and well for many centuries by the grace of his Guru Ashtavakra, who proved the treatise right.

While realisation of the Self is instantaneous, it requires preparation of the mind and the grace of the Guru. To realise even simple home truths, experience and the presence of one who has walked the path before, is mandatory.

SHABARI

Shabari, the daughter of a hunter, ran away the day before her wedding as her father had gathered 1,000 sheep and goats to be sacrificed for the occasion. Her tender heart could not bear the agony of the animals. But then, this was the custom in ancient times.

Along the beautiful lake, Pampasar, was the ashram of Sage Matang who was very wise and could easily discern the worth of a disciple. Shabari approached him for spiritual initiation after having been refused by several teachers because she was of low birth and a woman at that. He let her join his other disciples much against the protests and disapprovals of the other sages who decried him for this. He told Shabari that she could look after the ashram and serve the animals and he, in turn, would instruct her in the highest wisdom. He knew her potential for dedicated service and devotion.

Time went by and Sage Matang was now old. As he lay dying, Shabari was distraught and asked him to take her with him. He replied that she must promise to live. That, none other than Shri Rama, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu would come to meet her one day. In this hope she prayed day and night and waited patiently for the *darshan* of Shri Rama.

She became old but not impatient. One day, as she was going to bring water from the beautiful lake, one of the other sages who thought that an outcaste woman was polluting the water, threw a stone at her and hurt her ankle. A drop of her blood fell into the water and the whole lake became bloody. She hastily withdrew into her ashram. Now all the sages in the

vicinity were enraged and tried to clear the water by reciting *mantras*, *aushadhees* (medicines) and other means. All this to no avail!

At this very moment, someone came with the news that Shri Rama was in the forest looking for his wife Sita, and a touch of his holy feet would surely clear the water. Accordingly, they beseeched him to come. And even though he stepped into the lake, bathed in it and cleaned his mouth with it, the water remained blood-coloured. He then enquired as to how the water had become this way. One of the sages explained that it was the blood of the low caste woman Shabari, which had polluted it. Shri Rama said, “Oh, no wonder it did not clear by my touch. This is not blood from her ankle, it is from her own heart. I have come here to meet her!”

Every day, Shabari would clean her hut and go out to pick the sweetest berries. She would place them in a bowl made from tree leaves, hoping that Shri Rama would come one day to partake of them! And today, she heard that he had come! She ran out to meet him as fast as her old legs could carry her and in the process, dust from her feet flew into the lake water which dramatically cleared. She lay prostrate before Shri Rama and begged him to grace her little hut in the ashram.

Shri Rama along with Lakshmana, eagerly went with her. She offered the berries to her beloved Shri Rama with utmost humility. Each berry had been tasted before and only



the sweet ones had been retained. Shri Rama gladly partook of them while Lakshmana could not bring himself to eat what someone else had bitten and tasted. He surreptitiously threw away each one offered to him. Shabari advised Shri Rama to make contact with Sugriva, the exiled king of the monkey land, for help in finding *Sita*, the beloved of Shri Rama.

Compassion symbolises the destruction of the EGO and it arises in its true sense only after dispassion or non-attachment. Shabari had lost her attachment to her home and environment as she was filled with compassion. She could not bear the killing of so many innocent animals just because she was getting married. This led to non-attachment to 'me and mine,' just as easily as a snake casts its skin! She fled her home to find the true meaning of life.

When one identifies with the limited, 'I', one becomes selfish, jealous, greedy, and so on. The moment this identification drops, all is seen as self. These entrapments fall away. Shri Rama was God Incarnate. When Shabari offered half-eaten fruit, he felt the depth of her love and there exists no separation between her, him or the fruit. Unlike him, Lakshmana just throws the fruit over his shoulder. For to him, it would seem like to us, that the fruit is contaminated! There is great separation between the fruit, himself and Shabari. Aversion and Craving occur in duality; none exists in Oneness.

VALMIKI

Shri Rama was an Incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the Treta Yuga and took birth to restore the imbalance between Good and Evil by killing demons such as Taraka, Mareecha, many others, as well as Ravana who had abducted his divine wife *Sita*. The *Ramayana* was written by Sage Valmiki and first read out to Luv and Kush, the twin sons of Shri Rama.

We will begin with Sage Valmiki.

In a dense forest lived a dacoit named Ratnakar who made his living by looting people and occasionally killing them, if they did not co-operate. It so happened that once, Narada, the celestial devotee of Lord Vishnu, was passing through the forest, singing the glory of the Lord. Even he was not spared by Ratnakar who accosted him. Narada calmly enquired, “Do you know how much bad *karma* you are accumulating? Why do you do this?” Ratnakar replied, “I do it to feed and protect my family.” Narada gently asked again, “Will your family partake of your bad *karma*?” Ratnakar said, “Of course, they will.” Narada said, “I will wait here. Go and ask them and if anyone answers yes, I am willing to do whatever you say.” Notwithstanding this, Ratnakar tied Narada to a tree.

It was strange that Ratnakar, who never previously hesitated for a moment to assault anyone, was today impelled to listen. This was so, because the previous night he had perched himself on a high branch of a Bilva tree, waiting to hunt any passing game. That particular day was Maha Shivratri and at the base of the tree was a *Pindi* (an oval-shaped stone – the symbol of Shiva). It had rained a little and as he climbed, a leaf of the tree and few drops of water fell on the *Pindi*. It so happened that in the early

hours of the evening a female deer passed by. Ratnakar was about to shoot his arrow when she cried piteously, praying that she had to feed her young one and would be right back, if he would be so kind as to permit her to do so. As he had inadvertently worshipped Shiva, he acceded to her wish.

The deer, true to her word, returned to the spot! He took position to shoot her. Once again, a leaf and a few drops of water fell on the *Pindi*. He simultaneously heard another cry. This time, that of a male deer begging to be killed instead of his wife. Ratnakar paused. Yet another leaf fell on the *Pindi*. By this time, it was the early hours of the morning. He noticed three little foals running to their parents, oblivious of the danger. He could not believe that here, he had a good meal ready for his entire family, which he could even stack up and enjoy for a while! On the other hand, what was he actually thinking? This was quite an abnormal situation for him! What was even stranger, was the fact that he had let them all go!

He then descended from the tree. At this point, a fourth leaf and some water fell on the *Pindi* and his worship was thus complete. He had actually kept an all-night vigil and had worshipped the *Pindi* every three hours; albeit inadvertently.

He suddenly realised that he was empty-handed and that his family was hungry. This was when the grace of the Guru descended upon him, as Narada passed that way. Ratnakar had no option but to clutch at the last straw like a drowning man.

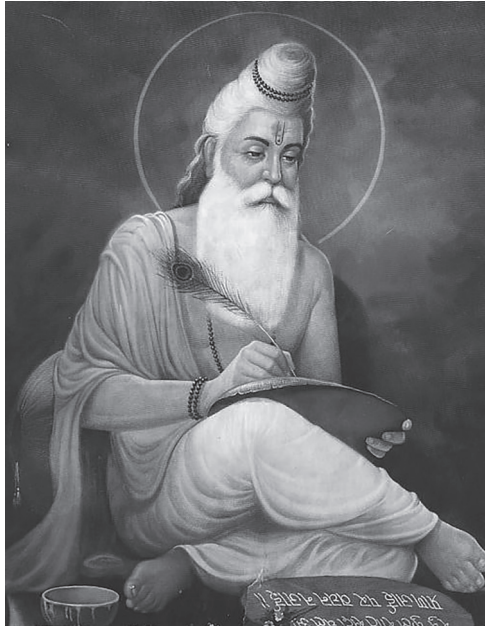
First he went to his parents, as only the love of parents is unconditional. They replied, “When you were a baby and young, we worked hard and fed you and did whatever we could to bring you up righteously. Now it is your duty to look after us. We will not partake in the *karma* accruing to you.”

Disappointed, he went to his wife. After all she was his *ardhangini* (half body), partner in life. Even she refused, saying that it was his duty to feed and look after her and the children. Just as it was her duty to take care of his parents and the children. Dejected, he returned to where he had tied Narada and asked for his forgiveness and guidance.

It is said that Narada told him to recite *Ram-a Ram-a Ram-a*. Ratnakar just sat under the same tree, and without question chanted the Lord's name. Initially, he could not even recite *Ram-a*. He chanted *mara, mara, mara* and simply sat. Years and years passed. Ants built houses all over him. So much so that he got buried under the anthills. This is how he got his name Valmiki (one who is buried under anthills).

Narada once again happened to be passing that way and heard a faint sound coming from near the tree *ram, ram, ram*. He realised that this was the same Ratnakar he had left chanting the Lord's name and dug him out of the anthills. He raised him to his feet and blessed him so that he may write the story of Shri Rama's life, one who was yet to be Incarnated. And so it is that the great epic *Ramayana* got to be composed.

Ratnakar, despite being a dacoit, was a simple man who realised his error and just accepted the Guru's advice with an unquestioning attitude! Every sinner has a future, every saint has a past and this brings hope and confidence to each one of us. We only need to be dedicated. The blessed grace of the Guru upholds us through the difficult times.



Another story is that one day, the celestial sage and Valmiki's Guru, Narada visited Valmiki, and told him that while the *Ramayana* written by him was exquisite, the one written by Shri Hanuman was divine. Hanuman had written the *Ramayana* with total and complete devotion. Upon hearing this Valmiki went to the banana forest where Shri Hanumanji had written the *Ramayana* on banana leaves. Valmiki read this divinely-composed *Ramayana* and burst into tears. Shri Hanuman was perplexed. He wondered whether he had made gross grammatical errors, Valmiki humbly confessed that it was so beautiful that no one would want to read the *Ramayana* written by him after reading this one. It was so absorbing that it surpassed the Valmiki *Ramayana* in beauty and grace.

On hearing this, Hanumanji immediately destroyed his own version of the *Ramayana* and thus ensured that Valmiki would never be forgotten.

Such was the greatness of Hanumanji. He is therefore worshipped and Sage Valmiki is venerated. When the 'I' is relinquished, the Universe is You.

YUDHISHTHIRA

The greatest epic in the world history is the *Mahabharata*, wherein, what is not given, does not exist! Thus, every life situation, every emotion, every response and every guidance for behaviour, every aspiration and every answer to the myriad questions arising in the mind, is to be found in this grand epic. It is thought to have been written 3,000 years ago and is partly historical and seems partly mythological. It is hard for us to believe for instance, that the Pandavas were conceived by their mother, simply by invoking the *mantra* connected to a certain God. Yet, once that hurdle of incredulity is crossed, we find an unsurpassed wealth of knowledge. Yudhishtira was the eldest of the Pandavas and was born to Kunti, the wife of Pandu, on invoking the God of Dharma. The name Yudhishtira, means one who is ‘still in battle.’ He was so honest that even his opponents looked up to him and would ask him for validation of facts – for they knew that he would never lie.

When in exile, the Pandavas, were one day approached by a Brahmin who complained that a deer had run away with his Arani, which is the stick used to light the fire for the *yagnas* (fire worship) and requested that they retrieve it for him. Sure enough, they saw a deer in the distance and gave chase but the deer was exceptionally fast and they could not get to him. Tired and thirsty they looked around for water. Nakula climbed up a tree and spotted a lake in the distance. He was duly sent to fetch water from the lake. As soon as he neared, he heard a voice, “Beware, answer my questions before you touch the water else you will die.” Not finding anyone in sight, he scooped up a handful of water. No sooner had he touched it to his lips, than he fell dead.

One by one, each of the brothers fell prey to the lake. Finally, Yudhishtira came to the lake in search of his brothers. Horrified, he found them all lying dead at the edge of the lake... and then he heard the same voice telling him that his brothers had met their fate, for they had partaken of the water without answering the questions. Yudhishtira wisely, agreed to answer the questions to the best of his ability and humbly asked, "May I know who you are, sir? You seem to have caused the death of my brothers."

The voice was that of a Yaksha (**Yaksha**, Sanskrit), a name given to a broad class of nature-spirits, usually benevolent, who are caretakers of the natural treasures hidden in the earth and tree roots. He manifested himself before Yudhishtira and asked the following questions:

- Q1. What equals the ocean?
A: The sky equals the ocean.
- Q2. Who is the mother of humans?
A: The cow.
- Q3. What is thinner than water?
A: Knowledge.
- Q4. What is darker than *kajal* (*kohl*)?
A: A bad reputation.
- Q5. What is greater than the earth?
A: Mother.
- Q6. What is greater than the sky?
A: Father.
- Q7. What is faster than the wind?
A: The mind is faster than the wind.

Q8. What is more numerous than grass?

A: Thoughts.

Q9. Of all the riches, what is the best?

A: Health is wealth.

Q10. What is the greatest wonder?

A: Man sees his near and dear ones die right before him and still never thinks he will himself die.

Q11. What when renounced, makes one rich?

A: Desire.

Q12. What when renounced, makes one happy?

A: Greed.

Q13. What when renounced, makes one agreeable?

A: Pride.

Q14. What when renounced, leaves no regret?

A: Anger.

Q15. What can compare with the brightness of the sun?

A: Knowledge.

Q16. Who is a great man?

A: The one who practices non-violence.

Several more questions attributed to this situation in the *Mahabharata* are quoted. However, the story further goes: the Yaksha, satisfied by the answers of Yudhishtira now granted Yudhishtira the life of one of his brothers and asked him to choose the brother he would like to return to life. Without hesitation Yudhishtira asked that his brother Nakula be given back life. On questioning why (since Bheema and Arjuna were his mother's children and the other two were the sons of Madri, the second

wife of Pandu), Yudhishtira replied that to him, both the mothers had the same standing. Therefore, he chose Nakula.

As for his own mother Kunti, Yudhishtira was alive. Whereas for Madri, there would be no one. Once again, the Yaksha was pleased and asked him to choose one more brother and this time, Yudhishtira chose Sahadeva. He explained that Sahadeva was the youngest and it was his *dharma* to protect him. The Yaksha was extremely pleased and revealed himself to be none other than Dharma himself, the *mantric* father of Yudhishtira, and he granted that all the brothers be restored to life.

Thus it is:

1. ***To have patience to listen even if we are tired and thirsty/hungry.***
2. ***To place truth and dharma above attachment and desire, and victory is sure to be attained.***
3. ***Indeed, the answers to the Yaksha's questions are a learning in themselves.***

During the reign of Yudhishtira as the Emperor of Bharat Varsha, he usually held court. As it happened, one day, when he was extremely busy, a Brahmin approached him for a gift of gold since he needed to get his daughter married. Yudhishtira requested the Brahmin to come the next day as on that particular day, he had many urgent cases to deal with.

As the day progressed, he noticed first that the palace was getting decorated, and then that the streets were decorated and preparations for great festivities were underway. Musicians and dancers, comedians and actors were preparing to present their fare. On asking his ministers as to what was happening, he was told that Bheema had ordered all of this. Yudhishtira called Bheema and asked him the reason for these festivities. He got an enigmatic reply. He said, "My brother is the only one in the world who knows that he would be alive the next day and so I am celebrating."

On reflection, Yudhishtira realised that he had told the Brahmin to come the next day for the gold and that his sharp brother had noted this. He immediately sent for the Brahmin and gave him the gold needed for his daughter's wedding.

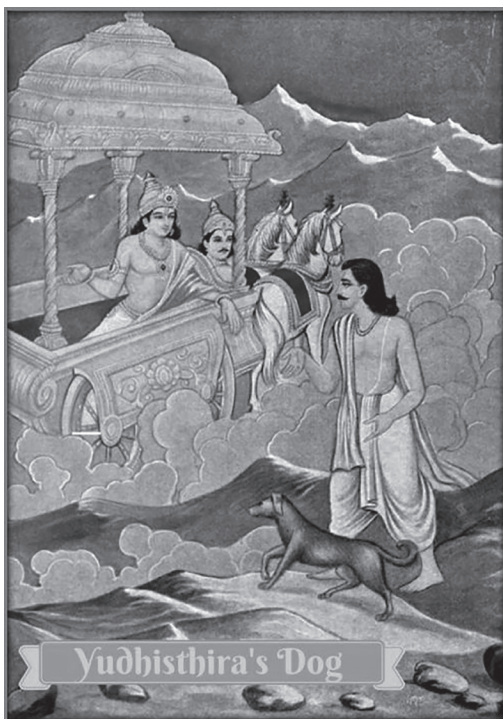
Thus, we learn never to leave any good deed to be done for the morrow, for no one knows what is in store for him.

The great Kurukshetra war was over between the Kauravas and Pandavas. Shri Krishna had completed the purpose of his incarnation on earth. Yudhishtira had also ruled peacefully for many years. The Pandavas decided to crown the only surviving descendent, Arjuna's grandson Parikshit and leave every material possession and attachment. Accordingly, they along with Draupadi and a loyal dog, started walking towards the Himalayan peaks beyond Kedarnath, to Mount Sumeru, their destination. As they walked, first Draupadi fell dead, followed by Nakula and Sahadeva. Even Arjuna dropped by the wayside, eventually Bheema too.

It is said that Draupadi fell because she loved Arjuna more than she did the other brothers. Nakula was proud of his looks and Sahadeva of his learning. Arjuna fell because he was proud of his archery and because he did not allow Ekalavya to learn from his Guru, Dronacharya. Bheema was vexed that Yudhishtira did not even look back at those falling along the way, but Yudhishtira knew that the time had come to cut asunder all attachments.

Yudhishtira, then focused entirely on the inner truth. At the peak of the mountain he was met by a chariot sent by the King of Heaven, Indra and was asked to board it, leaving behind the dog. He refused, saying that the dog was his loyal friend and could not be abandoned. The dog was none other than his father Dharma, who then manifested himself, and was very pleased with his son.

As they ascended to heaven, he found that neither Draupadi nor any of his brothers were there. He was told that they were atoning for their sins in hell. Yudhishtira immediately asked to be taken there. The road was dark and steep and along the way, he saw many a terrible sight. He saw rivers flowing with blood and people writhing in hot cauldrons. A terrible stench pervaded. He heard the moaning of his brothers and Draupadi was begging him to stay, since his arrival had caused a gentle breeze to blow and cool them. He just did not move. Such was his sacrifice.



The illusion immediately vanished and he was back with his brothers and Draupadi in heaven. This was a small retribution he had to undergo for the half-truth he had spoken during the war.

This story exemplifies several beautiful tenets.

First, dharma (in the form of the dog), follows one to the end.

Second, each of us has to leave, howsoever long we may live. If we voluntarily abandon the pleasures of the world and its attractions, which actually trap and entice us, we shall easily be in heaven right here and also deserve it after death. Thirdly, love and sacrifice are the true victors. For even when Yudhishtira was placed in hell, he preferred to bring happiness by his mere presence than to leave and enjoy the pleasures of heaven all by himself.

Finally, his equanimity was the ultimate in practice. For nothing except truth and Dharma appealed to him. Even hell held no fear or disgust.

Yudhishtira, along with his brothers and Draupadi was banished to live in the forest for twelve years. And for one year again, incognito, after the game of dice with Duryodhana, in which he had lost having staked his all. During this time they dwelt by a river in a hermitage. Duryodhana, not satisfied with the treatment he had meted out to the Pandavas, wanted to gloat over the Lordship of Indraprastha that he was presently enjoying. Karna, sensing this, arranged a *Ghosh Yatra* (which is taken by the king or general to inspect conditions in any part of the country) to the opposite bank of the river with the entourage of queens, Dushasana and the other brothers, to enjoy a few days so as to be in the view of the Pandavas and flaunt their glory.

Indra in the heavens saw this and got enraged. He decided to invite Chitrasena, the Chief of the Gandharvas who are celestial beings known for their music and dance. Unknown to others, they are great warriors as well. Indra expressed to Chitrasena that he wanted to teach Duryodhana a lesson and that he should take his army and descend upon earth to make hell for Duryodhana. This filled Chitrasena with great pride and love, for he felt that he was the chosen one by the Lord of the Heavens. Also, he had a special affection for Arjun, to whom he had taught the art of dance and music. Swiftly, he descended to the spot and ordered some of his Gandharvas to make some mischief with Duryodhana's people.

Karna saw this and called his army to attention. He decided to wage war against the Gandharvas, much to the delight of Duryodhana. Little did he realise the power of the Gandharvas. The powerful army of Duryodhana was reduced to pulp and even the mighty Karna was not to be seen.

Chitrasena presented himself and ordered his men to take Duryodhana and his queens along with Dushasana, prisoner. Two soldiers of Duryodhana's army who had escaped, knew where Yudhishtira dwelt. They came running and trembling to him for the protection of their King Duryodhana, pleading for help. Bheema, seeing the plight of Duryodhana, jeered and said, "Well, it serves them right." Arjuna too was amused. However, Yudhishtira looked grim and advised his brothers that 'they must go to the aid of Duryodhana. The Kauravas were their brothers and an outside enemy should not know of the split within.'

Thus the brothers challenged the Gandharvas who merely laughed. Hadn't they just demolished the army of Duryodhana? These were just four men! Bheema responded by saying that each one of them was an army by themselves and they had come to release Duryodhana. To the great astonishment of the Gandharva army, the five Pandavas felled almost their entire army. Chitrasena then came forward to behold Arjun, whom he loved, and he realised that the Pandavas could never be defeated. Accordingly, on Yudhishtira's request, Chitrasena released Duryodhana, who was smiting under the effect of profound shame. He, however, approached only Arjuna, and said that Arjuna could ask him any one boon whenever he felt he needed it. Arjuna, holding his anger back, said he would do so when the time was right.

In daily life, it is seen that greed has no end and nor does jealousy. However, they end in misery, making us eat humble pie in the end.

Yudhishtira, always right in his conduct, took decisions with a tranquil mind and never gave in to any emotional turbulence.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter IV, Shloka 22:

**Yadruchha labhsantushto dvandvatito vimatsara,
Sama sidhaavsisidhau cha krutva api na nibhadyate.**

(Content with whatever comes of its own accord, beyond dualities, devoid of jealousy, equi-poised in success or failure, to such a one, even though performing action, karma.)

The great war of Kurukshetra became inevitable as the vile Duryodhana refused to compromise and all peaceful attempts to avert the war ended in his saying that he would not part with even a pinhead of land for the Pandavas to live on. Even though Bheeshma, the Grand Sire, was the General of the Kaurava army and fought valiantly, it seemed as though the Kauravas would lose. That is when Duryodhana remembered that only Bheeshma had the power to demolish the Pandavas as he had five celestial arrows which meant certain death of the Pandavas. He went and chided the Grand Sire that he had been tardy in using the arrows.

Bheeshma listened with quiet resignation and with his entire concentration, poured the merit of his entire life into the arrows. Duryodhana watched the arrows glow in a golden hue and felt certain that the next day would be the end of the war and victory would certainly be theirs. However, he did not trust Bheeshma and pleaded that he be given the arrows for safe keeping. Bheeshma tried to reason with Duryodhana that he should trust him but to no avail. Finally he handed the arrows to Duryodhana, who took them, jubilant as though the war was over. As the fighting had ceased for the day, he carried his precious treasure to his tent.

In the meantime the Pandava spy ran to Shri Krishna to relate the entire episode. When Shri Krishna heard that Bheeshma had prepared the arrows, his face clouded and turned grim. But as the spy continued to inform him that the arrows were now in the possession of Duryodhana, a slow smile passed over his face. He called Arjuna and instructed him to go disguised to Duryodhana's tent, and ask for the boon that Duryodhana had granted Arjuna when they had faced imprisonment with the Gandharva chief.

A hooded figure entered the tent of Duryodhana, who was proudly gazing at the arrows and had his back turned towards the entry to the tent. He, however, perceived the entry of this figure and turned sharply saying, "Who is this? How did you get in?" Arjuna dropped his hood

and confronted Duryodhana, reminding him of his promise of granting him a boon when the Pandavas had rescued him from the Gandharvas. Duryodhana felt the commitment of his word and felt all power draining from him as he realised what Arjuna would ask for! And so it was that Arjuna got the arrows that otherwise would have spelt the death of the Pandavas.

As soon as Arjuna left with the arrows, Duryodhana rushed to the tent of Bheeshma cursing himself and begging the Grand Sire to recreate the arrows. Bheeshma's answer was that all his energy was now depleted and he could no longer bring forth the power he had invested into the arrows.

Lack of trust and a suspicious mind ended in total defeat for Duryodhana and his clan.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter IV, Shloka 40:

**Adnyashchaashraddhanashcha sanshayatma vinashyati,
naayam lokosti na paro na sukham sanshayatma.**

(He who lacks discrimination, is devoid of faith and is at the same time possessed by doubt, is lost to the spiritual path. For the doubting soul, there is neither this world nor the world beyond, not even happiness.)

It is seen that nothing actually works without faith. Even in every simple act which we apparently perform, an underlying faith is a must for its accomplishment. The doubting Thomas has no friends and only rushes to his ruin.

SECTION II
GURU STORIES

Stories Gurus like to tell...

It has been my great good fortune to have met many Masters. They point the way to Self-realisation.

First and foremost, was my mother at whose lotus feet this book is dedicated. She was a scholar of Sanskrit and a spiritual seeker. As children, we did Shirdi Baba's aarti every evening before meals, a practice we have followed till date. I being her youngest child, I was her shadow and she took me to almost all the living Gurus of her time.

Osho, when he was Acharya Rajneesh was her colleague in Robertson College, Jabalpur. At the time I was 12-years-old and she took me almost every day to his home for meditation classes.

Then on, it was Sathya Sai Baba for about 6–7 years. Then Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri, who initiated me in Kundalini Yoga. To me he is my primary Guru, to whom I owe this genuine glimpse into another dimension.

We met Chinmayananda, Dada Vaswani, and Goenkaji the Guru of Vipassana. At her insistence, I met Nisargadatta Maharaj one of the greatest Gurus of the Advaita philosophy. He was her ultimate Guru. Finally, I met Swami Rama of the Himalayas but that is another story.

His disciple, Swami Veda Bharati taught me practical Yoga. And once while I was at his ashram in Rishikesh I attended a satsang of Shri Mooji. He is a disciple of Shri H.L. Poonjiaji fondly known as Papaji, who was the disciple of Shri Ramana Maharshi.

Sadhguru is a well-respected contemporary Guru, who speaks on every subject under the sun including the Sun itself, with such authority that it commands our utmost respect.

It is with deep reverence for all the Gurus – those mentioned and many not mentioned – that I owe my love for the Divine and at whose feet I could get a glimpse of the greater power, such that I am certain there is a deeper meaning to existence than merely the material.

So often, they expound deep philosophical truths with small anecdotes, which touch the heart and appeal to the mind. Some stories I present here for the reader to enjoy. It could have even been a separate book by itself but...

Stories Swami Rama told

Story 1

As a disciple, Swami Rama took several liberties with his Guru. For indeed Swami Rama was the beloved of his Guru. So one day he told his Guru, “You make me work so hard... practice this, practice that, if only you bestowed your grace, everything could be so easy!” At this, his Guru told him to get two litres of milk and a vessel. Swamiji did as he was told. Then the Guru started pouring the milk into the vessel in which he had just made a hole. Needless to say, the milk was dripping on the floor. Exasperated, Swamiji shouted, “What are you doing? Now I will have to clean this floor!” The Guru replied, “Grace is always flowing over you but you have made holes in your discipline and psyche; hence nothing remains.”

So often it is seen that the sadhaka (spiritual seeker) has become slack with the spiritual practice, indulging in gossip, or getting attached to the fruit of the practice. All these and many more are the holes we

need to plug for our sadhana to bear fruit and for it to consolidate. Again, expecting results of sadhana is one subtle reason why results do not become apparent. Vigilance is the key.

Story 2

There was a King and Queen who were celebrating their anniversary with a lot of fanfare. A fair was arranged and everyone was invited to sell their wares. The King and Queen went to the fair and bought many things. However, one stall intrigued them the most. It was an empty stall with just one box kept on the table for sale. When the lone salesman was asked what he had to sell he said, “Well, your Majesty, this box has a genie that will do your work immediately. Then you will not need to employ anyone. But it costs a lot and if no work is given to the genie, it will swallow the owner.”

The King was not very interested as the salesman refused to show him the genie unless the box was purchased. They went home. The Queen, however, could not sleep and insisted on buying the genie. She convinced the King that there was enough work at the palace and truly, she needed someone all the time. They paid the price and brought the genie home. True to the salesman words, the genie instantly completed every job given to it and was ready for more. All day and all night it worked. They got the palace painted, cleared every nook and corner, tailored the children’s clothes, scrubbed the floors, tended the great gardens and all of this was accomplished in a flash. For fear of being swallowed, the Queen kept on creating work for the genie. So much so that she was herself exhausted and near collapse.

The King called his trusted minister and begged him for a solution. After some thought, the minister came up with a brilliant idea. He installed a pole in the middle of the garden and asked the Queen to tell the genie that its only job was to climb up the pole and as soon as it reached the top, it should come down; and as soon as it got down, it should climb up

again. This solution worked very well indeed and finally the Queen got some rest.

The analogy is simple. The genie is the mind which is restless and gives us no respite. The minister is our Guru who gives us sound advice. The pole is the breath and the mantra given by the Guru, is the form of the mind. The genie-mind is asked to recite it all the time, going up and down the pole of breath; and one then can find peace and quietly rest in our true nature, while the genie is kept busy doing his work.

There is a saying in Marathi: “Kallta ahey pann vallat nahee,” meaning ‘it is understood but cannot be practised.’ This is obviously due to the habit patterns which force us into a behaviour we have no control over, becoming slaves of our mind. There has to be a way out and it is this. To bring the mind under control the habit of breath awareness, Japa is extremely effective. The genie-mind then becomes subservient to Buddhi or intellect which has the power of discrimination. No longer are we slaves, but we become the masters of our mind. This leads to unbound happiness and peace.

Stories by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

Story 3

Shankar Pillai applied for a job to the Britannia Company. They were looking for a far-sighted executive, and at the interview, they asked Shankar Pillai, “What is further, the moon or Mumbai?” After a brief pause, Shankar Pillai answered with confidence, “Mumbai.” Shocked at the answer, the interview panel nevertheless wanted to know why he thought so, “Well,” he answered simply, “At night, I see the moon but I cannot see Mumbai!” Quite logical, but entirely false.

There is no way we can find the truth if we trusted only our senses. Our situation is similar when we are asked to look within, because we keep on trusting our senses and complain that truth is impossible to find. What is meant is that we should drop all that which is external to who we are, i.e. the body, our thoughts, our emotions and our intellect with all their conditionings. It is the withdrawal from sensory stimuli that introduces us, to our true nature, which is PURE BEING. Then and then alone, will Truth stand revealed inside this facade of delusion.

Story 4

A sadhu once decided that it was just too crowded in the town and that he should walk up to the Himalayas and meditate in the forests there. So up he went and diligently looked for a place. He had heard that God provides for those who think of Him, and so he had nothing to fear. He meditated all day and by evening, he was getting quite hungry. He was sure, however, that he would be taken care of and continued in his contemplation while sitting under a tree. Soon, he heard a lion's roar in the distance. This, of course, put the wind up him and he quickly climbed up the tree. A little distance away from the tree on which he was perched, he saw an injured fox unable to move but looking quite well-nourished. He was amazed to see the lion with a piece of meat in his mouth, with which he fed the fox. The sadhu had tears in his eyes as he watched this scene and it further strengthened his belief that if you have faith, God himself looks after you. After the lion had left, he descended and with greater fervour sat down to meditate.

The entire drama kept repeating itself over the next few days but no one brought any food to him. He grew weak and tired and even started to moan. Fortunately, a sage heard him when he was passing that way and approached him. On hearing his story, he simply asked, "Why did you imitate the fox? You could as well have played the role of the lion, is it not?"

We usually end up holding the wrong end of the stick and expect results. Both vivek (discrimination) and vairagya (dispassion) are needed to attain the goal.

Story 5

In Telangana, every devout household knows the name of the great poet Vemana, whose compositions are also termed as the common man's *Vedas*.

When he was a young boy, he was considered quite dim-witted. He stayed with his Guru as was the custom in those days, and although he could not grasp what he was taught, he served the master with exemplary devotion. As he could not grasp the teachings, he ended up being the personal attendant of the Guru. One day, the Guru was invited for a ceremony in town, for which he chose his best *dhoti* and *uparna*. He asked Vemana to hold these clothes in his hands and stand by the bank of the river while he took his bath. Under no circumstance was Vemana to put them down as they would get wet.

However, as he was totally dedicated to the Guru, Vemana kept looking to see if the Guru needed anything and when the Guru turned, he placed the clothes on the bank, running to the Guru in case any service was required. At this, the Guru just slapped his own forehead as the clothes had become wet. He told Vemana, "You are really good for nothing. Do only this much for now: write the name of Rama on this rock with this chalk."

Late in the evening, the Guru returned from his excursion. He did not find Vemana and got worried. Upon reaching the bank of the river, he found Vemana still writing 'Rama' on the rock. His chalk had long since finished. Even his finger had worn off and now he was using just his hand, writing, writing, writing, no questions asked! The Guru lifted him up, embraced him and bestowed his total grace upon him. Not only did

Vemana regain his hand, he also wrote poetry so simply and wisely, that his writings are referred to as the *Vedas* of the common man.

Chippalonabadda chinuku mutyambayye... nitabadda chinuku nita galise...

Brapti galugu chota phalamela tappura... Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema...

The rain drop that fell in the shell became a pearl, The one that fell in water merged with water, Where there's devotion, there's bound to be fruit, Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

Veshabhashalerigi Kashayavastramul...

gattagane mukti galugabodhu...

talalu bodulina talapulu bodula...

Viswadhaabhiraama, Vinura Vema...

Changing your appearance, language and wearing saffron (renunciate) clothes

Do not lead to *mukti* (liberation),

Shaving of the head (of a renunciate, widow, etc) does not shave (unwanted) thoughts

Beloved of the Bounteous, Vema, listen!

The story of Vemana exemplifies total surrender to the Guru. He, as an individual, did not exist. He had surrendered the 'I'. Thus he did not question his Guru: for how long do I have to do the Japa? When will you return? Where will it lead? No questions, only obedience and trust.

The goal is to overcome and see through this Ego. One may attain the goal by totally surrendering the EGO like how Vemana did, or one can see through the game of the EGO and recognise it for what it is. It is an excellent tool but most certainly it is not the tool smith.

Story 6

Shankar Pillai went for a business trip to London. After a whole day of meetings, he was walking down a street with one foot on the pavement and the other on the road. In just a while, the policeman came up to him and said he would have to book him for being drunk. Shankar Pillai was not quite sure that the cop was right and repeatedly asked him, “Are you sure I am drunk?” And on the cop confirming this with an, “Indeed you are!” Shankar Pillai could not stop thanking him.

This irked the guy who then asked, “But why are you thanking me?”

To this Shankar Pillai gratefully replied, “I thought I was handicapped!”

We are actually only drunk with this mesmerising drama of manifestation. When the Guru wakes us and shakes us out of slumber, we cannot believe that we are not handicapped. That we actually have wings and are free.

Story 7

Shankar Pillai continued his business trip to New York and late one night, got thrown out of a triple XXX bar. He landed straight at the feet of a cabby and as he looked up he pleaded, “Take me to a triple XXX bar please.” Amused, the guy told him, “You are right here,” and turned Shankar Pillai around to face to the bar. Quick to show his appreciation, Shankar Pillai took out a twenty dollar bill and handed it to the cabby exclaiming, “Well, next time, don’t drive so fast!!”

Intoxicated, we rush through life with a totally irrelevant sense of direction and importance. Basically, we do not know where we are going

Shri Mooji, a famous Jamaican Guru, has a most direct way of guiding one to the Self. Here are some of his stories.

Story 8

A middle-aged lady was dreaming that a tall handsome man was running towards her and he was coming nearer and nearer. As he approached, the lady's heart beat faster and her breathing became irregular. Now the man was so near she could feel his breath on her cheek. She looked wide-eyed at him and asked, "What are you going to do?" Looking at her he replied, "It's your dream lady!"

We do not recognise events as self-made and look for explanations outside us and thus get deluded. Once the onus of responsibility is taken for whatever comes one's way, how we create further, changes dramatically. We do it with awareness and vigilance. Before one ventures into any mindless action, one asks, "What do I actually want? Will this action lead to the desired fruit?"

What we experience as reality is in fact, only what we perceive. What we perceive depends entirely on our conditioning which changes our interpretation of our observations and hence, there is no factual truth in our experience – it is only fantasy.

What is worse is that we get entangled in our own creations and are unable to get out, as if in a maze.

Story 9

In a town in Jamaica lived this rather imaginative young lad who was always looking for the mysterious. One afternoon, he noticed a strange black vehicle parked near the neighbouring house, which was dilapidated, old and uninhabited for many years. What he saw from his window sent

a creepy feeling up his spine. He saw a tall, scary-looking man enter the house with a coffin and some articles.

As it happened, in the same town lived an actor who played the role of the man who could face any vampire or even Dracula. The boy was sure that this was Dracula himself. The boy ran out in search of the actor who could relieve him of the fear that now gripped his heart. By a strange coincidence, the boy met the actor in the market place. The boy somehow convinced the actor to bring along his box which had the cross and nail and other equipment, and go with him as he was sure that Dracula was in their very own village. The actor tried his best to explain that there was no reality in such stories and it was only the imagination of the storyteller and the skill of the director that made it all seem so real. The boy replied that if such was the case, there would be no harm in the actor coming along and proving the same to him. The logic was impeccable and the actor had to concede.

The boy, however, insisted that he take his equipment along. Thus the two of them went into the house to explore. To the horror of the actor, he did see that there was this eerie-looking Dracula, with vampire-like teeth, approaching him in a sinister manner. The boy took to his heels and ran out of the house. The actor got his cross out and held it in front of him, violently shaking in fear. Dracula kept approaching and the actor wondered why the cross did not work!! As if reading his mind, Dracula said, **“For that to work, you have to have that kind of faith young man...!”**

So it is, that it is the FAITH that works wonders, which then further strengthens FAITH. And that leads to total surrender. Not questioning – what, why, when, where or any such doubt.

Story 10

Each of us has a weak point which often gets camouflaged under many a mask. Sometimes it does not surface for years and suddenly sometimes,

it appears out of the blue, without any warning and shocks the person himself who knew nothing about it at all. It is then that one needs to maintain equilibrium and awareness to let go.

There was once a householder who was most dispassionate. So much so that his family members believed him to be a sage and everyone looked up to him. One morning, he left home and joined a monastery, for that seemed just the right thing to do. He would go every morning to the hilltop and sit for meditation, oblivious to the world, and by lunch descend to take part in the chores. He was never ruffled and was considered a great *tapasvi* (one who does penance).

As it happened, one day, a monkey sitting on a tree nearby, spotted the twig which the monk used, to mark the spot of his daily meditation. The monkey took a fancy to it and ran away with it. When the monk opened his eyes after his meditation that day, his equanimity was lost for the first time in years! He could not eat nor do any of the chores at the monastery. When the head monk asked him what had happened, he replied that his favourite twig had been taken away by a monkey!

So, Shri Mooji says, before it is too late, find out what your twig is and let go of attachment, if you truly desire liberation.

Story 11

Once upon a time there was a king who was wise enough to realise his own limitations and therefore asked his wise counsel to always be with him. The king never went anywhere nor did anything without the presence of his counsel. One morning, when the king woke up, in trying to put on his velvet slippers, he slipped and fell on the marble floor of his royal bedroom. He landed on his elbow and fractured it. Instantly he called for his counsel who was just outside his door and asked him why this had happened, and what was to be done now. The counsel replied, “It is good, my Lord!” and sent for the doctor. The king was furious for the first time as he was in agony

and all the wise counsel could say was, “It is good, my Lord.” Immediately he ordered for the counsel to be put into the dungeons.

In a few days, the king felt better and wanted to go for a horse ride. He had his favourite white stallion brought out and off he went with the breeze blowing his hair. He was almost intoxicated with a sense of well-being. He got carried away and before he knew it, he had crossed the borders of his own kingdom, into the land of the cannibals.

The inhabitants were struck by their own good fortune and quickly surrounded him. He was unceremoniously brought down. The chief was informed and the preparations for the ritual of a human sacrifice began. As they dragged the struggling king who was utterly distraught at his fate, the sleeve of his robe came off. Suddenly the drum-beating and the festivities came to a halt as the king’s broken arm became visible. For the human to be accepted as a sacrificial beast, he must be blemish-free. The king was released and put back on his horse. He wasted no time to get back to the safety of his palace.

Once safely back, he wondered at the close shave he had had and then he remembered... what had his counsel said? “It’s good, my Lord!” He ran to the dungeon to release his wise counsel! The counsel was happy to meet his king who now thanked him profusely and apologised.

Yet the king had a doubt. He asked, “It is true that this injury to my arm saved my life and thus it was good. But you my friend, were put into the dungeon and how could that have been good? You did not deserve it.” The counsel replied, “It was good, my Lord. For had you not done that, you would surely have taken me with you and on finding you unfit for the sacrifice, surely I would have been taken!”

So it is all for the good. We are not aware of the larger design and in our myopic vision, we judge events and even people, as good or bad,

this or that. If only we had the patience and wisdom to look without getting personally trapped, we could decipher the scheme of things.

Osho Loved to tell little stories of Mulla Naseeruddin. Mulla Naseeruddin was a wise man from Turkey. There are many stories narrated about his practical wisdom.

Story 12

Mulla Naseeruddin was found one night under a street light searching for something. When asked what he was looking for, he replied that he was looking for his house keys, which he had lost. The friend wanted to know where might it be that the Mulla would have lost his keys. To which Mulla replied, that the key was most probably lost on the way while walking back from his friend's home. When asked why then was he searching for the keys under the street light, he replied, "Obviously because there is light here!"

Such is our condition. We have lost our happiness and we are looking for it in this world because it is well-lit and our senses experience the world. Not realising that happiness is within and that's where we need to look...

Story 13

Mulla Naseeruddin was once seen riding a donkey, seated backwards. The donkey moved as he liked... to the marketplace, by the river and all through the town. Someone called, "Mullaji, where are you going?" Unable to stop the donkey, Mulla shouted, "Ask the donkey!"

Such is our plight. The donkey-mind runs hither and thither and we are taken for a ride by it. Little do we know that we are the riders; if only we knew how to sit and direct the mind!

Story 14

An old monk and a young monk, who had just taken his vows, were walking silently together for several miles when they came to a river bank. There they saw a young lady wanting to cross the river but too afraid, as the centre seemed very deep. Since the monks also needed to cross the river, the senior monk took her on his shoulders and waded safely across the river.

They continued on their journey without a word, for many a mile. Unable to control himself any longer, the young monk exclaimed to the senior monk, “You carried that young lady on your shoulders! How can you breach the code of conduct? You should know better! Kindly explain.” The senior monk quietly remarked, “I only took her over my shoulders for the breadth of the river. You are still carrying her!” The young man understood.

This story is just so beautiful. It exemplifies how it is the mind that is attached and that no external factor determines your inner milieu. Desire and attachment have to be seen for what they are... which is bondage and misery!

Story 15

A harassed householder-farmer approached Mulla Naseeruddin and complained, “I’ve just about had enough. My mother-in-law lives with us and what with the wife and children and her constant nagging, I am at my wit’s end. Can you please help me?”

Mulla Naseeruddin had a simple remedy. He asked the man, “Do you have goats on your farm?” On being answered in the affirmative, Mulla Naseeruddin advised the man, “Yours is a simple problem. Do just this much: take two goats into the house and keep them in the living room.”

A couple of weeks later, the distressed man returned in a distraught state saying that he could no longer bear his home, what with the *me-*

me of the goats and the nagging of his wife and the mother-in-law, and the crying of the children. To this, Mulla now had a strange remedy. He suggested that now a few hen and chicks be introduced into the living room. The farmer, totally trusting the wise man of the village, did as he was bade to do.

Once again, two weeks later, he returned. This time almost tearing his hair out, he shouted at Mulla Naseeruddin, “You have made my life hell and they call you a wise man?” Hearing this, the Mulla responded, “This was only half of the solution. Do not lose courage. Now do this: remove the goats and the hens and return after two weeks.” Despairing, the farmer returned to his home and promptly removed the animals from his living room.

Two weeks later, much relieved and deeply grateful, he returned to the Mulla and said, “Thank you, your remedy has indeed worked. Both my wife and my mother-in-law are quite tolerable really.”

Such is life. When a worse situation is presented, the primary one seems easy. It is well to remember that the situation could have been worse.

The stories that Guru Goenkaji tells in his lectures during the Vipassana course he conducts, are truly striking in their importance.

Story 16

A sage was passing a forest, when he heard the cries of a man who had been accidentally pierced by a hunter’s arrow. The sage ran to his rescue and was about to remove the arrow. But even as he was doing this, the injured man stopped him and asked, “Is this arrow poisonous?” The sage said that the arrow must be removed immediately or else the man might die. But

once again, the man stopped him and asked, “Are you competent enough to do so?” And finally, when the sage felt that he’d better leave the man to his fate, the man asked, “Which direction do you think it came from? Do help if you can but I doubt very much if anything can be done about it.”

Shri Guru Goenkaji goes on to explain that this is what we do when we step into the practice of a method meant to help us get out of this quagmire of existence. We ask, “Are you sure it works?”

The Guru is anxious to help you but we do not heed his earnest request, “Why don’t you try it?” he asks. “Why don’t you let me help you?”

Story 17

The Buddha travelled to several villages to teach the path of freedom from suffering. In a little village in North India, he had just completed a sermon when a distraught woman came rushing to him. She was weeping as she had lost her young son and felt that the Buddha could bring him back to life. She humbly prostrated herself before him and begged him again and again to do so.

The Compassionate One consoled her and said he would certainly bring the child to life if she could but get a pinch of salt from any household in the village where there had never been a death.

The woman ran from one household to another till late in the afternoon. She enquired at every household in the village and could not find a single home where there had been no death ever. She returned exhausted and weary from her search and deeply sad. She returned empty-handed.

The Buddha quietly held her hand and explained, “Why lament the inevitable? Why not accept everything exactly as it is?”

Slowly, wisdom entered her being and she felt consoled.

In the Bhagavad Gita Shri Krishna admonishes Arjuna that he should not lament the inevitable, for the body is made of the

five elements and is perishable. In this story above, the Buddha demonstrated to the bereaved mother this tenet, and to some extent her heart found solace.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter II, Shloka 27:

**Jatasya hi Dhruvo mrutyurdhruvam janma mrutyasya cha,
Tasmadpariharyearthena na tvam shochiturmarhasi.**

(For, in that case, death is certain for the born, and rebirth is inevitable for the dead. You should not, therefore grieve over the inevitable.)

Story 18

As the Buddha wandered from village to village teaching the *Dhamma*, his fame as a saint spread far and wide. Once, when he came to a village in Bihar, a frantic young man came to him and held his feet. The young man explained that his father had just passed away, and beseeched the Buddha to personally perform the last rites, so that the soul may ascend to heaven.

The Buddha indulging, obliged, asking the man to bring two earthenware pots, filling one with clarified butter and the other with stones. The young man ran to do his bidding and felt sure that this was a ritual that would ensure that his father would attain heaven.

The Buddha then asked him to immerse them in the river running by. It was seen that the pot with the stones sank forthwith to the bottom of the river and the one with the clarified butter floated.

The young man wondered whether the ritual was over and what the meaning of it all was. The Buddha explained simply, “If your father has done good deeds, he will easily float to heaven, and if not, automatically, he will sink to the bottom. Can any ritual save him?”

Thus we forget that we can only take goodwill with us and all else is of no real value.

Other stories

Story 19

Mahadev (Shiva) and his consort Parvati, were incognito in a village one evening when a beggar approached them and asked for alms. Mahadev replied that he had nothing to give him. This puzzled Parvati who asked Mahadev to at least give the beggar something. Mahadev reasoned that no matter what he gave, the beggar would not make use of it. However, since Parvati was insistent, Mahadev was forced to give the beggar something. Thus, Mahadev gave the beggar a watermelon.

The disappointed beggar did not like watermelon. He managed to sell it for a few paise (pennies). The man who bought the watermelon discovered many precious jewels in it.

Such is our fate too. We go to the Guru begging for relief, but do not like what is given. The one who follows, accepting what is given, discovers the many jewels within, which are not immediately apparent.

Story 20

A great king lay on his deathbed and wondered if any of his four queens would accompany him to the beyond. He thought of asking them. He loved the youngest queen the most and oftentimes neglected the others in preference to her. He pleadingly asked her if she would be so kind as to accompany him. She flatly refused, saying, “Respected Lord, my duty to you is in this world and under no circumstance can I come beyond.”

Disappointed the king decided to ask his next favourite queen. Even she refused saying that she would stay with him through his illness and do the best she could for him, but beyond was out of the question.

He reluctantly turned to the third queen who was very loving towards him and he expected a great deal from her. However, even she refused,

saying that at the most, she would go with him to the cremation ground (burning *ghat*), and was indeed very sorry that the king would leave them all behind.

Finally, deeply frustrated, he turned to his fourth queen whom he had often neglected and paid very little attention to. To his utter astonishment, the queen readily agreed to accompany him. She even declared total loyalty and said that she would accompany him across the three worlds if need be. This brought tears to the eyes of the king and he wondered why he had ever neglected her.

The story is an allegory obviously. The first wife is youth and the body, of which we take great care to the extent of neglecting all else, and which is the most fickle of all.

The second is wealth which no doubt keeps you comfortable through illness and disease, and offers the pleasures of life, but that's how far it will go. The third, our dear friends and relatives who are truly distressed that you are leaving them, wish you well and reach you to the burning ghat, recalling warm memories, but are unable to go with you any further.

The fourth, most faithful wife, whom we often neglect and even forget that she exists, is ever by our side and ready to be our companion here, now and beyond, is our karma!

Story 21

An old farmer lived on a farm in the mountains with his young grandson.

Each morning, grandpa would be up early, sitting, at the kitchen table, reading his *Bhagavad Gita*. His grandson wanted to be just like him and tried to imitate him in every way he could.

One day the grandson asked, “Grandpa! I try to read the *Bhagavad Gita* just like you do but I don’t understand it! And what I do understand, I forget as soon as I close the book. What good does reading the *Bhagavad Gita* do?”

The grandfather quietly turned from putting coal in the stove and replied, “Take this coal basket down to the river and bring me back a basket of water.”

The boy did as he was told but all the water leaked out before he got back to the house. The grandfather laughed and said, “You’ll have to move a little faster next time.” He sent him back to the river with the basket to try again. This time the boy ran faster but again, the basket was empty before he returned home.

Out of breath, he told his grandfather that it was impossible to carry water in a basket, and he went to get a bucket instead.

The old man said, “I don’t want a bucket of water; I want a basket of water. You’re just not trying hard enough.” And he went out of the door to watch the boy try again.

At this point, the boy knew it was impossible. However, he wanted to show his grandfather that even if he ran as fast as he could, the water would leak out before he got back to the house.

The boy again dipped the basket into the river and ran hard, but when he reached his grandfather the basket was again empty. Out of breath, he said, “See Grandpa, it’s useless!”

“So you think it is useless?” The old man said, “Look at the basket.”

The boy looked at the basket and for the first time realised that the basket was different. It had been transformed from a dirty old coal basket and was now clean, inside and out.

“Son, that’s what happens when you read the Bhagavad Gita. You might not understand or remember everything, but when you read it, you will be changed, inside and out. That is the work of Krishna in our lives.”

Story 22

This is a story told by **Dada Vaswani**, one of the sages of our times, (may he live many years more to guide us).

Monks generally wander through villages preaching, and do not stay long in any place so as to avoid getting attached to the luxuries of life. The village usually has a single main street where the *bazaar* is held. Early one morning, the sweetmeat shop opened to welcome a monk who desired a hot fried *gulab jamun* (a sweet which is made of condensed milk, fried in clarified butter and then dipped in sugar syrup). This is one delicious breakfast treat and can be served as a desert too. The monk in question had no money, so he decided to go to the nearby construction site, which hired workers on daily wages. He needed to carry bricks over to another site. He did it for nearly half the day and as he was not used to hard work, he went to the manager and asked to be relieved. He was given the wages for half the day.

He then went to the sweetmeat shop and bought six *gulab jamuns*. But instead of eating them, he was seen going to the bank of the river. At the river bank, he took each *gulab jamun*, put it to his lips and threw them one by one into the river, repeating to himself, “*Gulab jamun khayega eetein uthayga, gulab jamun khayega eetien utheyga!*” which means that if you eat *gulab jamun* you will need to carry bricks.

As a lesson to himself in dispassion, he understood from his experience that nothing comes free and there is no unalloyed pleasure. That desire leads to bondage.

Desire entered the mind of the monk and he had to work to satisfy it. Thus karma follows kaam (desire) and then more kaam follows karma, for one experiences the short-lived pleasure, and one wants to repeat it again and again!

Our monk however, was wise and alert. He became aware of this vicious cycle and decided to teach himself a lesson. He cut asunder the bondage of desire by not indulging in it. Kaam leads to karma and karma to more kaam.

I retell below one of my favourite stories, from the book ‘Illusions’ by Richard Bach: it answers our question about the meaning of life.

Story 23

Don was the Guru and Richard, a wise student. They were both pilots who took people for short fun rides and often parked in fields near villages. One evening Richard asked Don as they walked down a street, “Don, what is the meaning of life?” Don did not reply in spite of Richard repeating his question several times. Richard gave up. They continued to walk and Richard even forgot he had asked the question.

They passed a cinema theatre which was showing the newly-released movie *Sun Cassidy*. Don suggested that they go for the movie. Richard had already seen it and was reluctant but as Don insisted, he agreed. While watching it a second time, Richard noted several technical nuances he had never noticed before... the sets, the angle of the camera, the direction and several other features. As they came to the end of the movie, which gripped Richard once more, Don quietly whispered “Hey Richard, what is the meaning of life?” Richard was irritated and said, “Let me watch, this is the best part of the movie. Besides we are disturbing others.”

Don let it pass. As they came out of the theatre Richard wanted to know what the drama was about. Why was he questioned and disturbed exactly when they approached the finale? Don walked on. As they reached the yard where their planes were parked, they got out their sandwiches, lit a fire and settled down. Don said, “Well, you asked a question?” It suddenly struck Richard that Don was trying to answer his question. He became thoughtful for a moment and said, “You mean the movie had an answer?”

Don said, “You can do better than that.” Richard rubbed his chin for inspiration and then it struck him, “Oh! Are you asking why we went for the movie and may be that is the answer to what is the meaning of life?”

Don’s eyes lit up and Richard knew that this was the clue. He continued. “For entertainment, of course!” Don asked “Anything else?”

Richard became thoughtful again. He knew that he had seen the movie earlier so it could not be as entertaining as the first time. Then he realised that he had learnt a lot more by watching it the second time, noticing the actual making of the film. He answered, “Learning.”

“Yes.” said Don, “That is the meaning of life. We come for both entertainment and learning.”

Truth seems to shine forth from this story. Verily we are learning everyday of our lives at the same time as we are also being constantly entertained. Sometimes there are moments of pain, sometimes of pleasure, sometimes of breathless activity and sometimes of leisure, sometimes of grief and sometimes of joy and sometimes all emotions are mixed. Maintaining one’s balance, enjoying the passing show and learning with awareness is what the Guru tells us.

Story 24

A story from the life of Shri Ramana Maharishi.

Shri Ramana Maharishi spoke very little and conveyed much. His teachings were mainly through silence. One day, he pointed to the temple pillars which had beautifully carved figures at the base and explained that the EGO is exactly like those figures which seem to be upholding the building. Whereas, true support comes from something else altogether.

It is for the discerning sight and mind to clear any misconception.

Story 25

Vivek Devendranath, a business tycoon had a Guru whom he regularly visited. He hosted several *satsangs* of his Guru in his town and even took initiation from him. The Guru guided him in every walk of life.

One day, however, Vivek woke up with a start as it dawned on him that he knew nothing of the Spiritual Wisdom his Guru spoke of and had

absolutely no experiential knowledge. As was his wont, he knew clearly what he needed to do. He had a bath and got dressed, took some fruits and rushed to his Guru.

The Guru was not at all surprised to see him. Vivek humbly told the Guru, “I have attended several of your *satsangs* and practised what you have taught me but this morning I discovered I know nothing of what you speak. Are you keeping some knowledge from me?”

The Guru replied, “Come tomorrow. I will initiate you into the advanced yoga techniques. You seem ready for them.”

Encouraged and enthusiastic, Vivek reached early the next morning, after having bathed and done the preliminary rituals. The Guru lit a lamp, sat in front of him and asked to take a look at his palm.

Vivek held out his right palm out for the Guru to look. Suddenly the expression on the Guru’s face turned grave and almost sad as he told Vivek, “But alas! I cannot initiate you further as I see your death at the end of seven days. It is best you return to your home and come to terms with this.”

Vivek was distraught he ran home and shut the door to his room. His wife, Lata kept calling him, reminding him of his board meetings, his party commitments, so on and so forth. He just did not respond, he simply told her to leave him alone.

On the seventh day, the Guru appeared at Vivek’s doorstep and gently knocked on his room door.

Vivek opened the door and they both knew! Vivek was AWAKE!

Several times in our lives, Nature sends us small wake-up calls we do not heed to. We do not get our priorities right and we remain mesmerised with the manifest Universe, scarcely even wondering about the SOURCE, leave alone seeking IT! And seeking with such INTENSITY AS TO BECOME IT. That then is the goal of EXISTENCE that is why we are here.

SECTION III
PERSONAL STORIES

Personal Stories of Applied Wisdom

The usual manner of bringing up a child is a sort of conditioning to believe that he or she is a body that has somehow grown a mind, which has to be conditioned. And that there are do's and don'ts that must be followed, depending on the particular culture to which the child belongs. That we live in space and time with a constant eye on the future, with goals to achieve while regretting missed opportunities!

No one ever taught us that we are not a mere name and form! That, while we experience time and space, we are beyond both, which can only mean Consciousness. As events unfold, we do get glimpses of the possible reality. Yet, due to the embryonic indoctrination, we are unable to snap out of our self-imposed limitations.

Presented are a few happenings, which exemplify the application of the Truth learnt from scriptures and Gurus. It was my great good fortune to have been initiated by Swami Muktanand at Ganeshpuri, when I had just appeared for the finals and was awaiting my results. My mother being the seeker and scholar that she was, had taken me there. It so happened that I received my results while at the ashram. My sister called and said, "Shirin, your name is in the papers. You have got the gold medal in surgery!"

As expected, I ran to my Guru to tell him the news. He looked at me warmly and while congratulating me, he gave me the advice that I have tried never to forget, even in the most trying situations. He simply said, "In theory you have the gold medal, but when you get it in practice we

will know! You must treat each and every patient as a *Rugna Narayana* (God in the form of a sick person).”

It has been hard sometimes. Especially, when the patient is in need of counselling, more than medicine or surgery. After all I am not a psychiatrist!

REPUTATION PRECEDES AND FOLLOWS YOU

Mrs. Anita Bose a 29-year-old, came to me anxious to conceive. She also had painful periods. On detailed history-taking, examination and investigation, she was found to have a fibroid in the uterus with cysts in both ovaries. A special blood test was done to exclude cancer of the ovary. The level was raised but not alarmingly so. Accordingly, the patient was posted for a laparoscopy in order to deal with the fibroid and the ovarian cysts. An infertility specialist was involved during the surgery, so as to achieve the best results for the patient. Findings at surgery included a fibroid on the front part of the uterus, which needed to be removed, before we could tackle the ovaries. The ovaries and tubes were entangled with one another and it required a lot of handling and skill to release the adhesions and separate the ovaries from the back of the uterus. As the diagnosis seemed so obvious, no biopsy was taken.

The immediate postoperative period was a little unusual, in that the patient was spiking a temperature for nearly 3–4 days. This was managed with intravenous antibiotics and on the sixth postoperative day, she was sent home.

In the first month after surgery, the patient experienced fever off and on, yet nothing seemed very alarming. However, a little after a month she complained of inability to breathe deeply without pain. A chest X-ray and repeat ultrasound was done. The chest X-ray revealed that she had collected fluid in the chest and the ultrasound also showed some fluid in

and around the ovaries. The blood test for cancer was repeated and it had gone up six times. A truly alarming turn of events!

All this happened on a Saturday afternoon. No action could be taken before Monday morning. We needed to tap the fluid from the chest and check for cancer cells and Tuberculosis. TB could be the only other diagnosis, which seemed a remote possibility now, in view of the high cancer blood-marker.

I had no sleep or peace of mind. The entire exercise of the surgery was to help her. All it seemed to have done was to worsen her condition and upstage the cancer. Even a biopsy had not been taken! What if the first blood test, which was reassuringly low, was in fact a technical error? Could there have been other precautions taken in order to ensure greater safety for the patient? After all she was only 29-years-old!

The mind was in a whirl and the heart crying! As if to make matters even more poignant, I had a book release where friends and patients would honour me. The event would be covered in the papers. Fear arose that instead of honour, one would be faced with ignominy and blame for substandard treatment. This of course was a gross exaggeration of the fault in management if any, but the mind is forever ready to imagine the worst!

As Sunday dragged on, a deep introspection of the situation simultaneously progressed. The love for the patient was supreme and every effort had been made to take good care of her by involving an infertility specialist. But to what avail? Had all it ended up in doing, was to upstage the cancer? Then softly a voice whispered, "Is there a lesson in here for you?"

The worst that could happen to a good doctor is that her patient suffers due to her. And to add insult to injury, the doctor loses her good reputation. Deep and continuous reflection suddenly opened the window to the spiritual struggle. It became clear: that the Guru wanted your head!

Are you willing to surrender? Surrender so totally that you accept the consequence in all humility and actually welcome it?’

Strangely, the morning of Monday dawned fresh, cool and bright with absolute composure. The tapping of the chest fluid was done in a dear friend’s radiology clinic and lo and behold! The colour of the fluid that came out clearly indicated that it was NOT cancer! This was later confirmed with further tests. As it happened, it turned out to be TB!

In spite of taking every precaution and computing the data as available, we still cannot control the outcome, which is the result of many factors.

It is also amply clear that when total annihilation of the EGO is demanded nothing less will do. When all delusion is destroyed, Truth stands revealed. This can happen when one surrenders totally.

To quote Shri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita in Chapter II, Shloka 47, who repeatedly counsels us:

**Karmaneyavadhikaraste ma pheleshu kadachan ma
karmaphalaheturbhuh mate sangostvakarmani.**

(Yours is only to do, not to expect the fruit thereof, and at the same time not to be attached to inaction.)

HUMILITY IS THE BEST POLICY

Mrs. Sangita Kumari, a 32-year-old primigravida (first time pregnant) came in her *seventh* month of pregnancy for the first time. On investigation she was found to be severely diabetic. Unfortunately, this simple test had not been done earlier. Rigorous diet control and insulin therapy were required to get the sugar under control. At every step of the management, the patient was resisting. She almost refused insulin therapy unconvinced – she wondered whether it was really necessary! Is there no other way? Constant counselling was required and it was taxing everyone's patience each time she came for her check-up.

The protocol of treatment in such a patient demands that we deliver them at least three weeks before the due date, for the possibility of a still birth increases after that. As expected, this decision too was met with a lot of tears and resistance. After convincing her, the parents repeated the same questions, despite having been present for the entire question-answer session. As if this were not enough, the husband took his turn next! An associate doctor who had been present throughout, said quietly that I take the patient and husband's signature to that the risks had been adequately explained and that they would prefer to await normal delivery! This would absolve us of the responsibility. This, none of them was willing to do and the constant refrain was, "We have total faith in you doctor!!" All this transpired in the early part of the eighth month of her pregnancy.

Within a week she found herself in hospital with ruptured membranes and in early labour. This is a known complication of diabetes in pregnancy

and as it happened, she did not progress well in labour and indeed had to have a caesarean section. A big (again a complication of diabetes) baby boy was delivered and there was joy all round for he did well after birth and did not require any special care.

Introspection: Pride and arrogance raised their head! I was almost going to admonish the patient and say, “I told you so, but you were not listening to me,” when once again a gentle voice reminded me and I paused midsentence.

It seemed to whisper, “Neither did you know when the baby would come!” Immediately it humbled me and I modified the sentence by saying, “I told you so, only God knows when the baby would come.”

The truth is that, events in life unfold before you, who are the witness, and one can only do one’s best with no claim over the fruit of action – this was clearly demonstrated.

The lesson well-learnt was that the patient need not be ridiculed or made to feel guilty; they are going to be your friends. Humility is the best policy. To see the patient’s point of view would be the ultimate understanding. It is generally fear, that drives them to behave aggressively. It reminded me of what my Guru had told me: ‘Treat every patient as though Narayana himself had come to you in the form of a rugna.’

Undoubtedly, it is difficult to control the mind and as Shri Krishna advises Arjuna when he asks, how can one control the mind which is as restless as the wind. Chapter 6, Shloka 35:

Asaunshayam mahabaho mano durnighram chalam,
Abhyasena tu kaunteya vairagyena cha gruhyate.

(The mind is restless, and difficult to curb, O mighty armed one; but it can be brought under control by repeated practice and by the exercise of dispassion, O son Kunti.)

ALL TIME IS AUSPICIOUS

Dr. Mrs. Rita Ravat, a 29-year-old primigravida, came to the clinic at 32 weeks of pregnancy. Clinically the growth of the baby, seemed rather inadequate hence an urgent ultrasound was done. It showed a lag of two weeks, but with no compromise to the blood flow. The patient was counselled and given treatment to help the growth of the baby. However, at every visit, the growth restriction seemed to get worse. Repeat ultrasound was not alarming hence a decision to wait was taken.

However, at 36 weeks, I decided clinically, rather intuitively, that further waiting may jeopardise the life of the baby and accordingly admitted the patient, for daily monitoring. A day and date for delivery by caesarean section was decided. The parents of the patient had a small concern that the time for delivery of the baby should not be between 7.30 and 9 am on that day as it was *Rahukalam*.

As it happened early morning, the patient was undergoing a cardiotocograph, which monitors the maternal and foetal pulse, and it was found that the pulse of the patient was only 40. This can be an alarming situation and one could lose the baby. An immediate decision for delivery was taken and a really small 1,250 gm baby boy was delivered at 7.50 am!

The baby was in the NICU (neonatal intensive care unit) for a month mainly for feeding purposes. He did not require any ventilator support or invasive help to survive. He went home at 1.6 kg, in excellent health.

So for some, the inauspicious time is auspicious and one should not increase our load of psychological suffering by imposing further

limitations and conditions! We are all familiar with the saying ‘nothing is perfect!’

In fact, Stephen Hawking in his YouTube video on the ‘Origin of the Universe’ explains that manifestation resulted from the imperfection in the cooling of gases at the time of the Big Bang.

But for the imperfections, the Manifest Universe could not have come into existence.

NETWORK OF 'KARMA'

It all happened while I was living and working in Dubai all alone, to keep the home hearth burning on a 10,000 sq feet land with a three bedroom house. The family had shifted to Pune to finally settle in a beautiful, peaceful home. It was also to learn a lesson in detachment! Staying away from my sons; my two most precious, talented and well-behaved young lads, 14 and 15 years of age. Also, a time when 'mother at home' is important and I was away! Thanks to modern technology, I could stay in touch daily through the ICQ, a programme on the computer. This was like the mother tortoise who takes care of her young ones with just a glance from the other bank, even if a river separates them.

I had a caretaker Benjamin, who lived in a room at the back of the house but had access to the main house at all times. His wife worked at a friend's home and had recently delivered an angelic boy and was thus staying in the room with her husband. Her name was Ramola. It so happened that on returning from a trip back home, I found that a gold biscuit weighing around 100 gms was missing from my cupboard. On questioning, Benjamin accepted that he had used the house to entertain guests from India for a few days while I was away. Although I did not suspect him of the theft, every time I drove to the house, I asked myself, "Why was I letting him stay when I did not feel totally comfortable?" With a heavy heart and much apology, as the little baby would have to go too, I requested Benji to find another place to live. He was in a difficult position but there was no choice. Furthermore, he had to pay quite a steep rent at the new place, but he left.

On 30th March 2000, I visited a friend and neighbour Deepak. His sister-in-law Kunda, was visiting the same day. As it happened, all three of us shared the same Zodiac sign according to the Hindu Calendar. Kunda prophesied that bad days were coming and looked at me in particular. She said that the stars would make me rub my nose on the ground. I let it all pass and slept peacefully that night. However, the next day to my astonishment and horror, I received a court order saying that a patient of mine upon whom I had operated, had registered a case against me for malpractice and negligence. By an uncanny coincidence, her name was Ramola too.

I had removed a suspicious lump from her breast. Histology proved it to be cancerous. Taking every due precaution, I had contacted a doctor who I trusted at the Tata Cancer centre in India and sent her there at the earliest. Unfortunately, she developed a haematoma (blood collection) at the site of the wound and was given this as a reason for the removal of the breast and not the lump, which had been completely removed by me anyway. I had procured the pathology report from the hospital where she was operated which clearly stated that the lump was removed in toto and that no part was present in the breast tissue submitted for examination after the procedure of breast removal. She filed a case along with a letter from the doctor to whom I had sent her to, stating that but for the haematoma, her breast could have been preserved. As it happened, the same doctor had already sent me a certificate saying that the breast was removed because of the cancer and not the haematoma (common sense).

I wept for a full day. We went to my lawyer who said that he would handle the case and that I was not to worry. After the first day of having wept, I was joyful and was not in the least bit anxious! The case never featured in my thoughts, as despite taking every precaution to send her to the right place, in the right manner, at the earliest, this had been the outcome.

The same week I was moving to Welcare Hospital as a consultant and the private clinic where I had worked, refused to give me my dues saying that they might need it for the case! Down went 22,000 Dirhams! Not important, I told myself. Let's see how the case goes! It took two years for a final verdict from the Supreme Court declaring that this case had no substance in it and that it should never have been admitted in the first place. We had actually lost in the two lower courts! By this time, I was working full time in India and only going to Dubai as a visiting consultant. I got the good news while I was in the OPD one afternoon and it did not change my internal milieu in the least. I knew the case was undeserved and that I had done my very best.

To return to the story of the gold biscuit, six months after the above incident, a dear friend came over to help me clear my cupboard. She found a well-packed box in which a precious watch was placed and under it, was this gold biscuit. I was deeply embarrassed for having ousted the caretaker of my house along with his wife and their newborn baby. I telephoned him immediately, only to find that he was in Goa and on his way to church with the young babe. I asked him to forgive me for my misdeed and requested him to kindly place a thousand rupees at the feet of Mother Mary. Nothing could make up for the wrongful accusation but a sincere attempt at seeking forgiveness was made.

The network in Consciousness is most often hidden and we cannot fathom causes and effects. Very rarely does such a blatant connection become apparent. In this case, the name connection was uncanny to the extent of being eerie!

To a doctor, there is no greater disaster than losing his/her credibility due to a lapse in good practice. Yet one has to sometimes suffer this as a boomerang effect!

To quote the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter II, Shloka 34:

***Akirtimchapibhutani kathishyanti tevyayaam.
Sambhavitasya Chkirtirmarnadtirichyate.***

(Nay, people will also pour undying infamy on you. And infamy brought on a man enjoying popular esteem is worse than death.)

And again what is karma?

Chapter IV, Shloka 17:

*Karmano hyapi bodhavyam bodhavyam cha vikarmanah,
Akarmanaashcha bodhavyam gahana karmano gatih.*

[The truth about action must be known and the truth about inaction must also be known; even so, the truth about prohibited action (Vikarma) must be known. For, mysterious are the ways of action (Karma).]

So the mysterious way in which this came home to me is truly uncanny. Somehow I felt the connection of my action and the rebound reaction in the form of this dear patient with the same name, who suddenly went against me for no reason at all! Strange and mysterious are the ways of karma.

DO YOUR BEST AND LEAVE THE REST!

It was in the year 1995. I got a call one afternoon from the operation theatre saying that the consultant in-charge of a patient who was bleeding profusely after delivery had washed his hands off saying that the patient was a medical case and that his duty was now over. It came as a great shock but I rushed to the OT to find the patient turning dusky and mottled (signs of impending death). Immediately we opened the patient and removed her uterus within 11 minutes. The colour of the patient changed, her urine output improved and she stopped bleeding. The grateful anaesthetist prepared to move her to the ICU. He had already transfused 18 bottles of blood by this time and given her several DC shocks in order to revive her as she had a cardiac arrest on the operating table prior to my reaching. It seemed life had returned. My heart was overwhelmed, relieved and singing! I felt I had saved the patient from sure death.

The next morning, I went to the ICU to find her smiling. She had a Hb of 11 gms% and a urinary output of over 1,500 ml. No one can imagine my utter disbelief and profound sense of loss when at 11 am I got a call from one of the local doctors that thanks to my surgery, the patient had died. It was just not possible, I thought! She was so well when I had seen her. I rushed to the ICU and was quietly told by the anaesthetist that the patient had died of traumatic damage to the heart muscle due to the number of shocks that they had to give her in order to bring her back from the cardiac arrest. She had been pumped with 18 units of blood within 2–3 hours, just to compensate the continuing blood loss. Unfortunately, she

had suffered all the while when the tap of blood was open and no attempt had been made to remove her uterus. With a heavy heart and a deep sense of helplessness, I had no choice but to accept the turn of events.

A few months later I was summoned to court and accused of causing the death of the woman. The relatives filed a case saying that if she had not been operated upon, she would have survived! The patient's relatives had actually been instigated. A junior doctor who had delivered the baby by a vacuum extraction was also accused of neglect, as the baby had suffered brain damage due to intrapartum distress. We were actually both put in adjoining jail cells till the case came up for hearing and the lawyer had an opportunity to present the *prima facie* case. While the other doctor was crying, I was smiling. She was astonished at my incongruous response, considering that we were in a foreign country and in jail. Well, I said, the case is not admissible, so why shed tears? The inner conviction that I had done no wrong was so strong that no outward event could shake my equanimity.

In fact, I was reminded of a similar departmental event when three of my prize cases where I thought the surgery performed was exemplary, had been presented as errors in judgement to the Director of Health Services who was not a doctor! Even there I found myself smiling! The HOD who was very fond of me asked me to explain my smile, as she was mystified! She asked, "Don't you realise that these people want to impede your progress and are conspiring against you? What are you smiling about?" "Well," I replied, "If an innocent person is accused of murder what should he feel if not amusement?"

The jail personnel were very kind and offered us coffee which I heartily accepted while my colleague anxiously refused. After a few hours we were released, as we were employees of the Department of Health and Medical Services of the Dubai Government.

To my surprise, even after briefing our lawyer on the medical facts several times, we lost in the first two courts! Then, I told the lawyer that

he must ask for a medical committee. It was quite obvious that the judges had not quite followed the sequence of events. Since, no postmortem had been performed, we could not prove as to who or what the actual villain of the story was! Finally, the medical committee submitted its report, which read as follows: ‘Dr. Shirin must be praised for her immediate and apt response. The Head of Department who took his gloves off and walked out of theatre should be squarely blamed. This young life was lost due to the trauma suffered by the heart and timely action not being taken to stop the bleeding.’

The Supreme Court had no hesitation in dismissing the case promptly. The concerned doctor, however, was never brought to book because unlike him, we did not instigate the family to re-register another case. This time with the correct accused!

Who was ‘I’ to believe that I had saved the patient? How, in spite of being the star of the case, did I land in jail? How did I get justice finally, in spite of the fact that the doctors who gave the medical report were not of my nationality?

Paul Brunton a great philosopher has written, “Events are fixed; our attitude towards them are not.” How wonderful that at no time did fear, anxiety or even resentment grip me! Only contentment at doing one’s duty well, remained.

Once again, the words of Shri Krishna, Chapter II, Shloka 50, explain it thus:

**Budhiyuktojahateehubhesukratdushkrute,
Tasmadyogayuyjasvayogahkarmasukaushalam.**

(Endowed with equanimity, one sheds in this life both Good and Evil. Therefore, strive for the practice of equanimity. Skill in action lies in the practice of this Yoga.)

OPTIMISM AND INNOCENCE

Mrs. Kavita Lanjewar was a 31-year-old and 110 kg in weight in her first pregnancy when she came under my care. As she progressed through pregnancy, she put on another 10 kg and it seemed like a nightmare to have to deliver her, which in fact it eventually turned out to be!

Fortunately, she had no other complications such as Gestational Diabetes and pregnancy-induced high blood pressure, which can occur more frequently in a morbidly obese patient.

As she reached term, we decided to do an Elective Caesarean Section because the baby was in malposition. It was further decided that the safest anaesthesia would be spinal anaesthesia, and the anaesthetist accordingly gave the injection in her spine. On testing prior to starting the surgery, it was found that the spinal anaesthesia did not work. Hence it became necessary to give her general anaesthesia. Her neck was quite short and the anaesthetist found it difficult to intubate her even though he was an experienced anaesthetist. This can happen. The oxygen saturation dropped to a dangerous 30% and she turned blue. Her chest became congested with fluid and we felt that we might lose both the baby and the mother. My heart felt as though it would sink as I called for another anaesthetist who assisted and got the tube down her throat. He pushed Lasix into her blood to reduce the congestion from her lungs. In any dire situation it is mandatory we call for help.

As I stood by her side all washed up and pleading to the Lord to save her, the young nurse who had scrubbed to assist me, wrapped her hand over mine and whispered, “Ma’am she will be alright.” It was reassuring,

but at the same time, I realised that she had little experience to understand the implications of the impending disaster. In her innocence, she was optimistic! All this happened within three minutes and thanks to the effort of the entire team we managed to save the situation. I proceeded to deliver a 4 kg baby boy, crying his lungs out! The surgery went without any further mishap – one of the fastest Caesareans I have done.

In the recovery room she behaved as though nothing had happened. All her parameters were normal, and post-operatively, she made a splendid, uneventful recovery. In fact, we find obese patients very cooperative. They ambulate very fast. They do not fuss. Early mobilisation is a key to prevent the dreaded complications of clots in the leg!

On subsequent discussion, we discovered that she was allergic to one of the drugs we had given her, and had therefore gone into a state of shock. The lungs had got flooded due to this reaction and the urgency to intubate had become paramount.

The warmth of the nurse was deeply appreciated within.

The value of team-work, and that His Grace does it all, was experienced in a most poignant manner! This fact keeps coming home time and again. When I left home that morning I knew of course, that we had a difficult case on our hands. But nothing could have forewarned me of what actually was to happen.

I have delivered uneventfully a 156 kg patient and such is life's drama which reveals at one moment the sun, and the next a gloomy dark sky! Again one observes the fleeting nature of existence, and therefore it is possible to appreciate the dream-like quality of life. It seems real only because it is a divine dream and other beings are sharing it.

When one reflects deeply it becomes crystal clear that through this drama, there is an underlying consciousness which is the witness and is absolutely still. The Vedas say: "Tat tvamasi." (That thou art.)

ILLUSION OF CONTROL

After the ward round we had just settled down in the OPD to see patients, when an emergency call came from the casualty department, that a primigravida who was expecting twins had just come in with fits. The senior resident rushed to attend the call. After administering the emergency drugs, he called me to assess the need for delivery. A major surgery had already been posted immediately after OPD, and since the blood pressure of the patient was still high, we shifted her to the ICU for stabilising that, after which we proceeded to the operation theatre for the scheduled case.

The senior resident was very anxious. He even stayed back in the ICU not quite certain what to do if the patient had another fit! The treatment for repeated fits is general anaesthesia and delivery. It was unnerving for him and although every drug had been administered as far as his theoretical knowledge went, he was uncertain of the outcome, which could be disastrous for both mother and baby.

Fortunately, her BP came down and we delivered two baby boys weighing 1.5 kg and 1.6 kgs, who cried immediately after birth. Both the mother and babies did well post delivery. I quietly assured the resident who was both anxious and unnerved due to lack of experience.

It reminded me of my own residency days when we had lost a patient due to septic shock. She was a grand multipara who came to hospital with a ruptured uterus and the head of the baby stuck out since the past ten hours. After doing an obstetric hysterectomy, I had sat all night with the patient, measuring her blood pressure and adjusting the Noradrenaline

drip, but she succumbed at 4 am. I called my Consultant and wept bitterly on the phone just repeating, “Ma’am, she has died. We could not save her.”

With infinite patience, my Guru and mentor explained, “It will happen so sometimes, Shirin. This lady came to us very late.” Fortunately we don’t see such cases anymore! For days together, I was inconsolable.

It is indeed a cycle we all have to go through. In the early days of residency, one is highly sensitive and the path is uncertain! The direction a patient may take is unknown and yet all the time the feeling, “I will save this patient,” is predominant at the back of the mind. It takes many years to understand that all is not in the hands of the doctor and with more experience, one even comes to a deep insight that nothing is in the hands of the one who thinks that he does!

Let me explain. Undoubtedly, the doctor is highly trained and it seems to him that but for the medical support system, the patient could never have made it! Scientifically speaking, we can see the change in our practice, the change in the scenarios we face... Statistics seem to convince us that ‘...but for me this patient would have died!’

Yet the odd case which succumbs despite every best effort being put in, sows the seed of doubt in an introspective mind.

‘Is it possibly true that “I” am a mere instrument and not the doer?’

Shri Krishna exhorts us to perform action and not be concerned with the fruit therefore. This is so because action is certainly in our hands, but for the outcome, there are several factors involved which can neither be computed nor comprehended. These are most often subtle energies which no equipment is able to pick up. We term them unknown or the ‘will of God.’

***RUGNA NARAYAN* (GOD IN HUMAN FORM) IN YOUR CARE**

A tall, good-looking, western young lady came with her husband in her second month of pregnancy. All due care and investigations were done and as she had irregular periods. The ultrasound findings were taken as valid to decide the due date. During her visit it was noticed that she doubted every advice given and had several suggestions and questions. In the first visit, this seemed a little irksome but was tolerated and taken to be an over-anxious personality.

It is recommended at this clinic that pregnant girls attend meditation and *Pranayam* (breathing exercises), which the author personally conducted. Accordingly, Mrs. Eva Smith was advised and in fact, she attended and reported it worked. A warm understanding developed over her next few visits, and all seemed to be going well.

However, late in the pregnancy, she required admission and suddenly the fear, anxiety and the tantrums returned. This behaviour persisted and the residents had a tough time being on guard, for complaints against everything under the sun was the order of the day. As is my practice, a quiet chit chat and looking from the patient's point of view brought about a breakdown of her defences. She confessed that she was under a great deal of stress. We sat down and looked at it. She found ways of sorting out her office affairs that would give her time for herself.

Well, it was not over yet! Labour started a few days prior to the ultrasound date and on admission, of course, all pandemonium broke

loose. No treatment could be administered without, “Wait let me be mentally prepared, what are you going to do? Why are you doing it? Can you do it later? Can anything else be done?” When epidural was suggested for pain relief, the answer was, “I want everything to go naturally, please don’t shave, we don’t do it in the west.”

Of course, epidural had been given and now it was wearing out, as stage II was reached. It is preferable not to top up the epidural so that the patient can bear down, but boy – our lady had her bottom in the air and her legs in the most awkward angles. With two male assistants and a vacuum extractor, the delivery was accomplished of a healthy baby boy! Of course, suturing the episiotomy was another story.

All of the above is only the background to the real story that follows. Observing her over-zealous attitude towards breast feeding with no milk being produced on Day One, she was sincerely advised to also top feed her baby as neonatal hypoglycaemia can be dangerous to the brain and can cause severe jaundice in the baby. There was insurmountable resistance and I was categorically told, “Please do not tell me what to do with my baby. We in the west only breast feed. Our doctor back home has advised us not to listen to any advice contrary to theirs.” Of course, her doctors were only 10,000 kms away. The baby got deeply jaundiced and dehydrated and it became an emergency. Yet, when the paediatrician tried to explain this to her, he was told to hold any treatment as they needed to confirm the management suggested, which could only be done 12 hours later, as that was the time difference.

This is when I felt I had to intervene and decided to talk to the husband who ‘seemed’ relatively less unreasonable. The remark ‘seemed’ is so made, for indeed, he took up for his wife and blamed the paediatrician for improper communication, in fact, a total lack of communication. It was explained that they could take a second opinion if they chose or go to another hospital after signing the papers. They said they had already asked for a second opinion, but the doctor refused to see the child as the

senior most paediatrician had been taking care, and no way would he differ. He totally trusted his judgement.

Now this was a Catch-22. My only concern was for the baby and I phoned the father and begged him, “What are you going to do now? You know we have nothing but your well-being at heart, we have always done. The paediatrician in-charge of your baby has 35 years of experience and who should be offended, you or him? Besides every warning was given to you both of this happening, and any further delay could irreparably damage the baby’s brain.”

Finally, the phone call which lasted fifteen minutes and seemed like eternity, brought about a change in attitude. The patient reluctantly let the baby be taken to NICU. The baby took a week to recover but made a complete recovery.

This taught me the most important tenet: put the well-being of others over your understanding of right and wrong and you will benefit one and all. It also reminded me of what my Guru had instructed. ‘Treat each patient as if God has come in the form of a sick person.’ I wondered whether it was true – this one seemed more like the devil!

IS IT DESTINY?

Mrs. Gita Hate, a 32-year-old, primigravida came to me in her 20th week of gestation. All seemed well except for the history of infertility and of a condition called endometriosis. This is a disease which can hamper fertility and in Gita, had led to her undergoing treatment for nearly three years before she conceived. Besides, her husband was already 40 years of age and all were anxious for a good outcome.

During her second visit, routine tests were advised. The urine report showed protein, which is an ominous sign of impending rise in blood pressure with its consequences like growth restriction, possible foetal demise and in the mother – haemorrhage, fits and also possible death. On monitoring her blood pressure, it was initially normal. This led to investigating a renal cause for the protein leak in the urine. None of the tests revealed any abnormality. By the 24th week of pregnancy, however, she developed high blood pressure and required medication in gradually increasing the dosage to keep the blood pressure under control.

She was admitted into hospital in her 26th week so as to monitor her more intensely, because by this time, she was already on the maximum dosage of anti-hypertensive drugs. Fortunately there was no lack of blood flow to the baby and growth restriction had not occurred. This encouraged me to continue with conservative management in hospital.

One Sunday morning, when I went for the morning round, the cardiotocograph of the baby did not look good. Yet, because the baby was premature, by this time 27 weeks plus 6 days, it was difficult to interpret. I instructed the Chief Resident to monitor the baby continuously and if

in two hours the graph did not change, to inform me. As I got no call, I relaxed thinking all was well. At 6 pm I got a call from the resident who said she could no longer hear the foetal heart sounds! My own heart broke. I felt, only if I had listened to my intuition and operated in the morning, we could have saved the baby. I rushed to see the patient, hoping against hope that the resident was mistaken. But the ultrasound confirmed the death of the foetus. Now our concern was the mother for she looked pale. The ultrasound had shown no bleeding and we were therefore tempted to induce labour so as to avoid a caesarean section at the least. Labour did not progress, her Hb dropped to 8 gms % and I knew we would be in trouble if we did not operate. This was at about 2 am on Monday morning. Fortunately the father of Mrs. GH told me, "Doctor just go ahead. We don't mind you doing a caesarean even though the baby is dead."

When we got the baby out, it was a little girl, 1 kg (babies of this weight are routinely sent home from our NICU), it truly hurt. The patient had a sudden bleed behind the placenta, which had caused the death of the baby.

Post-operatively, she did well. Yet the protein leak continued for nearly 3- 6 months in spite of her BP being settled. Every colleague I discussed the case with was of the opinion that the pregnancy needed to be terminated for the sake of the mother not the baby, and if the baby had perished it was an acceptable outcome. Although this assuaged my feeling of having somehow let my patient down, it still did not dispel my doubt completely.

It felt as though I could never forgive myself for not having operated when I got the signal that things might not be quite right. The resident had let me down, she was inattentive and negligent but what, what was I doing, I kept asking myself? Why, oh why, did that doctor not inform me? Was she taking revenge on me from some past birth? Whenever I encountered that particular resident my mind revolted and it was almost

too much to bear. I eagerly waited for her to finish her term and never ever trusted her with any of my patients after that. For a long time, I could not forgive myself or her.

It was then that all the learning of a lifetime, from Gurus, from scriptures, from parents came to be put into practical life. First I learnt that I was not infallible that I too could make mistakes. It was a humbling experience. Second, I learnt that there were more factors at play that influence outcomes, which are not necessarily under our implicit control. It is only apparently so. Third, that it may be difficult to forget but it was possible to forgive. Finally, that pain as pleasure also passes.

It was two years before Gita conceived again. This time, she was started early on medications which could prevent her from developing pre-eclampsia (which is what she had suffered). Close monitoring was done throughout the pregnancy. To the joy of one and all, she did not develop any high blood pressure or protein leak, and at 37 weeks was delivered of a healthy baby boy.

The words of Paul Brunton come to mind. He says in answer to the question of whether everything is pre-determined? "Events are fixed but our attitude to them is not."

What then is the best attitude? One of acceptance, total and unconditional, so as not to sow another seed to fructify at some other time! So, I warned myself, "Quickly forgive the doctor, quickly forgive yourself, for there lies wisdom!"

EQUANIMITY

Mrs. Pooja Samant/Mrs. Suman Nakhare/Mrs. Sangita Khatri

Ram, my Man Friday, returned to his village as his mother was sick. Venkat, my dear husband, had high fever ranging from 102 to 103 in the past five days, with no sign of abating. I needed to admit him into hospital. It was Saturday night, so hospital staff was mostly the least competent. Suddenly I had three admissions. Pooja was a patient who was seven and half months pregnant, with leaking amniotic fluid and intrauterine foetal death. The cause of the intra uterine death, was a heart block in the foetus. Suman was 34-years-old in the second month of her first pregnancy, with bleeding! Sangita was a woman who just popped her baby out as soon as she arrived in the labour ward at 2 am and as a result, sustained a perineal tear which needed to be carefully sutured.

All tests done for Venkat kept coming negative, with fears of several uncommon and serious diseases arising in the mind. Anxiety levels couldn't have been higher. The patient with the intrauterine death made no progress for a trial of vaginal delivery. A second opinion was sought and the advice given was to wait another day. The danger of intrauterine infection was huge and the distress to the mother extreme! I feared grave complications, which could even lead to the loss of the womb in the patient. Yet I was told by a third doctor also, to wait. That, the patient would deliver vaginally.

At 6.30 am on Monday morning, I was committed to conduct a *Pranayama* class with 12 ladies at a clubhouse 10 kms away. The driver was to come to fetch me at 6.30 am. A doubt arose – should the class be

postponed? Best not to postpone if one could make it! Just try! The class was conducted. No one felt anything was amiss for indeed it was not. The patient with the foetal death had still not delivered. When I returned after the class, I helped Venkat with ablutions and a bath. Dear Venkat's fever was still raging in spite of IV antibiotics. Our son, dear Devendra, had to leave for Panvel on work. At home, one lone maidservant assisted to prepare lunch.

At 4 pm I took a call and carried out a caesarean for a dead baby! Fortunately, no complications occurred even though two whole days and nights had passed after ruptured membranes. By 5.30 pm, an auto rickshaw was taken to go home to prepare a good dinner for the daughter-in-law and to spend time reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. A dear friend attended on Venkat and a resident slept overnight to help. A good understanding of Chapter I was arrived at after discussion and reading the notes made. Slept at 10 pm, continued the commitment of 6.30 am for the *Pranayama* class. Conducted OPD as usual, nearly 20 patients seen. Day was full of serious patients including an ectopic pregnancy admitted saying, "Ma'am, I have faith only in you." So the thought passed, 'Welcome aboard, you were all that was missing in my life!' Hysterectomy for another patient was already posted for the next day.

Well, all was well two days on. Venkat's fever showed signs of receding, diagnosis of Chikanguniya made. The patient with the foetal death was doing well, ectopic settling. The patient with bleeding in early pregnancy aborted. Home front: the maid rose to the occasion and helped all she could. The class was loved by one and all. A small donation for the ashram was collected. Devendra returned from Panvel. Venkat back from hospital. The next day holiday by chance! The patient for hysterectomy did not turn up and one could return home early as all patients came on time and were seen before lunch!

There really is no problem if psychological suffering can be controlled. The day unfolds, as it will. We have only to respond to the

events without protest. Resentment arises only from the sense of 'I', 'me' and 'mine.'

All through, the sentiment was, "Thank you God for giving me the opportunity, health and ability to serve and not veer from the events unfolding as they will. Freedom from fear and worry is in surrender to His Will. What a surge of energy and goodwill. What heartfelt sympathy with fellow beings. No loss of equanimity and hence, skilled action. All acceptance, leading to the resolution of apparent disease. Beloved, thank you!"

Once again Chapter II, of the Bhagavad Gita where Shri Krishna discusses the character of a being with equanimity, came to mind and the conviction, that the practical application of all the instructions we receive in our scriptures is possible, grew.

Shloka 65:

**Prasadesarvadukhanamhanirasyopjayateprasannachet
asahyashubuddhihparyavatishthate.**

(With the attainment of such placidity of mind, all his sorrows come to an end, and the intellect of such a person of tranquil mind soon withdrawing itself from all sides, becomes firmly established in God.)

SURRENDER

15.6.16, Mrs. Rekha Sundaram

The day started as usual with the morning prayers and the 13th chapter of *Bhagavad Gita* chanting – one of my favourites. As I contemplated and listened to Mooji's tape, titled 'Enjoy your absence,' the inner heart spoke up and the insight, 'No more identity, no more delusion,' gripped the mind strongly.

As we left for work a little earlier than usual, I wished to meet Lalitha Krishnan, an 87-year-old lady through whom divinity shines easily as the covering of the EGO has worn thin. She greeted me warmly and taking my hand in hers said, "You look ready to go to the Himalayas." (I was wearing saffron no doubt). We shared the camaraderie of co-walkers on the path and she enjoyed the insight that I had this morning. While with her, a dear resident, Dr. Kiran, called and I was initially a little alarmed as I thought that something has gone wrong with a patient; he knew that I'd be there in a few minutes, so why should he call at all?

He was however, very warmly suggesting that we have breakfast together at the popular *Vohuman* restaurant nearby. I just could not resist. Eight residents awaited me at the restaurant and we enjoyed a delicious repast. Just being together away from the hospital and feeling the warmth of the group, further added to the floating of the mind into a realm that can only be described as joy.

By 9.20 am we left *Vohuman* and walked with a rapid springy step to the wards where our patients were doing well. We were in the OPD at 9.45 am which is around the time patients come in. Waiting for us was our

star (very high risk) patient. Mrs. RS is a 35-year-old primigravida with Dilated Cardiomyopathy who had booked under our care. Her history included seventeen years of infertility for which she had undergone major surgery some years back. However, this was a freak spontaneous conception after all treatment had been abandoned. As if this was not enough, she had a uterine prolapse in early pregnancy for which we had put in a ring in the vagina. Off and on she had been admitted for assessment of her cardiac status and once for diarrhoea, as she had eaten outside food.

We had slowly got her to the eighth month of pregnancy now. The cardiologists had reassured us that she was stable and we could take her to the ninth month with confidence. Much against my better judgement, I had agreed. We were happy to see her and she walked in quite well and very stable. I asked her how the movement of her baby was and we discussed the D-Date. We decided that it should be the first of July as she then completed her eighth month. I felt it was better not to wait any longer. I always personally examined her and today, I advised a CTG, which is a graph of the foetal heart, for which she went to the labour ward.

In the meanwhile we saw a couple of other patients and did a minor procedure. Miss. MP walked in. She was also 36-years-old but had undergone a hysterectomy as she insisted on it (she was suffering from vaginal discharge was known to be slightly mentally compromised). She was a favourite patient of ours and I greeted her with great enthusiasm. We had even contributed towards her operation, as she could not afford it. The OPD maid brought in a hot cup of coffee at 10.25 am, our holy time for coffee! Just at that instant, in walked Rekha gasping for breath, restless, pale and sweating.

The serene, pleasant atmosphere catapulted into one of instant activity. Fear of losing both the patient and baby gripped our guts and we called for Code Blue, and the cardiologists to help. Quickly, we had a cannula in

her veins and pumped Lasix to reduce the load on her heart while putting the oxygen mask with the oxygen cylinder open to full throttle. She kept taking it off, as she was restless.

Soon we had shifted her to the ICU. Two cardiologists were quickly on the spot. I kept reassuring her that she is going to be alright. She looked at me and nodded. Her blood pressure had shot up to 180/110. The cardiologist instructed that I should catheterise her bladder, as she was likely to put out much urine. However, this did not immediately happen and this was worrisome as well. We dared not monitor the baby's heart in case we had lost it and the patient might get further demoralised.

In the meantime, the patients attending the outpatient's department were shunted out while we shifted Rekha to ICU. The outpatients were then dealt with by the residents while I was in ICU. While all this was happening I received two calls, one from a friend who was visiting from Rishikesh and is in charge of the Neuroscience Dept at our ashram. He wanted to introduce me to the Crime Branch Police Commissioner to do some yoga classes with their personnel. I explained my situation and requested that he pass on my telephone number to the Commissioner. He hastily hung up.

The second was a call from a Senior Brigadier colleague who had timed his visit to his patient in the labour ward, so that he could find me in the outpatients. He too is a dear spiritual friend. As I could do nothing at that moment to relieve my patient, I went to meet him and take his blessings for her. He had come to see his patient who was aborting in mid-trimester in spite of a stitch that he had put in to prevent just such a mishap.

He explained that nothing is in our hands. We know not, the next moment. There is only the ONE who is worthy of praise.

Somehow, her breathing got better and we could shift her to the theatre for an emergency section. Two Senior Consultant Anaesthetists were apprised of the dire situation and they conferred with the cardiologist.

They convinced the cardiac team that epidural was the anaesthesia of choice, as by this time the patient's restlessness had reduced and she could sit up. I held her close as the anaesthetists did their job, as much for her sake as for mine. I am deeply attached to my patient and wondered if I was actually going to get a live or a dead baby out. What would I say if it was the latter? I did not dare ask her whether the baby was moving.

The paediatric team was in place with readiness to intubate the baby should it be required. Taking a quick vertical incision I got out a baby girl whose delightful cry sent a warm tender feeling along my spine as I delivered her. The paediatricians were happy. The patient smiled and I closed her as quickly as I could. The surgery took 20 minutes. Half the time we normally take, skin to skin. The patient was stable and taken to recovery as I changed to go to my clinic. I slowly awaited my next patient. All my patients had been rescheduled due to this emergency and each was curious to know what had happened. They were joyfully told.



It took my breath away when I realised with deep gratitude that this whole event had happened in the hospital, at the best hour of day when every consultant is in hospital, when the treating doctors were at hand, when the theatre was geared up and informed in advance, when the paediatric team and best anaesthetists were available. In fact, the anaesthetists confessed that they had been relaxing due to the cancellation of two cases telling themselves what luck, let's just have coffee today!

The afternoon passed and I saw my last patient by 4 pm. I then went and visited the ICU as I had to see yet another patient with dengue and 20 weeks pregnancy. Well... My dear Mrs. RS was stable. Her brothers had come to the clinic with tears in their eyes saying, "Thank you doctor you have saved her life." Only I knew how untrue that was!

Home by 5 pm, the carpenter had brought the Zen stools ready for the coming yoga festival.

The whole body-mind-being was overwhelmed with a strange joy, contentment and surrender. It was inexplicable. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I sat in front of the home temple singing the aarti, celebrating Being, celebrating the non-doing, feeling the sweep of surrender and truly 'enjoying my absence!' As the day had begun, so it had come to a close when nothing had indicated what it held as it unfolded the events.

What, I ask myself, was in my control? Who was I indeed to decide anything at all? For once, the fact was amply demonstrated in practical life.

Chapter 12, Bhagavad Gita, Shloka 12:

**Shreyohi gyanam abhyasat, gynat dhyanam upasate,
dhyanat karma phal tyagah tyagat shantih nirantaram.**

(Knowledge is better than practice without discernment, meditation on God is superior to knowledge, and renunciation of the fruit of action (surrender) is even superior to meditation; for, peace follows renunciation.)

YOGA IN ACTION

Today, clinical medicine seems to have faded and most doctors take a round of the investigations and treat scans and blood tests, hardly coming in contact with the patient, as if he/she is of no consequence. If the patient cannot afford investigations, she is summarily sent off with some medication for her symptoms. Contact with the patient for more than a couple of minutes is deemed a waste of time for it might indicate that the doctor is not good enough as he is not too busy.

When I got a gold medal in the final MBBS I was with my Guru while he congratulated me. He also instructed me and gave me specific *aadesh* (instruction). He said, “Treat every patient who comes to you as a *Rugna Narayan* (God in the garb of a sick person).”

Two cases exemplify what can go wrong if we just dispose of patients either because they are inconsequential or have petty complaints that we are not in a mood to entertain. Mrs. Geeta, the wife of a ward boy, came into the OPD requesting a pill to postpone her period for a day, as otherwise she would not be able to get the Goddess Kali home for the special festival of *Navratri*. It was very tempting to give her the pill and let her go. The residents were instructed, “No we don’t work like that. Please take her full history and examine her. Maybe she has never had a routine check.”

To the amazement of one and all, a routine examination revealed a BP of 200/110mm Hg. She was promptly sent to the physician for urgent help!

The second patient the same day had come for so-called menopausal symptoms and had been given a list of investigations by the previous doctor. A simple general examination revealed an enlarged thyroid, which then needed to be investigated while all other tests had been irrelevant.

In whatever we undertake, our commitment must be total and meticulous. Yoga is union. We thus achieve yoga when we are united with the field of action in which we are trained.

Shloka 50, Chapter II, Bhagavad Gita:

**Budhiryuktojahatihubhesukrutedushkrute,
tasmatyagayujyasway ogahkarmasukaushalam.**

(One endowed with wisdom relinquishes here both the good deeds as well as the bad ones. Therefore, be directed towards yoga: yoga is skilfulness in action.)

KARMA IS MYSTERIOUS

Mrs. Aarti Sachdev, a 31-year-old had booked with us for her second delivery. Her history included a previous caesarean section as she had developed high BP at 34 weeks and she had only one kidney. She had earlier donated one of her kidneys to her brother. All was going well in this pregnancy and we kept her under strict vigilance. We needed to start her on medication to lower her blood pressure at around 32 weeks in this pregnancy. For this, we had admitted her, monitored her carefully, had done her relevant blood tests and found all to be normal. We therefore let her go home. The next week, we re-admitted her as she became a little puffy with swelling on her feet. After giving her a day's rest and steroid injections to help mature the lungs of the baby and repeating all her blood tests which were perfectly normal with no leak of protein in the urine, we decided to let her go home for a few days before readmitting her for a caesarean section. She was instructed to report immediately in case she got swelling again or if the BP shot up to more than 130/90 or if her baby's movements seemed less.

It was only four days later that she came in suddenly with raised blood pressure, decreased foetal movements and swelling of her feet and body. A blood pressure lowering agent was given to her as soon as she got admitted and the baby's heart was monitored. It showed an ominous pattern and the patient was shifted for an emergency caesarean section. Unfortunately, the baby came out flat (without any muscle tone-floppy, as in impending death) and on resuscitation, could survive for only 5–6 hours. This had happened because the patient had a sudden (termed concealed accidental haemorrhage) bleeding episode behind the

placenta, which thereby got separated internally. Although there was no obvious bleeding, the baby could not sustain the blood loss. In fact, this resulted in the mother going into early coagulation failure and severe blood loss, dropping the haemoglobin by 5 gms%. She was given 3 units of blood and other clotting factors, shifted to the ICU and stabilised. Her condition reversed and she recovered fully.

The team and I were left devastated as in spite of such close monitoring and involvement in her management, we ended up with a dead baby on our hands. We kept reviewing and blaming ourselves that we could have done a caesarean the second time that we admitted her. Then all would have been well. Why did we not do it? It is a well-known fact that the decisions in our team are based on guidelines which suggest that we take the pregnancy as close to term as possible. It is also well-known that we are usually proactive and deliver patients early so as to get a live baby out in a good condition and then manage in the super NICU that we have in our hospital. What made the whole scene even more heart-breaking was that she has a son and had tried for a girl – and this baby was a girl. The husband and wife are devoted to each other and very understanding.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 11, when Arjuna is shown the Virat Swaroop by Shri Krishna, he trembles to see Drona his beloved teacher, Bheeshma his grand uncle and several venerable elders and kinsmen with their heads asunder. Some stuck between the giant teeth of Shri Krishna.

Each and everyone meeting, a gory end! Shri Krishna tells Arjun, “Whether you take part in the war or not, these have met their end on earth. So now it is up to you whether you choose to be my instrument or not.”

Arjuna beseeches him to assume his normal form for he is terrified to behold this Swaroop, which encompasses the whole manifestation and all there is beyond.

I wondered whether this applied in our case. Birth and death happen in another dimension. Do we need to take responsibility? Is it being callous not to accept blame for decisions taken by us? Nowhere in the entire management was there any doubt of neglect or overlooking any point. Yet the decision to let her go home that day was wrong. Why had we not just delivered her? This question will haunt us to our last days, if we accept doer-ship and believe that we save lives and our errors in judgement cause death. For an error in judgement on the part of the doctor, the patient has to pay the price. What kind of justice is that?

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 11, Shloka 33:

**Tasmatvamuthistha yasholabhasvajitvashatrubhunkshva
rajyamsamrudham, mayyeveatamnihatahpurvamevni
mitamatrambhavsav yasachin.**

(Therefore, do you arise and win glory; conquering foes, enjoy the affluent kingdom. These warriors stand already slain by Me; be you only an instrument Arjun.)

INNER WITNESS

Mrs. Meeta Ambani, a 34-year-old, having one normally-delivered girl, consulted me asking if it were possible to enhance the chances of conceiving a male. A few scientific facts were explained and the young lady conceived in the same cycle. All was progressing well till the scan done at 12 weeks (3 months), when it was found that the placenta was covering the mouth of the womb (cervix). This is usually the opposite of what happens in a normal pregnancy and such a position of the placenta can cause bleeding. The patient then has to avoid any undue strain and even abstain from sexual intercourse till such time that the placenta migrates upwards. This is possible. She was accordingly counselled.

All went well through the first and second trimester. The patient travelled abroad and in India without any limitation to her activities and with no mishap. The pregnancy progressed to 30 weeks and she was asked to repeat an ultrasound to check the placental site and growth of the baby. The ultrasound showed that the placenta had moved up and it was no longer covering the cervix. However, it was still low and just 2 cms from the opening of the cervix. She was again counselled that bleeding can still happen and that she should take utmost care. She, however, much against the better judgement of the doctor, took a flight to a nearby country for a break before the baby arrived.

On the second day of her stay in the evening when she was playing with her three-year-old daughter, she experienced a sudden gush of blood, which was painless but alarming. She had to be rushed to hospital and was admitted. Here, they gave her an injection to improve

the lung maturation of the baby and repeated the ultrasound which showed that the placenta was fully covering the cervix. This made the ultrasound done here seem ridiculous, for this cannot happen. Either their findings or ours were totally wrong. The fact that she had bleeding meant that the placenta was low and this we knew.

She was treated conservatively and discharged from the hospital with strict precautionary instructions and to report immediately in case of bleeding. AND of course, not to travel back under ANY circumstances and that she would not get a travel certificate from any doctor in town. The patient had contacted me right through the event and wanted me to talk to the treating doctor in the nearby country. This was done and with all due respect, it is necessary to record that the doctor spoke most vehemently about their ultrasound findings and expressed the impossibility of allowing the patient to fly back home.

Whereas it was the safest option for the patient to stay put, she was not prepared to stay on and pleaded that I make a trip to that place and assess the situation for myself. I explained to the husband that if the placenta was truly covering the cervix it would not be prudent to fly her across. It would also be worth their while to seek a second opinion from senior colleagues.

Two of the most-senior, renowned and respected gynaecologists in India were consulted and both were of the opinion that the patient could be transported back. It was accordingly decided that I should fly there to assess the situation first hand and make the decision.

Accordingly, on November 11, 2016, I flew down. 12.11.16 we had taken an appointment with another sonologist to get a third opinion! Fortunately, the sonologist had absolutely no bias as she did not quite know the details of the previous ultrasound reports. As I was personally present, no manipulation of reports could take place. As we looked keenly, the placenta was actually 2cms away and it proved that our original findings were correct.

Yet it must be noted that in spite of whatever the findings are, the patient did have a bleed. That is always an alarming sign in late pregnancy and who was to say it would not happen again? It is well-known that bleeding in such cases is recurrent. As any obstetrician knows, placental site bleed can be torrential and dangerous to both *Jaccha-Baccha* (mother and baby)! It was decided to take the challenge and move the patient back home, particularly in view of the positive opinions of the stalwart consultants and most importantly, the ultrasound findings.

The flight had to be a chartered one in order to make it as smooth and safe as possible for the patient so that she could sleep on the bed comfortably and there was no pressure on the pelvis. We also needed to be able to access the set-up for intravenous infusion in case it was required! All this was possible in a chartered flight as one can access one's checked-in luggage.

The precautions taken were.

The patient had been started on a uterine relaxant a few days prior. An injection to keep the uterus quiet was given the night before travelling.

An IV drip was set and solutions were packed

The Foetal Doppler for monitoring the baby, as well as a BP apparatus was taken.

An injection to stem bleeding if it occurred was also taken.

An ambulance was kept waiting at the arrival airport.

A nurse was on board to help me in case a drip had to be set up.

It cannot be over-emphasised that should bleeding occur, the patient had to reach a hospital within half an hour to prevent any catastrophe, that in spite of every precaution it would be of precious little use in such an eventuality.

We needed the prayers and blessings of all who knew what we were undertaking. All this had to be done without unduly alarming the patient or her relatives.

Throughout the flight I observed myself being on high alert. At this time, I noticed there was an observing consciousness within which was totally still and seemed unconcerned with the persona of THE DOCTOR who felt she WAS RESPONSIBLE. The quiet inward look revealed the truth that events are fixed. Our attitude to them is not.

Let me elaborate: It seemed that I had taken every possible precaution and would certainly help somewhat in protecting my patient. Equally, it could also prove to be grossly inadequate! Which I also knew in myself! So then, who or what was taking action? Who or what would respond to the action with the right reflexes? As I dwelt on these principles, the heart was at peace and the mind was on alert!

The thirteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita came to mind where Shri Krishna expounds the philosophy of Kshetra and Kshetrajnya, i.e. the field (of action) and the knower of the field. In the field, he includes all the faculties of the body-mind complex, meaning the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, and the Ego!

So this then was what was happening! The inner field was becoming apparent to whom? Me? Thus if all my faculties are not me, who am I? This has to be experienced and it is possible to experience it. Much of our suffering is due to the wrong identification with the inner field which leads to the misconception of doer-ship (karta) and then its corollary, the enjoyer or sufferer (bhokta). One need not assume the role of either and let life unfold while responding perfectly appropriately when the need arises.

I know everyone would now want to know what happened. Forget all this philosophy, you say! Well, in all this drama, the lady relaxed and was supremely confident that nothing would happen. And she was right. Nothing did happen! Is this a contradiction in terms or what? Nothing happened?

We dismissed the ambulance and drove home in a limousine safe and sound, totally surrendered.

Knowledge, of the field and the knower of the field, had made even the journey blissful.

In Chapter 13 of the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna explains to Arjuna what the field is and who the knower of the field is. Ordinarily we understand that this manifestation as the field and this body-mind complex who we refer to as “I” as the knower of the field, but on deeper reflection and following the pointings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Gurus such as Shri Ramana Maharshi and more recently Shri Mooji, it is clear that there is an inner presence who is witness even of the EGO and That is the Knower of the field.

Shloka 5 and 6:

**Mahabhutanyahankarobudhirvyaktameva cha,
indriyannidashaik am cha panchachendriyagocharah.**

[The five elements, the Ego, the Intellect, the Unmanifest (Primordial Matter), the ten organs of perception and action, and the five objects of sense (sound, touch, colour, taste and smell).]

**Ichhadveshahsukhamdukhamasangataschetanadhrutih,
atetkshetr amsamasenasavikaramudahrutam.**

(Also desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, the physical body consciousness, firmness: thus is the Ksetra (field) with its evolutes, briefly stated.

PARADOX

The day was drawing to a close. No one knew how it would go. Had a section on a VIP scheduled at 10 am. Last night, tried to sleep early to be fresh for the case. At midnight, got a call from a patient with PIH with severe IUGR reporting that her BP had shot up to 170/120. I told her to get to the hospital as soon as possible, called the resident and gave the protocol of drugs and what to keep ready. I asked him to call me as soon as the patient reached. Twenty minutes later, I phoned the patient's husband to find out where they were. They said they would reach in twenty minutes. Half an hour later, I got a call from the resident saying that the BP was 156 /96 and that the patient was stable.

In the meantime, I had called a colleague requesting him to take over the care of the patient in the morning in case it was needed. He had kindly agreed. The patient also had a placenta *previa centralis*, which meant we could not deliver her vaginally as that would engender bleeding. All her blood tests were normal, but some bright spark decided to do a fundoscopy and the ophthalmology resident came and declared that she had papilloedema, which meant that we had endangered her vision and not acted early enough.

Fortunately I was told all this in the morning at 7 am. I asked Dr. Devendra, Consultant, Retina, to please review, which he kindly did and he said, "No papilloedema. Diagnosis: Resident is a donkey!" I was amused and grateful, both, for it was now a matter of organising the time for the section to be done for this patient following the VIP patient. Obviously, no sleep last night, what with nightmares of eclampsia and antepartum haemorrhage, none of which, happened, fortunately.

We left early, for we had to do our round before travelling 25 kms to the institution where the VIP was scheduled to be operated. The car had come to our clinic to pick us up. We left at 8.25 sharp. The *muhurat* was between 10 am–12 noon but my dear husband Dr. Venkat reminded me that *Rahukaal* was from 10.30 am to noon today. He said, “You better do it early.” The driver was alert and kept dodging vehicles, choosing the road that would take us quickly, wading through traffic and humans, almost elbowing people out of the way as if he could control the chaos around him.

In the meantime, the mind was racing as to what should be the plan, how could we get the patient into theatre quickly. We must also get back for the other patient. Planning, planning, planning! Suddenly an insight arose as I noticed that the elastic of my leggings was loose and that I needed to pull up the leggings to keep them in place. I almost laughed aloud when I realised that, “You cannot control your leggings and are you going to control the birth time and all other activities that are racing through?”

Managed the leggings all right and got the patient into OT by 10 am. I delivered the baby at 10.15 am BUT the suction did not work, the light was dim to say the least. The sister kept calling the *maushibai* (lady who cleans the theatre being addressed as maternal aunt to give respect) to rectify the suction! I almost did an underwater birth, as the baby had to be brought out in its own amniotic fluid with no suction of any kind. Mops were far and few between and were also wet as that is what they keep prepared for intra abdominal use!

After seeing the patient out of OT into her room and seeing that she was comfortable, we set out for home hospital, where the midnight patient developed a severe headache and was shifted to theatre as I entered the driveway. Rushed up to the theatre, had Dr. Duggal on call in case the patient suffered excessive bleeding. Had a fantastic team, superb lights and all working instruments. Carefully planned the section, delivered a

220 gm live baby girl. Dear Dr. Venkat resuscitated the baby and was taking utmost care with intubation, adrenaline and every possible drug to keep the baby alive. I found it so touching, for the baby had stood absolutely NO CHANCE. But he did not give up – that to me is LOVE. The baby died 2–3 hours later.

The paradox was that the VIP was delivered in a General Hospital which is a teaching one as it belonged to her family. It would be below their dignity if she went to another hospital. The lower middle class patient was delivered in a premier Private Institute in the city. It was all in the fitness of things – indeed such is the will of God.

Both patients are doing well this evening and the day unfolded its mysteries as it usually does. Deep within, peace stillness and silence, a gentle understanding of what will be will be, quiet- is the key!

Again and again, the Bhagavad Gita exhorts us to maintain equilibrium under all circumstances. It is really difficult for the surgeon to maintain balance when surgical instruments, etc. do not function optimally, when the possibility of bleeding and losing the life of a patient is a high possibility.

Yet it is possible and leads to a far better performance than when in an agitated state.

The day has not ended for me. A 36-year-old patient who had been married for 16 years, who had one miscarriage and one ectopic pregnancy, was planning to go for IVF when she discovered that she was pregnant. How joyous was that moment! The ultrasound was done to see the foetus. It was discovered she had an uterine abnormality (subseptate uterus), as well as a polyp, which had resulted in the opening of the mouth of the womb. An urgent decision was taken to excise the polyp and put in a stitch because that would be the only way to save the baby. So much for what we think is the best course, for she had just started bleeding. It may not be the end of this pregnancy and we may still be surprised, but it certainly looked sinister tonight.

In Chapter II Arjuna asks Shri Krishna, “What are the characteristics of the one who is equanimous?” Shri Krishna responds with Shloka 56:

**Dukheshwanudvignamanahsukheshuvigatspruha,
vitaragabhayakrodhahsthitadhirmuniruchayte.**

(The sage whose mind remains unperturbed amidst sorrows, whose thirst for pleasures has altogether disappeared, and who is free from passion, fear and anger, is called of stable mind.)

WHOLEHEARTED EFFORT IS BOUND TO SUCCEED

It was on the day celebrating the Birth Anniversary of the Founder of Ruby Hall Clinic, Pune, that the whole family had gone together to enjoy the evening. Each of us is attached to this great institution in some way or the other. The car had been parked at our clinic across the road. Our son Devendra had to pick up his laptop from the clinic and I had given him the keys to the building. At 10 pm we were returning home, when Devendra duly handed back the keys.

As the servant was out, once again the key had to be extricated from the little purse to open the house. As I went in to keep the purse, I noticed that one of a pair of my diamond earrings which I kept in the purse was missing. Since one was there it proved the other had fallen out when I took out my keys on one of the above two occasions. A diligent search of the house was found to be futile.

It was past 11 pm and really, if it had fallen near the clinic somewhere, it might be impossible to find. Was it worth going back to search? I told myself, “It does not matter whether you lose the earring or not. Let not the effort be lacking. Go, go to look for it.” Dear Devendra decided to drive me back. He and took the car keys and went from the back door to the garage. I lit the flashlight of my phone and retraced my steps as I had entered from the front door. Imagine my delight when I found a gleaming object in the side walk – my earring! I let out a sound of delight and called to Devendra that the earring was found!

Had the effort been lacking, had I decided that it was futile searching for it, the earring would have been buried in the mud. Our gardener, who comes at 5 am, would never have spotted it and he would have swept the place, watered the shrubs lining the sidewalk and that would have been the end of it.

This little incident taught me what lies in our hands is only the effort and not the result. There should be absolutely no compromise on that and whatever the result, it should be accepted in toto. This will eliminate psychological suffering. What comes intuitively is that this suffering then does not become a nidus (seed) for further suffering. It also breaks the habit of the mind to wallow in the past.

HOLISTIC MOTHERHOOD

Finally

It was in 2013 November. I was attending a course Swami Veda Bharati was conducting, on the subject of *Kalyan Mitra*. He had taken the vow of silence earlier the same year and hence was painstakingly typing his lecture on a computer, which was then seen via an LCD projector on the screen. His compassion was so touching and inspiring! One afternoon, I felt that I should take his blessings to start writing a book on yoga and motherhood. Accordingly, I wrote a note and gave it to his secretary Tejas. To my great surprise, Swamiji talked about the influence of the environment on the unborn child and typed, ‘...there is no one more competent than Dr. Shirin Venkat to write a book on Yoga and Pregnancy.’ My heart was singing. I had his blessings and was sure to succeed. I started writing the book on 30.1.2014. as it was Mauni Amawasya, a day to be spent in silence and contemplation, an auspicious day.

The book was completed by the end of the year and I brought the manuscript to be placed at his feet by mid-November 2014. It took some editing and was titled ‘Holistic Motherhood.’ By June 2015, I had a letter in hand which confirmed that *Jaypee Publishers* (they publish only scientific books) would be publishing the book. I took this letter and showed it to Swamiji. He was indeed very happy.

The book was ready and in my hands by mid-August. I felt deeply sad that Swamiji had left his physical body before I could present the book to him. Yet somewhere, I knew that he knew this and that it met with his

approval. On the release of the book in September at *Crossword* at the hands of Padmashri Rustom Soonawala, I was filled with gratitude. At the same time, a thought arose, ‘Now, we have to distribute this book and sell it! Oh, so it does not end here?’

A really neat insight arose which made it clear that the cause of desire is *karma* and the cause of *karma* is desire! Firstly, a desire to write a book and do the *karma* of writing it and then a new desire arises from this *karma*, that of having to sell it! So, it’s actually a Catch-22 situation! A vicious circle indeed!

How does one get out of its grip? My mind immediately went to the scriptures. Indeed, the answer lies in the surrender of the fruit of action at the feet of the Guru or God and not to accept the doer-ship of action. Once this insight arose, action was undertaken for the sake of the action and all fruit of action was surrendered at His lotus feet. Desire took to its heels and pure action remained.

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 12, Shloka 12:

**Shreyohigynanamabhyasatgy nanyatdhyanamuchyate,
dhyanat-karmaphaltyagattyagatchantiranant aram.**

(Knowledge is better than practice without discernment, meditation on God is superior to knowledge, and renunciation of the fruit of action is even superior to meditation; for peace immediately follows renunciation.)

AFTERWORD

Equanimity versus the Vicissitudes of Experience

The *Bhagavad Gita*, the Buddha and most sages tell us the importance of attaining an equipoise mind. Very often young people complain, “But we want to feel sad, we want to feel excited and glad, we want to, we want to... why do you preach equanimity? It will take away the joy of **experience.**”

I have been mulling over the answer to this question. The following are a few of my insights, which may help you understand the apparent dilemma.

- ♦ At no time, does equanimity imply insensitivity.
- ♦ We are all sentient beings and as such cannot escape sensations unless anaesthetised.
- ♦ There are four aspects to any sensation first: the stimulus e.g. a sound; second: the perception; third: the interpretation of the stimulus; and fourth: the reaction to it. The reaction is most often instant and uncontrollable.
- ♦ Reaction to the experience is of two kinds – craving or aversion. If it is craving one wants to repeat it again and again, if it is aversion one avoids it again and again.
- ♦ Repetitive behaviour, results in a cyclic, inexorable, habit pattern, which enslaves our mind.
- ♦ A mind that is mesmerised and enslaved by habit patterns, sometimes even addicted, can only lead to misery.

What does an equipoise mind mean?

- ♦ A mind that is discerning and is not subject to a compulsive instant reaction. Instead it has the time to respond appropriately and adequately.
- ♦ A mind that can appreciate the fleeting nature of all experience and hence does not swing like a pendulum from mania to misery.
- ♦ A sensitive mind that feels the injury of another and has the patience to soothe.
- ♦ A mind that has clarity and direction, for reactions do not leave it turbulent. It is tranquil and serene.
- ♦ The reflection of experience happens in all its clarity only in the calm lake of an equipoise mind.
- ♦ The experience can unfold in all its purity for preconceived craving and aversion does not tarnish its perception.
- ♦ The still state of Being is ever in the moment and the experience happens in the now, so synchronicity is no longer rare it is a given.*
- ♦ The desire to repeat the pleasant and avoid the painful is seen for what it is and no longer holds one hostage.

Need more be said? Oh! What freedom, can such a mind not experience?

Note:* Synchronicity is the occurrence of events which are in sync, when the opposites are not at play and all is still.

To elaborate life is movement whether gross or subtle. Even thought has form and movement, emotions move all the time, all of this is perceived. In fact, we can catch ourselves often remarking, “The thought is at the back of my mind,” implying it has to make it to the front to be perceived. All movement happens against a still background, (Just Being not Becoming) or else it can never be appreciated. If the mind is still there is no movement, if there is no movement there is no space, no time! There is no past to compare with, there is no future to fear.

GLOSSARY

Fibroid – a benign tumor which arises from the fibrous tissue and affects the womb quite commonly.

Cyst – literally, a bag with fluid.

Adhesions – bands of tissue which attach one organ to another and happen in many diseases such as endometriosis, infections and cancer.

Intravenous – given through a vein.

Primigravida – first-time pregnant.

Fetal – pertaining to the baby in the womb.

Cardiotocograph – the graph taken to assess the well-being of the baby's heart in relationship with the movement of uterine contractions. It also records the maternal pulse.

Placenta Centralis – Placenta is the organ that feed the baby. When it is situated lower than the baby it is called Previa. When it covers the opening of the womb completely, it is called centralis.

Papilloedema – swelling of the most sensitive part of the eye which signifies raised pressure in the brain which could be due to high blood pressure.

Retina – is the lining of the eye which receives images.

Endometriosis – a disease where the lining of the uterus which is normally shed during menstruation also implants over the uterus and ovaries and other sites.

Infertility – inability to conceive a baby.

Hypertension – high blood pressure.

Amniotic fluid – the baby is covered fluid in a bag (amniotic sac).

Intrauterine – inside the uterus (womb).

Cardiomyopathy – disease of the heart muscle which weakens it.

Epidural – anesthesia given in the spine, it can be used make labour painless.

Fundoscopy – looking into the eye to see the state of the retina.

Eclampsia – Fits during pregnancy they come suddenly as a flash and are associated with high blood pressure.

Anepartum – Haemorrhage bleeding during pregnancy after fifth month.

Intrauterine – inside the womb

Hypoglycemia – low blood glucose

Foetal death – dead baby in the womb

REFERENCES

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THE PERENNIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF
THE BHAGVADGITA –SWAMI RAMA.

JEEVANSAR KATHAMRUT

The human predicament is such that at some time, at some place, during some event, one is forced to introspect about the meaning of life and its experiences.

With the help of stories from the epics which are eternally relevant, and poignant personal experiences, Dr. Shirin Venkatramani attempts to show the way out of the avoidable psychological suffering that we experience.

This delightful and insightful book is a simple and quick read – but makes you pause and introspect.



Dr. Shirin Venkatramani is a gynaecologist by training, but a seeker at heart.

Her medical career spanning nearly four decades has been filled with numerous awards, and has been professionally satisfying.

In her role as a doctor she has been able to provide medical care, emotional support, and practical guidance to thousands of patients. Her passion has been to reduce maternal mortality in India, towards which she spearheaded the *SuPraBha Ganga Yatra*, a 108-day awareness walkathon along the River Ganga.

However she has consciously balanced her worldly career with an inward quest, fuelled by her close association with the great sages of our times and her love for reading of spiritual and philosophical texts. Throughout her life she has strived to reconcile spiritual concepts with the mundane experience, and this book is one such attempt.