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A SPIRITUAL QUARTERLY

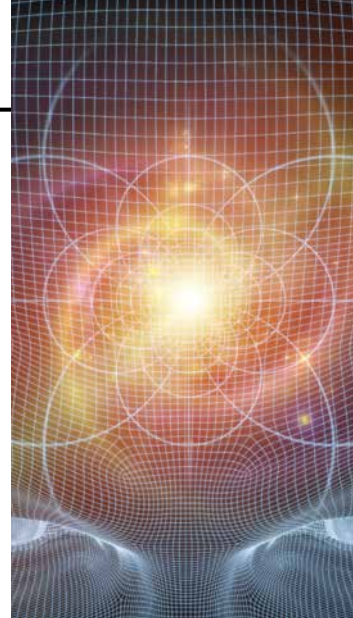


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Universal Target is a spiritual journal promoting unity in diversity and peaceful co-existence. It is founded on the belief that all human beings share a common source and spiritual heritage, irrespective of apparent differences of culture and world traditions. The journal draws upon the shared and accumulated wisdom of our common heritage, to encourage harmony through self-realisation. Universal Target endorses the maxim of His Holiness Nirankari Baba, 'Know One, Believe in One, Become One'.

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WWW.NIRANKARI.ORG

EDITORIAL

Inspiration

Our human race shall forever be indebted to its famous sons and daughters for the awesome leaps in advancement and the outstanding contributions to material progress. Even more so, however, it shall remain beholden to those rare beings to whom humanity owes its continued existence.

Like the high achievers, the spiritually enlightened personages have always been around. In this day and age, they are dedicating their lives to serve and sustain society at large by being one in word and deed.

They are infusing it with love, joy and goodness. By touching the hearts of countless people, they make a marked difference to their lives. When they pass from this world, they leave behind their indelible imprints.

On 29th August 2014, we witnessed the passing of one such rare being: Nirankari Rajmataji. Born to a family of religious devouts, she was spiritually inclined from a very early age. She was well versed in scriptures, of which she had a remarkable understanding. Well before her teens, she met a spiritual adept in the person of Baba Avtar Singh Ji.

Upon seeking, Baba Avtar Singh Ji endowed her, and her parents, with the Divine Vision ('Brahm Gyan'), which she immediately embraced. She was thrilled. With an exceptional enthusiasm, she began to practise it and mould her life in accordance with her Guide's teachings. She became an exemplary disciple.

She loved to serve others without any selfish motives. She travelled to share her spiritual understanding not only in India, but the world over. The last fifty years of her life were spent crusading for the welfare and spiritual well-being of human beings, regardless of their culture, creed or background. Whoever she came into contact with, was touched by her motherly care, compassion and kindness. She ruled many a heart.

She gave hope and solace to millions, all over the world, sharing their pain and joy as her own. Yet she led an incredibly simple, down-to-earth and practical life. Her sole goal was to uplift others. The Mission was her life.

She taught by setting an example, not through mere words. Despite having attained the heights of spirituality and godliness, she played the role of a meek and humble disciple. She had nothing but respect for one and all. She saw the image of God in each and every person, treating everyone alike. She practised God's love by loving all. This was her way of worshipping the Lord.



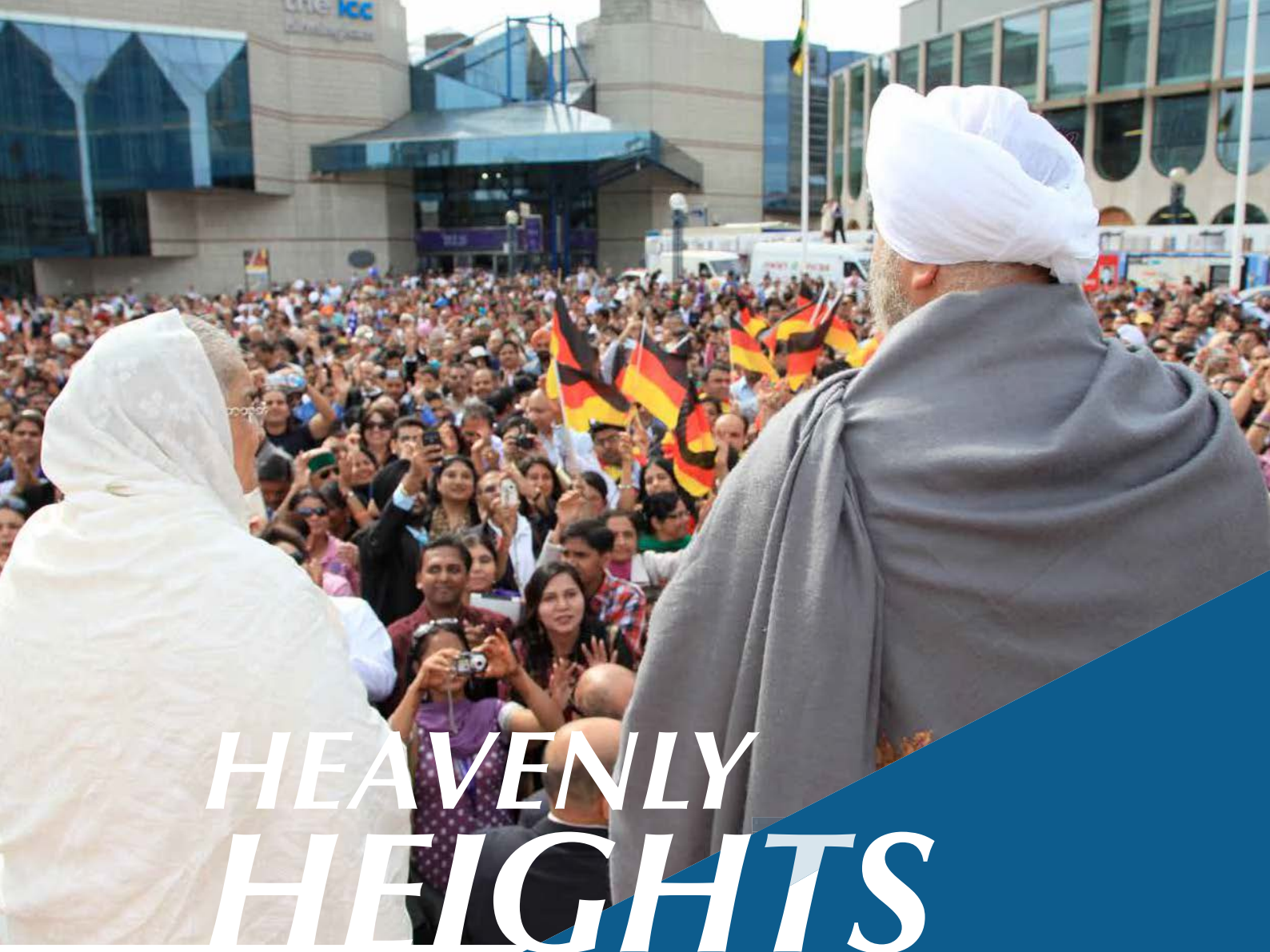
She readily mixed with ordinary folks. She sang, danced and laughed with them and prayed for their welfare. And to millions, who had the opportunity of seeing her at close quarters over six decades, she was indeed a role model. She redefined the parameters for living as a perfect daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and mother. She took every responsibility sincerely, facing any adversities that presented themselves, with a resolute and undaunting faith in God.

By showing personal interests in the needs of others, and finding viable solutions, she was instrumental in positively changing their lives. They would be given the necessary support, be it moral or material. Their station in life was irrelevant. They could be well-to-do on the one hand and acutely deprived and under-privileged, on the other.

Without any qualms, Rajmataji would visit them and shower God's blessings. And what is noteworthy is the fact that she never claimed or accepted any credit for her good deeds. Whenever someone praised her work, she would respond by saying, 'I am not capable of doing anything; it is all Baba Avtar Singh ji's blessings and grace that is doing the work'.

If there was ever a saint who walked on this earth, Nirankari Rajmataji is one of them. She was a rare being, whose life will continue to inspire and guide posterity. Our world can certainly do with more inspired beings like her, such that she will be deeply missed, and remembered always. ■

Harbans Singh



HEAVENLY HEIGHTS

TIMELESS MESSAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS NIRANKARI BABA

There are many people in the world who reach material heights of achievement, but often, if not always, at the expense of spiritual fulfilment. On the other hand there are those – not as many in number – who are fortunate enough to have risen to great heavenly heights. They transcend their material nature. They live in the world; they enjoy its gifts, whilst remaining aligned to their inner being and true nature.

Their distinguishing traits are selfless service, unfailing devotion, large-heartedness, cool-mindedness, and among other things, a sense of equality. One such life that rose above all challenges to inspire, touch and live in the hearts of millions all over the world, was Nirankari Rajmata ji.¹

Her legacy is beyond words. Her practical life was awe-inspiring, and her teachings truly remarkable. Simplicity was her trademark. And indeed, it is a rare opportunity to witness the ordinary life of such an extraordinary noble soul. She rose to great heights through the grace of God.

It is evident from the numerous tributes received from all over the globe that she was instinctively motherly, caring, kind and compassionate towards all who came into contact with her.

The Mission was her life. For almost fifty years, she shouldered the responsibility of crusading for the welfare and spiritual liberation of mankind. And for 17 years, she accompanied Baba Gurbachan Singh ji² everywhere, from small hamlets, villages to towns and metropolises in India, and cities abroad. Nothing could deter them from their goal.

Rajmata ji was never put off by the rickety pot-holed roads, austere accommodation and the lack of even the most basic of facilities. Whichever place she went to with Baba Gurbachan Singh ji, she conveniently adapted to, be it a one-room, tiny hut barely big enough for its own occupants. She would help in the cooking of meals and find a place to rest, wherever it was available. There are countless examples where she and Baba Gurbachan Singh ji left an indelible mark on the devouts they visited.

They inspired and touched all those who came close to them with love, sweet words and meaningful deliberations. They taught them devotion, saintliness and discipleship. This was done through practical, personal examples, never through empty words or rhetoric. And whenever they went abroad, their message to the audience they met was always to realise the Almighty God and fulfil the purpose of life.

Rajmata ji's humility spoke volumes. She honoured every responsibility with vigour: physical, mental and spiritual strength, however adverse the circumstances. As a resolute and determined personality, and strong of character, she inspired everybody. Even though the physical body has its own limitations, she, like Baba Avtar Singh ji³, utilised it beyond its years. She never gave up her life-long commitment even through her advancing years.

She was 50 years of age in 1980. Beyond that age, advancing years have their ups and downs. But even that did not stop her. She was always mentally prepared and ready to travel here, there and everywhere to share the Mission's message. In 1985, she accompanied me abroad on a world tour. In 1986, she went abroad on her own. For a number of years, we would go abroad alternately. In India, she toured with me on numerous occasions, keenly spreading the message of Truth.

She was a great support for me from the very beginning to the very end. I was able to tour abroad due only to her presence and her management of the missionary affairs in India.

She not only gave me birth and brought me up, but more significantly, she instilled in me, and my sisters, the importance of and the reverence for the sadhsangat (the

company of enlightened beings), the fountainhead of all virtues. She always taught us not to be proud of our family background, but to learn, train and develop ourselves within the parameters of the sadhsangat. Our identity and strength of character should flow from it.

She always said that the sadhsangat was the real mother and that everybody, young and old, should be a part of it. She was a perfect example of motherhood. Whoever had the occasion to see her was struck by her elegance and her positive aura. She led a profound spiritual life.

When Baba Gurbachan Singh ji relinquished his mortal form in 1980, I did not only lose a father, but thereafter a mother too, as she prevented me from that day onwards from touching her feet⁴. I would often ask for her blessings. But as soon as I would bend down to reach for her feet, she would hold me back, not allowing me to do so. She would get hold of my hands and place them on her head⁵.

Literally a minute or two prior to Rajmata ji's passing, when the family members were focused on remembering God, I removed the cover from her legs, kissed her feet, and prayed, saying:

'Mata ji, you are not an individual, but the Mission that Baba Avtar Singh ji endowed upon you – the Mission that Baba Gurbachan Singh ji wished to propagate. I pray for your Mission to be followed and shared with everyone, and the humility that you had to be established in each and every member of the Mission. I ask for devotees not to falter, but to rise above those habits and shortcomings that obstruct their spiritual development, and form a barrier to the propagation of the Mission. Just as you honoured and respected each and every saint, I pray for all to follow your example. I ask for your blessings, in the light of the sacrifices made by saints, for your Mission to continue in the way that you want'.

I pray to Nirankar for all – children and adults alike – to be inspired by Rajmata Ji to lead such a life.

Mother, we salute you. We salute your devotion; we salute your large-heartedness and your manner of honouring responsibilities; and we salute you for everything you have done. ■

English adaptation by Dr. D K Mehta

1. Rajmata Ji – the name by which Respected Kulwant Kaur Ji, mother of His Holiness Nirankari Baba Hardev Singh ji, has been known.

2. Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji – the third in the lineage of Nirankari Spiritual Masters, to whom Rajmata Ji was joined in matrimony. Rajmata Ji honored this relationship more so as a spiritual one, in which she followed Baba Gurbachan Singh Ji as a manifest Enlightened Being.

3. Baba Avtar Singh Ji, the second in the lineage of Nirankari Spiritual Masters, and author of the key scriptural text of the Sant Nirankari Mission, known as the Sampuran Avtar Bani.

4. The touching of the feet of elders, is a tradition in India. It marks one's respect for the elder, and is commonplace between children and their parents, even in adult years.

5. The placing of hands on someone's head, symbolises a sacred blessing. By rights, it would be usual for the Mother to bless the son in this manner, but Rajmata Ji revered her son as the manifest Enlightened Master, and sought blessings from him through this humble act.

What is freedom?

Dave Dhanoa, Toronto, Canada

**“..there is only one
substratum in the
universe,
which permeates
everything”**

Freedom is being free of bondage and not being tied down in chains, be they physical or mental. Are we really free? If not, what chains do we have?

According to the ancient Spiritual Masters, these chains result from an all-pervasive illusion, which has also been described as Maya.

Maya is Creation, a transient and temporary manifestation of the Eternal Source. It is essentially illusory in nature, which ensnares and besots the mind, keeping it trapped in a vicious circle of pleasure and pain.

To get out of this trap of endless suffering and illusion, we have to turn to the guidance of the accomplished Spiritual Masters. They are the liberated ones, possessing the skills and know-how to instruct and assist us to break free from the cycle of misery.

“...being free of bondage and not being tied down in chains”

They make us aware that we are more than just the physical body or the mind that plays havoc with it. We are in fact the Spirit, the formless soul within us. Our soul is part and parcel of the All-Pervasive, Over-soul (God).

Our body is a vehicle, which enables us to undertake the spiritual journey towards our goal, which is self-realization (the discovery of our true nature) through God realization.

What makes this world beautiful is its variety of colours, diverse forms, differing natures, fauna, flora and manifold species, including race, culture, creed, and many ways of living. In fact, the things that make this planet unique and amazing are countless.

“Maya is Creation, a transient and temporary manifestation of the Eternal Source. It is essentially illusory in nature, which ensnares and besots the mind.”

However, this wonderful diversity is, and can also be, the cause of disharmony, disunity, misunderstanding and seismic negativity, which feeds both misery and strife, prolonging the on-going human suffering. All this is the effect of Maya.

The Spiritual Master helps us to rise above it and to discover our true inner being, and to be one with it. The Master teaches us that, in reality, there is only one substratum in the Universe, which permeates everything. This is the Singularity, the embracing of which, through divine knowledge, is the prime purpose of life.

This divine knowledge, which comes from the Spiritual Master, is bestowed upon the sincere seeker. For thousands of years, this mystic exchange has taken place between Master and disciple, transporting the seeker to the Knowledge of the Self and the Universe. This Knowledge brings about freedom and liberates the mind of bondages, caused by illusions. It enlightens one's life and endows appreciation of the divine essence of things, animate and inanimate.

An enlightened person thrills in diversity and aligns his being to the One underlying Consciousness, which is the source of real freedom. ■



LET GO OF FEAR

Julie Horsley
Solihull, UK

Let go of fear
This is your chance to be as one
To shine
You can save lives
From one to another
This is your time to share your power
To give
You are the source

Let go of fear
This takes you to another plain
To merge
You seek the light
From one to another
The fading heart awaits your help
To live
You must decide

Let go of fear
This is your right to join again
As one
Your life force

From one to another
This energy will seek to radiate
Transfuse
Your vital form

Let go of fear
This giving now will also take
Sustain
Your life as one

From one to another
This makes you proud
And glad
Your blood is life ■

The Gift of Blood

Racing in and out of chambers, on repeat
Pumping pulsating, without missing a beat

Thundering trembling and rolling around
Filling sustaining with many a sound

Sometimes red, sometimes blue
I am always there, a part of you

Donate me, share me generously
Indeed, sacrifice me opportunely

The lives I save will never forget
Welcome bonds that have no regret

You too can become this life-giving part
Pumping sustaining other needy hearts

When blood flows into another's heart
It's a gift of grace and a sure work of art ■

Dr. C Dadlani, Washington DC, USA



One Blood

One blood – although we have different skin,
The pulse of life beats in all of our hearts
Regardless of the wars which tear apart,
People all bleed the same colour within.
The human race is one which we can win,
The world's rivers flow into one ocean
And we have the same needs and emotions,
To give up on ourselves would be a sin.

The world is not separate warring states,
One people, one kingdom and one planet,
Hearts filled with love and not full of granite
And we must stop the misery and hate.
One blood – come together and celebrate,
Tears of pain, replaced by laughter and mirth
It is time to prove humanity's worth:
One blood – shared lives, together, in one fate. ■

Ian Henery, Walsall, UK

Humanity is Dying

We began by hitting each other over
the heads with wooden clubs, then
with swords and now with bombs.

Surjit Dhami, Staffordshire, UK

“No amount of darkness outside can extinguish the flame of humanity, but a gust of doubt within is all it takes to turn light to smoke.”

.....

“...realise that our hunger for happiness will remain, unless we share in the bread of peace and joy.”

.....

“We have walked miles to an empty well, rather than drinking from the ever-flowing river of compassion and equality, which runs right beside us.”

Being humane is a sacred responsibility which we have wholeheartedly rejected. We have taken the treasure chest after throwing out the treasure because it was too heavy to carry! It is as if we are holding a candle after blowing out the flame because it was too glaring. Who then will rise to the challenge of saving humanity, other than those whose vision is broad enough to embrace the whole of mankind?

If doctors refuse to help, then what can you expect the hospital to do? If the firemen sit by, what can the home-owner do? If the crew on the ship makes holes on the deck, where will the passengers find refuge? We cannot run contrary to our nature, and duty. It is the sacred responsibility of every single person, who has been graced by universal love to share its grace with others.

However hard people tried to dissuade them, the enlightened never shied away from their universal values. However, in the midst of tribal, social divisions, man has reduced his stature to less than that of an animal. At least in the jungle there is natural beauty; but we have turned our concrete jungles into fortresses of fear, where people are not only scared to walk at night, but also in the day. We are no longer chased by wild beasts, but now dread strangers who simply say ‘hello’!

What advancement can we boast about? What is our achievement? We began by hitting each other over the heads with wooden clubs, then with swords and now with bombs. We are still violent—the only difference is the method has become more clinical. We have become more efficient at being hurtful!

It would be fatal if we overlooked the urgency of the moment. The sweltering fever of hatred will not pass until the remedial cure of indiscriminating compassion is applied. Those who wish to quieten the voice of unity in the world and limit it to small halls will realise the air is the microphone, the sky is a sacred dome and the earth is the sacred ground upon which the message of Oneness is to be shared.

There is no time to engage in the luxury of waiting by or taking the tranquilizing drug of ‘never mind’. Now is the time to bring oneself and others to the awareness that humans are destroying their own humanity. No amount of darkness outside can extinguish the flame of humanity, but a gust of doubt within is all it takes to turn light to smoke.

Society may apparently not be segregated, yet the segregated mind holds our humanity captive. Walking in a vibrant garden, we fail to appreciate the colourful diversity of its flowers, and choose to close our eyes. Still the fragrance of equality cannot be ignored. We all belong to each other as flowers belong to the same soil. To deny this is to deny life.

Humanity is languishing in the dark ages though surrounded by streetlights everywhere. We have fallen in the poverty of greed, though sitting on a mound of riches. We find ourselves lonely at heart, though surrounded by billions of people. Through self-imposed exile to the island of selfishness, we now cry that no one loves us. This is the pitiful condition of the human race.

Instead of honouring the sacred obligation to reflect on life as the rarest gift, we have chosen to squander it on the desolate path of cheap thrills and short-lived dreams. We have walked miles to an empty well, rather than drinking from the ever-flowing river of compassion and equality which runs right beside us. As a result, humanity is suffering under unspeakable brutality, often at the hands of those who claim to protect it.

But let us not lose hope or feel that all is lost on this blessed ground called Earth. The pages of history have clearly shown, that it is not the huge bank accounts, colossal organisations or giant nations that make the world peaceful, but the big hearts, enormous vision and gigantic souls that shower beauty over the world.

Now is the time to bring oneself and others to the awareness that humanity is dying. Let us realise that our hunger for happiness will remain, unless we share in the bread of peace and joy. Let us build new hope, atop the mountain of Oneness. Let us understand that by opening our arms to embrace each other, we are unfolding wings of freedom! Such vision will revive the dying spirit of humanity, and allow us to soar to the heights of human potential. ■

Random Acts Of Kindness

Navneet Bansal, London, UK

Smile at the next person I see.

Give up my seat on the tube for someone more needy than me.

Pass some change to the next busker...

These are the first things that pop into my head when I think of a random act of kindness.

Yet after careful thought and reflection, I come up with a very different list. As a working mother with two young children, my life can be best described as hectic, busy and tiring. Juggling household chores with work demands, all at the same time. So along with the 101 things I need to remember every day, including not leaving the house with chocolate sticky finger marks on my clothes and baby porridge in my hair, what can I do which will enable me to be a good role model to others as well as my own children?

Actions speak louder than words.

A widely used and repeated proverbial phrase – yet it can succinctly describe one of the most important responsibilities we have to show a child. How to love, be happy and be kind to one another.

As a parent, I would rather know my child is happy than know that they have attained a certain score in a test. I am not saying that we can forget about education and academic studies, but that we should not forget about emotional intelligence. Kindness can be taught; it can make immeasurable improvements to so many lives. And do acts of kindness towards children make us happier

parents? Of course they do. Teaching a child to be kind provides a lifetime of happiness to so many people, long after we are gone!

My findings reveal that tiny acts of kindness have larger consequences, and that generosity is contagious! We are told that we feel happier when we perform acts of kindness – for our children, families, friends and communities. Not only do good deeds make us feel better, people who are kind and compassionate are usually the most successful.

**A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds.
A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy
reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness
gathers love.**

Saint Basil

Unfortunately, we do not make children happy by simply enabling them to be receivers of kindness. We increase their feelings of happiness and well-being, reduce bullying, and improve their friendships by teaching them to be givers of kindness. One such study conducted by researchers from the University of British Columbia and the University of California, broke new ground by showing the benefits derived by children when they were taught 'happiness-increasing' strategies.

For a month, several hundred 9-11 year-olds performed and recorded three acts of kindness each week for anyone they wished. Another several hundred kept track of three pleasant places they visited during the week. Not

surprisingly, the results were consistent with adult studies. When kids performed acts of kindness or took notice of the pleasant places they visited during the week, they significantly increased feelings of happiness and satisfaction.

But those who performed acts of kindness received an additional benefit. Measuring how well children were liked or accepted by their peers, the study showed those who performed acts of kindness gained an average of 1.5 friends during the four-week period. Like many others, this study demonstrated that being kind to other people benefits the giver. For children, it earns them increased well-being and also popularity and acceptance among peers.

Furthermore, threads of kindness are interwoven with many other positive behaviours and benefits for youth. Well-liked children exhibit more positive, less bullying behaviours when they become older. Happier children are more likely to have higher academic achievement. And the list goes on.

**A rose doesn't tell a tulip you can't exist.
Flowers live together in harmony.
Let's make earth a garden.**

His Holiness Nirankari Baba

The Nirankari Baba says we should live with love, tolerance and big heartedness. We should not be cruel, we should not exploit others and there should always be 'sweetness' in our speech and in our behaviour.

Work for a cause, not for applause

When you consider performing an act of kindness, think about its potential three way positive effect. There's the positive effect on the recipient, and the positive effect on you – you might find yourself experiencing the positive emotion of the "helper's high", (you know that warm fuzzy feeling in the tummy!). But perhaps the biggest effect of all will be on a passer-by who just happens to witness the act.

A single act of kindness can change a person's day – who knows, perhaps even having a transformative impact on their life! And the thing is why stop with one? Kindness is infectious, and if we continue to engage with these acts, the tantalizing possibility of changing the world is at our fingertips. That may sound grandiose, but just think about it. The world consists of us! What we do, has an impact.

Whatever our calling, and regardless of the kindness that works through us, we need to bear in mind that we must work for a cause – not to time our acts perfectly to present a certain image, for a certain time that is not maintained in our



day to day lives. God did not give us mouths to be rude and hurt others, hands to kill others, power to exploit others – he has given us these bodies to add to the goodness in the word – in short, to put smiles on other people's faces.

Let us ensure that one of the biggest lessons we teach our youngsters of today is the act of kindness. In our household the current mantra my partner and I are trying to teach our daughters is "sharing is caring" especially when it comes to fighting over toys and dolls! It's a start, and this simple learning can be applied in any aspect of life in the adult world.


The earth can only be beautiful by creating beautiful minds...

One brilliant thing about random acts of kindness is that they do not have to take up too much time! Yes, we all know life is constantly busy – balancing family needs with career demands, daily commutes with daily chores as well as trying to get our recommended 8 hours sleep! Yet, we must make time.

His Holiness Nirankari Baba says "Man is so entangled in material life that he becomes so busy, which causes his nature to become arrogant. Man says, 'I'm busy'. When we look at the word busy it rhymes well with the word easy. So, why not be "easy-busy" – in other words, be busy, but still remain at ease! This will let us rise above bitterness".

So, I ask anyone reading these words to go out there and do just one act of kindness – something which renews someone's faith in human nature. It doesn't have to be anything major, time-consuming or costly. It just has to be kind.

Martin Kornfeld reminds us, "If we all do one random act of kindness daily, we just might set the world in the right direction". ■

A close-up photograph of a human hand, palm facing up, holding a small white heart-shaped object. The heart contains a quote in bold black text. The background is a blurred, light-colored surface.

**The earth
can only be
beautiful by
creating
beautiful
minds...**

Sant Nirankari Mission

Instances of acts of kindness can be seen in many activities the Sant Nirankari Mission has been involved in over the years for the good of the community, the environment and mankind.

Blood donation camps

The Nirankari Baba started the voluntary blood donation programme by donating blood himself in 1986, when the Mission organised its first blood donation camp during the Annual Nirankari Sant Samagam in Delhi. Blood donation camps are now held regularly in many of the Centres for Oneness worldwide. It must be noted that the Mission has become the largest supplier of Blood Units in India per annum and this in turn has encouraged and strengthened the Global Campaign. The Mission recently launched a special initiative called "One Blood" in Partnership with the National Blood Service in the UK and in Canada the Mission is a Partner for life with the Canadian Blood Service. In order to inspire people to appreciate the noble act of donating blood and to consider it from a creative perspective, an anthology of poetry was also released. This is an ongoing drive that continues to gain momentum with the spirit that by giving blood we save lives.

Eye camps

Free Eye Camps have been held in India on a regular basis since 1988 in cooperation with Government hospitals. Doctors and Eye Specialists screen the patients and those selected for cataract operations are sent to the Government hospitals for the operations. These camps are in great demand particularly in the rural areas and remote villages of India. The order of these activities are now conducted under the guidance of the Sant Nirankari Charitable Foundation and thousands of patients are supported and offered a new lease of life through such initiatives, improving general well being and quality of life.



Compassionate aid

This is organised in cases of natural disasters or other calamities e.g. the Mission set up a Relief Camp for Tsunami victims at Port Blair of the Andaman Islands, functioning for more than a year. The Mission dispatches its skilled volunteers at times of disaster management to help coordinate and organise relief across the globe. In recent times the Mission has supported flood relief efforts in the United Kingdom and Jammu, India. There are different levels of support offered from Counselling to offering food and shelter provisions. The Volunteers are always recognised by Local Authorities and National Governments for their dedicated efforts in the field.

Tree planting and Environmental Care

More recently, the Mission has been making contributions towards environmental awareness and conservation, by actively being involved in tree planting and street cleaning. The Mission is involved Internationally making recent contributions in Australia, North America and throughout Europe. The Mission being recognised as a Legacy Project of the 20th Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014, was involved in a project entitled, "Oneness Our Commonwealth". This included participation in a large scale Tree Planting Initiative at the Commonwealth Woods site, Laing Craigs in Dumbarton (Scotland) in association with the Woodland Trust. ■



My friend Julie and I, spent a quiet Retreat Day last Monday focusing our thoughts and discussions on the concept of simplicity. It was a very satisfying and thought-provoking experience, which I think led us both to a deeper personal understanding of what simplicity means to each of us.

Simplicity

CAROLINE GIBBS, SOLIHULL, UK



We reflected upon the following three areas where simplicity has a positive influence: namely Living, Speaking and Thinking.

1. Simplicity in Living

My Dad, born in 1920, was a shocking hoarder. He had one of those kitchen drawers that was bursting with things—odd lengths of string rolled into a ball, spare spectacles with either an arm or a lens missing, a bicycle repair kit (he was 91 for goodness sake!), travel sewing kits, safety pins, elastic bands, guest soaps, match books, a glass eye from a teddy bear and a box of powdered blackout paint. Although I used to despair of him and my ex-mother-in-law, who could not open a gift without peeling away the sellotape and retaining and re-folding the wrapping paper for later use, I, a post-war baby, ended up doing exactly the same. My home, my loft and my drawers have been filled with things that just might be handy one day, waste not want not, you never know, just in case...ENOUGH NOW!

Today, I want simplicity in my 'living' life. I want to de-clutter, divest myself of all unnecessary objects and things. That is my project for 2014. What message do we pass on to our children about lack and scarcity when we hoard, scrimp and save up junk?

In recent years, I have fostered and developed a sense of great wealth, abundance and prosperity in areas of my life and that is the legacy that I want to pass onto my children. Despite this, I am not fooled into thinking that a pile of externals can lead to my internal happiness. I have no desire to spend my life striving to collect the latest car, gadget, fashion accessory – just to be caught up in the hamster wheel of more, better, best as if acquiring things could fill a sense of emptiness within.

“spiritual connections are only ever made in the present moment”

2. Simplicity in Speaking

Plain speaking is where people can be honest and open with each other. When I speak plainly I am able to offer my true and genuine self to the other person...to be congruent. By speaking clearly, with kindness, I am better able to communicate my needs – being both boundaried and principled at the same time. And an occasional simple silence can carry a great deal of weight within that communication too. So often flowery and gushing verbosity can become a barrier to clear communication, thereby preventing connections and intimacy between people.

3. Simplicity in thinking

It is easy to project forward into tomorrow and beyond, to set off a chain of fictional scenarios with our imaginative minds taking the role of all parties. Before long we can become mired in fear-based gloom and negativity as the imagined outcomes spiral out of control, leaving us paralysed with indecision and fear. Equally, we can rummage through our resentments or muddle through our mistakes and replay them like some well-worn video tapes, pressing rewind, stop and play as we invest our time, energy and emotions into the should, oughts and musts of what became history the second after they took place. So, “yes please” to simplicity in thinking!

For me it's about trying my best to be mindful, to be living in the present moment, one day at a time, giving my full attention to the Now – even if that means I have to say to myself aloud, “I'm washing the dishes, right now” or “I'm cleaning my teeth, right now” in order to bring myself back to the moment I am in. I believe that spiritual connections are only ever made in the present moment so that's where I need to be if I want a spiritual life with all the rewards that brings – and I do!

Last Monday I asked an elderly spiritual friend what simplicity meant to him. He said it was a bit like God, “There are no divisions or complications. God is simple and absolute. He just is.” ■

Human Values

What are they? The traits of tolerance, love, patience, peace, trust and forgiveness seem so basic, and yet so difficult to implement. Why is this so?

Upon self-reflection, I have realized that I am always reacting to external factors, which cause me to lose my human values. Further reflection made me realize that the only way I can maintain these human values is by strengthening myself from within. Since this understanding dawned, I have been trying very hard to introspect. The process has been challenging and at times, difficult. This is what I have been doing.

/ The First Step 01

I have reminded myself daily to reflect upon what is happening within my mind – are my thoughts negative, or am I nurturing a more positive tone and mood? You might ask - why does it matter? Well, when in a state of negativity, the tendency is to attract negative situations or people. Being in a state of negativity, our words, actions and behaviour all become negative too. This, in turn, results in our receiving negative responses through other people, or circumstances, and thus, spoiling our whole day.

For example, we sleep through our alarm. This makes us grouchy and impatient because we are now going to be late. This kind of mood leads us to snap at our spouse or children; it causes us to cut people off while driving to work; and within an hour not only has our negative state of mind stressed us out, but now we have potentially spoiled three other people's mood as well! And this negative state just continues throughout the day. Quickly, this becomes a pattern and often carries over from day to day. In other words, what our state of mind is, that is what we are attracting into our life. Also, If we are in a state of negativity, then human values go straight out of the window. The goal, therefore, is to make the negative, positive.

/ The Second Step 02

How do I go about recognizing my state of mind? Ideally, this reflection should be done on an hourly basis. We can set an alarm for every hour, and when it goes off, just take a few seconds, to stop and reflect - how was my past hour? What kind of thoughts have I been having this past hour? How am I feeling? What kind of interactions have I had with those around me? If there is a negative feel to the answers, then some change is needed. The goal is to convert the thought and feeling pattern to a positive one, such that the next hour may be improved.

/ The Third Step 03

How do we change a pattern that is essentially negative, towards the positive? I have tried a few mechanisms, to break the pattern – they are simple, and just act like a reset button, so that we can start anew. Experiment with whatever suits you best, and feel free to try any of my ideas or your own method. By trial and error you will figure out what works for you.

- (1) Take a few deep breaths. Become mindful of the present moment, and what kind of mood and thought you'd like to fill this moment with.
- (2) Keep a diary – what negativity did you feel, what may have triggered it, and how could you think differently about the situation?
- (3) If negativity is getting a hold, stop what you are doing. Get up and fetch yourself a drink of cool water. Resolve to go back to the task at hand, with an alternative strategy.

Reflecting every hour may prove to be difficult (what with all the pressures of work, study, classes, meetings etc), so do it every 2 or 3 hours. If we wait until the end of the day or before going to bed to do this reflection, we may find we've spent the whole day in negativity, which in turn produced negative behaviour – how we behaved with others, talked to others, body language etc. The point is to reflect throughout the day so that we can change our attitude/way of thinking immediately so that the next moment is spent in positivity. ■

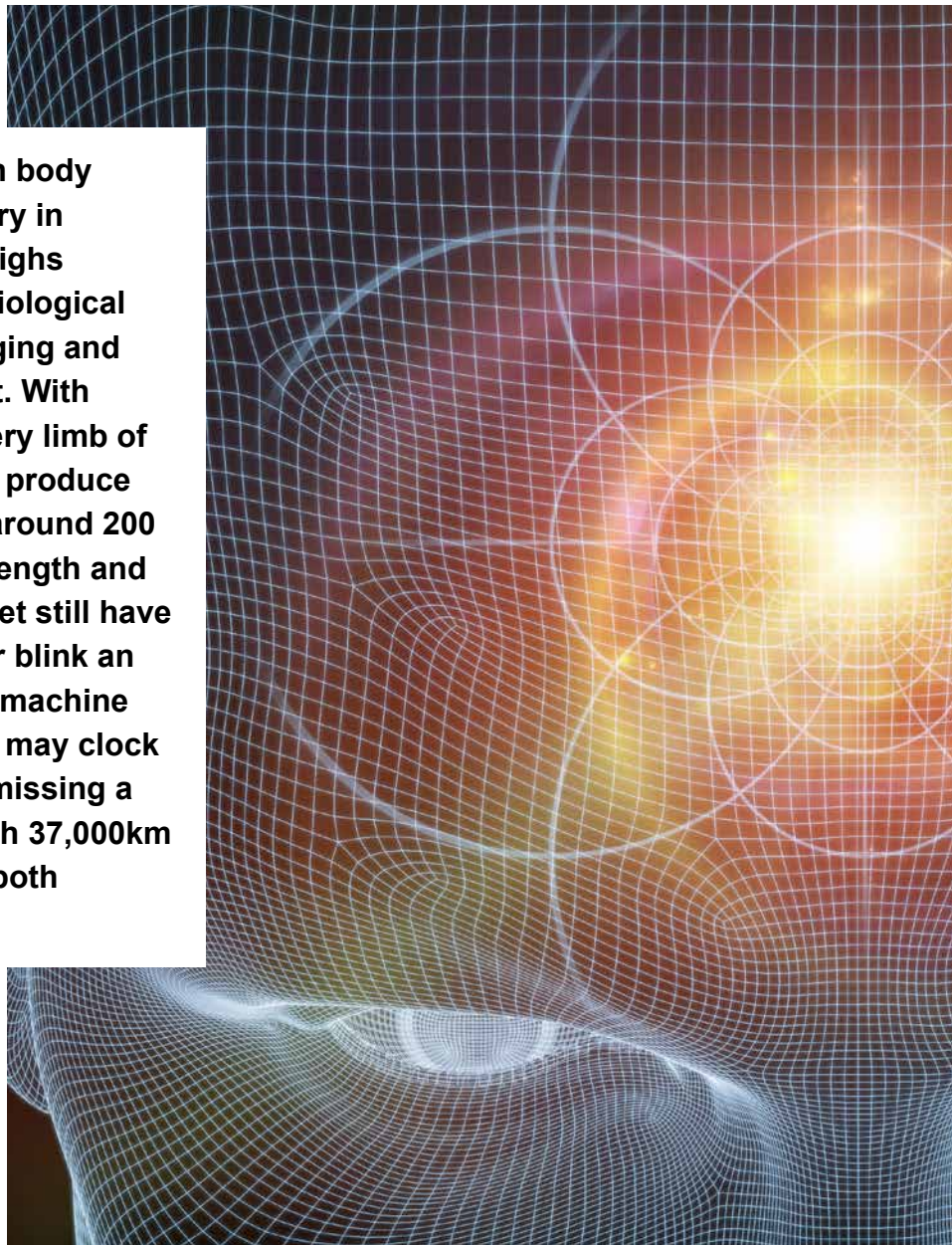
Implementing Human Values

Nishi Bahl, Toronto, Canada

The Mysterious Mind

George Khambe, Iwer, UK

Few would dispute that the human body is the greatest biological machinery in existence. The average human weighs around 70kg, and has all the physiological equipment to survive in a challenging and continually changing environment. With power from over 600 muscles, every limb of the body works in coordination to produce the subtlest of movements, from around 200 joints. Human beings have the strength and mobility to swim, run, and jump, yet still have the precision to thread a needle or blink an eyelid. A beating heart drives this machine which, during an average lifetime, may clock up to 2,000 million beats without missing a single one, pumping blood through 37,000km of capillaries. One might say it is both astonishing and beautiful.

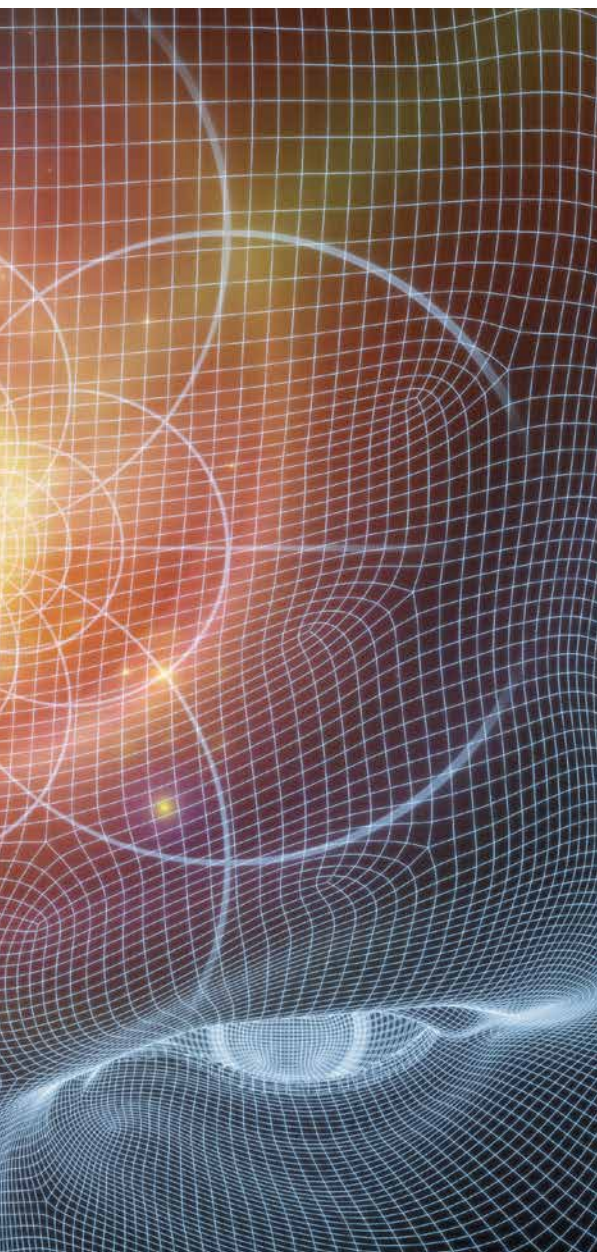


Clearly this is workmanship of the highest order, and whilst biomechanical Sciences have progressed to new frontiers it seems that nature is always one step ahead with an additional level of complexity to reveal just as soon as we might feel we are growing closer to the truth. Whilst we may not be able to compete at this level of creation, we have become rather good at making repairs – some would even claim ‘upgrades’! In fact, a few years ago I met an individual that had received a total of fourteen biological repairs and no doubt others may have undergone more. With time, we are undertaking more complex and riskier procedures and also charting further into the most fundamental and somewhat controversial field of genetics. There is no doubt that there is much more to come in this area, and not everyone will be in agreement.

Even with all this progress there is still one organ in the body that continues to perplex – the brain. This 1kg blob of cells (10 billion cells to be more precise – but who’s counting?) is probably the most incredible piece of architectural work in the human body. The beauty and complexity of the human brain nonetheless amazes me, but the real mystery is less so the brain, and more so the Mind.



I have a
Mind – what
should I do
with it, and
if I don't do
anything,
what will it
do to me?



In fact, there have been countless interpretations and analyses of the mind that have prompted many different views of our own real existence. The experimental methods of modern days science continue to push the boundaries of our understanding in this regard.

One of the most popular interpretations was presented by the rationalist Rene Descartes (1596-1650), who thought that the mind was responsible for man's personal perception of the universe, and thus proclaimed the well-known statement, “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes proposed the idea that the mind (which we might consider in some way to be synonymous with consciousness) and matter (or the body) were two separate entities. For physicists, this was certainly good news. It meant they could concentrate on the mechanics of the ‘real’ (material) world, without having to worry about the Mind, Consciousness, or God. That was a neat solution for things to continue for some time then.

However, we should all have some implicit experience of the practicalities of mind since we all possess one. One obvious observation that I would make from personal experience then is that at least my own Mind can often appear to be very restless and difficult to control – analogous to the wild horse running loose. Moreover, there is no way that I could really completely describe or quantify it. For example, I have often found that I could continue to revise for many of my exams when I was student whilst still being able to follow my favourite programmes on the television.

There is then also the scenario of the wandering Mind, which travels to ‘more interesting places’ whilst I sit rigidly in my seat in the office. But, most intriguing of all for me is the issue of time: it may take us months to plan a holiday, but the mind can take us on a globe trotting expedition in a matter of seconds. Moreover, whilst I may operate in the present moment, the mind ventures backwards and forwards in time, reminding me of my history one minute whilst planning my future in the next. The human mind can even bring our dearly departed companions back to life when we miss them most! So what do you do? You try to switch off for a while – take a break, get some sleep – and what happens? You start dreaming!



...whilst I may operate in the present moment, the mind ventures backwards and forwards in time, reminding me of my history one minute whilst planning my future in the next.



The Mind's so difficult to control. The old Yogis and Mystics used to sit in meditation to keep it under wraps, and they ended up doing some quite remarkable feats with it. These days we see people on the television performing all sorts of 'Mind over matter' tricks. The real icing on the cake is the fact that we only use our brains to about 12-13% capacity at most, so imagine the potential that a fully attentive brain could enable, assuming that the brain and Mind are intrinsically related.

These facts have mystified the great thinkers of every age. To make matters worse, in trying to understand such

phenomena it is difficult not to return to the conceptual definitions of the things we were trying to isolate from our scientific models to preserve their logical integrity. What is Consciousness and Spirit? How does it manifest in a living being? Many people have been working very hard on this for a very long time.

The Freudian view proposes that the human mind consists of three major components, namely the 'Id', the 'Ego', and the 'Super-ego'. Humans have striving needs, pleasures and ideas that need to be fulfilled. In this scenario the Id is the self-preserving survival response, present in us from birth, with the Ego appearing slightly later in time to help ensure that our base instincts and desires are managed in the context of social norms and behaviours. The Super-ego provides the moral compass, which we may inherit from our environment in the first instance. It is further proposed that these personalities operate in two states of the Mind – the unconscious and the preconscious, all of which implies that we are not always aware of our personal state of Mind and why we act in the way we do.

Of course this is not the only theory of mind, but it does go some way in revealing the subtleties inherent in the questions we have referred to earlier. With this in context, let me then pose the question, "accepted, I have a Mind – what should I do with it, and if I don't do anything, what will it do to me?"

In this instance I am pointing to the situation that we live in a physical world in which we all react to what others, including ourselves, say and do. We might try to 'figure out' somebody, but actually this is more complex than we can imagine. At the same time my own Mind is like a factory that is churning out thoughts 24 hours a day. It is even claimed that we have in the region of 60,000 thoughts a day yet circa 95% of them are the same thoughts as the previous day! So, whilst I may have a conscious Mind I am still operating somewhat in auto pilot. It follows that once I reach a certain state of Mind it would become very much part of my nature to think that way going forward unless there was some conscious intervention. Like the production manager in the factory, it is of critical importance that I find some way to quality assure what's coming off the conveyer belt, and even more important to find the source of any problems before I'm forced to issue a recall to all of my customers.

I am reminded of a conversation on this topic with a very inspirational figure of the Sant Nirankari Mission, the late Giani Joginder Singh Ji, who responded very simply:

“Son, the Mind is like a knife: you can use it to cut bread to feed yourself, but conversely, you can use it to inflict physical harm. Similarly, the Mind naturally generates both good and bad thoughts. This is its job, as ordained by natural law, and no person can stop his Mind from working as such. It is the individual’s responsibility to analyse his thoughts and act in the appropriate manner.”

He continued,

“The devotee deals with this situation by sustaining a state of conscious awareness in which he ensures that his every action is in keeping with the Guru’s teachings. More importantly, the devotee uses a powerful weapon, Simran (i.e. remembrance or awareness of the Formless Being), with which he keeps his Mind under control. However, a restless Mind will continually churn out many different thoughts and if not careful, these thoughts will no doubt influence one’s character and emotional strength. By exercising the power of Simran one remains in conscious awareness of the true reality of one’s environment, and thus is more equipped to identify the polluted thoughts that may arise from our sensory perceptions. At the same time, the company of enlightened beings (Satsang) and the adoption of the spirit of selfless service (Sewa) as a way of life, will then keep the Ego at bay.”

I still remember the sincerity of this conversation and the way in which Giani Ji’s words inspired me – recognition of how our Mind can impact behaviour is the first step towards self-awareness, though it doesn’t end there

“Bondage and liberation are of the Mind.
The Mind will take the colour you dye with.”

Sri Ramakrishna

So what is the dye that one uses? My personal view is that there is only one dye that is all encompassing – Love. By this I mean the Love that is rooted in the Formless Spirit, the Almighty Lord. Love is the only emotion that can contain all the baser emotions, which left unchecked lead to intolerance, discrimination, greed and anger. Left uncontained by Love, the baser emotions run havok, and ultimately plague our Mind.

“The mind in its own place, and in itself, can make
a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n...”

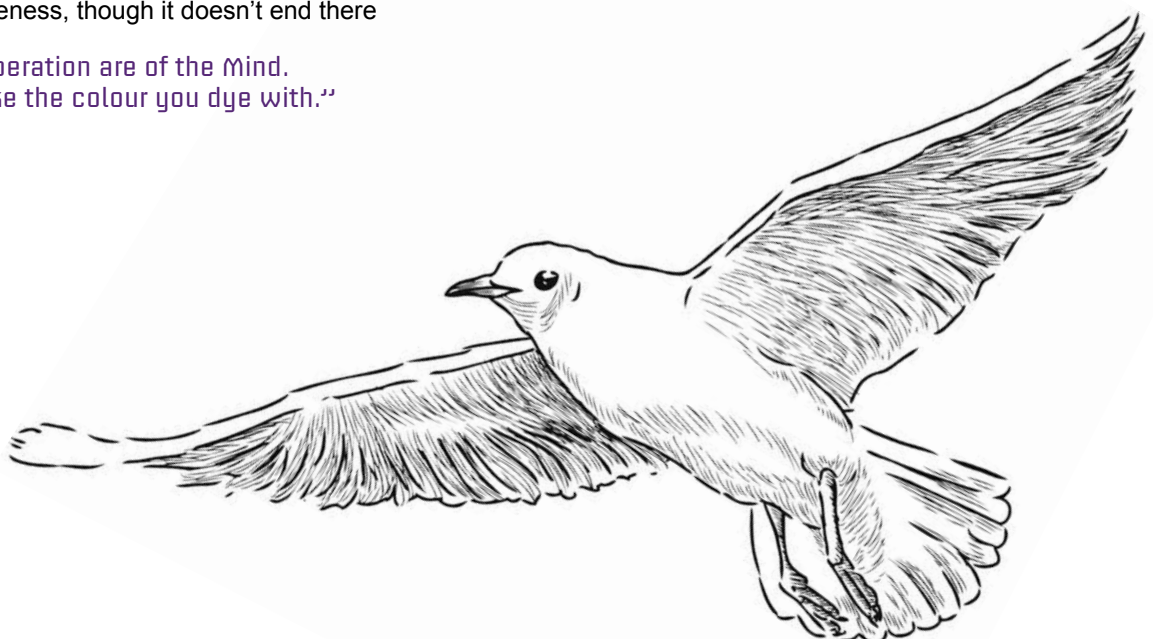
...He who reigns within himself and rules passions,
desires, and fears, is more than as king”

J Milton

I believe that it is important for all of us to take time to reflect on where we stand in this regard. Whilst we may have significantly evolved from a cultural, technological, and scientific perspective, we are still very much exposed to our human instincts and emotions. We still have much to learn about who we truly are when we look past the physical body that exists in the material universe. Until then, we will always be exposed to the implications of our Mind, carrying us on its wayward journey to some other far off place.

“The human mind has been likened to a bird, which
can fly in any direction in the vast open skies of life.
It is, therefore, for the individual to give it proper
direction. It must fly to the places where it finds
sweetness and coolness.”

His Holiness Nirankari Baba ■





We have a choice!

Dina Sabnani, Hong Kong

Positivity

breeds happiness, and negativity unhappiness. If we are not careful, we can get entangled in a vicious circle of gloom. We constantly feel bad and in a negative frame of mind. Our frequencies remain at a level, which keep on attracting despondencies.

When we don't vibrate in a positive manner, we cannot attract that which is positive to us. The truth is, we have a choice. We can choose to find things to be grateful for, and focus on things that make us feel good and help us to change our outlook. It is simple, but not easy because we do not really like change. But if we keep on doing what we're doing, we're going to keep on getting what we're getting.

In order to create something different, we have to do something different. The choice to do something about it lies in our own hands. We can either opt for the 'light', or stay in the dark. For, where there is light, there can be no darkness, as light and darkness can not co-exist

Often, we put ourselves in situations we know to be toxic for our souls, and yet we choose to be in them because of guilt, conditioning or fear. On the other hand, when in a 'feel good' state of mind, we attract good feelings, together with a whole host of opportunities, synchronicity and guidance. Things start happening effortlessly.

"If we keep on doing what we're doing, we're going to keep on getting what we're getting"

The people we meet, the books we read, the songs we hear on the radio, all become relevant when we are open, positive and alert. However, we have to take action to bring about this positive state of mind. Carpe diem, seize the day!

Let's pause, and take a look at our life. Think how we are feeling at this very moment in time. Let us be honest with ourselves and ask ourselves if we are really happy. Or are we accepting our lot in life passively? For, it is not okay to be passive. We need to own and live our life. It is not living to keep wallowing in the pit of despair, or even worse.

"we put ourselves in situations we know to be toxic for our souls"

In my life, I went through my phases when I allowed myself to be sucked into such a pit, and unconsciously invited other people to drag me down and make me feel inadequate. It was the fear of so many things—past conditioning, not being good enough, not being smart, pretty or capable.

I thank God for my friends, who supported me and helped me to get out of the mire. I am truly grateful for having been blessed with the awareness of knowing what I was doing and how it was not serving me.

When I managed to break free from this cycle of madness, and got back on my feet, I felt overjoyed. I watched how things happened out of the blue, how opportunities fell in my lap, how people came my way to help, and how my sun shone many times brighter even in the rain. It taught me that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. We need to allow this light to shine brightly and effulgently within us.

Life is about fun, joy, love, laughter and learning to rise above. So let's say that enough is enough, and face life with a smile. Let us be positive all the time, shining so brightly that this planet glitters with a dazzling glow. ■

"there is always a light at the end of the tunnel"

The reservoir welling up within you
The integral part of the eternal sea
Fathomless in its width, its depth,
Is your primordial, original entity!

It is always still, and ever at peace
Emitting sheer joy, contentedness
But if you indeed fail to savour it,
You are in form, and not formless

Between you and your 'joy' of old
There's a wall of harrowing hubris,
The 'I, my' overwhelming identity
Making finite that's infinitely free

Transcending this wall is never easy
For it lies in your every single clime
Wherever you go, whatever you do
With eyes open, you're kept blind!

You look indeed, but you do not see
Lures of the world do keep you apart
You n' yourself become two personas
One not knowing the other's heart!

The pressures mount, stress multiplies
There is distress, dissatisfaction galore
Shoring them up with secular security
You aggravate the malaise even more

Discipline, morality, focus-meditation
And your ritual observances un-told,
Provide nothing but a fleeting solace
Leaving you exposed, open and cold

Paradisiacal reservoir, Garden of Eden
From the start has always been there,
It is you, and you it, forever within you
Yet sadly, of yourself, you're unaware!

Peace is plentiful, delight sans measure
Calm, collected composure, all around,
When the veil you erect, you tear down
To soar again by first running aground!

It's not easy; it's the hardest thing to do
In facing challenges that go on till infinity
You have to find the Formless in 'form',
Who alone can align you to set you free

With his grace n' mercy; he can deliver,
He can tap into your reservoir to increase
Your merit, your worth and spiritual legacy
To grant you freedom and lasting peace! ■

SHEER JOY

Dr. D K Mehta, Wolverhampton, UK



Living philosophically

Margaret Morris, Aldridge, UK

My appreciation of the world of philosophy and enthusiasm for living philosophically arises from a personal understanding of philosophy as an activity or behaviour to be engaged in.

What I came to realise, as time passed, was how that which I had read became meaningful only when connected to my experience, and that these experiences begin to happen when we act philosophically.

Reading the written works of the philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Descartes and attempting to reach my own conclusion in isolation left me feeling unable to express the ideas that were emerging from this solitary activity. Meeting with others would allow me to experience a dialogue where I could say 'yes but' and ask 'what if'.

One of the things we discussed was how, in my professional life as a head-teacher, I had attempted to take an approach to dealing with discipline issues that was inspired by my experiences studying philosophy. For example, when a number of pupils had been involved in an incident on the playground, I was tasked with determining what had actually happened and carrying out the according disciplinary measures. It soon became apparent that in such situations the reports of the event provided by the children varied considerably from each other. My approach to this situation was to allow each child to offer their explanation of the events, letting them know that I would provide each of them the time to say whatever they wished. I also stressed that no judgment or decisions would be made until everyone had provided me with their version of what had transpired.

The initial benefit of such an approach was that the children stopped attempting to talk over each other. The more profound and surprising benefit was that by the time the

children had heard each other's reports of what had happened, their own explanations were adjusted to take the multiplicity of perspectives into account. Many times a child would take responsibility for an action that they had initially entered my office exclaiming enthusiastically they hadn't committed. The phenomenon seems to suggest that engaging with divergent interpretations of the same event is capable of changing behaviours.

Another illuminating example occurred when a group of pupils felt that they had been unfairly overlooked when selections had been made for prefect duty, perceived by most of the children to be a much coveted position. Once the children had been tasked with defining the responsibilities of the position and qualities of character their ideal candidate would possess, their desire to be chosen and sense of injustice at the decision vanished. Experience suggests many adults do not make such considerations before passing judgement on those in positions of power.

Graham Harman, summarising the challenges of explaining the work of Heidegger in his book 'Heidegger Explained', writes:

"To explain a philosophy is not to explain the content of the philosophy's opinions at any given moment. Instead, to explain a philosophy means to approach the central insight that guides it through its entire lifespan, through all surface changes of opinion and all troubled reversals of viewpoint".

Taking inspiration from this advice, I would describe the first part of my own central insight as keeping an open mind and allowing oneself to be changed by new information. I never underestimate the value of the time invested in considering problems in both philosophy and life.

Engaging with philosophy, and the altered approach to thinking and reasoning that seems to arise as a result, has helped me to learn the most during my hardest, darkest and loneliest periods. The value of love and humility, the opportunity to care and feel for others and the process of learning itself have all been understood more deeply than they would have otherwise.

engaging with divergent interpretations of the same event is capable of changing behaviours.

Heidegger's own thoughts spell it out as follows:

"Philosophy is something we learn by doing it ourselves, since the history of philosophy cannot help us: unless we are thinking for ourselves, we can learn nothing from Plato or Kant except superficial information about their opinions."

One of the most interesting aspects of working with a group who were eager to develop their understanding of philosophy was how to encourage openness, mutual respect and trust. Tolerance for other people and their

ideas is necessary for a reasonable discussion of the kinds of complex issues that arise in the works of philosophers.

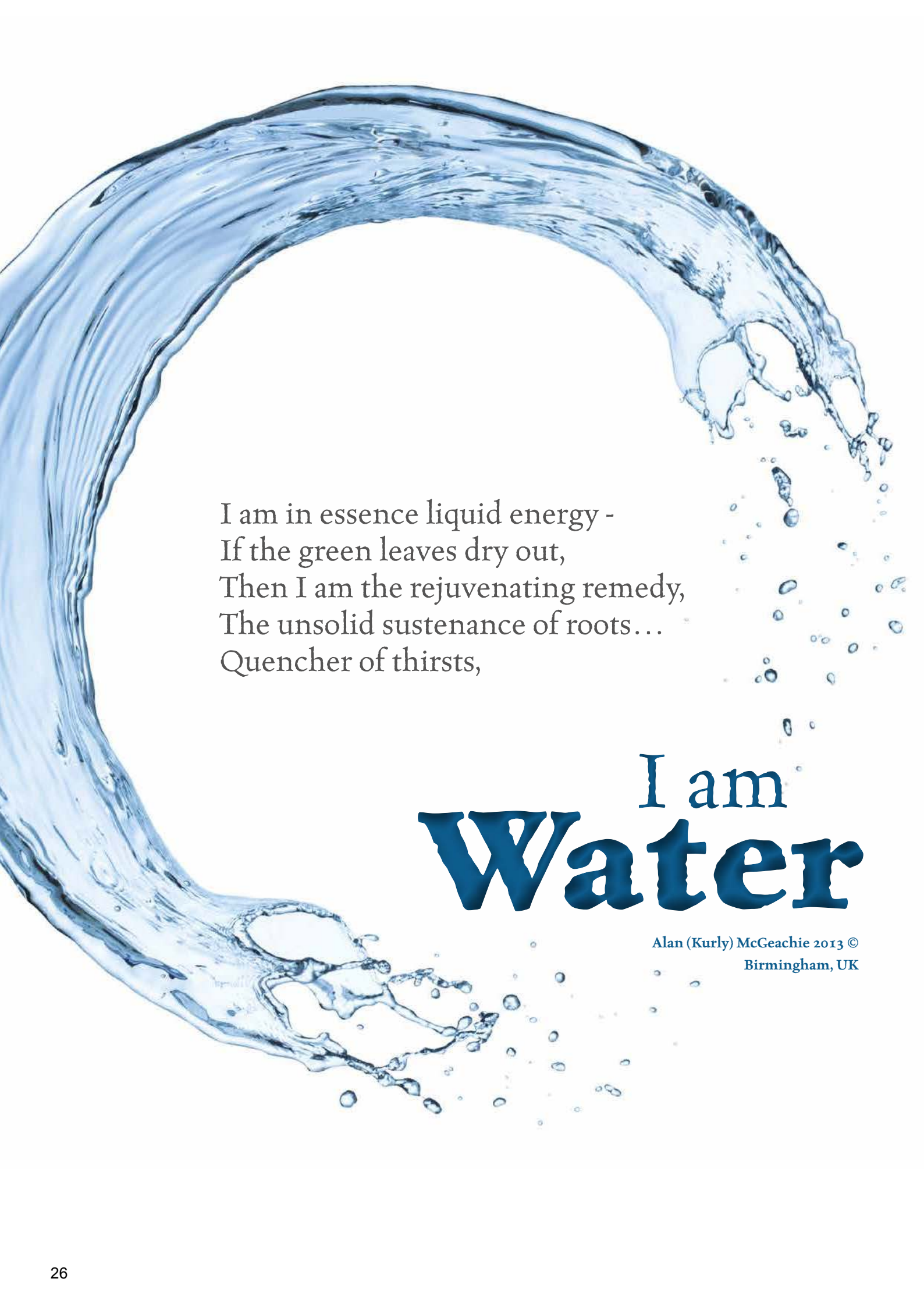
The compassion I feel while caring for my husband has taught me far more about the conduct of caring than all the books I have read.

In my own experience a group rarely seems to exhibit these traits from their initial meeting, but a group of persistent attendees will usually reach this point given a number of meetings. While I obviously encourage participants to be mindful of these attributes, in practice I have observed the same change in attitude occurs with adults as it does with children. In both instances the group finds itself automatically accepting and trusting the other group members, revealing aspects of their inner and outer life that they have nowhere else to talk about. Perhaps such a group provides people with the chance to share their confusion and their own perspectives on their experiences, and pondering 'unanswerable' questions creates a situation where the group members are already involved in considering ideas that can seem to disregard received wisdom. Whatever the reason, the transformation seems to occur without specific efforts to that end being made.

Recently I have entered the most challenging phase of my life. Three years ago, after sixty years of marriage, my husband developed Alzheimer's disease. The hardest part of caring for someone in such a condition is that you are unable to learn from experience. You master and cope with one situation but it doesn't help with new problems as they arise. You are constantly dealing with the unknown. The love and concern you experience for your partner as he struggles with his situation is painful for both of you. I draw constantly on what I have learned in order to help me deal with each new experience, but there are times when I feel lost and alone. At these times, reflecting on personal experiences that I would describe as spiritual has helped me to discover the strength to find a way through. These are those experiences in my life that have often given rise to overwhelming positive feelings and defy easy explanation. Darwin once wrote, 'no one can stand in these solitudes unmoved and not feel that there is more to man than the mere breath of his body', and this seems an apt description of my experiences. The compassion I feel while caring for my husband has taught me far more about the conduct of caring than all the books I have read.

Albert Schweitzer writes,

"...Much that has become our own gentleness, modesty, kindness, willingness to forgive, in veracity, loyalty, resignation under suffering, we owe to people in whom we have seen or experienced these virtues at work, sometimes in a great matter, sometimes in a small. A thought which had become an act sprang into us like a spark, and lighted a new flame within us..." ■



I am in essence liquid energy -
If the green leaves dry out,
Then I am the rejuvenating remedy,
The unsolid sustenance of roots...
Quencher of thirsts,

I am **Water**

Alan (Kurly) McGeachie 2013 ©
Birmingham, UK

Dance as I conduct electricity through your muscles,
 ...In rhythmic bursts,
 I am boiled and cooled, then consumed to detox.
 Through holes in leaky roofs I trickle, trickle, trickle...
 and dribble in little drip drops.
 But to avoid damp spots on your carpet,
 I can be funneled into vessels such as buckets or pots.

I can also be a placid lake, an organic mirror for the sky!
 Or gush forth through channeled streams,
 In the cycle of life's supply.
 From whales to microbes,
 There's so much that can inhabit,
 The very depths of my body...
 As I occupy three quarters of the planet!
 But like the cash flow of any riverbank
 My tide can be withdrawn!
 Revealing sea weed and sea shells
 That she sells on sea shores,
 A sea horse gallops through my temperate currents,
 As surfers ride the crests of my wave's bubbling abundance.

And people might sail in dreamy contemplation,
 Upon my debts of ice-cap liquidation.
 So I offer King Poseidon who was worshipped by the ancients,
 And can enhance any modern day goddess,
 Upon whom I'm finely sprayed, with a most alluring fragrance!

You can stare upon me, as a mirror broken,
 By ripples ranging so spacious.
 But unless my fluid surface is calm...
 I will forever remain faceless.
 To stroke or quench your ego,
 With my body would literally be tasteless.
 And until poured into vessels my true beauty lies,
 In the fact that my form remains shapeless!
 Do you like my literal physicality or the concept of my properties?
 Like a Bruce Lee philosophy that informs us,
 To consider the very art of being formless.

In the shape of a moat I can swell,
 The security of a castle fortress.
 My splashes can turn into crashes...
 To sing out a destructive chorus.
 I can be a Titanic Tsunami, flushing and ever flowing,
 Or a waterfall diving into the depths of unknowing.

I can also be a curious drip,
 Wishing to penetrate the true key to growing.
 And if you wish to be enriched,
 Soak up knowledge, like the most porous substance going...
 Syphoning the best of your own energy is truly essential.
 Don't follow gravity, direct yourself!
 As we are all oceans of infinite potential.

Me?!
 I am the transcendence of all possibility,
 As in the next breath I may form...
 As condensation on your glasses!
 Or be jerked as a tear,
 To mess up the eyeliner on your beautiful lashes!
 I may even cause you to wake,
 As I gently tip tap on your window...
 The clear orbs collide and cascade down it,
 Leaving glistening trails as they go.
 Then later on in the distance,
 You might admire my natural light show,
 As I bend the very spectrum of light,
 To form bright colours of the rainbow!

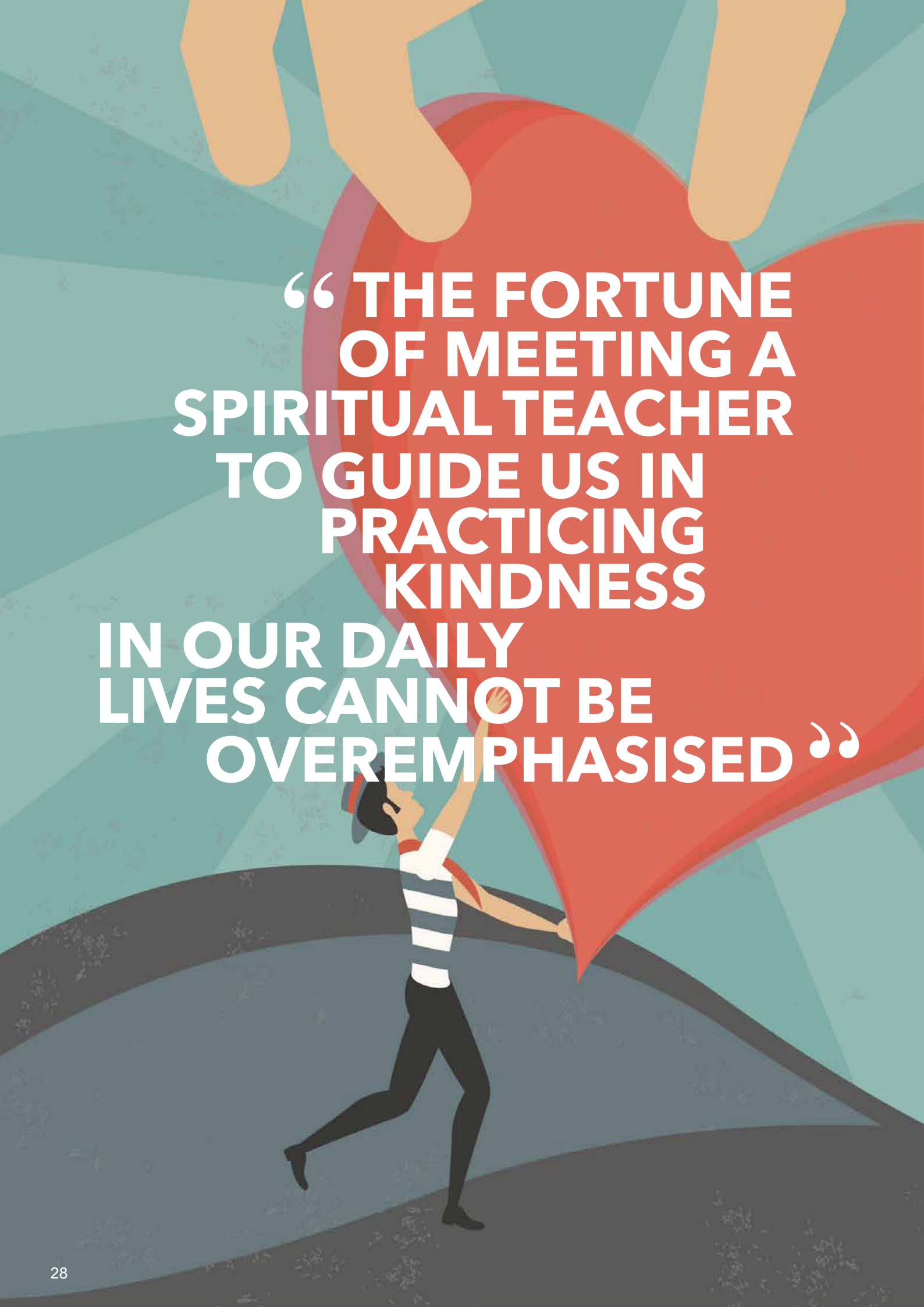
So you see...
 The destiny of raindrops are not all that they seem,
 They end up in gutters, drainpipes,
 And they're seen in your dreams.
 Or films with dramatic opening scenes,
 They can bounce off your umbrella and soak onto your sleeves.

I can thrash down with thunder, then evaporate into vapor,
 Then create clouds darker and gales with more force than...
 Darth Vader!
 I've got the overflows juxtaposed
 'Cos I am reservoir with no limits

I can take or encourage life...
 Yet never dampen your spirits.

I am...
...Water.

To hear the poem please visit www.Kurlyspetry.com



**“ THE FORTUNE
OF MEETING A
SPIRITUAL TEACHER
TO GUIDE US IN
PRACTICING
KINDNESS
IN OUR DAILY
LIVES CANNOT BE
OVEREMPHASISED ”**

Is it usual to experience a stranger offering you help to carry your groceries, or is the norm to see someone offering support only at times of dire need? It seems the motivation to assist has become relegated to crisis situations, with the everyday needs being forgotten.

In the light of the importance given to matters material, affection, gratitude and kindness appears to have become extinct. In the scientific march towards progress, why is it human attributes seem to become sidelined? Why have we lost our sense of solidarity?

Kindness may be exhibited through gestures of selfless service, described as sewa in Punjabi. It is one of the three tools – sewa (selfless service), simran (remembrance) and satsang (fellowship of enlightened beings), offered by the Nirankari Baba, to build meaningful and balanced lives. He teaches us that the spirit of sewa should become the norm, rather than an occasional or fleeting behaviour. It should define our living, at every moment of our lives.

This sewa or kindness, which our saints and seers have always impressed upon us, can have many positive applications. It can be instrumental in the demolition of vices - hate, jealousy, selfishness and greed; it can encourage interaction between human beings; and it can even help us rise above our bestial nature to become divine. Since Sewa can't be performed without humbling ourselves first of all, we seem to fall, before we rise. The Avtar Bani, a modern day scripture, highlights this process as follows;

The highest of all, the loftiest and the most revered is he, who rides his ego via the company of the wise!

- Avtar Bani 153

This verse beautifully explains that human beings, who are respected the most and hold the loftiest place in the world, are those who selflessly serve fellow beings and rid themselves of their ego and pride. Kindness, therefore, does not benefit the receiver

alone,
but also
all the others
involved.

The fact of the matter is that we all have the capacity to be kind in every walk of life, but unfortunately our institutions do not always reinforce this. Hence, the fortune of meeting a spiritual teacher to guide us in practicing kindness in our daily lives cannot be overemphasised.

His guidance can help us achieve peace not only within our homes amongst our loved ones, but also with strangers, who are all potentially divine.

Once kindness for others is embedded in our lives, we become involved in the charity of others, with less and less time to be consumed about our own worries and negativities. In return, we begin to reveal our true purpose – to realise that the things we thought defined us - wealth and social status – do not hold as much importance as they did previously.

The service, beyond the trio of body mind and wealth, is one...

That's selfless, without expectation, and pleasing to the Master

- Avtar Bani 226

As stated above, it is important that kindness is completely selfless and free from bodily, mental and material desires. For in so doing, we become who we are in essence - subtle beings experiencing the gross world. ■

Kindness Through Selflessness

**Meenakshi Kanda,
Bradford, UK**

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, was en-route to one of his political engagements. India had newly gained its independence. When he got there, he encountered a crowd of unhappy locals, one of whom asked: "What is there to be celebrated? Are we not enjoying only so-called freedom?"

Mr. Nehru kept his cool and replied, "Indeed, we must celebrate the right to express our views without having to jeopardize our well-being". He continued, "The very freedom you refuse to acknowledge, has granted you the right to address the highest office holder in the land directly. Had this remark been uttered prior to this freedom, there would have been severe repercussions."

Just as a dependent nation craves freedom to fulfill its destiny, an individual also longs for the inner liberation to realize the supreme purpose of life. And just as an ordinary citizen is able to have access to the most powerful authority in the realm, the individual soul can also directly address the Almighty God.

BONDED FREEDOM

Kiren Pandey New York, USA

When the shackles that keep the individual in darkness are broken, the face of God is unveiled and light pervades both the mind and the heart. With such a divine revelation, one's doubts, delusions and misperceptions are dissolved. He is able to see the wood for the trees, and begins to walk on the righteous path, avoiding misdemeanors and trespasses against his fellow-humans.

"..it is only freedom, coupled with moral obligation and social responsibility, which brings bliss."

This state of mind does not admit arrogance. There is always a clear line between an emancipated mind and one's rebellious nature. However, if the freedom is not strictly maintained and safeguarded, the suffering will return, rendering the 'freedom' futile. His Holiness Nirankari Baba explains this very beautifully,

"Oh Lord, grant me enough freedom to keep me bound to Your will".

It is good to have a free and independent life. But it is only freedom, coupled with moral obligation and social responsibility, which brings bliss. One may then fully enjoy freedom, whilst remaining within the parameters prescribed by the highest authority. ■

TOLERANCE

at home & work

Navreen Batra,
Gerrards Cross, UK

Tolerance is the willingness to accept the feelings, habits or beliefs that are different from our own. In a practical sense, this means keeping an open mind when interacting with others, who are different from us and treating everyone with respect and compassion.



Why is tolerance in the work place important?

Tolerance encourages open and honest communication. It improves teamwork and loyalty – all of which are important in a company.

What challenges do we face in the workplace which can cause us to become intolerant?


If we feel that our manager has not treated us fairly or if a junior has not given us enough respect and we do not understand things from their point of view, this may cause us to be intolerant.

If we don't think that we have got the status, promotion or pay that we think we deserve, this can cause us to become unhappy, short tempered and more intolerant of our situation.

If we are working with people of different cultural backgrounds such as international colleagues who may speak differently to us, it is quite possible we may misinterpret their messages over email, and vice versa. We may think they are being aggressive, when they have no such intent, but our intolerant response may already have been registered.

How, amongst all of this do we practically maintain tolerance in the work place?

It is about distilling it back to basics. No matter how different someone else may seem, we all share the common bond of humanity. We all have emotions and life experiences which are common and everyone wants to be treated with love, compassion and respect. As Mother Theresa said, there is more hunger for love and appreciation in this world than for bread. With these same fundamental principles – we have more in common with people than we may think.



Having tolerance is about embracing the differences and recognising this helps make our lives a rich, diverse and exciting place. It is like appreciating the beauty of flowers in a garden – realising that the bluebell is different to the sunflower and that individually each flower may be different, yet together they form a beautiful place.

To exercise tolerance in the work place it is important for us not to wrap ourselves in our ego – thinking that our views are the best, or we are of a certain status so can behave in a certain way – instead we should have an attitude of understanding and inclusion towards others and remember that we are all One.

It is also important to have a sense of perspective. Having faith in a Supreme Being can help us to achieve this. It is very easy to be at work, to get bogged down in the detail and feel pressured by our to-do lists and think what we are doing is the most important and critical thing. We sometimes need to take a step back and put the issues in perspective; the workplace is only one aspect of our lives. We should have faith that things will work out and according to God's divine plan.

It is also important to communicate well with colleagues. Although we are discussing tolerance in the workplace this would also apply if you are at school or university and working in team projects. Differences of thinking may arise but by seeking to understand what drives other people and the issues they face and in explaining our point of view there can be a better understanding of each other and consequently a more tolerant working style.

***“there is
more hunger
for love and
appreciation
in this world
than for
bread.”***

It is important to note though, that by being tolerant it does not mean that people should take advantage of us or that we should not stand up for ourselves. What it does do, is that it changes our thoughts. It makes us question why we are being inflexible. If something needs to be raised as a genuine concern, we are able to take control of our emotions and explain our point of view in a respectful and considerate way – rather than in an intolerant or aggressive manner or by putting others down.

The Nirankari Baba is our model. He shows us how to behave and conduct ourselves through action. He is loving and compassionate. He perseveres with us, even when we make mistakes.

The challenges that we face are not there to break us, but to teach us. The Dalai Lama explains it as follows, if you can cultivate the right attitude, your enemies are your best spiritual teachers because their presence provides you with the opportunity to enhance and develop tolerance, patience and understanding. It is also important to keep the right company to guide us and remind us of these values.

Tolerance in the family

That is why it is also important to have tolerance in family life – it is the characteristics that we develop at home that we spread when outside. For all those people who are not yet working – being tolerant at home and in the family are learning grounds for the future work place. In the family, we learn to adapt compromise and be flexible and often face challenging situations. For example, I have two brothers, one supports Manchester United FC and the other Liverpool FC. When there is a football match between these two teams, my dad must act as the peacemaker by sitting in the middle of them. He has to remind my brothers to stay tolerant and that it is just a football game!

There may be differences in the family, for example, sibling rivalry or child parent generation differences, but by being tolerant of each other we can focus on spreading love in a caring way. By having respect and not taking people for granted and realising that we are all souls, who are potentially divine children and adults alike, we can share respect and tolerance in the home.

As Desmond Tutu says, God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realise that we are a family made for togetherness, for goodness, and for compassion. ■

The Finite and the Infinite



Sunny Nirala, London, UK

Whilst the world seeks the finite, the infinite is accessed only by those who seek God-realisation. Those who chase the infinite attain the associated wealth of freedom.

In Corinthians 3:17, we are told,

For the Lord is the Spirit and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

But the spirit has to be realised, accessed and fully embraced in life for it to be beneficial. The power of the Spirit is what we refer to as 'Nirankar' (the Formless Being). This is the all-pervading energy that the enlightened Master reveals to the seeker.

The spirit is infact the divine intellect. In the scriptural writings of the Avtar Bani, the enlightened Master Baba Avtar Singh Ji states that this spirit is beyond the grasp of intellectual reasoning or mental calculation. The mind is but a recipient of information from the greater, or universal intellect and translates it into action. The mind is neither the author nor source of the experience. The actual source is eternal, the full extent of which is beyond human comprehension.

The information that the mind receives is a divine blessing, which is not seen, but intuitively sensed through the grace of the enlightened Master. As a result, the seeker's spirit is awakened and integrated into his daily life. The seeker realises his own self – that which he has always been, or truly is. It's like gazing at one's own reflection, through the mirror that the enlightened Master represents. These reflections cannot be expressed in words, and can only be felt or experienced. They are like divine lessons, lovingly arranged for the seeker, by the universal intellect – Nirankar (Formless Being).

Through this experience, God is brought into our lives. When this happens, our attitude and perspective change. It's akin to a reality shift. We see more clearly and experience the world differently, thereby cherishing and enjoying life to the full.

It is not education that unlocks the divine intellect; it is, in reality, the Master's benevolence that does it. As long as this prevails, there will be order, harmony and equilibrium. The mind and lesser intellect can only make decisions based on past experience and conditioning. It is the sum total of the voices and messages we have listened to. This is why we must be discerning in who we associate with. There is nothing worse than knowing much about others – their ideas and beliefs – but remaining ignorant of our own self. The supreme intellect is at once aware of past, present and future and therefore the source of sound judgment. It can keep us on track, like a reliable internal compass. If we allow this universal intellect to be the guiding force, we can travel freely, without obstruction, to realizing our full potential as spiritual beings.

The ego however, is very powerful. It can clutter the mind, creating noise that shuts out the voice of the universal intellect. If it is not contained, the ego can rob us, in an instant, of all our achievements and spiritual wealth. It can take over our lives, filling our world with suffering, despair and misery. So much so, that the voice of God within, is rendered silent.

To keep the ego at bay, we have to ensure that we are plugged into the universal intellect at all times, so that it keeps us awake and alert.

Such awakening and connection to the divine is not possible, without God realization. Realisation, in turn, is not possible without the grace of the Master. ■

The Universal Prayer

(‘Manglacharan’)

Almighty, Formless, Nirankar,
Creator of the Universe You are,

You manifest in one and all,
You alone are the origin of all,

You are Timeless Truth Eternal,
And all creation is temporal,

You dwell in all that exists,
Immortal Creator, O Lord,

With Your grace and mercy alone,
Can we attain Liberation, O Lord,

With and without form, You are
The Universal Sustainer Nirankar,

You are beyond praise and intellect,
Your children we are, O Lord,

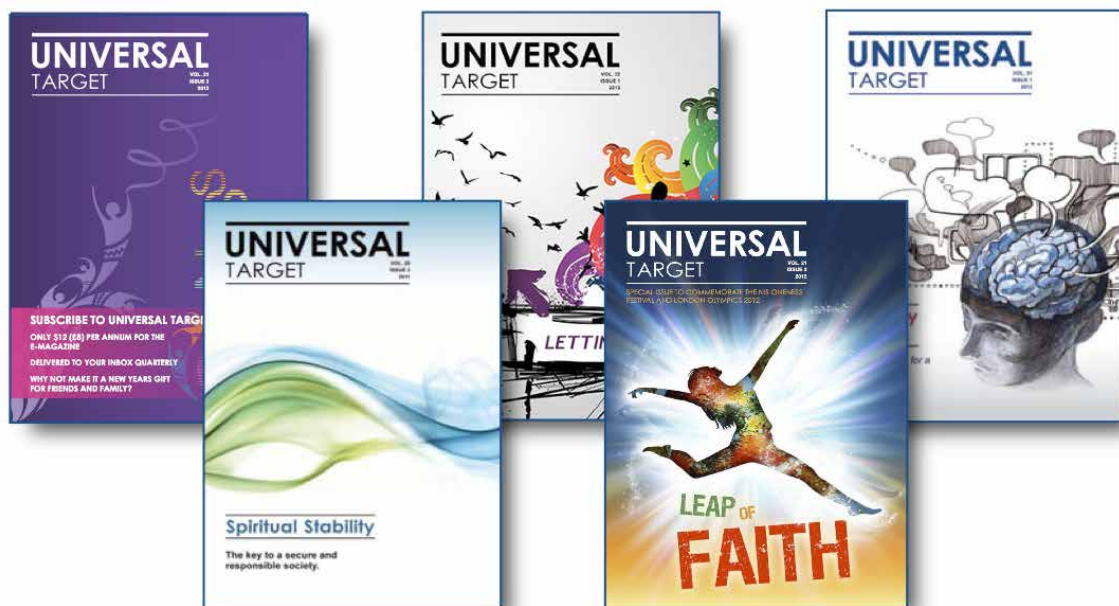
Shower Your blessing on all beings,
And save us one and all, O Lord. ■

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