

Spirituality / Secret of Success in Surgeon's Profession

*(Text of the Diamond Jubilee Oration
by Shri R.C. Lahoti, Former Chief Justice of India,
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- (1) Possibly, I am the only non-medico who has been called upon to speak before you the medicos, by Dr. Deven Taneja. At the end of my oration, if you are happy, you can thank me ! If you are disappointed, thank Dr. Deven Taneja !!
- (2) I would begin by a beautiful Urdu couplet which I would also translate for the benefit of those not conversant with Hindi / Urdu. It says:
*Maine khuda se dua mangi,
Dua main apne liye maut mangi,
Khuda ne kaha – maut to main tujhe de deta, magar-
Us se kya kahoon jis ne tere liye zindagi mangi*
- (3) Translated in English the couplet is – I prayed to the God; in the prayer I asked for my death. God- the merciful, descended before me and told me – dear child, I would have given the death to you, but what do I do with that one who is incessantly asking for your life.
- (4) The one who is incessantly busy fighting against death, disease and trauma, and exerting himself for the life, health and well-being of human beings is the doctor. We believe that life and death are in the hands of God. On the earth, if there is anyone who can create life and disrupt the schedule of death, he is a doctor. In this sense, what a doctor does is a divine function.
- (5) A doctor may be a believer or an atheist. The former believes in the existence of God, the Almighty. The latter though a non-believer, would at least acknowledge that there is some super power greater than himself, be it nature or anything else, which controls and guides him. A friend of Einstein, the great scientist

of preceding century told Einstein – ‘I am a non-believer.’ Einstein asked him – do you believe that there is no God? The friend said – ‘yes, I do believe so’. Einstein quickly responded – ‘if it be so, then you are a believer!’ I go with Einstein. I am a believer. I firmly believe in God, religion, and spirituality.

- (6) Spirituality is essential to success in any profession. I have been a lawyer and a judge. I inherited spirituality from my late father who was a great lawyer and a good human being. When I look back into the times which have gone by, I recall that as a lawyer my presentation of the case in the Court has been the best when I was dwelling in spirituality. As a judge, the best of my judgments were written when I was under the trance of spirituality.
- (7) Spiritual Power is faith in a higher power, a consciousness which offers and assures a sense of peace, contentment, confidence and hope. When you are connected with this higher power, limitless loving energy flows which makes you feel good, positive, creative, and yet relaxed. This higher power is known by many names – God, Goddess, Jesus, Allah or even just your own inner self. Spiritual Power is an invisible force, abundant in nature which allows betterment of all.
- (8) In 2004 the Noble Prize in Physics was given for contributions towards the ‘Theory of Everything’. This theory aims to show that all fundamental particles and fields which go into making everything physical in this universe and all living creatures are nothing but different aspects of one single source¹. Charles H. Townes, a Noble Laureate who invented the maser and co-invented the laser has said that there is indeed a spiritual world and a creator. Most people do not realize that science, like religion, requires faith. He goes on to say, ‘I do believe there is a spiritual presence in the Universe; though it is difficult to define God but, I can feel an omnipresence everywhere.
- (9) Have you ever tried to analyse in what state of mind you are while performing a surgery or any other procedure? You are calm, quiet, and centered - in a state of perfect emotional

balance. Your entire energy, physical and emotional, is processed only in one direction – you must succeed! You must win!! Your mind-body relationship is at its best and perfect. Sense of self disappears. You turn to the needs of your patient lying helplessly on your table. Your understanding of your patient's suffering and your compassion for him is at its height. You may say - this happens naturally. But the truth is - it is your spirituality which overtakes you at that moment.

(10) There are at least four forceful spiritual principles which make you perform a surgery, even a most difficult surgery. Every surgeon present here must have performed hundreds of surgeries. It is your routine. If I could record several waves passing through the mind of a surgeon ready to perform a surgery, what he believes, thinks, hears and speaks, it would be something like this:

- i) He believes that secret of success is to find a problem and solve it, to find a hurt and heal it;
- ii) He reacts with positivity to a negative situation;
- iii) He hears an inner voice – I would try to do something great, whether I succeed or not, rather than to do nothing;
- iv) He tells his patient in a voice which cannot be heard – there is a good news that a bad news can be turned into a good news as you are in the hands of a surgeon whose heart is filled with faith and confidence. Faith is the courage to face reality with hope.²

(11) What is the moral of every surgery which a surgeon performs:

- (i) Deadly sharp instrument in the hands of a surgeon cut the body to cure it;
- (ii) One positive thought of gaining a chance of surviving overpowers an entire army of negative thoughts.

(12) Many a times you come across strange questions. The same doctor treating two patients with similar symptoms finds some day that one survives the other does not. Two physicians

prescribe similar medicines to two patients; One is cured, the other is not. Why a particular patient comes to a particular doctor only? These and several similar questions have been answered by Einstein who has said that everything is predestined, prefixed. Nothing happens by chance. God does not play dice, he does not gamble - says Einstein. There is someone who is engineer of engineers, doctor of doctors, judge of judges and so on. I call it divinity. The only principle which can explain this phenomenon is that there is something which is Divine. I hope that many of you would agree.

- (13) What is spirituality? Most simply stated, Spirituality is the measure of how willing we are to allow the grace of some power greater than ourselves to enter our lives and guide us along our way.
- (14) A spiritual person is one who loves himself and others equally. Necessarily, a spiritual person is a kind person. A spiritual person believes that his virtues are a gift and a blessing, which are not meant to be kept for himself; but are meant to be shared with the rest of the world. Such person aims at higher goals, and spirituality helps him in reaching those goals. Howsoever difficult the situation be, a spiritual person acts inspired by divine courage and wisdom.
- (15) Have you ever asked a question to yourself - why you chose to become a doctor? Certainly in a materialistic world, any young person would opt for a career that would enable him earning a lot of money and also name and fame, but the basic instinct which is decisive of a student choosing medical course of study is different. He has deep respect for human life and an intense desire to serve the humanity, the human-beings. Medicine cures the disease; doctor heals the patient. A doctor would not have been a doctor unless the God had willed him to be so. I do say – a doctor is the noblest creature of God.
- (16) Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, has indicated, the skill of being a doctor is a hardest job to learn and perform. To be a doctor, a man of medicine or surgery, you have to possess some

of the most excellent virtues - intelligence, kindness, precision, devotion, patience and versatility. If you are a successful doctor, then you have these traits.

(17) Hippocrates, led a life of uprightness. He was venerated almost as a saint by his colleagues. He visualized man of medicine being a man of utmost honor and trust, bestowed with generosity and kindness, loyal and devoted to the patients. The medical profession demands being most ethical of all professions.

(18) To me, it seems that it was some doctor speaking through him, when Emily Dickinson, a great poet, wrote these lines:

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain.
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain;
Or help one lonely person,
into happiness again.
I shall not live in vain.

(19) An orthopaedician does not aim at just fixing the joint or just nailing the broken bones; he wants his patient to leave more happy and perfect than what he was when he came in.

(20) Every person who has suffered a trauma is inflicted with anger and fear; anger for what has happened and fear for what may happen. The duty of a surgeon is not only to take care of the bodily trauma but also of emotional dents which the trauma has caused. It has been proved by research that to heal quicker and better a patient from trauma he must be got ridden of anger and fear, caused by trauma. He must instead develop a strong urge to survive, to recover from the trauma and this he can do only by having faith in the doctor and by praying to the God.

(21) My younger brother is a doctor. In his clinic hangs a placard which his patients read – “Your faith in me helps me treat you better.” *Doctor Willard A. Krehl*, Emeritus Professor of

Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia has said – ‘.... [A] person’s expectation is an important part of taking any medication – even vitamins and aspirin. Good physicians intuitively know this and it is the reason they tend to give patients not only prescriptions but also reassuring words – this will make you better.’ Doctor Krehl, has emphasized – ‘medicine must be given with a strong spiritual support. The patient must develop a sense of faith not only in the doctor and the medication, but, most importantly, within him or herself’. *Time Magazine* (March 12, 1990) carried an article discussing the role of emotions in medical prevention or treatment of disease and points to modern science’s discovery of innovative ways to measure the mind’s impact on the body’s health. The article has quoted Doctor N. Herward Spector, a neurophysiologist at the National Institute of Health as saying that the appropriate clinical uses for mind-body therapy, can result in a revolution in medical practice.³

- (22) A doctor while treating the patient or a surgeon while performing the surgery must be able to generate in the patient a feeling of faith for him, himself. *‘Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible and receives the impossible.’* How beautifully Dr. Joseph Murphy has articulated the scientific truth - *It is the world within which creates the world without. Your thoughts, feelings and visualized imagery are the organizing principles of what you experience.*⁴
- (23) It would make a lot of difference if the doctor receives a patient suffering from trauma with an expression writ large on the face of the doctor conveying to the patient that he is feeling as concerned as the victim himself is, but the treatment should begin with a reassuring smile that the patient is sure to be cured. *A smile is a gently curved line that can set a lot of things straight.* It is the spirituality which enables the doctor to be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and too steadfast to permit the pressure of trouble. *When the spirituality in a surgeon rises and commands, the Gods are ready to obey.* A physician practicing spirituality can by the power of the mind

affirm and visualize health for many years beyond the average life span computed by the insurance companies.

- (24) I respect the doctors. I admire the medical profession. No other profession serves the God's creation so well as medical profession. A doctor serves and earns. Between the motto of service and motive to earn, which one is placed higher, makes all the difference. By this oration, I am not for a moment suggesting that God cures and doctor raises the bill ! A patient has narrated his memoirs by saying – my doctor gave me only six months to live but when I could not pay his bill he gave me six months more! The moral of the anecdote is - next after the God one who can determine the length of life, is a doctor. In that sense, every successful doctor is manifestation of God's divinity.
- (26) I always follow my doctor's advice religiously. Would you permit me to today to give some advice to you? Every doctor is first a human being. Away from the profession he also owes duty to his family, friends and society. I suggest – rather request – please :
- (i) Find time for yoga and meditation.
 - (ii) Write diary, only a few lines, every day or once in a week. Record some memorable incidents, some miraculous recoveries, also some extra ordinary patients you have dealt with. A few years hence, they will be cherished as your golden memoirs!
 - (iii) Practice and develop a sense of detachment. Then your professional obligations would never take a toll of your other relationships. You would also prove and continue to be a good spouse, a good parent, a good neighbour and a responsible/popular citizen. This practice of Spirituality would enable you in defining the limits of your person and profession, preventing one from intruding on the other.
 - (iv) Take a weekly off and vacation. Go for outing with family at least once in a year.
 - (v) Set apart 10% of your income for charity. It can be a little more or less.

- (vi) Organize and / or participate in free medical camps for poor and needy.
- (vii) Keep on renewing and updating yourself by participating in conference / seminar / workshop, at least once or twice in a year.
- (viii) Last but not the least, imbibe Spirituality. It would bestow on you peace, tranquillity and happiness, it would also enable you discharging the most important fundamental duty, which the Constitution of India mandates for every citizen that he shall strive towards excellence / in all spheres of individual and collective activity /so that the nation constantly rises / to higher levels of endeavour and achievement. You will really serve the nation.

(27) Dear Doctors, I believe and beseech you also to believe, that you are a distinct portion of the essence of God in yourself. Remind yourself every day that you are a divine creation and entitled to be loved by all those whom you treat and deal with. Love yourself too. By seeing yourself as connected to - rather than separated from - God you will feel a greater reverence for yourself.⁵

(28) Let us all pray:-

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः; सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु, मा कश्चित् दुःख भाग्भवेत् ॥

[“Let all be happy, Let all be free from diseases,
Let all see auspicious things, Let nobody suffer from grief.”⁶]

¹ *Best of Speaking Tree*, Vol. 4, p. 149

² With gratitude to Robert H. Shuller, *Tough Times Never Last But Tough People Do*.

³ Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Living*, Ch. 9

⁴ *The Power of Your Sub-Conscious Mind*, Bantam books, pp 7/8

⁵ *Wisdom of the Ages*, Wayne W. Dyer, pp. 31, 34

⁶ Inscribed on the gate of Parliament House