

The Empty Jar

Let me tell you the parable of the empty jar, which the *shishya* (the student) asked his *guru* (teacher) to fill up. The *guru* in front of the entire class looked around and found the round stones that were lying around. So he filled the jar with these balls. He then asked: "Is the jar full now?" The students agreed that it was full. He then went out and brought in some small stones and poured these into the jar. He then shook the jar. The stones settled into the jar. He then asked the students again if the jar was full and when they agreed that it was, he went out again and brought in some sand and poured that into the jar. Of course, the sand filled every part of the jar. Now everyone agreed that the jar was as full as it could be. In front of them all, he poured some tea into the jar, this time filling every cubic centimeter of the jar.

The entire class laughed. Once the laughter was over, the teacher told them: "This jar is a bit like your life. The round balls are things that are important in your life; your family, your children, your health, your friends, - those things that if everything else was lost and only these remained, you would still call your life full. The small stones are the other slightly less significant things, but still important in your life; like your job, your house, your car etc.

The sand is everything else; if you had poured the sand in first you would have had no space for the important things, things really important to you for your happiness, comfort and fulfillment. Therefore pay attention to things that are central to your happiness. As you grow up, and have children, take time to play with them; keep yourself in good physical and mental condition, take regular exercise. There will always be time to do small things that are important for pleasing others; for example, keeping your house clean, and ensure that the water system in your house is in good shape, your books and papers are kept in a orderly manner so that you can lay your hands on that which you need quickly. Then the teacher was about to leave.

One of the more observant students raised her hand and said "*Guruji* what about the tea?" The teacher laughed aloud and said "I am delighted you asked. The tea indicates that no matter how full your life may seem, there is always room for a cup of tea with a friend or your wife, giving you an opportunity to laugh, joke, think, dream, or smile to yourself; for those are things that fill you again with energy and provide the capacity to review as also renew life that lies ahead of you".

Adapted from Mr. S K Singh's Convocation Address

The Story of the Pencil

A boy was watching his grandmother write a letter. At one point he asked:

‘Are you writing a story about what we have done? Is it a story about me?’

His grandmother stopped writing her letter and said to her grandson:

‘I *am* writing about you. Actually, but more important than the words is the pencil I am using. I hope you will be like this pencil when you grow up.’

Intrigued the boy looked at the pencil. It didn’t seem very special.

‘But its just like any other pencil I have ever seen!’

‘That depends on how you look at things. It has five qualities which. If you manage to them, will make you a person who is always at peace with the world.’

‘First quality: you are capable of great things, but you must never forget, that there is a hand guiding your steps. We call that hand God and He always guides us according to His will.’

‘Second quality: now and then I have to stop writing and use a sharpener. That makes the pencil suffer a little, but afterwards, it is much sharper. So you, too, must learn to bear certain pains and sorrows, because they will make you a better person.’

‘Third quality: the pencil always allows us to use an eraser to rub out any mistakes. This means that correcting something we did is not necessarily a bad thing; it helps to keep us on the road to justice.’

‘Fourth quality: what really matters in a pencil is not its wooden exterior, but the graphite inside. So always pay attention to what is happening inside you.’

‘Finally, the pencil’s fifth quality: it always leaves a mark. In just the same way, you should know that everything you do in life will leave a mark, so try to be conscious of that in your every action.’

By

Paulo Coelho

(Brazilian Author)

Source: *Like the Flowing River*

(London) Harper Collins, 2005

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Interfaith Dialogue: Principles of Understanding and Cooperation

In adherence to the spirit and laws of our respective religious traditions, to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and to the secular spirit of our and to the constitution, we affirm our commitment to uphold the right of every human being to freedom of speech, thought, religion, and conscience.

We jointly declare our dedication to challenge continuously all forms of religious [intolerance], ethnic intolerance, and bigotry through active promotion of mutual understanding and respect for human life and dignity.

- a. By responding openly to acts of religious, racial, ethnic or any other kind of intolerance.
- b. By investing time, labor and talents to sensitizing our own communities to the evils of such intolerance.
- c. By informing and educating each on matters of public concern.

We dedicate and commit ourselves to foster the maturing relationship of mutual respect and cooperation between our two communities, by promoting a deeper knowledge of and respect for each other's history, tradition, and sensitivities.

For us to accomplish this, our communities are seriously encouraged to discover even better ways to foster and promote:

- a. A comprehensive dialogue that leads to goodwill and mutual understanding.
- b. The development and dissemination of appropriate information involving each other's religious traditions for both children and adults. Combined learning experiences are especially encouraged.
- c. The necessity to deepen awareness and sensitivity to issues of special contemporary concern to either community.

In regard to community outreach, whenever possible, we are strongly encouraged to collaborate in developing mutually beneficial services while respecting the integrity and independence of each other's service organizations.

- a. By supporting, whenever feasible, efforts in each other's community as well as in the general public to provide for the basic needs of all.
- b. By being whenever possible cognizant of, comprehending, and being sensitive to, the global needs of each tradition.

Face Difficulties Positively

This parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule praying or whatever mules do when they fall into wells.

After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth the trouble of saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together, told them what had happened, and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

Initially the old mule was hysterical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling and the dirt hit his back, a thought struck him. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back, HE WOULD SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP!

This he did, blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up... shake it off and step up... shake it off and step up!" He repeated to encourage himself. No matter how painful the blows, or how distressing the situation seemed, the old mule fought panic and just kept right on SHAKING IT OFF AND STEPPING UP!

It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly over the wall of that well! What seemed like it would bury him actually helped him ... all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.

THAT'S LIFE! We face our problems and respond to them positively, and refuse to give in to panic, bitterness, or self-pity.

From: <http://academictips.org/blogs/face-difficulties-positively/>

Letter from a Father to His Son's Teacher

The following letter was written by Abraham Lincoln, the 16 President of the United States born on 12 February 1809. He was the President of the United States from March 1861 till he was assassinated in April 1865. Lincoln is revered in the United States as a founding father of the democratic nation. He led the country through the American Civil War and abolished slavery. Reared in a poor family Lincoln modernized the economy and set the path of progress for the United States of America.

*He will have to learn, I know,
that all men are not just,
all men are not true.
But teach him also that
for every scoundrel there is a hero;
that for every selfish Politician,
there is a dedicated leader...
Teach him for every enemy there is a
friend,*

*Steer him away from envy,
if you can,
teach him the secret of
quiet laughter.*

*Let him learn early that
the bullies are the easiest to lick... Teach him, if you can,
the wonder of books...
But also give him quiet time
to ponder the eternal mystery of birds in the sky,
bees in the sun,
and the flowers on a green hillside.*

*In the school teach him
it is far honourable to fail
than to cheat...
Teach him to have faith
in his own ideas,
even if everyone tells him
they are wrong...
Teach him to be gentle
with gentle people,*

and tough with the tough.

*Try to give my son
the strength not to follow the crowd
when everyone is getting on the band wagon...
Teach him to listen to all men...
but teach him also to filter
all he hears on a screen of truth,
and take only the good
that comes through.*

*Teach him if you can,
how to laugh when he is sad...
Teach him there is no shame in tears,
Teach him to scoff at cynics
and to beware of too much sweetness...
Teach him to sell his brawn
and brain to the highest bidders
but never to put a price-tag
on his heart and soul.*

*Teach him to close his ears
to a howling mob
and to stand and fight
if he thinks he's right.
Treat him gently,
but do not cuddle him,
because only the test
of fire makes fine steel.*

*Let him have the courage
to be impatient...
let him have the patience to be brave.
Teach him always
to have sublime faith in himself,
because then he will have
sublime faith in mankind.*

*This is a big order,
but see what you can do...
He is such a fine fellow,
my son!*

‘Tryst with destiny’

Address by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, on the eve of Independence to the first Constituent Assembly on 14 August 1947

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.

It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

Future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we may fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity.

And so we have to labour and to work, and work hard, to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for anyone of them to imagine that it can live apart.

Peace has been said to be indivisible; so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this one world that can no longer be split into isolated fragments.

Freedom brings responsibilities and burdens and we have to face them in the spirit of a free and disciplined people.

Our thoughts must be of the unknown volunteers and soldiers of freedom who, without praise or reward, have served India even unto death.

The future beckons to us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India; to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman.

We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be.

We are citizens of a great country, on the verge of bold advance, and we have to live up to that high standard. All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness, for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action.

To the nations and peoples of the world we send greetings and pledge ourselves to cooperate with them in furthering peace, freedom and democracy.

And to India, our much-loved motherland, the ancient, the eternal and the ever-new, we pay our reverent homage and we bind ourselves afresh to her service. Jai Hind

My Mom Only had one Eye

My mom only had one eye. I hated her... She was such an embarrassment. She cooked for students and teachers to support the family. There was this one day during elementary school where my mom came to say hello to me. I was so embarrassed.

How could she do this to me? I ignored her, threw her a hateful look and ran out. The next day at school one of my classmates said, "EEEE, your mom only has one eye!"

I wanted to bury myself. I also wanted my mom to just disappear. I confronted her that day and said, "If you're only gonna make me a laughing stock, why don't you just die?"

My mom did not respond... I didn't even stop to think for a second about what I had said, because I was full of anger. I was oblivious to her feelings.

I wanted out of that house, and have nothing to do with her. So I studied real hard, got a chance to go abroad to study.

Then, I got married. I bought a house of my own. I had kids of my own. I was happy with my life, my kids and the comforts. Then one day, my Mother came to visit me. She hadn't seen me in years and she didn't even meet her grandchildren.

When she stood by the door, my children laughed at her, and I yelled at her for coming over uninvited. I screamed at her, "How dare you come to my house and scare my children! GET OUT OF HERE! NOW!!!"

And to this, my mother quietly answered, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I may have gotten the wrong address." – and she disappeared out of sight.

One day, a letter regarding a school reunion came to my house. So I lied to my wife that I was going on a business trip. After the reunion, I went to the old shack just out of curiosity.

My neighbors said that she died. I did not shed a single tear. They handed me a letter that she had wanted me to have.

"My dearest son,

I think of you all the time. I'm sorry that I came to your house and scared your children.

I was so glad when I heard you were coming for the reunion. But I may not be able to even get out of bed to see you. I'm sorry that I was a constant embarrassment to you when you were growing up. You see.....when you were very little, you got into an accident, and lost your eye. As a mother, I couldn't stand watching you having to grow up with one eye. So I gave you mine.

I was so proud of my son who was seeing a whole new world for me, in my place, with that eye.

With all my love to you,

Your mother."

<http://academictips.org/blogs/my-mom-only-had-one-eye/>

THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

Preamble

WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a [SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC] and to secure to all its citizens:

JUSTICE, social, economic and political;

LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and of opportunity;

and to promote among them all

FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the *[unity and integrity of the Nation];

IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.

42nd Amendment – Socialist, Secular and Integrity – these words were inserted by Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the wake of the Emergency.

Life is a Gift

- Today before you think of saying an unkind word—
think of someone who can't speak.
- Before you complain about the taste of your food—
think of someone who has nothing to eat.
- Before you complain about your husband or wife—
think of someone who is crying out to God for a companion.
- Today before you complain about life—
think of someone who went too early to heaven.
- Before you complain about your children—
think of someone who desires children but they're barren.
- Before you argue about your dirty house, someone didn't clean or sweep—
think of the people who are living in the streets.
- Before whining about the distance you drive—
think of someone who walks the same distance with their feet.
- And when you are tired and complain about your job
think of the unemployed, the disabled and those who wished they had your job.
- But before you think of pointing the finger or condemning another—
remember that not one of us are without sin and we all answer to one maker.
- And when depressing thoughts seem to get you down—
put a smile on your face and thank God you're alive and still around.

Life is a gift – Live it, Enjoy it, Celebrate it, and Fulfil it.

<http://academictips.org/life-is-a-gift/>

Time Management

Good advice from Mahatma Gandhi

Father of the Nation

In Sevagram in Bapu Kutli, a small board was hung just behind Gandhiji's seat.

There was a very useful threefold advice written on it:

Be Quick,

Be Brief,

Be Gone

When the interviewees did not show any sign after their time was over, even after Bapu's glance at the watch, Bapu would point at the board and laugh loudly with his toothless mouth.

From *The Fire and the Rose* by Narayan Desai, p 637.

A word of wisdom by Sheikh Sadi

Sheikh Sadi, was a Medieval Poet of Iran, whose Parables and Verses from the epics *Gulistan* and *Bustan* are still quoted freely. Translated in almost all languages his Persian verses are considered a treasure trove of knowledge and wisdom to spend a peaceful, respected and successful life.

This well-known verse, part of chapter 1, story 10 of the *Gulistan*, is displayed in the entrance of the United Nations 'Hall of Nations' in New York:

بنی آدم اعضای یک پیکرند
 که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند
 چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار
 دگر عضوها را نماند قرار
 تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی
 نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

*Human beings are members of a whole,
 In creation of one essence and soul.
 If one member is afflicted with pain,
 Other members uneasy will remain.
 If you have no sympathy for human pain,
 The name of human you cannot retain.*

US President, Barack Obama quoted this in his videotaped *Nowruz* (New Year's) greeting to the Iranian people in March 2009: "There are those who insist that we be defined by our differences. But let us remember the words that were written by the poet Saadi, so many years ago: 'The children of Adam are limbs to each other, having been created of one essence.'"

Every Woman Every Child

The UNO (United Nations Organization) is the widest ranging multi-lateral institution of the world for international cooperation to maintain peace and harmony for mankind on planet earth. The various Articles of the UN Charter and the chapters in the declarations emphasize women's rights and giving equal opportunities to women.

Women welfare in the founding document of UN, the United Nations Charter (1948):

1. The Preamble reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations.
2. UN should promote and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.
3. Puts condition of equality and no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity in the United Nations principal and subsidiary organs.
4. Promotes universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.

The UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS reaffirms:

1. Faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women
2. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.
3. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.
4. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage during marriage and at its dissolution.
5. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
6. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.
7. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Other women centred UN efforts

1. Birth of Global Feminism successfully asserts that all issues are Human Issues
2. Commission on status of women stipulated the use of gender neutral language
3. UN Women: a New UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women merging the UN's UNIFEM, DAW, UN-INSTRAW and special office on Gender Issues.
4. Women's rights are human rights and gender equality is universal concern
5. The fundamental shift of focus from women to the concept of gender.
6. The entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women are to be re-evaluated to fully empower women to take their rightful place as equal partners with men in all aspects of life.

Mountains and molehills

By Maj-Gen G G Dwivedi (retd)

It was the maiden day of our new academic session in Sainik School, Amravati. To every one's relief, the whole class had been promoted. As seventh graders, we had inched up the ladder, with two classes as cushion to boss over. Sitting in the freshly constructed block, amidst din and the nose deep into the new textbooks, our homesickness had already vanished.

The staff list displayed on the notice board had indicated only one change in respect of our class. For English, it was to be Mr. Michael St John. We soon gathered that he was a fresh graduate, barely 22, and was due to join the following week.

On Monday, we excitedly waited for the new English teacher. As Mr. John entered the classroom, we were enamoured by his impressive personality and deportment. During introduction, he went over his early years, gave snapshot of his family, including girlfriend, and details of home county, which was near London. He had represented college in football and rowing, besides being an experienced mountaineer.

In less than an hour, we were totally at ease with our new teacher. However, Mr John's accent and his preference to be addressed by first name, took some time to get used to. Within weeks we could feel the difference, vindicated by our all-round brilliant performance. Under Mr. John's tutelage, the Canoe Club took off and half a dozen boats were fabricated from the 'Knockdown' kits. Canoe racing became a regular fixture and weekend hikes and addiction.

To pump up our adrenaline, Mr. John would whisper sneeringly, "Indians lack killer instinct!" This was spark enough for us to fire on all burners. He took pains to develop each individual's talent. An orchestra item with plates, spoons, empty jam cans as instruments, choreographed by Mr. John, was a hit during the annual day function. Some of our activities were even covered in his country newspaper in the classroom, English period was great fun. The classics like 'David Copperfield' and around the World in Eighty Days' were enacted, Mr. John playing the lead roles. Discussions in the class were candid, covering a wide range of issues. Topic of British colonial rule was always a contentious one. Mr. Shukla, the Hindi teacher, and Mr. John became arch rivals. The two confronted each other head on. However, disengagement was always on a pleasant note.

During the India-England cricket series, the atmosphere was highly charged. When Tiger Pataudi scored a double century, Mr. John was literally made to eat a humble pie.

Two years flew by, marking an end of our iconic teacher's tenure. During the farewell speech, Mr. John frankly confessed that his focus was always on developing the students' attitude; honing language skills being secondary. His oft-reiterated mountaineering fundamentals - "through preparation and acclimatization, not to force pace and respect for nature" – had universal application.

Mr. John was an ardent advocate of individualism and self effort. His pet single liner was "one who climb with their own crooked legs stand taller atop a molehill, vis- a – vis those who piggyback to perch on lofty mountain"

Currently, the school is amidst the golden jubilee celebrations. The values Mr. John preached and practiced have stood the test of time; being as relevant today as these were half a century back!

‘Nothing is ever lasting’

MAJ GEN GG DWIVEDI (RETD)

I perched myself tactically on a vacant bench so that I could have a bird’s eye view of the Harvard Square, as I waited for my wife to shop for souvenirs. She was to join me after a hectic day at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she was attending the Senior Educator’s Programme. Enjoying the sunny June afternoon, I sat watching hordes of starry-eyed fresher’s on an orientation tour, all set to make their entry into the elite university; reminiscing my own experience as an ‘exec-edu’ participant at Kennedy School.

Suddenly, I was jolted from the semi slumber state, when I saw a well-built elderly gentleman standing in front of me and gesturing for help to sit down. Promptly, I got up and lent my shoulder so that he could slip on to the bench. Moaning with grief, he cursed his knees, the most precious part of the body in younger days when he was a renowned footballer. Today, these very knees had become a handicap and source of unbearable pain. I empathized by complimenting him for taking life in his stride in the twilight years.

Soon, he seemed to have disengaged from me as I found him making efforts to strike conversation with passersby. A bit intrigued, I tried to ignore him by digging into the book “48 Laws of Power” by Robert Greene that I was carrying. Through the corner of the eye, I observed that barely one in ten people he accosted cared to reciprocate.

Abruptly, he inched towards me and smilingly gestured, “You are apparently reading a book on power! Everyone wants it. Once I too possessed it, as a celebrity. It’s a very heady stuff” Clenching my right arm tightly, he grinned and quizzed me: “if you are following the 2014 World Cup, then tell me ‘who is Neymar?’”

“Brazilian star striker – and who doesn’t know him?” I replied with an air of confidence. Promptly, he shot back his next question, “What tattoo does he support on his neck?” I was now stumped.

Loosening the grip on my wrist, he whispered the words “tudo passa” as if sharing a secret. Painstakingly, he explained to me that pair of Latin words meant that “nothing is ever lasting”, particularly position and fame. Elaborating further, he went on to define how power corrupts by isolating individuals from the ground reality, forcing them to live virtual lives and missing out on basic human relationships. Making a case in point he mumbled, “just saw, how hardly anyone cared to respond to my innocent gestures a little while ago! All these people are in trance, intoxicated with power”

Sensing a captive audience in me he paused for a while. Then taking a deep breath, in a heavy emotional tone, teeth clenched and tears dripping down his bearded cheeks, he sighed: “Ironically, the very assets which catapult one to fame later undergo mutation and manifest as the Achilles’ heel. Look at my knees!”

With a little support from me, he stretched out on the bench with eyes closed. As I got up to leave, he forced a smile, reminding me that the ordinary people are blessed, as they have a heart, both for nature and humanity. They never suffer the pangs of loss of power. I was soon hot footing to catch up with my wife to share the joy of being just an ordinary mortal – but the blessed one!