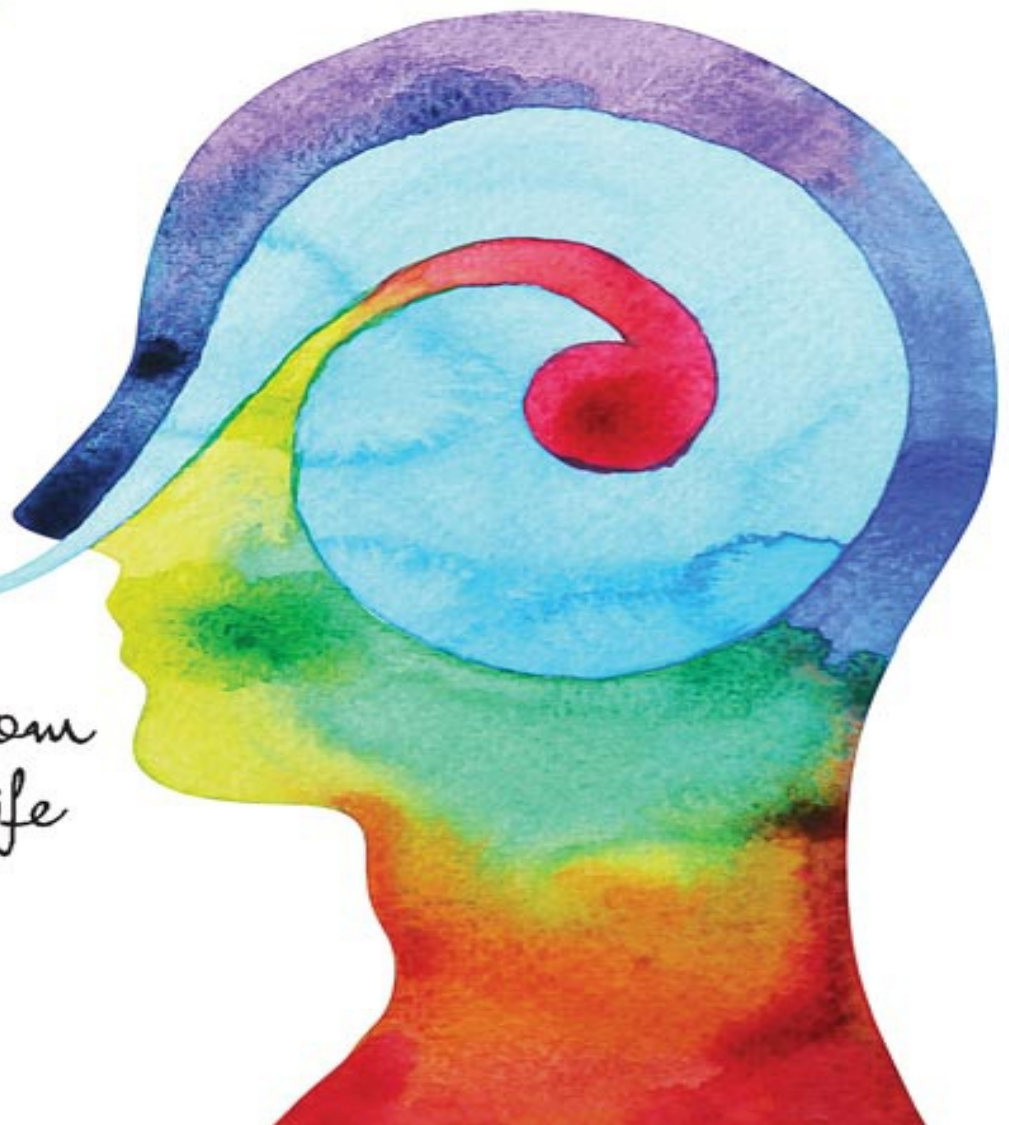


S H U B H A V I L A S

Author of the bestselling Ramayana - The Game of Life series

# OPEN-EYED MEDITATIONS

*practical wisdom  
for everyday life*



*Open-eyed Meditations* is a beautiful compilation of thoughts wherein each meditation takes you on a journey to the past, bringing a secret herb to heal a problem of the present.

A true distillation of ancient wisdom tips for modern lives, this unique self-help book uses the wisdom of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to solve your everyday problems.

Beyond the storyline, something deeper is waiting to be discovered from these ancient texts. This book is an attempt to uncover the hidden layer of wealth that is cleverly packaged within the commonly known storylines.

**'A book that can be read again and again . . . observations and insights that inspire to think deeper and change life for the better.'**

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**'Deep exploration, cogent analysis, and lucid interpretation of stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata . . . This book should be on every bookshelf and in every home.'**

– CHRISTOPHER C. DOYLE, author

**'Intuitive yet pragmatic, *Open-eyed Meditations* is a lucid and thoughtful window to mindfulness.'**

– NAMITA GOKHALE, writer

**'A wonderful book that reveals many profound secrets through varied meditations, each of which can nurture a different aspect of your life.'**

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**'A unique approach to help us address issues and questions that we have in our life . . . useful and enlightening. Highly recommended.'**

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**'*Open-eyed Meditations* is a book for all moods and all seasons . . . these rare 64 gems talk to us, make us ponder, and goad us to accept . . . Read it and digest it for a better life!'**

– HITAL R. MESWANI, Executive Director and Board Member of Reliance Industries Ltd.

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**BELIEF**

Published by  
**FiNGERPRINT! BEL!EF**  
An imprint of Prakash Books India Pvt. Ltd.

113/A, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002,  
Tel: (011) 2324 7062 – 65, Fax: (011) 2324 6975  
E-mail: [info@prakashbooks.com](mailto:info@prakashbooks.com)/[sales@prakashbooks.com](mailto:sales@prakashbooks.com)

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ISBN: 978 81 7599 404 1

## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

‘A book that can be read again and again . . . observations and insights that inspire to think deeper and change life for the better . . . the day I can implement everything from here, that day I can call myself a self-realised being.’

**- Shri Laxmikant Parsekarji,  
Hon’ble Chief Minister of Goa**

‘Shri Shubha Vilas has chosen a unique way of presenting this book. His writings resonate so perfectly with Sri Ramanuja’s teachings. His precision of thinking and understanding of life is breathtaking. Each page is bejewelled with the clarity of his thought. Some people read the scriptures for literary pleasure while others read them for after-life increments. Shri Shubha Vilas reads them to address the problems of NOW. The book is an absolute guide for efficient and effective living.’

**- Shri Badri Bhattar Swamy,  
leading Ramayana exponent**

‘Intuitive yet pragmatic, *Open-eyed Meditations* is a lucid and thoughtful window to mindfulness.’

**- Namita Gokhale, writer**

‘Deep exploration, cogent analysis, and lucid interpretation of stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata provide useful and practical lessons on how to cope with the everyday challenges we face in our modern world. This book should be on every bookshelf and in every home.’

**- Christopher C. Doyle, author**

‘A wonderful book that reveals many profound secrets through varied meditations, each of which can nurture a different aspect of your life.’

**- Ashwin Sanghi, author**

‘This book by Shubha Vilas ji is a unique approach to help us address issues

and questions that we have in our life, through the aid of short snippets quoting examples and behaviours from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. I have found virtually every sphere of our life—be it personal, professional, or societal questions—answered and guided. I found this book very useful and enlightening. It also is written in a contemporary form, which keeps the interest alive, particularly with youth. This book is a keeper and to be referenced every now and then. Highly recommended.’

**- Anil Valluri, President, SAARC & NetApp India**

‘If you thought you knew everything about the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Shubha Vilas will surprise you! He has extracted the knowledge of these timeless epics, distilled the wisdom, and presented it in a contemporary form that is relevant in every aspect of our lives. It’s a book you will want to read over again to absorb the brilliant learnings.’

**- Abhishek Karnani, Director, *The Free Press Journal***

‘*Open-eyed Meditations* is a book for all moods and all seasons. Shubha Vilas has managed the compilation of these rare 64 gems, which talk to us, make us ponder, and goad us to accept . . . The success of the book will be in remembering and applying each and every lesson learnt herein. I wish every reader all the very best. Read it and digest it for a better life!’

**- Hital R. Meswani, Executive Director and  
Board Member of Reliance Industries Ltd.**

‘This book is a top quality jewel which is not only good to look at but also something that enhances the quality of life. Every page is a pleasure to read and at the end of it you’re a lot wiser than before.’

**- Shobha Asar, jeweller**

*To the thousands of teachers I have come across in  
the journey of life that have guided me to meditate  
on the beauty of life.*

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Those who consider themselves permanent students of the classroom of life, look at every person who enters into that classroom as teachers who teach a subject to ponder about and grow.

Walking through life, I have always seen myself as a student, surrounded by teachers who have touched and enhanced my life immensely. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for all that I have been fortunate enough to learn from them.

To name all of them here would be impossible; however, two of the most prominent teachers in my life have been: H.D.G. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, the founder acharya of the Hare Krsna Movement, and H.H. Radhanath Swami, the author of the international bestseller *The Journey Home—Autobiography of an American Swami*.

My special gratitude to Dr. Shrilekha Hada, who has been much more than just an editor for this book. Her invaluable inputs, at every step, have helped me bring more eloquence and clarity into every meditation.

This book initially began as a blog and later took the shape of this book. I would like to express my gratitude to so many friends and well-wishers who wholeheartedly shared their feedback and appreciation for these meditations. Their encouragement and their desire to see these meditations available to the world was my primary motive behind bringing them out in the form of a book.

And, of course, my warm thanks to the entire team of Fingerprint! Publishing, especially Ms. Shikha Sabharwal and Pooja Dadwal—their intense efforts and sincere dedication are visible on every page of the book. I would also like to thank Kanishka Gupta profusely for being the invisible link behind making this book available to the world.

# INTRODUCTION



Meditation essentially means perceiving deeper truths from within.

For those who thought that meditation is a closed-eyed phenomenon, I beg to differ. And offer them *Open-eyed Meditations*, a book that shows another perspective to meditation.

When you are open to life, life opens up to you. The upper limit of your ability to learn is determined by the upper limit of your desire to learn. Nature is actually a school that happily teaches eager students the secret lessons of life. *Open-eyed Meditations* is a collection of thoughts about various aspects of life that is purely inspired by observing the world through the lenses of the Vedic epics.

Each meditation in the book deals with a modern problem that each one of us encounters in life and is accompanied by profound insights to those situations through a story or a character from the ancient epics.

Why ancient epics? The reason being that there is something attractive about the epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana that has kept them alive century after century. Beyond the storyline, something deeper is waiting to be discovered from these ancient texts. This book is an attempt to uncover the hidden layer of wealth that is cleverly packaged within the commonly known storylines.

Albert Einstein said, ‘Life is like riding a bicycle; to keep the balance one has to keep moving.’ For most people, there is no time to stop to learn how to maintain good relationships, how to become effective leaders, how to manage complications in life, and so on and so forth. They are already on the bicycle of life and most of the times speedily trending downwards. In such a delicate situation any quick tip to help retain the balance is always welcome!

Thus, *Open-eyed Meditations* is a distillation of ancient wisdom tips for

modern lives; a unique self-help book wherein each meditation takes you on a journey to the past, bringing a secret herb to heal a problem of the present.

Whether you are dealing with complex dynamics of relationships or solving an impossible crisis in your life or coming to terms with embarrassing failures or struggling with important decisions or dealing with any kind of addiction, this book offers valuable nuggets of wisdom and action point resources to deal with it all.

*Open-eyed Meditations* is a by-product of reading thousands of wisdom books, learning from thousands of wise men and keenly observing thousands of life situations. It is replete with intellectually stimulating analogies and quotes that will stick in your mind long after you have put the book down. It's definitely not a one-time read, but surely warrants a meditative one. Every meditation is independent and complete. These meditations will provoke you to think about life in ways you would have never thought of.

Water is all over the air, but when air is subjected to the process of condensation, we get water. Similarly, ideas/thoughts are all over, but when subjected to the process of contemplation, they become accessible to us. When a thought is held for a long duration of time and processed through the machinery of contemplation, then life *sutras* are produced. *Open-eyed Meditations* is a book of 'thought sutras' that can become 'life sutras'.

Read this book the way a cow eats grass while ruminating. Chew on every word carefully till you have milky lucidity that nourishes every aspect of your life. This book will help you learn the art of meditating with your eyes wide open as you keenly observe the world around you and allow it to enlighten you.



## YOGA OF COMMUNICATION



Yoga is the buzzword for a healthy body today, as it was for a healthy spirit in the past. So, can it possibly be used as a *mantra* for healthy relationships as well?

The word yoga means wholesome connection. For a spiritualist, yoga is connecting oneself to God by sacrificing one's focus, time, and energy in meditating on God. The same elements when used in communication become the yoga for connecting two individuals.

Yoga of communication is essentially a combination of three limbs, namely the yoga of interaction, the yoga of participation, and the yoga of non-intervention.

The yoga of interaction is practiced by pulling the mind away from personal needs, interests, and concerns and focusing on the needs, interests, and concerns of the one we want to connect with. Deep connections are forged when one learns the art of empathetically listening without diagnosing. If the deep-seated addiction to conclude before listening is sacrificed, healthy interactions will begin.

Why was Rama loved so much? Just because He practiced the yoga of interaction perfectly! When a citizen achieved some success, Rama celebrated with the family. And when someone went through a loss, Rama cried more than the family members. Not that He actually offered solutions to their problems every time, but just by empathising with their situation, He won their hearts. Rama knew that not every problem is meant to be solved, some are meant to be tolerated. Tolerating a problem becomes easy when there is adequate empathy available close by.



The yoga of participation is practiced by appreciating the opinion of others and when need be, sacrificing personal opinion in the fire of cooperation. Being a superman is about being right and having the solutions to all problems. Being a Hanuman is about valuing others' opinions and abilities above your own.

When Hanuman met Sita in Lanka and was asked for his introduction, he replied he was the most insignificant of the monkeys in Sugriva's army and, therefore, chosen to be the messenger. He increased Sita's confidence by stating that if the most insignificant monkey could jump over the ocean and create havoc in the city of Lanka alone, then naturally, all the mightier heroes put together will surely be able to rescue her and reconnect her to Rama. He appreciated and valued others knowing that people are happy to participate in a relationship till the extent they feel valued and wanted.

The yoga of non-intervention is practiced by maintaining a healthy distance from those you want to connect with. One prefers seats in a plane with more leg space. Similarly, one prefers space to be oneself. In the name of relationships, many times, we squeeze the space out of people's lives and force them to be a replica of ourselves. The yoga of non-intervention helps us appreciate and accept people the way they are while simultaneously allowing us to remain at peace in the way we are.

Each of the five Pandavas had their individual likes and dislikes. Arjuna never forced Bhima to learn archery. Yudhishtira never criticised any of his brothers for not being as truthful as he was. Nakula never compared his good looks with others. Sahadeva never discussed his superiority in knowledge of conversing with animals. And none of them were dissatisfied with their eating capacity in comparison to Bhima. By practicing the yoga of non-intervention, they remained deeply bonded and used their differences to strengthen the unity from multiple dimensions.

When communication becomes yoga, relationships breathe a sigh of relief!

Yoga is synonymous with health. Can it also be applied to improve the health of relationships? Yes, yoga of communication proves to be useful in healthy bonding of two individuals too. It is a combination of three limbs: the yoga of interaction, the yoga of participation, and the yoga of non-intervention.

Yoga of interaction involves pulling the mind away from self while empathetically listening to others. Tolerating problems for one in difficulties becomes easier if we can offer an empathetic ear to listen.

Yoga of participation is cooperating with others by valuing others' opinions and sacrificing our own. People are happy to participate in a relationship till the extent they feel valued and wanted.

Yoga of non-intervention implies accepting people as they are and giving them space. This in turn allows us to remain at peace with the way we are.



## THE PARALYSIS BY ANALYSIS SYNDROME



Are you an over-thinker who analyses everything to the point of exhaustion? Or, do you know people who prowl around with a magnifying glass, hysterically analysing every situation or every person around them? Does analysis sometimes lead you to paralysis? Does everything really need to be analysed?

Complexities outside slowly percolate into complexities inside. Simplicity is about living the present moment with gratitude and satisfaction. Complexity is about sulking over past events and ruminating with anxiety about future happenings.

Analysis is a strength but overanalysis is a blemish. Analysis leads to clarity but overanalysis leads to garbled thinking. Analysis leads to action, overanalysis leads to paralysis. Effective analysis is a by-product of simplicity but overanalysis is a ramification of complexity.

In the Ramayana, Lord Rama shows us the way. Intriguingly, He never overanalysed why He was banished or who was responsible for His banishment. The simplicity in His persona just accepted the unchangeable reality and embraced it gracefully.

Overanalysis stems out of two extremes in human thought process; blind over-confidence in oneself and utmost insecurity. These two make one carry immense amount of negative charge. At some point, such a person blows up like an unqualified electronic circuit holding too much current. Handling too much negativity while already being filled with negativity is a sure shot way to self-immolation.

In an airplane, one has to switch off all connections with the lower plane.

In fact, we are warned that any connection to the lower plane affects the performance in the higher plane. Similarly, for one to go higher in one's thought process, one has to switch off the lower thought processes and lower connections. Rather than using our ability to analyse in downgrading our mind, we should use it to upgrade our mind. Rather than downgrading and analysing who is responsible for our predicament or why we landed in this predicament, one should upgrade and analyse what one can learn from this opportunity.

A very inspiring way of overcoming the paralysis by analysis syndrome is visible in Arjuna's example in the Mahabharata. When he was cursed by Urvashi to become a eunuch for refusing her advances, neither did he overanalyse his decision nor her intentions, but accepted it as a gift of life. But when he personally made a mistake of vilifying Yudhishtira, he analysed his decision aggressively and took corrective measures. When it came to analysing others' actions, Arjuna used simplicity as a tool, keeping his analytical abilities aside, he did not downgrade Urvashi. But when it came to analysing his own actions, he used complexity as a tool and overanalysed his fault and upgraded himself.

When overanalysis helps one upgrade to a higher plane, it is a welcome tool. But when analysis itself downgrades one to a lower plane, it is a disgraceful venom.

A complex mind analyses every small detail with a magnifying glass. Although analytical thinking is a strength, extreme of anything is a weakness. Weakness because while analysis boosts action, overanalysis causes paralysis.

A simple mind accepts the unchangeable reality, whereas a complex mind dwells on it indefinitely creating immense negativity. While analysis upgrades us, overanalysis downgrades—unless we can discover what we can learn from it. Thus, analysis of our own faults and overanalysis of others' faults is a pitfall we should watch out for.



## DO ALL PROBLEMS HAVE QUICK FIX SOLUTIONS?



How long can you be uncomplaining when electricity goes away? How long can you tolerate being in a no-network zone? How quickly do you want to solve the problems in life?

One word less in most dictionaries today is ‘patience’. Fast food, fast pace, fast cars, fast gadgets, what naturally follows is the need for fast solutions!

Krishna was born to solve a major problem in that era: Kamsa. But He went away from Mathura and came back after eleven years to solve the problem. He probably wanted to teach us not to expect immediate solutions to all problems!

In fact, many problems don’t need to be solved, they need to be just tolerated. This type of problem solving is called ‘Delayed Management’. Rather than attempting to find a quick fix solution, just delay trying to find a solution. With time many things change—the situation changes, your need changes, your mood changes. But most of all, your maturity level changes. Time is a good baker. But you have to be patient while the cake is baking.

Even gaps in playing of a drum, actually enhance the musical melody. So sometimes not doing anything is itself a solution.

So, when we come across a problem about which you feel helpless, remember Lord Rama who having lost His wife, waited patiently for four months on the Malyavan hill, waiting for the rainy season to get over.

An intelligent problem solver is not one who solves every problem, but

one who knows which problems to solve and which to tolerate.

In a fast-paced life, fast solutions loom overhead as an emergency. At the opposite spectrum of fast solutions is the concept of 'delayed management' based on the premise that many problems need not be solved but only tolerated. Delayed management capitalises on a change in situation, changing moods and changing needs with time. Intelligence lies in knowing which problems can be solved and which can be tolerated. If you feel helpless in the face of a problem, remember, Lord Rama waited for four months of monsoon before rescuing Sita.





## WHY DON'T I MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS IN LIFE?



Is decision-making a feeling-based art, or a logic-based science? When decisions are based on feelings and love is based on logic, both tend to meet with disappointments.

More important than knowing how to make good decisions is knowing when to make those decisions. And more important than knowing when to make decisions is knowing when not to make them!

Here are seven circumstances in the Mahabharata that reveal when and how decisions ought not be made.

1. **Fear-driven decisions** – The tortoise shell protects as long as the shell is above it, but as soon as it flips over, the shell makes it helpless and the tortoise flaps around helplessly.

Similarly, a person who takes decisions out of fear flaps around just like this tortoise, and takes stubborn, abrupt steps.

In the Mahabharata, Ashwatthama when cornered by the Pandavas, took the most foolish decision of unleashing the deadly Brahmastra capable of destroying the whole world. This decision stemmed from his intense fear and need for his own security. The Brahmastra was meant to obscure his fear and create fear and insecurity for the Pandavas, which ultimately backfired.

2. **Affinity-driven decisions** – A cloth hung on a hook, takes shelter from it. The same hook tears the cloth, when pulled away forcefully. Just like

the cloth, those who take decisions based on unnatural affinity to people they are hooked to, get torn apart!

In the Mahabharata, since Karna's each and every decision was based on his assumed affinity to his friend Duryodhana, he was torn apart between his loyalty to dharma and that to his friendship. The friendship hook gripped him tight and when decisions had to be taken, his dharma was torn apart.

3. **Grief-driven decisions** – A drop of ink on a blotting paper spreads and pervades the paper. Similarly, grief too begins with a drop. But when it falls into the blotting paper of the uncontrolled mind, it percolates into every aspect of life.

In the Mahabharata, Gandhari made two decisions blinded by extreme grief and ended up with large-scale destruction.

The first instance was when she realised that Kunti had given birth to a son before her, she struck her womb in envy, resulting in a hundred sons being born to her carrying the spirit of envy in their lives. The second was when she felt that Krishna was the cause of death of her children, she cursed that His Yadu dynasty be destroyed.

4. **Joy-driven decisions** – When a hilarious joke triggers uncontrollable laughter, at some point tears roll out from the eyes. The tears indicate that one has gone out of balance. Just like the body has a check and balance mechanism, life should also be based on a similar check and balance mechanism. Often the most crucial decisions of life are taken on a high when there is too much joy or success. When the head is in the clouds, it is difficult to judge ground realities.

In the Mahabharata, the king of Virata was happy beyond imagination on hearing that his son Uttara Kumar had defeated all the Kauravas alone in a battle. His joy was overflowing so much that he disregarded and even humiliated Yudhishtira. When decisions are taken in a fit of joy, they bring sorrow into life.

5. **Anxiety-driven decisions** – When running for life, will one even have the desire to eat or drink, let alone the ability to do it? Just like one has to have a stable body to relish the joy of tasty food and drink, a stable mind is a prerequisite to relish the satisfaction of tastefully taken decisions.

In the Mahabharata, all of Bhishma's decisions were anxiety-driven. His anxiety to protect the throne of Hastinapur led him to many

wrong decisions; more than that, his anxiety made him decision-less sometimes.

6. **Opinion-driven decisions** – Others’ opinions are like sticky notes put on the walls of our minds. But before we use those opinions in our decision-making, we should establish clarity in our hearts by developing the skill of personal discrimination.

When dharma becomes the foundation of the heart, clarity becomes the background on which others’ opinions can be judged.

In the Mahabharata, Duryodhana’s opinion was constantly moulded by his uncle Shakuni, towards the systematic destruction of the dynasty. Since Duryodhana did not have background clarity of dharma, he blindly followed Shakuni; not seeing his dubious agenda and the deep ditch he was shoving him into. But though Krishna also moulded Arjuna’s opinion, Arjuna used the clarity lens of dharma to analyse every strategy suggested by Krishna.

Only when one finds an opinion coming his way that stands the test of principles based clarity and not driven by personal agenda of the advisor, one should consider it.

7. **Weakness-driven decisions** – A weak person uses a stick to balance himself and the stick becomes his life support. But instead, if he uses that stick to hit people around him, his weakness has now become his meanness. When decisions are taken focusing on weaknesses, we only over-sympathise with our disability, rather than doing what is right.

In the Mahabharata, Dhritarashtra had one weakness, his blindness. All his decisions were based on his meditations and frustrations about this weakness. Every time he made a decision, he always brought out his stick of weakness and lashed out at others, reflecting his vicious mind. When your weakness becomes your meanness, instead of attracting sympathy you attract apathy into your life.

The Mahabharata is all about the science of decision-making; the greatest secrets of good and bad decision-making and their repercussions are placed in front of us. When the Pandavas had to take a decision whether to fight the war or not, they consulted Krishna and all their friends, carefully weighing the advantages of the war and its consequences. Their personal understanding of dharma and selfless guidance from genuine agenda-less friends helped them take good decisions. When Duryodhana had to take a decision about the gambling

match, he kept it a secret and consulted only the agenda-based Shakuni. His personal lack of understanding of dharma and self-centred guidance drove him to take bad decisions that resulted in short-term gain and long-term loss.

In conclusion, good decisions are natural outcomes of stable minds using stable intelligence in stable situations with the desire to have stability internally and externally, thereby choosing a stable path. A stable mind being free from the influence of debilitating emotions like fear, unnatural affinity, grief, anxiety, etc. When your intelligence is unstable, the mind is unstable, the situation is unstable, and people who are guiding you are unstable, how can stable decisions happen?

Making timely decisions is a critical skill. Equally critical is the decision of not making a decision.

Fear drives you to take abrupt steps out of insecurity, which ultimately backfire.

Decisions based on extreme affinity tear you away from the path of dharma.

Grief makes you blind, and decisions made in grief can end up causing large-scale destruction; whereas decisions coming from joy are unbalanced, unchecked, and can result in sorrow.

Anxiety leads to ineffective and untimely decisions, causing all-round instability.

Decisions based on others' opinions imply lack of clarity. Clarity comes from understanding of dharma and only opinions that stand the test of principles should be considered.

Decisions stemming from one's weaknesses reflect self-sympathy rather than what is right. Such decisions bring in apathy.

Only a stable mind, free from fear, anger, grief, etc., is qualified to make positive and progressive decisions.





## SPIRITUALITY @ WORKPLACE



Spirituality at workplace essentially means working in the right spirit.

For many, workplace is like a war zone where one is fighting many internal and external battles. Colleagues are divided into friends and enemies, changing parties almost randomly. It seems that war strategies are scheming in every mind from the clerk to the boss, with an aim to pin you down. However, sometimes the war is totally internal, with you trying to push yourself to perform. In such an atmosphere, what should a tired, untrained warrior do to be peaceful, yet make a fulfilling and meaningful contribution at work?

Imagine your workplace as an external projection of what is virtually being simulated on the screen of your mind. By reprogramming the visuals in the gaming environment of your mind, you will find your workplace changing from a simulated war field of conflict and hatred to a creative art gallery where each one is exhibiting his talent for the benefit of others and the organisation.

Here are some reprogramming tips that may help you achieve that objective by changing the way you perceive multiple internal and external battles (challenges) in a workplace.

### **External Battles:**

1. **Competition** – Competition when directed towards the self is like a shaving blade that neatly removes the stubbles of laziness and brings forth your best appearance and performance. But when competition is directed towards others, it is like offering them a cactus plant. It first hurts you and then hurts them.
2. **Comparison** – Comparison is a systematic way of insulting your



uniqueness and gifting yourself with misery. The mother of innovation is uniqueness in thinking. When a shark is happy with its teeth and an elephant is happy with its trunk, why do we humans remain unhappy with our gifts and hanker for others' talents? Being grateful for our individuality can reduce the self-destructive habit of comparison.

3. **Peer pressure** – Succumbing to peer pressure is like being wet clay. Our perception of who we are is dependent on who peers into our life and moulds it with the pressure of their opinions. It requires the pressure of a dynamite to remould a mountain than to remould a heap of clay. When there is a mountainous clarity of what ideals we stand for, the pressure of a few hands cannot remould us.
4. **Relationships** – Success at work depends on success in relationships. Success in relationships depends on successful attitudes. Successful attitudes depend on our expectations. Failures in relationships happen due to failures in others' meeting our expectations. When we expect others to direct their energy towards meeting our expectations, such self-centric relationships fail the test of time.
5. **Appreciation** – Spending quality time daily in genuinely appreciating the contribution and qualities of people who matter to you is a foolproof way of ensuring a happy working environment. Empty flattery strokes the mind and ego while genuine appreciation touches the heart. Flattery engages only the tongue, while appreciation employs the eyes to observe, the ears to listen, the intelligence to analyse, and the words come from the heart. The fruit of flattery when eaten merely intoxicates and weakens mind and soul. The fruit of appreciation when eaten nourishes, strengthens, and encourages.

### **Internal battles:**

1. **Procrastination** – Procrastination is the funeral in which you burn your chance of success. Procrastination is nothing but electrocuting opportunities to grow. The knowledge of consequence is the enemy of procrastination. Embrace this friend tightly.
2. **Motivation** – When what we want to do is what we have to do, then motivation is a self-generated enzyme. But when what we have to do is what others want us to do, then motivation is an injected steroid. Discover your likes and motivation will discover you.
3. **Concentration** – A mind that is focused on many things is focused on

nothing. The success of a lion on a chase is not so much its speed but its focus on one deer at a time. Concentration is the by-product of active patience with a problem.

4. **Stability** – Equanimity in the midst of success and failure is the father of stability. Pride in success is an orphan and depression in failure is a beggar. Understanding that your talent is just one ingredient in the meal of success, keeps one humble. And understanding that the pain of failure is merely discomfort that a diamond undergoes when polished keeps one hopeful.

It's easy to make your work zone a no war zone by implementing some dos and don'ts.

Compete with yourself not others. Competition with self improves performance and causes no heartburn either. Further, comparing yourself with others undermines your uniqueness. Gratitude for our individuality can reduce the self-destructive habit of comparison. Peer pressure can be eased by having clarity in beliefs. Nurture relationships. Success in relationships is inversely proportional to expectations. Self-centric relationships fail the test of time. Appreciating contribution of significant others goes a long way in creating a loving work environment. Unlike flattery, appreciation requires skills and comes from the heart.

Our internal battles are against procrastination that burns our chances of success; motivation that comes when aligned with desires; concentrating on one problem at a time, and maintaining stability in success as well as failure with humility and hope.





## SOLVING THE PROBLEM MATRIX



Dealing with negativity does not need good aptitude but good attitude. To find negativity in an extremely positive situation requires you to just be human. But to find positivity in an extremely negative situation requires you to be an evolved human.

Such human evolution is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice! A problem dealt with positivity is spelled as opportunity. Hidden within calamitous problems are hidden opportunities. In the Mahabharata, when Arjuna visited the heavens, he was cursed by Urvashi (for refusing her sensuous advances) to become a eunuch. He converted that calamity into an opportunity by using it during the one year of incognito.

Krishna converted the calamity caused by the thousand-hooded demoniac snake Kaliya into an opportunity to exhibit his dancing skills to the residents of Vrindavan. He converted a threat into theatre.

You cannot solve a problem with the same mindset that caused the problem. In the Ramayana, instead of arguing with Keikeyi and trying to claim His rights over the throne, Rama dealt with the situation from a higher level. He disclosed that He was in fact waiting for such an opportunity where He could unload His burden of responsibilities and learn from the sages in the forest. When an eagle is attacked by a flock of crows, it chooses to fly higher and out of the crows' reach rather than fight back. Rather than delve in negative situations, Rama chose to focus on the positives awaiting Him.

Problems are your best chance to prove your maturity. Anyone can fake maturity in fair weathers, but to act mature in tough climates is a sign of a seasoned traveller. In the Mahabharata, the Kauravas cheated the Pandavas by

giving them a barren land named Khandava Prastha as their share. They accepted it gratefully and worked hard transforming it into Indra Prastha, a realm better than the heavens. A problem when seen from proximity and with clarity appears small. The same problem when seen from a distance and with obscurity appears gigantic.

When a bad problem comes in contact with a good attitude, the result is an inspirational story.

An evolved human is one who deals with negativities with attitude and not aptitude. A good attitude sees negative situations positively and finds hidden within them untold opportunities. In the midst of storms in our lives, we can discover how mature we are. It is up to our discretion whether we see a problem as Herculean or microscopic.

Good attitude is a matter of choice not chance.



## WHY DO PEOPLE I ONCE LOVED NOW APPEAR DETESTABLE?



When two people initially develop a loving relationship, the bond seems uncleavable. But how does that formidable love melt with time leaving behind an ugly puddle of detest? Why do we end up in a situation, where in spite of searching, we are unable to find a single good quality in the midst of all the faults of that person?

Love ripens by seeing commonalities, but it rots by only seeing the differences.

When two people love each other, they admire each other as god, considering each other to be infallible. When the focus is purely on the good, the vision is always divine and the experience in the relation is flawlessly heavenly.

Limited qualities of a person are visible within a limited time span and within the boundary of a limited medley of events. As life progresses and taxing events unfold, the person's response mechanisms manifest in the form of detestable qualities. When such qualities surface, it almost seems that the person is replaced by his diabolical counterpart. The detestable behaviour patterns then lead to doubt. And doubt is a seed that eventually grows into a tree of separation.

High expectation is an imagination of the mind. The mind fools you to expect perfection in every sphere. But relationships that are expectation-oriented fail; while relationships that are discernment-oriented last. Discernment or the ability to judge helps evaluate people based on realities

and not imagination. Discernment is about seeing people as they are and not how you want them to be.

Most people want to deal with successes and not failures. Similarly, most people want to deal with others' strengths and not weaknesses; their stabilities and not idiosyncrasies; their good and not bad natures. Everyone expects a perfect masterpiece in others, while they themselves are happy to be deformed relics.

In the Ramayana, we find that Rama and Lakshmana had diametrically opposite nature and yet were the closest of associates. Rama not only knew the sweet side of Lakshmana, but also was fully aware of his angry and violent side. With genuine care, Rama not only appreciated his good side, but assisted him deal with his bad side. Rather than rejecting a person due to his bad side, the need is to provide empathic assistance in dealing with the shortcomings.

With people whom we love over relatively longer periods of time, it is important to remember that people seldom change, our perceptions do, based on our steady expectations. When you look for a perfect god you are met with imperfection and, naturally, disappointment follows. When you look for a mortal, you are met with someone struggling to overcome imperfections.

When you look for garbage-like bad qualities, you find people resembling a dump yard. When you look for gold like good qualities, you find people resembling gold mines, with invisible nuggets of gold enclosed in massive amounts of dirt. It's worth shovelling away heaps of dirt to uncover one piece of gold. Appreciation of others' good qualities is not just lip talk, but also a meditation.

Love, in relationships, fades away all too soon. And then, we are unable to find a single good quality in the person we once loved. The survival of any relationship depends on accepting people as they are and not how you want them to be. It's important to remember that our perspective changes with expectations and we end up getting what we are looking for, whether it is a garbage of bad qualities or a gold mine of good qualities.

People want to deal with others' strengths and not weaknesses; their stabilities and not idiosyncrasies. Rather than rejecting a person due to his bad side, the need is to provide empathic assistance in

dealing with the shortcomings.





## DO YOU NEED WHAT YOU SHOP OR SHOP WHAT YOU NEED?



As you turn around every corner of the house, do you see possessions that you have needlessly accumulated or those that you actually need? Is shopping your need or has it become your hobby? With the undertakings varying from window-shopping, to tracking discount sales, international expos, free gift offers, etc., shopping fills not just cupboards, but also mental space.

Perhaps two characters of the Mahabharata have precious wisdom to share with us in this regard.

Ashwatthama, the son of Drona, was what you would call a shopping freak. He owned a rare jewel as decoration for his forehead because of which he had no need to be afraid of enemies, no disease would ever bother him, hunger and thirst would never subjugate him, and no living being could harm him! Though he knew the effect of the jewel, he never really believed it to be effective and had no confidence in its performance. He would sheepishly run to his father for protection at the sight of imminent danger. It was like a high-end mobile phone in the hands of a gadget-ignorant person. A good showpiece with little pragmatic use!

He loved to gather things that made him feel secure. What he desired, he thought he deserved. Like an adamant child, he demanded and coerced his father to bestow him the Brahmastra, the most powerful missile in the world. Remember, if you desire what you deserve, it will come to you. But if you desire what you don't deserve, you will run after it.

The natural result of Ashwatthama's disposition was that he was always

convinced that what others have is of better quality than what he has. He even approached Krishna to swap his Brahmastra for Krishna's Sudarshana Chakra! The mind is a magician that tricks us to perceive things in our hands as uninteresting and grandeur in things in others' hands.

Arjuna's approach to shopping provides insight into our weary and tricky minds. Rather than accumulating more and more, Arjuna chose to find value in everything he had. Rather than dig in more places, he chose to dig deep. Rather than looking for rare jewels, he cultivated the rare jewel of confidence in himself. He never demanded anything from his father or his guru Drona; he trained himself to be self-sufficient.

Arjuna realised that if he learnt to use what he has to the optimum, he could activate the law of magnetism. Rather than coerce Drona to give him more gifts, he pleased Drona to give him more blessings. The trigger to the law of magnetism is pleased blessings.

Arjuna was so overwhelmed with gratitude for what he had, that he had no time to think about what he did not have. The feeling of incompleteness envelops one when gratitude is absent.

A shopping freak would do well to remember that the mind is like a bottomless pit. The more effort you put in filling it, like Ashwatthama, the more depth you will find in its hollowness. The pit has to be capped with the lid of intelligence, like Arjuna did.

We tend to accumulate more than we need because that brings in a sense of security. Instead of appreciating what we have, we desire what others have and strive to have that by hook or by crook.

We should instead focus on accumulating by quality and not by quantity, which means accumulating good character and values rather than material possessions. Qualitative accumulation attracts blessings and blessings give satisfaction, which is far superior to the incomplete satisfaction of owning material things.

Let us cap with intelligence the bottomless pit that our mind is.



## THE MAGIC CARPET FOR RELATIONSHIPS



Could there be a magic carpet that could take two people to lofty heights in their relationship? Most carpets take you high to some extent and then eject in different directions.

Appreciation is one magic carpet that takes you on an upward spiral in your relationships. But to experience this upward spiral, you have to make some commitments.

You have to appreciate the person you love—continuously, constantly, constructively, contemplatively, and consciously. If you ignite the 5cc engine of appreciation from your end, then you will find an additional 2cc added from your partner's side. He/she will make the habit of appreciation contagious, adding the element of change in attitude towards you.

Appreciation is not a tactic to win hearts, but a culture to retain hearts. When appreciation becomes a culture, good relationships become a norm. Why does Krishna call His best friend Arjuna by so many names that address his different qualities, like Dhananjaya (acquirer of wealth), Savyasachi (ambidextrous in war), Gudakesha (conqueror of sleep), and so on? Because Krishna understands that the fine comb of appreciation grooms relationships.

Just like an oyster takes in a single grain of sand and ruminates on it, finally producing a priceless pearl; just like a cow eats grass and ruminates on her love for her calf to produce nectarine milk; similarly, one should sufficiently ruminate on the good qualities of another person before producing even a single cherished appreciation.

Like a snake voluntarily sheds its old skin, similarly appreciation helps one shed layers of negativity to replace it with a new glowing complexion of

positivity.

It's easy for an ant to appreciate the might of an elephant and it's much easier for an eagle to find fault in a sparrow. But how tough it is for two bees that are equals to appreciate one another! Appreciation is the art of seeing through the heart and not eyes. Appreciation is a meditation on the beauty of qualities and not faults in beauty.

If one does not scramble up the magic carpet of appreciation that takes you on an upward spiral in relationships, you will end up in a submarine of criticism that takes you on a downward spiral to the rock bottom of relationships. Unlike Krishna, Shisupala chose to sit on the submarine of criticism and drowned all relationships he had.

Appreciation is the magic comb that grooms relationships. It takes a lot of reflection and rumination on good qualities of others to make it genuine and heartfelt. The 5Cs of appreciation are Continuous, Constant, Constructive, Contemplative, and Conscious. And then it becomes contagious coming back to you, replacing negativity with positivity.

Without appreciation, relationships head south and hit rock bottom sooner or later.



## CAN YOUR TALENT BE YOUR ENEMY?



Can talent help you solve all equations in the arithmetic of life?

Ever come across a problem that your talent cannot solve? Do people hate you even though you are talented?

Sometimes talent that has helped you gain the greatest accolades in life becomes a hurdle for accolades in relationships. Very often, the most talented people are the loneliest people too.

While talent is enough to deal with ‘the world’, a good attitude is mandatory to deal with ‘your world’. While talent is useful in handling things and projects, good attitude is useful in handling people and relations. While talent moulds our actions, attitudes mould our reactions. While talent is like rain given by god, attitude is like a farm cultivated by man. While talents are like an air pump that bloats up the ego, good attitude is a metre gauge that keeps the ego under check and prevents it from bursting.

In the Mahabharata, both Karna and Arjuna were equally talented but Krishna chose Arjuna because he had a good attitude. Success did not make him boast and failure did not make him lament. On the other hand, Karna boasted every instance about his superior skills and lamented every instance about his inferior birth. Karna used his talent as a means to shield his deep insecurities. Exhibition of talent is an exposé of one’s weakness when the attitude behind it is negative.

A talented person is bound by the ropes of perfectionism. If he comes across as an embarrassment (which is bound to happen at some point in life) in spite of his unlimited talent, he shrivels up with depression or bursts out with frustration. When Duryodhana fell into a pool of water, which he mistook to be

land, and Draupadi laughed at his plight, the perfectionist in him could not hide his frustration.

A person who has a good attitude soars high like a kite through the thread of accommodation, while being grounded in discipline. Even if he comes across a disappointment or a setback that his talent cannot tackle, rather than press the panic button, he turns on the cooling shower of acceptance. After the Mahabharata war, when Krishna was cursed by Gandhari, the accommodationist in Him accepted the change with grace.

Life moves on without talent but relationships wither without the right attitude. We will never be appreciated for the rigidity that self-absorbing talent brings along, but will attract others with the flexibility that altruistic good attitude inculcates. Is this why Arjuna loved Krishna so much? Krishna had the talent to teach and train Arjuna, but He also had the right attitude and flexibility to allow Arjuna to make his own decisions.

No perfectionist can perfectly overcome imperfections. Better to mould oneself to be an accommodationist who is grateful in the presence of his perfections, knowing that they are products of God's benevolence, and accommodative of his shortcomings, knowing that they are opportunities to exhibit flexibility and a chance for him to depend on other people and thus access their love.

Talent is not a panacea for all problem of life. Sometimes it's a hurdle. What talent cannot accomplish alone can be accomplished in conjunction with good attitude. Exhibition of talent is an exposé of one's weakness when the attitude behind it is negative.

Talented people with negative attitudes are unable to cope with the ups and downs of life. Right attitude helps to move on in life. Relationships too wither away without the right attitude.

Right attitude means to be grateful for our talent, knowing they are gifts of God, and accepting our shortcomings as a chance to depend on others to access their love.



## HOW DO I ENHANCE MY HAPPINESS QUOTIENT?



Do people we love make us happy? Are our friends supposed to be pleasure pumps, to keep our happiness tanks filled? Could there be a universal equation to keep our happiness quotient high?

When we perceive people with sky-high expectations, they always seem to disappoint us. In the quest for a relation that floods our life with happiness, we forget to consider that we also have a role in that relationship or that there could be equally high cross expectations from the other side as well.

The question now is which part of the cultivation of a relation should be my priority? Is my focus on sowing the seed of relationship in the fertile soil of giving? Or do I directly focus on the gains (not grains) of receiving through the process of harvesting from the relationship?

Most people are only bothered or enthusiastic about receiving happiness from their friends, so much so that they have absolutely no thought or inclination to give happiness. A vital clue to real happiness in relationships lies in the way the God of happiness, Krishna, lived His life. Krishna's life was centred on giving happiness to people He loved. While in Vrindavan, using His flute, He knew exactly which melody would churn people's hearts at different times of the day. Any danger to the community and He would put His life at risk. Realising how much He cared for their happiness, people were more than ready to offer their lives at His beck and call.

Because Krishna always cared for others' happiness, His friends knew they could always rely on Him, come what may. Draupadi called only for Him

during two of her greatest crisis, during *vastra-haran* and when Durvasa created a dilemma for her. Arjuna turned to Him and only Him (in the presence of the greatest scholars on earth, including his guru) for solutions during his greatest confusions. Yudhishtira offered the greatest respect and the entire credit of winning only to Krishna when he became the emperor of the world.

Historically, with every kingdom that Krishna was instrumental in conquering, He preferred the lasting joy of winning more friends than the joy of sitting on the throne. He gleefully handed over the throne to someone else. Whether it was Magadha, Mathura, or Hastinapura, Krishna gave His strategy to win the war, but His greater strategy was in winning lifelong friendships. He gave so much, so naturally, He received so much.

When you contemplate on the needs, interests, and concerns of others and are tuned into thinking of what really makes another happy, there is no time or predisposition to think of your own happiness. Self-absorption results in depression. Psychologically, most depressions are result of thinking too much about one's own needs, interests, and concerns. In fact, those who live thinking about the needs, interests, and concerns of others become icons for the world.

The same is true on the level of individual relationships. Just like a small tidal wave inside an ocean becomes a tsunami outside the ocean. Similarly, your small efforts in giving happiness to others, come flooding into your life in the form of happiness that others try to give you.

When you look for your happiness exclusively, friends abandon you in no time, conscious of your selfishness. Then, you have to contend yourself with short spurts of happiness from myriad sources. But when you focus on others' happiness, people get helplessly drawn towards you and what you get is a lifetime of exponential growth of mutual happiness.

IQ is about how much intelligence you have, but HQ is about how much happiness you give others. The more the HQ, the happier you will be!

In search of a relationship that gives pleasure, we forget we could also be that person who gives pleasure to others. We are so engrossed in our own happiness, we have no thought of giving others happiness too. But the fact is that in giving we receive. We receive love, joy, and lifelong friendships.

An added advantage of giving others' needs and concerns priority



is that we have little time left to think of our own joys and sorrows, thereby eliminating depression from our life. Self-absorption results in depression. Small efforts in giving others happiness results in others trying to give you happiness with the happy result of mutual happiness.

Your happiness quotient lies in how much joy you give others.



## A FORMULA TO REBRAND THE MIND



Do external symbols trigger internal emotions and mindsets?

Can we actually train our mind to think and act in certain ways using symbols?

We have seen brand logos that symbolise business, but can different symbols brand our mindsets?

Very often symbols signify belief and value systems that are automatically associated with them. Strangely, symbols also carry intense memories along with them.

In the Mahabharata, for Shakuni, whose father and brother had been tortured to death by the cruelty of Dhritarashtra, the dice which he had fashioned from the backbone of his father, symbolised the unforgettable memories of pain. His leg, which his father broke purposely before dying, symbolised his broken family's quest for vengeance.

In the Ramayana, for Bharata, who had to forcibly rule the kingdom of Ayodhya, the *paduka*, or wooden footwear of Rama, symbolised that he was ruling on behalf of his brother Rama. The *paduka* is footwear that has to be gripped tightly. For Bharata, it naturally represented that he had to rule the kingdom having a tight grip over the value systems that Rama was a paragon of and stood for.

In the Bhagavata, for the Vrajvasis, who were constantly harassed by Kamsa's atrocities, Krishna's flute was a sign of sweetness amid paranoia. They could easily forget all their sorrow as soon as they saw the flute ascending towards Krishna's lips. It had become their symbol of hope and tranquillity in turbulent times and that of celebration and love in pleasant times.

Upgrading symbolism is when a symbol serves to make you embrace a higher value system. Degrading symbolism is when a symbol pushes you downwards into a torrent of negativity.

Human memory has to be employed diligently. When we choose to fill our memories with heaps of negativity, positive thoughts and higher values have to be squeezed into small gaps that remain thereafter. But unfortunately, the nature of negativity is to expand and even the small gaps become invisible. Which means, in an inherently negative atmosphere, even positive events will seem to appear bordered with a dark line. But if we settle on providing housing on a priority to positivity and higher values, then in an inherent negative environment, we will find reasons to be joyous and contented.

Symbols trigger our memories because our minds translate them to act as storehouses of our emotions and value systems. Just like the dice and broken leg for Shakuni kept him swivelling in a whirlpool of negativity, the *paduka* kept Bharata shuttling upwards in a rocket of higher values and the flute kept the Vrajavasis floating in a high cloud of positivity. Similarly, we can choose any symbol in our life that will either act as an upgrader or a downgrader.

Bharata and the Vrajavasis chose a symbol that was associated with inspiration and thus joy filled their life and they could contribute more keeping their fears at bay. Whereas Shakuni chose a symbol that justified his bad memories and he vulnerably gyrated towards more negativity and lived a self-destructive anxiety-driven lifestyle.

Before choosing your branding symbol, remember: inspiration is always needed to upgrade and justification is necessary to downgrade.

Human mind, thoughts, beliefs, values, culture, all operate through symbolism. For Bharata, *paduka* was symbolic of Rama's principles and for Vrajavasis, the flute represented hope and joy.

We have the bandwidth to upgrade our symbols (like Bharata and Vrajavasis) and climb up a higher rung of value system. We could also end up downgrading our symbols to an abyss of negativities and anxieties.

We can choose a symbol that inspires or choose one that revives bad memories and creates self-destruction.



## VALENTINE'S DAY SECRET TIPS



Are you sure that your first valentine will remain your last valentine? Does the pre-valentine day witness you desperately hunting for your valentine?

Here are some thoughts that you could preserve as your Valentine's Day secret tips.

Loving relationships thrive on acceptance and strangle on expectations. When the focus changes from acceptance to expectation, the focus is effectively shifting from 'we' to 'me'.

In the Ramayana, we find that the love story of Dasaratha and Keikeyi grew when they set aside their personal needs and focused on the other's needs. Keikeyi was ready to risk her life to assist Dasaratha in wars. When he gave her two boons, she was so focused on his needs that she couldn't even think of her personal wants. But what made her change so much later? A change in the externals of relationships occurs when there is change in the motto or loyalty on the internal level. Between two people, the common centre has to be selfless love. When this common centre is displaced by individual selfish centres, mutual love turns into self-centred love and lovers turn into strangers.

In love, conditions and satisfaction are inversely proportional to each other. The more conditions you put on one another, the lesser you experience satisfaction in the relationship. The more you have loyalty towards personal satisfaction, the lesser you have the ability for reciprocal appreciation.

Relationships have to be treated like a kite. For it to soar high, you have to pull the string towards yourself. If you tug the string away from yourself, the kite will soon come falling down. Every human has some shortcomings. Every time you accept the other's shortcomings, you are pulling the string of

relationships towards yourself.

And every time you expect others to align with your needs, you are pushing the string of relationships away from yourself.

Why don't we find any mention of Duryodhana's love story with Bhanumati in the Mahabharata? Because for Duryodhana relationships were never a need, they were strategies to satisfy his needs. Any relationship that helped him achieve his ambition, he prioritised and those that didn't remained hidden and neglected forever.

We will do good to remember that relationships don't need us; it is we who need relationships. If there is any need we can be selfish about, it is this need. And to satisfy this need, all other needs can be sacrificed. Valentine's Day essentially is symbolic of periodic sacrifice to celebrate eternal love.

Love thrives on acceptance and is strangled with expectations. A shift from acceptance to expectations implies a shift from 'we' to 'me'.

In love, conditions and satisfaction are inversely proportional. More the conditions, less satisfying is the relationship.

Need for personal satisfaction has to be sacrificed to fulfil need for a loving relationship because our need for relationship cannot be done away with. It is over and above all needs. Valentine's Day is symbolic of periodic sacrifice to celebrate eternal love.



## WHO CONTROLS MY OPINIONS AND DECISIONS?



Are you too people conscious? Do you dress, walk, talk, style your hair, thinking only whether it will impress others? Do you suffer from an inferiority complex and need constant approval from others?

Does your self-image depend on the image others have of you?

People with a weak self-image look for approval to upgrade their self-image. Some people create a self-image according to environment in which they live and according to the way they respond to that environment. Four personalities in the Mahabharata teach us how to and how not to develop our self-image.

Dhritarashtra grew up with a self-image of being weak and helpless because his mother had closed her eyes to his needs. His wife Gandhari, instead of assisting him with his needs, adopted his self-image of being weak and also closed her eyes to his needs. The by-product of two people with weak self-images was Duryodhana, with a hollow self-image. When Gandhari was pregnant, she hit her womb in disappointment and envy because Kunti gave birth first. The hit on her womb became a psychological slap on the self-image of Duryodhana. He constantly stuffed himself with wealth, resources, followers, position, and power to improve his hollow self-image.

Education, training, wealth, unlimited possessions cannot help improve your self-image. Only those who have experienced unlimited love have stable self-image. Dhritarashtra and Gandhari gave him lots of resources but were never his source of love. Because he did not get love, he looked for it in

objects, power, and fame.

On the other hand, Yudhishtira grew up in an unfortunate atmosphere in a forest set up with hardly any resources. But because Pandu and Kunti showered unlimited love on him, he never sought love in things. He learnt to prioritise values over valuables and not grope for things to improve his self-image that was lovingly shaped by deeper values.

Another factor that plays a role in defining your self-image is skills. Exhibition of great skills does not necessarily mean having a great self-image. Karna had the best of skills, but no self-confidence; he needed constant approval from others to convince himself that he is good. The abandonment by Kunti was a psychological slap on his self-image and he grew up with an inferiority complex. He was extremely people conscious and too easily provoked. Simply because somewhere deep within himself, he was not at peace with who he was. When Duryodhana understood Karna's need, or rather weakness, he gave him his wholehearted approval and therefore, Karna dedicated his life to Duryodhana's whims and fancies. His foster parent's love too was insufficient as he constantly sought approval instead of love.

Interestingly, Krishna was also abandoned by His parents, Vasudeva and Devaki. But the atmosphere He grew up in was filled with love. People in Vrindavan loved Him more than anything. Because He was filled with so much love, He never really looked for approval from others. He developed His own unique personality, fitting into variegated roles, from a cowherd to a wrestler, a king maker, a driver, a messenger, a friend, an advisor, and a lover. Because He was filled with love, He could give confidence to others.

When love shapes your self-image, you mirror extreme confidence. When things and approval shape your self-image, you are a mirror reflecting others' desires.

If you are people conscious and need constant approval from others, you have a weak self-image dependent on the image others have of you.

Wealth, education, possessions, etc., cannot improve your self-image. Even great skills are not enough if lacking in self-confidence. Only unlimited love builds a stable image. Love helps prioritise values over valuables. People who are surrounded with wholesome love are

confident and at peace with themselves, harbouring an unshakeable self-image. Conversely, your image is constantly in flux when shaped by things and others' desires.





## IS BEING CHARISMATIC A PRIVILEGE OF A FEW?



Do you desire to be a charismatic person? Have you wondered if it is at all possible for you to be charismatic? Have you always wanted people to love you and respect you constantly?

Four thoughts from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata provide the charismatic solution you are looking for.

1. **Respect breeds respect** – Fountain water that gushes upward with zeal comes down with grace. A boomerang sent at a great speed returns with increased velocity. Similarly, respect, when sent forth with genuineness, returns with elegance.

In the Ramayana, the first lesson that Rama taught the monkey army as soon as He took charge of them was how much He valued the concept of respect. He allowed Sugriva to get badly beaten by his brother, Vali, as punishment for him not respecting, ill-treating, and practically insulting Lakshmana. The result of that experiential learning was that immediately every monkey began to respect not only Rama but also one another.

In the Mahabharata, just before the war commenced, Yudhishtira dropped all his weapons, shed his armour, walked up to his enemies, and sought blessings of all his elders. That one act of respect brought him all their well wishes and blessings. Their respect for him grew beyond their enmity towards him. On the other hand, Duryodhana was extremely disrespectful towards every person even in his own army.

The natural repercussion was that even though he tried his best, he could not gain heartfelt respect even from his team members.

2. **Think of others** – The success of a magnet in being able to attract others lies in its constant desire and meditation on how to attract others. When you meditate on others you manage to magnetically attract others towards yourself. When you meditate on yourself, you manage to repel others from yourself.

In the Ramayana, Ravana managed to lose respect from his own people because he always thought of himself and never really cared for people who served him so much. He ditched his own uncle, Maricha, who as a golden deer was an aid to his plan to kidnap Sita. In the fight in Lanka, Ravana made sure that the bodies of *rakshasa* soldiers who died were disrespectfully dumped into the ocean to keep the head count of the dead ambiguous to the enemies.

On the other hand, we find that Rama was loved not just by his own people but also by his enemies like Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna, because he thought and cared more for his people than for himself. He offered his deepest heartfelt love and gratitude to Jatayu, who had offered his life in attempting to save Sita, by giving him an elaborate funeral, as he would do for his own father. In the fight in Lanka, Rama thoughtfully made sure that the bodies of the monkey soldiers who died were respectfully preserved and all of them were mystically revived when Hanuman brought the herbs from the enigmatic Himalayan mountains. If only Ravana had not thrown the bodies of his people away!

3. **Venture out of your box** – A parasitic relation is one where one entity uses another to achieve his goal. But a symbiotic relation is one where two entities mutually benefit each other. In a symbiotic relationship, for one to succeed the success of the other is imperative. When you help people achieve their goal, they will eagerly assist you in achieving yours.

In the Mahabharata, the Pandavas helped make the kingdom of Virata prosperous in just one year and risked their lives to stave off an attack on the kingdom. Consequently, the entire kingdom of Virata joined forces with them in the Kurukshetra war and, moreover, the heir to the throne of the Pandavas came from that symbiotic relationship.

In the Ramayana, Rama assisted Sugriva in stabilising his life. Out of gratitude, Sugriva enthusiastically helped Rama deal with His

calamities.

4. **Value Your Contribution** – A honey bee is so focused on its contribution that it has no time to focus on either its cosmetics or on the honey. As busy as a bee, they say, and that is really the way. In fact, bees contribute more to human society than most humans by nonchalantly managing the pollination department. Focus on your contribution so much that people cannot but helplessly value you. It does not really matter what one has, but what really matters is what one does with what one has.

In the Ramayana, there is a unique personality, Sumanthara, who was the chariot driver of the king of Ayodhya. But he upgraded his knowledge to such an extent that he was also appointed as the prime minister of the country. He did not focus on his post, but rather on his contribution. The value of his contribution made him valuable in the eyes of the king and he naturally gained respect.

On the other hand, we have Ashwatthama in the Mahabharata, who was the son of the greatest guru on earth. Given the facility he had, instead of focusing on upgrading his ability to contribute, Ashwatthama chose to focus on accumulating resources and positions, even coercing his father to gain him a kingdom. He had no idea what he could do with what he had and therefore, no one really respected him.

Being a charismatic person is not the privilege of a few but the right of all. When you send the boomerang of respect towards another, it returns making you a magnetically attractive person who thinks more about others, thereby building mutually beneficial relationships. Charisma is not about what you have, but like a bee, what you do with what you have.

Charisma, a much-desired trait, can be cultivated through practice. Giving respect begets respect. The natural repercussion of giving respect is that you get the same along with precious blessings. Another way to attract people is by caring about them, meditating on their needs. Meditating on self like Ravana did only drives people away.

Charisma comes naturally in symbiotic relationships. If you help people achieve their goals, they enthusiastically help you achieve

yours. And lastly, charismatic people are contributors. Their contribution is of such magnitude that people cannot help valuing them. Being charismatic is your right. What matters is not what you have but what you do with what you have.



## LESSONS FROM THE LION



Can travelling to a jungle safari or a zoo make you wiser? Yes, if you think carefully.

In a safari, the lion is free to roam, but you are captive within the confines of a vehicle. In a zoo, you are free to roam, but the lion is captive within the confines of a cage. Imagine the havoc if both were unconfined!

Now consider the mind to be like a lion, then these are exactly the two ways we usually employ to deal with our mind. One is to put the mind in a box, confine it within the boundaries of electrified discipline. The other is to protect self from the whims of the mind by the impenetrable shield of good intelligence.

The day you are over-confident that your mind has become your friend and you venture out for a rendezvous with it, you've had it! Never trust the gracious look of a lion and the innocent plea of the mind.

Here is another tip from the lion on relationships.

Some relationships work best when respectful distances are preserved. Often we are faced with people whose nature is completely contradictory to ours. More often than not, we deal with such people in two ways—we either seal them in a box, thus dominating them, or we adopt a liberal stance and set them free, thus constricting ourselves into a box. In either case, the ego that is boxed is howling to be let free.

Just like harmony between a lion and human is unlikely, harmony between unlike minds is unlikely. For stable relationships, we need to embrace like-minded people, rather than forcing the unlike-minded people to embrace change. Expecting people's natures to change to suit ours is like expecting the

lion to dwell peacefully in a city with a human.

The best way to deal with those having contradictory nature is by maintaining respectful distances. When circumstances force you to deal with them, keep the interactions to the minimum. Even the most trained caretaker, when he enters the cage of a lion, doesn't hang around longer than needed, aware that their natures are dissimilar.

Our mind, like the lion in a zoo, needs to be confined within the boundaries of discipline. And if the lion (mind) is out in the jungle, we need to protect ourselves with the barriers of intelligence.

The lion also teaches us that two unlike people can never have a stable relationship. We cannot expect a lion to live in the city. And so, the best way out for a relationship between two unlike people, like a human and a lion, is to maintain a healthy distance.



## ARE YOU PROGRAMMED BY SOMEONE ELSE?



Do you think for yourself or does someone else think for you? Are you a by-product of an environment created by someone else? Is your behaviour a replica of someone else's helpless conditionings?

The fact is that a human is an average of five people he is surrounded most with. People are helpless by products of the psychosomatic habitat they live in. When you are surrounded by people who think of petty things, your thinking tends to become cheap. When you live amid negative, unsuccessful people, you tend to become an expert in justifying failure, rationalising the futility of even trying, ridiculing the concept of optimistic fools as being unrealistic and how success is for a chosen few. The result is paralysis of any attempt towards positivity. When you live with people who have abundance in their minds, you tend to utilise every failure as a milestone rather than a roadblock.

The story of the Mahabharata is nothing but a tiff between these two types of mindsets. The household of the two brothers, Dhritarashtra and Pandu, was an obvious reflection of these two mindsets. Pandu nurtured his family to consider every setback as an opportunity to grow; he chose to embrace flexible positivity filled with hope and thereby attracted an abundance mindset. Dhritarashtra standardised his responses to life's unpleasantries with inflexible negativity filled with rigidity and a scarcity mindset. The result obviously reflected in their children's behavioural patterns.

When Pandu made the grave mistake of killing a sage, he decided to set a precedent through exemplary behaviour expected of a king. Accepting his

mistake, he walked out of his kingdom into the forest to undergo purification and upgradation. Rather than brooding over it negatively, he chose to look for a positive alternative. His mindset reflected in his son Arjuna. When Arjuna made a mistake of breaking the privacy of Yudhishtira and Draupadi, even though it was for a higher cause of protecting the interest of a citizen, he still accepted his mistake and followed the code of conduct. He also walked out of his kingdom into the forest for twelve years and in those many years, he upgraded himself in skills like martial arts. Like his father, for him negativity was a hidden chance for positive upgradation.

Dhritarashtra and Gandhari never learnt flexibility because their physical movements were restricted by blindness; therefore, their physical inflexibility made them mentally rigid. Rather than choosing the pain of discipline, they chose the pain of regret. Rather than painfully disciplining their son, they ended up painfully regretting his behaviour and their decisions. Their rigid mindset reflected in the stubbornness of Duryodhana who refused to share with the Pandavas land equivalent to the amount covered by the tip of a needle.

Life of uncertainty in the forest gave the Pandavas a chance to grow up to become flexible and enterprising. Rather than making strategy their strength, they made inner strength their strategy. The forest stay increased their ability to deal with problems. The comforts of the palace made Duryodhana a rich slave of his needs.

The difficulties in the forest helped Pandavas understand what is really of value. Just like an asthma patient realises the value of every breath over all the resources in the world, a man in an emergency focuses only on those things that will help him immediately and stays away from luxuries of leisure.

Pandavas prioritised relationships over resources. The luxurious atmosphere of the palace camouflaged unnecessary wants as necessities and Duryodhana ended up groping for mirages in the dry deserts of loneliness.

We see the result of psychological conditioning aptly summarised in this story. When Drona asked Duryodhana to go around the kingdom and find at least one person who is better than him, he returned back with news that he just couldn't find anyone who was better than him. Every person he inspected had at least one bad quality that he didn't have. Whereas when Yudhishtira went around the kingdom to find at least one person who was worse than him, he too returned back with news of his failure. Every person he inspected happened to have at least one good quality that he himself didn't possess. Both of them were simply reflecting their psychological programming. Identifying good in



others requires you to be conditioned with positive hope. To discover only bad in others reveals the mandatory coaching of pessimistic nihilism.

You are simply a reflection in the mirror of your environment. Choose the convex mirror of a positive environment and you will reflect positive flexibility amid negative circumstances, like the Pandavas. Choose the concave mirror of negative environment and you will reflect negative rigidity amid extreme positivity, like Duryodhana.

A large part of us is conditioned by our immediate environment and the people in it. Contact with negative people fuels a pessimistic outlook, paralysing any attempt towards positivity, while positive people programme us into a mindset of abundance, marking every failure as a milestone to success.

An environment of physical inflexibility made the blind Dhritarashtra rigid, a trait he passed on to his son Duryodhana who was equally stubborn and uncompromising with a scarcity mindset. On the other hand were the Pandavas who lived in the forest and were flexible and enterprising to the core.

Our psychological conditioning is largely a reflection of our immediate environment.



## FROM INFORMATION TO TRANSFORMATION



There are three mindsets in this world: Sanskriti, Vikriti, and Prakriti. Vikriti is the mindset where your needs take prominence to the extent of even crushing others' needs. This is called competition. Sanskriti is the mindset where you keep your needs aside and focus on others' needs. And Prakriti is the mindset that is convertible into either Sanskriti or Vikriti.

In the Ramayana, Ayodhya represents Sanskriti, Lanka represents Vikriti, and Kishkinda represents Prakriti. When we love things and use people, leading to the mindset of use and throw, we are following the culture of Lanka. The law of coercing teaches one that what is mine is mine and what is yours is also mine.

The law of sharing acts as a bridge across waters of frustration around the island of pride and loneliness, opening up the route to the mainland garden of love.

When we follow the law of sharing, we are following the culture of Ayodhya.

Today, these three mindsets have become three value systems and, therefore, three lifestyles. The greatest hunger today is not the hunger of the belly, but the hunger of the heart. Today's education system informs, but we need a system that transforms. An uneducated heart competes, a half-educated heart cooperates, but an enlightened heart serves. From self-satisfaction comes contentment and from contentment comes the desire to serve.

All of us are in the category of Prakriti, when we tilt towards Vikriti, we

create a Lanka atmosphere in the world. But when we tilt towards Sanskriti, we create an Ayodhya atmosphere.

A mind that prioritises others over oneself is called Sanskriti, example being Ayodhya. When one prioritises needs of self over others', it is known as Vikriti, like Lanka. Culture of Lanka is to love things and use people.

Our mind is in state of Prakriti, which can veer towards either Sanskriti or Vikriti. Change to Sanskriti is routed through education that not only informs but transforms. An uneducated heart competes, a half-educated heart cooperates, but an enlightened heart serves.



## HAS RAVANA REALLY GONE?



The search for Ravana is still on. But this time the search is within. Every time he manifests in our life in many hidden forms. His ten heads are revealing themselves at different situations in life. Whenever we experience

1. the lust to acquire others' prosperity
2. the greed to grab others' resources
3. the pride to dominate others' opinions
4. the illusion to not realise our insignificance
5. the anger venting out of our small needs not being met
6. the envy popping out seeing another's competence
7. the happiness at another's loss
8. the ambition that crosses the line of ethics
9. the inability to tolerate provocations
10. the insecurity arising out of fear of loss

we can see one of the heads of Ravana.

Dussehra is time not only to cut these heads of Ravana, but also a time to install the Rama of satisfaction in our lives.

Ravana exists not outside us but within. And he attacks in multiple ways.

Every time our ambition crosses the line of ethics, it is an attack by Ravana. Whether it is envy, pride, lust, greed, or happiness at others'

sorrow, it is Ravana raising his ugly head.

Install satisfaction during Dussehra by welcoming Rama into your life, not Ravana.



## IS REAL LOVE IN KISSES AND GIFTS?



Public display of affection (PDA) is condemned by the orthodox and given a thumbs-up by the liberal.

How does one really convey love? Is there a scale on which your love can be measured? Does the number of kisses and gifts we share give an idea of the depth of love we have?

In the world where reel life dominates real life, the public scene is an illusion and the private scene is the reality. The public display of love is often tailed by private demonstration of hate.

Often there are unseen conditions loaded on our display of love. The Mahabharata unfolds itself with Ganga and Satyawati falling in love with King Shantanu, each with strong conditions. Every one-sided condition on a relationship tilts the balance and the struggle becomes to see who can have more weighty conditions. The focus changes from love to one-upmanship.

A secret is revealed in the Ramayana regarding where real love lies, through Sita and Urmila. Rather than choosing the path of gifts and kisses, both decided to choose the path of sacrifice and unconditional love. Urmila, by releasing Lakshmana to serve Rama, demonstrated unconditional love. And Sita by leaving her comforts to accompany Rama chose the path of sacrifice.

What the world sees will give at best mental satisfaction that leaves superficial impressions. What your heart sees will give you heartfelt satisfaction that gives very deep impressions.

When the word sacrifice is replaced by the word gratifice, the quest changes from ‘What can you do for me?’ to ‘What can I do for you?’.

True love is tested by circumstances and established by the eagerness to

sacrifice personal desires, comforts, and opinions, to uphold that sacred bond of love.

Is there a scale to measure love? Do kisses and hugs tell how much you love someone? Definitely not. This public display of love is often tailed by private demonstration of hate.

Rather than conditional gifts and kisses, a relationship needs unconditional love and sacrifice. The question to ask is not 'What can you do for me?' but 'What can I do for you?'

True love is measured by our eagerness to let go of our personal desires, opinions, and comforts.



## IS LACK OF FOCUS A DISEASE OR A CHOICE?



Do you find yourself increasingly unable to focus on your work or study for as much time as you could earlier? Do you find yourself getting bored of relationships too soon? Or do you find yourself actively searching for newer ways to spend your free time?

If all this is true, don't look for a solution, look for the *problem*. Only when you manage to identify the problem, will you be able to solve it. The problem, you will discover, is not with your restless mind, but with your lifestyle. Mind's behaviour is a helpless by-product of your impatient lifestyle. With this understanding, look at your lifestyle. You will be amazed to find that you are surrounded by things, people, and an environment that demands constant change, constant reprioritisation, and constant movement.

For many people, impatience is a sign of enthusiasm and eagerness to grow. But in reality it may be a sign of anxiety. In an impatient mind, the desire to run into the perceived security of future is so prominent that it's just impossible to experience anything tangible in the present. The fact is that an impatient person can neither motivate others nor motivate himself.

In the Mahabharata, Dronacharya asked his young disciples to come together for a skill testing competition. In reality, he wasn't testing their skill, but was testing their patience. The task was to shoot an arrow at the eye of a wooden bird that was perched on a high branch of a tree. Before he allowed them to make their attempt to shoot, he asked them what they could see. When Bhima was asked, he said that he could see the tree with many succulent fruits



hanging on them and the bird sitting in the midst of those fruits. Duryodhana claimed that he could see the sky, the tree, the branches, the fruits, and the bird. While Bhima was distracted by the desire to enjoy the fruits in future, Duryodhana was distracted by his desire to focus on everything at a time.

The unimpressed Drona then turned to Arjuna and asked him to take aim. When asked what he could see, Arjuna matter-of-factly said, 'The bird's eye!' Even before he shot the arrow, Drona knew what the result would be. According to Drona, life's success or failure doesn't lie in the action per se, but in the mindset with which that action is carried out. As expected, Arjuna's arrow pierced the eyes of the wooden bird right in the centre with unbelievable accuracy.

The ability to focus on one thing is a bold act of patience. Exhibition of such patience is a sign of maturity. When one learns to patiently respond to situations, one allows the best of him to manifest. When one reacts hastily to finish off a chore one allows the worst of him to surface.

One of the most powerful tools to foster patience is change in perspective towards life. Most people perceive patience as a sign of inaction and, therefore, slackness. Naturally, they consider action as a sign of vigour and vitality. Patience is actually an incubation period for reflection. A patient person is energetic on an inner plane though he may seem out of action on an external realm. For them, waiting doesn't mean they are doing nothing. But rather, it's an opportunity to relax, observe, and reflect carefully before executing anything. They understand that there are a lot of wonders to be explored in the inner landscape of the mind.

If patience is the key to focus, then the key to patience is spending time in an environment that encourages patience. A farmer cannot be as impatient as a geek who complains of his 4G Internet being slow. An artist or a writer cannot demand ideas to be served to him at the speed of a fast food outlet. A mother cannot expect the baby in her womb to be delivered at the speed of an email. Observe the lifestyle of those that have to be patient to get the right results. Focus on those aspects of life that foster patience.

In the Mahabharata, during the *gurukul* days, late one night, Arjuna heard a faint sound that seemed out of place. He tiptoed in the dark, following the direction from which the sound came. As he neared the source, he realised that it was a clear sound of someone chomping away happily. Inquisitively, he turned on a torch to find out who could be eating in the dead of the night in such darkness. He was shocked to see Bhima gobbling down sweets. When inquired

about how he could eat in such darkness, Bhima's straightforward reply was that he knew where the sweets were and he knew where his mouth was. Knowing the placement of both, it didn't matter if it was dark or light. Arjuna instantly reflected on this and took a crucial decision. If Bhima could eat in the dark, he could surely practice archery in the dark. From then on, every night he practiced diligently shooting targets he couldn't see. This intense rigorous practice made him the master-archer who could focus without distractions.

The ability to focus patiently is not a result of a one-time decision. It's the concentrated result of zillions of times of practicing pulling the mind away from distractions. Just like it takes zillions of drops water falling on a stone to crack it, it takes zillions of drops of practice to crack the wandering habits of the distracted mind. Just like it takes zillions of repetition of pushing weights to make the muscles strong, it takes zillions of repetition of pushing distractions away to make the focus muscle strong.

One bird-eye hit was the result of zillions of practice hits of missing the target in the dark. Arjuna's focus was a result of patience to practice unlimited times pulling back his mind from distractions of sleep and gratifications. By practicing to delay gratification, he prioritised patiently focusing on his aim in life. Repetition brings mastery. Concentration is the by-product of zillions of repetitions.

Rather than brooding over lack of focus, one should patiently practice the tug of war with the distracted mind, thus nudging it slowly but surely towards unwavering focus.

Lack of focus is a choice not disease. The ability to focus comes from having patience. Patience should not be equated with inaction; it is actually a positive quality contributing to developing focus. Impatience implies anxiety, insecurity, and lack of motivation.

To focus one needs patience and to develop patience one needs:

1. repeated practice of pulling back the mind from distractions and gratifications
2. placing oneself in an environment that fosters patience
3. reflection and prioritisation of life's goals



## AN IDEA TO PREVENT HACKING OF IDEAS



Can you really hack ideas from another's brains?

The history of this universe starts with Madhu and Kaitava hacking the Vedas from Brahma's brain and dashing away with the loot. If it weren't for the first cyber police, Vishnu, the original hackers might have got away and history would have been written differently.

Water when stored in one place stinks if unused. Flowing water retains its ever-freshness. Vishnu rectified this by incarnating as Vyasa and freely distributing the same knowledge through His disciples and books. How many brains would the Madhus and Kaitavas of this world need to hack now?

Whether it is Vyasa or Tukaram or Purandar Das or Tulsidas, each tried to not just acquire knowledge, but to distribute knowledge. In allowing their knowledge to flow, they ensured it remain ever fresh in millions of hearts.

One cannot claim proprietorship over ideas. Inspirational ideas are never conceived by force, they are received by grace. Rather than trying to store knowledge or ideas for personal aggrandizement, one should distribute them for communal enhancement.

Knowledge, creativity, intelligence are gifts of grace. They should not be kept restricted but allowed to be shared with others. This sharing keeps knowledge fresh and fragrant whereas stored knowledge

becomes stagnant and stale. Our aim should be to distribute knowledge wholeheartedly for boosting community upliftment.



## IS A BROAD CHEST AND SLIM WAIST THE RIGHT FIGURE?



Getting into the right shape takes so much effort. Probably, the only thing tougher than getting into the right shape is staying in the right shape. While one would agree that a broad chest and slim waistline is the right shape for the body, one remains clueless as to what would be the best shape for the mind.

The scintillating story of Saubari Muni's mistake from the Bhagavata Purana gives us a hint of the right shape for the mind. Deciding to stay away from the distracting world, he sat at the bottom of a lake and performed austerities by taking charge of his senses. His mind had a broad chest pumped up with pride of being the controller. But the waistline of his mind was slim owing to a lack of loving relationship with friends and peers. He preferred isolation to company. He was uncomfortable with anyone advising him or correcting him or even entering his zone of control.

Though he had left everything in the world in pursuit of higher things, he had quietly retained his pride. That pride subtly convinced him that he was the undisputed controller of the lake he was meditating in. Naturally, that meant that all the fishes living in that lake were his dependent subordinates. The problem emerged when Garuda, the king of the eagles, entered the lake searching for fish. When the fishes ran to him helplessly for protection, his mind got a reconfirmation of his ownership. The joy of being in control gave him a high. The result was that out of pride, he offended his superior Garuda by banning him from that lake. Garuda left silently, leaving Saubari to his lonely destiny. Soon Saubari deviated from focusing on the goal of his life and

focused on getting higher and higher ways of experiencing the kick of being in charge. Very soon the very fishes that he tried to protect became the cause of his degradation. Seeing the fishes enjoying themselves, Saubari developed a desire to enjoy like them. His pride prevented him from consulting anyone and his ego had never allowed anyone to be his well-wishing friend. He left the privacy of the lake and went back into the world of distractions absorbing himself in reckless enjoyment. Pride in his own abilities and lack of accommodation of other's love resulted in a disfigured mind.

The right figure for the mind is to have a slim chest with no egoistic vanity and a broad waist filled with loads of love to accommodate others.

The greatest obstacle to love is pride. Pride acts like a thick transparent glass wall that prevents any loving transaction from penetrating. When someone tries to enter into a proud person's domain, that transparent wall bounces him or her off. Though a proud person seems accessible since they are visible, the transparent wall of pride does not allow any access, neither physically nor audibly. As a result, a proud person remains aloof not just from loving exchanges but also from wise advice. They prefer to live in the island of their own loneliness surrounded by vast salty waters of their own achievements.

The symptom of a proud person is that he bathes in the shower of self-glorification while viciously spraying others with a hosepipe of criticism. The only way they feel they can be under a permanent spotlight of fame is through self-assurance that no one is as good as they are. Therefore, they auto-degrade others to preserve their cherished limelight. Proud people are fanatically convinced that they deserve what they desire. Naturally, they act like a proud bull that cannot accommodate anyone that even faintly seems like competition. Because they are in love with themselves so seriously, they have neither time nor any capacity to love anyone else. The combination of self-love and auto-degradation of others makes a proud person lonely. Loneliness is the by-product of pride.

Every balloon has an inflation limit, defined by its stretch capacity and its proximity to a pin. Similarly, every arrogant person has a pride limit of his ego, which is determined by time factor and proximity to a pride-buster. When the pride limit is reached a pride-buster is triggered. A busted ego is often called an embarrassment. Pride ends in embarrassment too awkward to declare to the world. Should humility develop by such humiliation only? Can it not develop by realisation based on knowledge and guidance? Yes, it can!

Provided one is ready to place down the heavy baggage of pride and share the weight of wisdom from others' heads.

While pride pushes away others, humility pulls in others. While pride brings in loneliness, humility brings in guidance. While pride brings in embarrassments, humility brings in acceptance.

The workout for the body is to push against heavy weights. Similarly, the work-in for the mind is to push against the weight of thinking 'I don't need anyone' and pull in positive love.

While attempting to retain the broad chest and thin waist for the body, one should endeavour to get the distorted mind in the right shape too. When the mind develops a thin chest devoid of pride and a broad waist that is filled with love, then it has fallen into perfect shape. Rather than proudly exhibiting one's impressive body shape, one should take pride in exhibiting one's inspiring mental shape. Exhibition of a well-chiselled bodily shape is a matter of pride and presentation of well-developed mental shape is a matter of humility. Perfect bodily shape is worth taking selfies of. Perfect mental shape is worth being photographed by others.

We need to work towards not only a perfect body shape but, more importantly, towards a perfect mental shape. Pride in our own abilities and lack of accommodation of other's love results in a disfigured mind. Pride creates distance and keeps love at bay. It demands self-glorification while degrading others; love for self and criticism for others.

Loneliness is a by-product of such pride. Replacing pride with humility eliminates the loneliness and the embarrassment if one is ready to share wisdom and guidance from others. This is the much-desired right shape of mind.



## ARE YOU SCARED TO BE OFFLINE?



The more responsive you are, the more connected you are. Isn't this today's motto?

With so much going on online every nanosecond, through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, one would feel almost extinct if he weren't active for a few hours. The insecurity of being forgotten drives one to be hysterically active.

Every word you say, gives so many an opportunity to judge you. That being the case, are we not eligible to be mini-celebs?

Lord Rama would sometimes go offline. He would just disappear without telling anyone. Invariably in many such instances, He would be found sitting with a simple sage and hearing from him.

Every celebrity needs privacy to upgrade himself. The insecurity of being offline has to be replaced by the security of the need to personally grow. To enable one to offer others something of substance.

So, the motto has to change now.

Get offline, grow. Get online, give.

Today's fad is to be online 24/7. The desire to be online comes from insecurity of being forgotten. However, going offline is a greater need. It is imperative to have space and solace for personal growth and upgradation. Only when we grow can we give.





## CAN I CHANGE WITHOUT CHANGING?



The inspiration to look forward to change comes from the hope of positive pleasure that it brings along. The monotony of one's present situation and the discontent that it triggers is often replaced by the prospect of exhilaration that a change heralds.

The grass is always greener on the other side. Or rather in today's context, prospects are always higher on the other side of the ocean. The bug of discontent has spread like an epidemic to destroy the healthy mind. Just like metal detectors detect presence of extra metal in a person, if we could have mental detectors that could detect the metallic presence of discontent, the buzzer would probably be perpetually on.

Currently, change is welcomed at every level, even at the level of gender change. The discontent of the present gender has to be dissipated and replaced with a new role that heralds pleasure. The Bhagavata Purana heralds the story of a king named Sudyumna who prayed for a sex change and was blessed with change of gender every month. Now he had to deal with not just a physical sex change but along with that a change of mindset also that came as a package. As his mind and body went through excruciating trauma with the change every month, he repented his original desire for change. The change made him realise that any change, though promising newer pleasure, can alongside give rise to newer pains also.

A bear never looks at a tiger's shiny skin coat with envy, frustrated with his grisly hairy coat as he might be. A crow never looks at a peacock's colourful feathers with envy, even if he is frustrated with his black feathers. Desire for change stems from the fact that we focus on the limited negatives of our lives,

rather than the unlimited positives life has to offer. Addiction to change is simply an outcome of not focusing on what you have and seeking an escape into the world of what you don't have.

The desire to experience constant change is an indicator of an unstable, uncounselled mind. Mind is constantly exploring reasons to be dissatisfied. Mind being a turbulent ocean, its waves venture into the shores and return unsatisfied; constantly trying to explore different temptations and relations to achieve happiness but always returns unsatisfied. Just like the wave cycles of the ocean never end, the changing wish list of the mind never ends.

Changes can be generated from outside the purview of your influence or suggested from inside the centrifuge of your raging mind. Changes thrust upon us from outside are to be accepted silently with humility. Changes prompted by the untrained mind are to be curtailed diligently with dexterity. To accept the outside change with grace is a sign of maturity. To resist the desperate inner voice gnawing for rapid change is a sign of stability.

In the Ramayana, Vishwamitra was desperate to become a brahmarishi even though he was a king, thinking that this change will bring happiness to his life. He performed *tapasya* in every direction in order to become a brahmarishi; and every time he came across some distraction that would dissuade him from his focus on his goal. Each time he failed, he blamed the place and the direction in which he was, for his failure. Immediately he would change the place to see if the new location could add to his luck factor. After such Herculean efforts, when he was finally declared by Lord Brahma to be a brahmarishi, he got an important realisation in his life. He realised that change does not necessarily mean growth. So far, he had always associated growth with change. Therefore, he had given up kingship and changed to a rishi in order to convince himself that he was actually growing. And from a rishi, he had desperately endeavoured to become a brahmarishi. He had definitely changed, but not definitely grown. Instead of thinking that he could grow by changing, he concluded that if he had focused on growth by satisfaction, he would have actually grown. Satisfaction, he realised, is the only way to change and grow.

When we look for change in people or change in things, we are actually looking for something or some person who will satisfy us. In an attempt to purchase satisfaction from outside, we forget to look for it inside. The quest for satisfaction is actually a mind game. Because one tends to deal with things and people in one's purview superficially, one tends to neglect them by

undervaluing them. And then, the mental machinery gets into auto-compare mode to churn out copious number of thoughts of dissatisfaction by comparison. This in turn causes cracks in the personal satisfaction levels.

Have you ever wondered why Krishna always wears a yellow dhoti and a peacock feather without any exception? Do you know why Rama took a vow of being loyal to one word, one arrow, and one wife? And why sages did exactly the same daily routine in performing their sadhana?

The answer is obvious to the observant eyes. To cultivate satisfaction!

Satisfaction is about being happy with what life offers you. Instead of constantly changing things, change your perspective of seeing things. If you find change mandatory for growth, what you need to change is your perspective rather than changing your things and relationships. Zoom in, appreciate and explore the potential of what you already have before hankering for what you don't. The power to be content in life is within you. Don't allow negative energy to leave you dissatisfied and thirsty.

Just like a tree takes simple water and returns sweet fruits in gratitude. Similarly, when one cultivates the tree of gratitude for whatever simple things one has, sweet fruits of satisfaction will grow.

Rather than changing external situations, if one changes one's mental framework from discontent to satisfaction, every situation in life will be rewarding.

Desire for constant change reflects deep-seated discontentment. Though promising joy, changes are accompanied with pain too. Discontentment may originate from either envy or a negative outlook on what we have, taking the form of a habit. Change then is yearned for as means of escapism.

Changes can be external or internal. No matter how much the external change, it does not result in satisfaction. To accept the outside change with grace is a sign of maturity. To resist the desperate inner voice gnawing for rapid change is a sign of stability. Satisfaction is the only growth; satisfaction is being happy with what life has to offer. If at all a change is needed, it is a change in perspective—appreciating and exploring your potential; stopping the negative energies from draining you with discontentment.



## ARE YOU ANGRY AGAINST ANGER?



Do you blast at the drop of the hat? What triggers your blasts? Do you feel remote controlled? Does it seem that a hidden tout has taken the contract to trigger the time and magnitude of your blasts?

Anger is called *kamanuja*, or younger brother of desire. Whenever you find the younger brother sneak peeking, look for the dissatisfied older brother who must be pacing around. Anger is the result of some unsatisfied need.

Needs distinctly differ from wants. If needs are like a glass of fresh water, then wants are like a salty ocean. Needs can quench, wants only frustrate. Needs can be quenched, wants only get magnified.

If the trigger point of anger is an unmet need, then as soon as you identify the need, you can tackle your anger. But if the trigger point of anger is an unmet want, then in spite of identifying the want, you can do nothing to tackle your anger. Because it may be humanly possible to make arrangements to meet all needs but it is divinely impossible to satisfy all wants. Before you decide to handle your anger, first qualify whether your desire is a need or a want.

When an unfulfilled need angers you, one should deal with it assertively. Being assertive about your needs is not being demanding from others but about being respectful to yourself. The need-based trigger points of anger can be dealt by being assertive about them without hurting anyone else. However, when an unfulfilled want angers you, it completely conquers you.

In the Ramayana, when Vibhishana tried his best to counsel his elder brother Ravana about his wrong judgment of Rama's prowess and his unethical kidnapping of Sita, Ravana became wildly angry. Such was the magnitude of his anger that he ran up to Vibhishana and kicked him disdainfully, as a full

court looked on aghast. Ravana wanted absolute autocracy where no questions were asked. When his unreasonable want of absolute autocracy was not met, he blasted his own brother Vibhishana. In simply trying to help Ravana see his mistake, Vibhishana unwittingly stepped on his brother's oxygen tube named absolutism and became the recipient of his wrath.

Aggressive anger is a bad counsellor. Just like the sweat of hippopotamus becomes red when angry, a human becomes tainted with shameless colours when angry. Aggression is a persuasive technique used by the weak at heart. They try to show their confidence by aggressive body language. But in reality, they end up displaying their discomfoting weakness. A weak man in anger cannot be a strong man in stability. The value system of a man in anger changes swifter than the stock market.

In the Bhagavata Purana, a tired king named Muchukunda sought the benediction of uninterrupted sleep. After years and years of serving others selflessly, all Muchukunda aspired for was to sleep unlimitedly and uninterruptedly. As he was fast asleep in a cave, a siege was taking place in Mathura by a demoniac ruler named Kalayavana. Feigning to run away from the battlefield in fear, Krishna masterfully brought Kalayavana to the very cave where Muchukunda was snoring away. Mistaking this king to be sleeping Krishna, the reckless Kalayavana kicked him awake. When his need to sleep was broken, Muchukunda blasted on Kalayavana and burnt him to ashes. Only when he saw the repercussion of his anger did Muchukunda come to his senses and immediately repented for his foolhardiness.

Getting angry is easy, but identifying our need is difficult. Sometimes our anger may be directed at one place, but our need may be at a completely different place. One's need may be to reach office on time, but one may express his unmet need, due to being stuck in a traffic jam, on a driver who is honking behind. By identifying your unmet need, you identify the trigger point of anger. Dealing with an enemy becomes easy when you know why he is your enemy.

Anger is like a black rat that nibbles away the peace of your mind. Whatever is done during the momentary madness of anger, when dissected peacefully, converts into embarrassment. Most often anger begins with an incorrect understanding of others' actions and ends with a shameful feeling of our own actions.

In the Mahabharata, there is a story of a Brahman named Kaushika who was very proud of his mystic powers and expected the world to honour and

respect him. Once when he was meditating under a tree, a bird passed stool on his head. This angered Kaushika so much that he reduced the bird to ashes with a single furious stare. Kaushika was convinced that he had taught the bird an apt lesson for its impudence. The same day as Kaushika knocked at a house for begging alms, a simple lady greeted him. Just then her husband returned home and the lady got absorbed in serving him. She completely neglected Kaushika who began to boil over in anger. After a while, she returned back to the still angry Brahman and said something that completely shocked him. She said that he wouldn't be able to burn her the way he had scorched the bird. As Kaushika wondered how she could know of that incident, she explained that his anger wouldn't affect those who were sincerely performing their prescribed duties. Kaushika returned dazed, but with a profound realisation. He took his anger too seriously. His fear of being disrespected manifested itself into anger and that anger converted itself into hatred that eventually made him suffer. The lady's wisdom helped him understand that not everything happens in accordance with our desire. When events are out of our control instead of boiling over in anger, one should relax basking under that knowledge.

Anger could also be the trigger point for someone else's humour. Almost always when an unconcerned person observes your anger, it seems comical. The best remedy for anger is procrastination. One moment of delay in expressing anger will save a quadrillion moments of shame later. An angry person is simultaneously happy and sad. Happy for venting out his anger, but sad about the embarrassment and shame that follows that expression.

Those who live on slopes have to ensure that the handbrake of their car is pulled up sturdily. Similarly, before your car rolls down the steep slope of anger get a grip of the hand brake of your unmet needs. Pull it up on time and avoid the roller coaster. It's easier to remember to pull the handbrake when you know that it's shamefully embarrassing for yourself and those in your car to be in a vehicle where the driver has no control.

Anger is the result of an unsatisfied need. The trick is to differentiate wants from needs. Needs can be quenched, wants only get magnified. Anger triggered by unmet needs can be tackled whereas that from unmet wants is unmanageable.

Aggression is the weapon of the weak. Need-base anger can be

dealt with assertion. And when wants come into the picture with the situation going out of control, then anger ought to be replaced by acceptance of the fact of not being in control.

By identifying your unmet need, you identify the trigger point of anger. Get a grip on the enemy called anger before the enemy gets a grip on you.



## THE INVESTMENT THAT RETURNS HEARTS



Whether it is about piloting an airplane during turbulent times or it is about manoeuvring a relationship during unruly times, the easiest option is to press the eject button. Most people prefer to abort a troubled relationship than handle it maturely. Yet at the same time, there is a hankering deep within the soul for a relationship that lasts all tests of time no matter how complex and unnerving it may be. That innate longing is what drives a man gasping for water in a parched desert into finding newer relationships time and again in spite of failing and falling repeatedly. Just like plants grow healthier when exposed to a lightning storm, the search is for a formula that ensures that relationships grow healthier when it passes through an emotional storm.

Winning relationships is unlike winning medals. Winning medals is about outdoing others' deeds. Winning relationships is about outdoing your wrong attitudes. In relationships, what matters most is to understand why you are in it in the first place. Most people enter into a relationship with the hope that this relation will fill the lacunae in their life. Their need is in the forefront of the relationship. People often look for returns from a relationship even before adequate investments have been made. Any venture, which begins without a substantial backing of investment, fails even before it begins.

Whether it is about investing money or investing in a relationship, choosing the right plan is the key. Here is a risk-free, easily doable, double guaranteed, and triply verified plan for investment in relationships, which pledges manifold and long-term returns.

Do something for the others that which they cannot do for themselves!

Why did the Pandavas love Krishna so much? He did for them what they



couldn't do for themselves. He not only helped them get their kingdom back, but He also helped them handle emotional trauma, sabotage, disunity, and insult, with confidence and grace. He never gave them a penny during their years of struggle, though He owned the most fascinating kingdom. Rather than facilitating their comfort, He chose to facilitate their growth. He tutored them to become self-dependent, rather than depend on circumstances. More than that, Krishna was with the Pandavas when they went through their toughest challenges as well as their greatest celebrations. Mystically, in the midst of the most complex dilemmas, they always found Him around helping them with His profound yet practical wisdom. Though He never lived with them constantly, they thought of Him more than they thought of their closest family members.

The creation of the universe is orchestrated in such a way that every individual has lacunae which he can't fill, which is why one must actively look for opportunities to do something for others that which they cannot do for themselves. If we constantly think about what we deserve from a relationship, then we are actually butchering the quality of the relationship. When we meditate on what we can do for others, we are actually watering the root of the relationship. When you enter into a relationship looking for massive doses of gratification, you are strangling the relationship even before it has begun to breathe properly. When you focus on valuing others as more valuable than yourself, then you focus on the relationship than on the net profit gained from the relationship.

In the Ramayana, Vali had the boon of mystically getting half of the strength of whomever he stared at. If instead he had the power to get half the understanding of anyone he faced, he wouldn't have lost his brother and his life. Vali understood less and concluded more. Sugriva, his brother had made one error in his life and Vali chose not to forgive him for that mistake. In spite of repeatedly being pleaded by Sugriva, Vali became aggressive and strangled the relationship violently. He preferred a relationship that was based on one-sided power and control rather than based on mutual understanding and love. Sugriva ran from Kishkinda kingdom and settled on a mountain that Vali could not step his foot on due to a curse. In spite of that, Vali kept flying over that mountain and kicking Sugriva on his head, reminding him of his mistake. That's when Rama entered into Sugriva's sad life. Understanding Sugriva's dilemma Rama decided to do something for Sugriva, which he couldn't do for himself. He helped Sugriva get back his kingdom, his dignity, and his wife by killing Vali who had abducted her. By investing his energy on fulfilling Sugriva's

need, Rama proved to Sugriva that this was a relationship that was worth investing in. Sugriva became so grateful to Rama that he rallied the whole monkey army to assist him in fulfilling his need to find mother Sita. Much beyond their needs being met, the mutual love and affection Rama and Sugriva shared remained all through their lives as a symbolic representation of how relationships can thrive lifelong.

While Vali focused on his need, Rama chose to focus on Sugriva's need. While Vali was a self-focused brother, Rama was a Sugriva-focussed stranger. While Vali chose to strangle the relationship, Rama chose to cultivate the relationship.

Love in any relationship is about action and not just a feeling. Active love is about prioritising others' needs, not just in words but also in your actions. It means that in a relationship we may have to prioritise others' needs even if we have no interest or gain from it. To the degree one is ready to sacrifice to satisfy the greatest need of another, to that degree love in the relationship will escalate. Gaps that people have in their lives are the best means to leverage out that love in the relationship. The moment people understand that you have accepted their problem as your own, that very moment they accept you as their own. The environment of mutual acceptance brings hearts together.

When one does something which is clearly visible as a genuine expression of one's decision to treat the other as more important than oneself, that single act solders hearts together.

Invest in this plan of doing something for others that they cannot do for themselves and you will be assured of returns in the form of grateful hearts that will in turn be desperate to invest in a plan that returns your heart.

When the going gets tough, most give up. Especially in a relationship. Although we give up relationships, we keep seeking love. Number one factor in stabilising a relationship is how much can you contribute to it. One needs to make deposits in a relationship before making withdrawals. A healthy plan of investment is to deposit acts of service because love is just not about feelings but also about action. Love means prioritising other's needs over self. Do something for others that they cannot do for themselves. When people see you giving more importance to them than yourself, then their hearts solder with yours.



## A TIP TO BECOME INFAMOUS



Who wants to be friends with Mr. Perfect or Ms. Seamless? No one! That's as much true today as it was in the past.

When a person spins around himself, he perceives the whole world to be rotating. Like a spinning top, a person with a strong self-centeredness, swivels around driven by his own needs, interests, and concerns. He dreams that the stationary world is eagerly rotating to fulfil him. Such people mistakenly consider real life to be like reel life. They begin to perceive their existence to be a life-long movie in which they are the sole heroes and the cameras of the world are pointed towards them, recording their every move fascinatingly.

A practical tip to become infamous is to always show that you are right. Try it! It won't fail you!

When a person carries a mask of perfection, people hand him over a vote of rejection. Except nature, everyone else is prone to imperfection. The perfection that we see in nature is the thumbprint of God that cannot be plagiarised. A boastful perfectionist is one who hasn't attentively studied his honeycomb of imperfections. Perfection has nothing to do with greatness. In fact, those who are aspiring for greatness love imperfections. From dealing with imperfections comes real greatness. However, the first step in dealing with imperfections is to acknowledge their existence. Behind the desire to be perfect is a fear psychosis. Every person who projects himself as perfect is trying his best to hide from the world behind a mask of perfection. The fear of being superseded by someone else! This is called the deficiency syndrome. To allay this fear, he chooses to venture out on the lonely path of self-proclaimed perfectionism. He shudders internally when he sees someone else having an

answer that he doesn't have. To hide his fear and reaffirm that he is better, he goes on a rampage to prove that person wrong even if he internally knows that his competitor was absolutely right.

In the Ramayana, Ravana could never accept a 'no' for his proposals. He had mentally made a plan to kidnap Sita and approached his uncle Maricha to see if he would like to assist him in its execution. As soon as Maricha heard that plan, he began to tremble in fear and blurted out his previous disastrous experiences with Rama's show of strength. He, in fact, warned Ravana to drop his plan of even looking at Sita, to say nothing of kidnapping her. With every word of disagreement, Ravana's anger began to swell. He was a master planner and considered himself to be a perfectionist. And here was someone (his elder, no doubt, but still . . .) who was trying to tell him that his plan had an imperfection. For Ravana, calling his plan imperfect was akin to calling him imperfect. This triggered Ravana's deficiency syndrome and he went on a rampage boasting about his strengths and achievements, comparing them with the punity of Rama. Finally, he warned Maricha with dire consequences if he did not accede to his well thought out plan.

When one is obsessed about always being right, he has given up his right of being wrong. Being wrong is a human's right. Being wrong gives you the ability to progress from where you are. Being wrong is about being human. Being adamant about always being right is about being Ravana. Perfection is achieved by chiselling out loads of faults. Imperfection is the extra marble that was on the stone before it becomes a perfect sculpture. Just like the process of chiselling is painful for the marble, the process of accepting advice and guidance, which is subtle chiselling of the ego, is extremely painful.

When you show that you are always right, you are in love with a dream image of yourself, which is perfect and flawless. But much more than that it shows that you are scared of the real image of yourself, which is laced with flaws and imperfections. Real perfection of a man is to find joy in accepting his imperfections as potential for his growth rather than as a source of his fears. Perfection is not about not thinking of one's imperfections but about rightly thinking of one's imperfections.

In the Mahabharata, Duryodhana always wanted to be Mr. Perfect, always right and always having the last word. He naturally resisted and desisted anyone who even remotely contradicted or challenged him. In fact, one folk tale talks about a peculiar habit he had that actually hinted at his deficiency syndrome. Even under the scorching hot sun, Duryodhana wouldn't allow an

umbrella to be held over his head. Anything or anyone above him triggered his fear of being superseded and he resisted it vehemently. This fear became most obvious after he returned from seeing the magnitude of Yudhishtira's glory in the Rajasuya sacrifice. He realised that the power and control had totally shifted from Hastinapura to Indraprastha. The shifting of power made Duryodhana go berserk and he was ready to do anything to get his mental security back. For him, his security stemmed from always being right and always being the celebrated hero.

Those with the deficiency syndrome mistakenly feel that heroes are those who have no weakness. But in reality, heroes are those who strive in spite of their weaknesses. People love to eulogise heroes who have weaknesses because in those heroes, they see a ray of hope for themselves and possibility of being heroes some day. People may like Superman on screen but in reality they only like humans. The nature of a human is to scrutinise and find faults when there is a claim of perfection and to find good if there is a self-acceptance of faults.

If Ravana and Duryodhana could become infamous by always claiming that they are right, so can you!

When you show that you are flawless, you actually say that you are needless. And when you say that you are needless, people become heedless towards you.

Perfect people are unpopular and boastful perfectionists more so. Perfection has nothing to do with greatness. Greatness comes from dealing with imperfections.

Perfection is just a mask to hide the underlying fear of being inferior, aka deficiency syndrome. The mask helps give security against a perceived deficiency.

Deficiency syndrome sufferers always think themselves to be right. Being adamant about always being right is about being Ravana. Being wrong is about being human. They also think they have no weaknesses. However, people love heroes who have weaknesses because in such heroes, they see themselves.

Real perfection of a man is to find joy in accepting his imperfections as potential for his growth rather than as a source of his

fears.



## CAN YOUR SUCCESS BE YOUR FAILURE?



What is the first word that comes to your mind when you meet success? Is it ‘celebration’?

When you are close to success it is almost like getting intoxicated. Everything blurs and you can’t see clearly. The fish seldom sees the noose behind the bait when its eyes glean in anticipation of the joy of eating. The desperation to taste success is so obsessive that at that moment consequences hardly matter.

When you go through a nerve-wrecking phase with the goal to achieve success, the natural reaction is to savour every second of it when it comes and bask in the rain of self-praise. The more the heat in the milk, better the taste of tea. To the degree you are subjected to heat (like a tea bag), to that degree you become desperate to taste the resultant success. Many times that desperation to celebrate becomes the very noose that strangles your success and converts it into an embarrassing failure.

In the Mahabharata, when the six *maharathi* warriors slaughtered Abhimanyu mercilessly and unethically, his father Arjuna became furious. Arjuna’s first question was why his son was left alone to become a prey to so many vultures. When his brothers explained that it was Jayadratha who had prevented them from helping his son, Arjuna instantly took a vow to eliminate him by sunset the next day failing which he would self-immolate. This news sent a wave of joy in the Kaurava camp as they considered their victory impossible as long as Arjuna stood opposing them. All Jayadratha had to do was to keep himself concealed till sunset and success would be his, and death would be Arjuna’s. The next day Arjuna had to literally fight across a sea of

warriors to reach his well-hidden target. By the time he reached close enough, the sun had already begun setting. When the first hint of success peeped in with the apparent setting of the sun, Jayadratha jumped out of his cover anxious to celebrate his success and express the end of his desperation. In that desperation to celebrate his success, Jayadratha had overlooked the fact that the sun seemed to have set too early that day. Krishna, knowing the mindset of those who look at success as a chance to celebrate, had deceived him into thinking that the sun had set. As soon as Jayadratha perceived the sunset, he began to dance around the battlefield, gleefully expressing his victory over Arjuna. That celebration cost him his life and his head rolled off.

Don't celebrate before reaching there because you may never actually reach there. Proximity to success can be a source of greater disgrace than being in the midst of a failure. Proximity to success lubricates our secret desire to celebrate success. That desperation to hear applause before deserving it becomes the very impediment in achieving it. A simplistic secret ingredient in ensuring success without embarrassment could be to keep the mouth shut before becoming a success.

In the Ramayana, Ravana being a mastermind in astrology had consciously selected the perfect *muhurta* for kidnapping Sita, which would ensure his success. But while he was kidnapping her, Jatayu opposed him vehemently. Ravana got so carried away with his desire to succeed over Jatayu that he completely lost track of his astrological calculations. In a desperate attempt to taste success, Ravana forgot the purpose for which he wanted that success. While Ravana was busy celebrating his success, Jatayu who had himself failed, was smiling at Ravana's failure. The delay caused by the fight had changed the *muhurta* from *Vinda muhurta* (which would ensure the Sita wouldn't return to Rama) to *Punarvasu muhurta* (which would ensure that Sita returned to Rama soon). Ravana's success in winning against Jatayu actually became his failure. Jatayu's failure in winning against Ravana actually became his success.

On the ladder of success, the lower rungs are tests of your ability to handle failures and higher rungs are tests of your ability to handle successes. The seasons of success are more windy and turbulent than the seasons of failure. Tasting success without the humility to handle it is like a man who is enthusiastic to eat a heavy meal without the ability to digest it.

Becoming successful is about vigorous action. Remaining successful is about sober intention. Beyond success lies the responsibility for success. Most



people look at success as an opportunity to celebrate. But in reality, one should be looking at success as an opportunity to serve. The key to win the game of life is to focus not on celebration of success but on contribution as the purpose of success. Power alone can help you purchase success. Power plus wisdom means that you deserve success. Power, wisdom plus character ensure that you retain success. Soul strengthening happens through character strengthening. And character strengthening happens through purpose strengthening. The best way to celebrate success is by constantly realigning yourself with the purpose behind the success.

In the Mahabharata, when the Pandavas achieved unparalleled success by becoming the kings of the world during the Rajasuya sacrifice, they chose to receive their success with sobriety. They invited all the great sages and Krishna, wanting to serve them and invoke their blessings. Instead of looking at success as a chance to celebrate, they regarded it as an opportunity to serve. For them success meant service, service meant blessings, and blessings ensured continued success.

A blessing is the insurance policy that insures your success for life. The EMI to be paid is in the form of selfless service. Mustering sobriety and collecting blessings can rebuild success. Enjoy success privately and celebrate failure publically. Disinterest in enjoying the public display of success is the real success of a successful person.

Just like externally a duck seems to be gliding on water very smoothly while it is desperately peddling inside the water, a successful person should, externally, confidently venture on his pursuit of success while, internally, should be desperately serving while begging for blessings. Success powered by blessings becomes sustainable success.

When we look at proximity to success as a chance to celebrate like Ravana and Jayadratha, our success will morph into a failure and our intelligence to discriminate will roll to the ground. When we look at success as an opportunity to serve like the Pandavas, we accumulate blessings that sustain our success.

The faint smell of success is enough to intoxicate one with euphoria. The euphoria creates a veil prompting premature celebration and hiding the ultimate goal. Premature celebration eventually leads to

failure and embarrassments. The desperation to hear appreciation even before success comes becomes a roadblock for success.

Success is not an opportunity to celebrate but an opportunity to serve. The best way to celebrate success is by constantly realigning yourself with the purpose behind the success. Success means service; service means blessings and blessings ensure continued success.

Enjoy success privately and celebrate failure publically.



## DO I REALLY LACK SOMETHING?



Incompleteness is a fear and completeness is a myth. Living in a fantasy world beyond myth and fear is more exciting and in fact more alluring. ‘If only . . .’ is the name of a new virus in the market that causes a disease called unhealthy comparison.

Every adorable quality rests in the universal set of God. Each of us is given a few of these good qualities as our sub-set. When every quality in our own sub-set is utilised to the best of our capacity and honoured with gratitude, new qualities remarkably pop up in our sub-set. If the mind instead chooses to focus on what goodies are laying in others sub-sets and enviously hankers for them, the existing qualities in our sub-set shrivel up. Envy of another’s quality is essentially envy of God’s virtues.

Each of us is like pieces in the mega jigsaw puzzle of God. Our strengths are the juts and shortcomings are the slots in the pieces. Acceptance of the perfection of God’s plans helps us handle our strengths with gratitude and weaknesses with humility. For every strength we have, there is a slot that has to be filled and for every weakness we have there is a jut to aid us. Wanting only strengths and no weaknesses is wanting only juts and no slots in us. When everyone acts in reverence to the plans of God and in accordance to the strengths and weaknesses assigned to us, a complete picture of God’s plan emerges.

The role of an orchestra conductor is to ensure a perfect symphony. And to do that, he may have to occasionally silence the best of players. He knows that even silence enhances music. God may occasionally not provide a quality we hanker for. At such times, remember, God is the expert orchestra conductor;

even our lack of a quality is a contribution to the plan of the Lord.

When one says, 'If only I . . .' he is envying the universal set, he is claiming to better know the jigsaw puzzle of God and is boasting of understanding the symphony better than the conductor. The virus has spread and the disease of unhealthy comparison is speedily spreading. The only antibiotic for this disease is gratitude, available only in short supply, because it is made from a rare creeper called humility.

'If only . . .' is wishful thinking that drives us to make unhealthy comparisons. Craving for what others have is a disease that can only be cured by the medicine of gratitude, which is not at all easily available.

Acceptance of the perfection of God's plans helps us handle our strengths with gratitude and weaknesses with humility.



## CAN I EMBRACE MY EMBARRASMENTS?



In every perfect life lies a drop of imperfection that acts like poison in delectable sweet rice. Every person is trying to run away from at least one embarrassment in his life and wishes that it weren't true.

Whether it is due to a personal flaw or a person who is a flaw in your life or a situation that has flawed your life, an embarrassment is excruciatingly painful.

Vibhishana was an embarrassment in the life of Ravana. At the peak of his life, Ravana hated Vibhishana for embarrassing him, for repeatedly warning him not to make mistakes. Ravana believed that if he removed Vibhishana from his kingdom, then there would be no embarrassment in his life. Just like Ravana, most people lash out at that which they consider to be an embarrassment, or if that's not possible, they attempt to hide it from the vision of the world. When Arjuna was wrongly cursed to become a eunuch for his integrity, he took this embarrassment with positivity. For Arjuna, this embarrassment coincided with his biggest victory against the king of heavens, Indra. But he considered it as God's way of keeping one grounded in the middle of one's triumphs.

While most prefer to hide their embarrassments by showing off their success, Arjuna-like individuals prefer to look at them with grace and relish them as God's humour in their otherwise dry life. If success is a floating balloon, embarrassment acts like a thread that holds it down.

Thus, success is defined not by lack of embarrassments, but by the ability to handle embarrassments with dignity and humility.

We all have embarrassments that we want to run away from. One perspective is to look at them as God's way of keeping us grounded amid success. The secret is to handle embarrassments with dignity and humility, which is also how we should handle success.



## HORRORS OF HOROSCOPE



Every morning, what if we could predict what's exactly in store for us? Isn't that the mindset capitalised on to provide insights into our future through horoscopes?

The future plays hide and seek with the present. The desire to control aspects of life that we have no control over and the desire to conquer fear of failures are two forces that drive one to almost hysterically depend on horoscopes.

Therefore, people are drawn towards astrologers, palmists, tarot readers, numerologists, et al, to unearth the mysterious and eluding future.

Claim as they may, can anyone possibly accurately predict the future? If our future were static, it would be possible to predict it. But unfortunately, our life is like a novel, where some pages have already been written and the remaining pages get written depending on our present actions. Predicting the dynamically updated pages is like predicting whether the next wave hitting the shore is going to be big or small; it will always leave you surprised!

The science of predictions or horoscopy is like a weather forecast system; it can hint that it may rain, but it won't advice you to carry an umbrella or not. Astrology may advice that nature of two individuals may or may not match, but even if it matches, one can still mess up the relationship by one's irate actions.

In the Mahabharata, Sahadeva could predict the future, but he could hardly prevent it from happening. Krishna could see what would happen in the future, but He would never reveal it and hardly ever tried to change its course. Vyasadev predicted the disaster that Duryodhana would cause to the world based on his birth signs, but he never interfered with the decision of

Dhritarashtra to not believe his words.

Essentially, astrology is advanced mathematics. For accurate results, there has to be accurate calculations. And for accurate calculations, there has to be an unhurried, patient, and focused effort. In addition to this, there is a side to astrology, which cannot be taught—the power of intuition. Immature predictions are done taking into account all the visible factors. But the many invisible factors that exist have an equal if not more dynamic role in predicting the future. The power of intuition is not the result of external study; it is the result of being internally steady in connecting with all-knowing God within.

Instead of trying to focus on those aspects of life that can't be controlled, if we learn to focus on aspects that can be controlled, we will in effect influence our actions rather than influencing the results of our actions.

Horoscopes capture our interest because we desperately want to know our future. It gives us a semblance of control over our fears; fears about future and fears of failure. But predictions, like weather forecasts, can never be accurate or final. At best, they are indicative of possibilities that lie ahead.

What makes better sense is to focus on our actions that can be controlled, rather than the results of our actions that lie outside our jurisdiction.





## CAN I HURT OTHERS WITHOUT GETTING HURT?



Perhaps the toughest human emotion to deal with is the feeling of being hurt. That feeling only escalates when the one who hurts you is also the one you love the most. Most try to deal with hurt by hurting in turn. The result is an ugly relationship. So, how do you deal with this complex phenomenon with dignity?

Just like porcupines, wanting to avoid cold and experience warmth, come together and thereby, in the process, hurt one another with their sharp quills, similarly, humans, being relational animals, come together to seek warm love but in the process hurt one another with sharp words.

Three stories from the Mahabharata may give you some insights about why hurt people try to hurt others.

1. Drona refused to educate Karna in celestial weapons realising that Karna came with a bad attitude as a student and also the fact that he came with a competitive mentality to be better than Arjuna. Karna was extremely hurt because of Drona considering him disqualified. Then on, lifelong, Karna lashed out on the immediate cause of his hurt, Drona, and the remote cause of his hurt, Arjuna.

A hurt person lashes out not so much in response to what is happening outside but in response to what is happening inside. The inability to deal with something negative that lies within themselves causes them to hurt others. Karna was just unable to accept the fact that he was denied this special privilege. Whenever any privilege was denied to him, he concluded that it was due to his low birth. At all such

times, he felt that they were actually pointing out to a part of himself that he hated. When you hate someone, you actually hate something in him that is a part of yourself.

2. Amba's hatred towards Bhishma turned into fiery wrath that lasted two lifetimes. She spent her entire life trying to destroy Bhishma but she managed to destroy only her peace. Reborn as Shikhandi, she did manage to destroy him but not without personal loss.

A person who wants to hurt others is primarily hurting himself. A person screaming with a thorn in his hands is screaming more out of pain than anger. Similarly, hostile words and violent actions originate from hurt rather than anger. All of Amba's efforts to hurt Bhishma stemmed from the extreme amount of hurt she had felt by his insensitivity and stubbornness.

3. Drona was hurt by Drupada's insensitivity. He in turn hurt Drupada by humiliating him through his disciples. Drupada returned that hurt by begetting a son that caused Drona's death. Drona's son in turn avenged his father's death by killing Drupada's son.

A person who hurts another in reality hurts himself only. A hurt conscience hurts. But any hurt caused is actually a hurt felt. Both Drona and Drupada aimed at hurting each other. Of the two, who faced greater loss is difficult to point out, but what is obvious is that by attempting to hurt the other, they were only self-whipping.

Just like paramedics handle an external hurt or wound with gentle care, a trained intelligence has to delicately handle a hurt heart.

Just like an ocean full of water cannot sink a tiny boat unless it enters it, negative experiences cannot hurt a person unless he allows them to seep into his mind.

Just like a crown that hurts is not worth wearing, a thought that hurts is not worth storing.

When we get hurt by those we love, then the natural reaction is to hurt back. A hurt person lashes out not so much in response to what is happening outside but in response to what is hurting him inside. And then our inability to handle hurt erupts like a volcano of words or actions. A person who hurts another in reality hurts himself only.

How, then, do we cope with this hurt? By not storing hurtful thoughts inside us, by not allowing more negative thoughts to seep in, and by training the intelligence towards these goals.



## CROSSING THE LOC IN RELATIONSHIPS



When two countries fight, an LOC (Line of Control) is created to ensure peace. When two people fight, is there an LOC? Yes! It is called LOR, Line of Respect. When the LOR is crossed, the fight begins.

Have you ever travelled with a cake box? To the degree you handle it with care and respect, to that degree the impressive shape of the cake is retained till the destination. Time and familiarity makes one careless and inattentive. Relationships are like that cake. The moment you lose respect and care and instead breed familiarity and contempt, you may find a perfect box but a mashed cake.

As soon as respect is taken away from a relationship, life is taken away from that relationship. Just like mystics keep their life locked in a jewel that is safely hidden and thus continue living for very long, the life of a relationship should be kept safely locked within the jewel of respect, thus ensuring its long life. Respect should permeate in a relationship like fragrance permeates a room.

A healthy balance of love is needed between self-respect and respecting others. Love is the force transforming self-centred babies to non self-conscious mature adults. Craving to love another shouldn't be at the cost of respecting one's individuality. True love is respect in spite of shortcomings.

Just like monkeys patiently pull out lice from each other's bodies, humans who love one another should respect each other's weaknesses and help one another in overcoming rather than condemning them. A man who laughs at another's shortcoming is like a monkey who is busy laughing away at another's plight while he himself is infested with lice. The bond that relates two

individuals may be that of blood, but the bond that actually connects two individuals is that of respectful love.

In the Mahabharata, Shishupala was born with three eyes and four arms and looked ugly and abnormal. His paranoid parents consulted wise men and were told that they need not panic, the extra organs would disappear as soon as a special person picked him up. But that very person would also be the cause of his death. Very soon Krishna, who was the cousin of Shishupala, came by and picked up the child and immediately the extra organs disappeared, causing great fear in the heart of his mother. The disturbed mother was pacified only when Krishna assured her that He would forgive His cousin for hundred lapses everyday. Only when he exceeded that disrespectful limit would He punish him. Shishupala's mother was satisfied hearing the magnanimous LOR that had been drawn by Krishna. She was sure that no human could cross that limit of being disrespectful and definitely not her son. Shishupala grew up with a natural hatred for his cousin that he made no attempt to suppress. At every opportunity he would shoot a barrage of slang abusive words at Krishna. Krishna would patiently avoid reacting in keeping with *his* promise and Shishupala would religiously stop before the LOR was crossed. On the day of the *Rajasyuya yajna* of Yudhishtira, Krishna was selected to receive the highest honour and respect in the prestigious assembly of the most important men in the world. Shishupala's envy for his cousin peaked and he inadvertently crossed the LOR that Krishna had drawn by firing a volley of more than hundred abusive words at a stretch. As soon the LOR was crossed, Krishna severed the relationship with His disc.

Important relationships should be preserved judiciously like a priceless jewel. When one mistakes priceless relationships to be artificial jewels and treats them like artificial jewels, one crosses the LOR. Crossing the LOR harbingers the disc of time to sever the relationship forever.

Love needs respect right in the beginning and in the middle of a relationship but not in the end of it. When respect ends, love ends. Disrespectful verbal violence is like a relationship suicide bomber. The need to be respected is far greater than the need to be provided for. Relationships seldom break because the other is unable to provide for one's needs. In fact, when there is struggle for basic things in life, relationships solidify, baked in the fire of cooperation. But when one is unable to cater to the need to be respected, relationships crack under the weight of small-mindedness. Without respect, love is a dramatic expression of self-interest.

In the Ramayana, the love between Keikeyi and Dasaratha was epic. Keikeyi treated Dasaratha with respect and intensely endeavoured to please him. Dasaratha loved her with all his heart and respected her gratefully. The only thing that changed the dynamics of that deep loving relationship was the introduction of the element of disrespect by Manthara. She coerced Keikeyi to prioritise self-respect over respecting the sacred bond of love. Keikeyi succumbed and she rubbed off her sindoor on her forehead, which was the symbol of her respect for the relationship. By rubbing off the mark of respect, she rubbed off the relationship. When Bharata returned and asked about the whereabouts of his father, Keikeyi bluntly replied that he had gone to the same place where every animal goes after death. When respect is lost, love is lost.

Respect, in fact, is the greatest form of expression and means of strengthening of divine love. Just like plants require space to grow into trees, healthy relationships require space to flourish. When one tries to stuff himself into the life of people he loves, the relationship tends to suffocate. When we respect boundaries, we value the relationship. When we step into boundaries without being welcome, we only value ourselves.

In the Ramayana, the moment Ravana crossed the LOR drawn by Lakshmana, Sita lost her respect for him as a *sadhu* and knew that he had sinister intentions.

Love without respect for boundaries is at best temporary and at worst selfishness. Before you begin to love, learn to identify the invisible LORs in people's lives. Love that is fortified with respect, can defy time and circumstances.

Relationships thrive within limits drawn by LOR (Line of Respect). True love is respecting in spite of shortcomings, whereas crossing the LOR severs the relationship forever.

The need to be respected is far greater than the need to be provided for. Relationships break not because of lack of basic amenities but because of lack of respect. When we respect boundaries, we value the relationship. Love fortified with respect stands the test of time.



## CAN AN ENVIOUS PERSON ACTUALLY BE A DISGUISED FRIEND?



Is there someone out there who makes your otherwise happy life miserable? Why does your success give birth to the child of envy in others? Is it possible to perceive others' envy towards you positively?

Just like in the game of football each player in the opposite team is earmarked, in the game of life, it seems that each person has another earmarked to check his progress or at least check his happiness. However talented you may be and how many ever people may appreciate and eulogise you, there will always be someone who is rather expert at finding faults even when none exist. Interestingly, the emergence of these people almost always coincides with our greatest successes. It almost appears that it is orchestrated by a subtle cosmic feedback system.

In the Mahabharata, we find that Karna was assigned to Arjuna by the cosmic feedback system. Shishupala was assigned to Krishna. Shakuni to Bhishma. Duryodhana to Bhima. Similarly, in the Ramayana, we find Manthara assigned to Rama and Vibhishana to Ravana.

The tendency of the ego is to consider these people as agents sent to check our growth. But if rightly perceived, they are sent to check our pride. With success comes self-love that hates improvement. At such times, feedback from such people actually acts as negative mindset filter and helps us deal with our complacency and lack of upward progress. They expertly trigger our insecurities by acting as competitors or freelance critics.

In the board game of life, amateur players look upon envious people as

snakes who pull us down. But the expert players look upon them as hidden ladders that actually can potentially push us up. Karna became a disguised ladder for Arjuna. From the day he appeared in Arjuna's life, Arjuna was on his toes and constantly upgrading and trying to improve his skill-sets and resources. On the other hand, Duryodhana was a disguised snake for Karna. From the day he appeared in Karna's life, he eulogised Karna as an expert who needed no improvement but whom the world needed to recognise. From then on, Karna lived to prove while Arjuna preferred to improve.

Manthara walked into Rama's life and systematically dismantled the tower of happiness that was being constructed in Ayodhya for the past twenty-five years. Rather than accepting the misfortune with a grudge, Rama chose to see the fourteen years of exile as fourteen years of higher education under the tutelage of master teachers in the forest. When an eagle is attacked by a bunch of crows, the eagle seldom wastes time dealing with petty negative mindsets. Instead it soars higher in thoughts and actions. Rama chose to see Manthara's intervention in his life as a much-needed opportunity to upgrade himself in order to perform better on returning.

When Ravana was at the peak of his career, his brother Kumbhakarna was too complacent to give any feedback. His sister Surpanakha was too self-absorbed to give any feedback. His youngest brother Vibhishana, a disguised ladder, was considered by him to be a snake. His feedback was considered to be his envy.

Contemplation helps see a streak of positivity even in the most negative environment and within the intentions of the most envious person. Instead of rejecting them as venomous, treat them as balancers. Instead of resisting, accept negativity after dipping it in positivity. Because the most envious of competitors is merely a helpless pawn in the cosmic feedback system to ensure your balanced self-growth!

We come across envious people (competitors, critics, etc.) who seem to be mainly concerned with making our lives miserable and wanting to halt our growth. But we can also see them as our well-wishers wanting to check our pride. Feedback from such people helps us deal with complacency that comes with success and inertia that comes from stagnation following success.



It is worthwhile to see the positive element even within the negative intentions of the most envious people. They are, in effect, balancers—balancing our growth and progress.



## ARE FESTIVALS A TIME FOR CELEBRATION OR CONTEMPLATION?



Different people perceive life's jubilations differently. An upcoming festival is a joy to most and a relief to many. Those who focus on new clothes, sweets, fun and frolic elements of the festival, perceive it as a joy. Those who focus on the freedom it gives you from the burden of work since a festival also means a holiday, look at it as a relief. What does a festival herald for you?

Most people choose to float on the ritual of the festival rather than delve into its essence. They celebrate festivals with mechanical enthusiasm rather than essence based awareness. The question shouldn't be 'Have we enjoyed the festival?', rather it should be 'Have we been upgraded by the festival?' Rather than thinking how we have celebrated the festival, we should be thinking have we contemplated during the festival.

Interestingly, almost every festival in the world is born to commemorate the sacrifice of some divine personality. Janmashtami is as much a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of Vasudeva and Devaki, as it is to celebrate the birth of Krishna. Diwali is as much a festival to celebrate the spirit of sacrifice of Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Sita as it is a festival of lights to celebrate their return to Ayodhya. Christmas is as much a festival to celebrate the spirit of sacrifice of Christ as much as it is a festival to celebrate his birth. Dussehra is a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of Vibhishana as much as it is to celebrate the victory of Rama over Ravana. Independence Day is a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of the martyrs as much as it is to celebrate freedom from domination.

The question now is, if someone's hard work and sacrifice is celebrated as a festival now, what should be our role in it? Do these dates on the calendar mark the freedom from burden of work or do they actually mark opportunities to achieve freedom from selfishness, to dilute it by our frivolousness or uphold its sanctity by genuine appreciation and active gratitude? Being not in sync with the mood of the festival is like going to a funeral ceremony not for contemplating on the good qualities of the departed, but for using it as a networking opportunity.

When a festival is celebrated, it brings smiles of joy but when a festival is contemplated, it brings tears of gratitude. Celebration with contemplation uplifts us, sobers us, inspires us, empowers us, and infuses us with the mood of respect and sacrifice.

When a festival is celebrated money is spent, but when a festival is contemplated blessings are earned!

Festivals should be a time for contemplation and upgradation. Because every festival celebrates not only a happy event like birth but also many sacrifices that went along with it. Janmashtami is as much a festival to celebrate the sacrifice of Vasudeva and Devaki, as it is to celebrate the birth of Krishna. So it is with Diwali and Christmas too.

Thus, festivals are not merely dates for holidays but an opportunity to be free from selfishness. If we understand the sacrifice that goes behind the festival, the mood changes from being frivolous to that of responsibility. When a festival is celebrated it brings smiles of joy but when a festival is contemplated, it brings tears of gratitude.



## THE SCIENCE OF HOW TO LET GO



Have you ever felt your past decisions affecting your present growth? Or like a pilot taxiing around the runway trying to gather the guts to take off? Or maybe like a powerful bull helplessly tied to an imaginary pole?

Yes? Then it's time to let go!

Humans often latch onto opinions, positions, and principles like Velcro. Just like a complete castle can be built by arranging bamboos horizontally and vertically, securely tied by ropes, individuals often enthrone themselves in illusory fortresses of their own prejudices that apparently appear secure.

Three characters of the Mahabharata share this mindset. Dhritarashtra sought security in his position. Bhishma sought the same security in his principles. Drona sought his security with attachment to his son. The three oldest people in the Kuru dynasty exemplified the era of holding on to their coveted mindset no matter how their decisions affected themselves or the people they were responsible for or the society.

Trees don't hold fruits and flowers beyond a certain point; they let go. Rivers don't hold water beyond a certain point; they let go to allow newer opinions to flow. Dark clouds don't store water beyond a certain capacity; they let go and in the process become white. Valuable books with termite infection have to be burnt to save a library. The Vedas recommend pouring of valuable butter into the fire of cooperative sacrifices.

Three young characters in the Mahabharata share the mindset to let go. From the day he was born, Yudhishtira learned to let go from Pandu, his father. He even let go of his reverence to the principle of speaking the truth when the need arose. Parikshit let go of his position; the moment destiny

whispered a curse into his ears. Janamejaya let go of his attachment to his opinion of performing a snake sacrifice to eliminate every snake in the world, when requested by the sages.

When to let go, why to let go, where to let go, and how to let go is a matter of prudence. But the need to let go is a matter of common sense.

If you are selfless, then it's easy to let go. But if you are selfish, then it's critically important to let go.

The first instalment that is deposited into your account for investing in the let-go fund is mental peace. Mental peace automatically restores one's ability to see clearly. Clear vision helps you spot newer opportunities that had otherwise blurred when seen with a disturbed mind.

When Yudhishtira let go of his principle of speaking the truth, he learnt that the real meaning of truth is to cause greater good and not just feel good. When Parikshit let go of his fleeting temporary position in the transient earthly realms, he saw a newer opportunity to receive a permanent placement in the eternal spiritual realms. When Janamejaya let go of his opinion to continue the snake sacrifice, he could clearly see that anger had blinded him.

The second instalment that is deposited into your account for investing in the let-go fund is freedom from fear. Fear is the outcome of resisting change that challenges what you guard the most. To the degree one is willing to let go, to that degree fear loses its power.

When finally Bhishma was forced to let go, he realised that he was holding on to the thorny tree of principles for the security it provided. But in actuality those principles bled him every day of his life. When Drona was tricked to let go, perhaps for the first time in his life he breathed freely as attachment to his son could give him pain no more. When Dhritarashtra was inspired by Vidura to let go, he realised that the throne of Hastinapura had not elevated him to a king but chained him like a dog.

When you let go at the right time, in the right way, and in the right mood, you blossom internally and are honoured externally.

When you don't let go at the right time, in the right way, and in the right mood, you shrivel into self-pity internally and defend yourself like a lone knight externally.

Our nature is to hold on steadfastly to our opinions, principles, or

position, no matter what. Unlike us, mother nature lets go magnanimously. Trees don't hold fruits and flowers beyond a certain point; neither do rivers hold water beyond a certain point. Letting go is characteristic of the selfless. The moment you let go you experience profound peace of mind and freedom from fear. To the degree one is willing to let go, to that degree fear loses its power.

Letting go at the right time and in the right mood allows you to blossom without hindrance. Either that or you shrivel in self-pity.



## THE ART OF NOURISHING RELATIONSHIPS: EXPRESSION NOT SUPPRESSION



Have you ever felt suffocated in a relationship? Do you find yourself calculating before speaking anything to someone you love? Is it best to keep quiet in some relationships to retain peace?

If even one of this is true, it means you are suffering from suppressing-the-expression syndrome. Far too many relationships are lost not due to wrong expression but due to suppression of right expression.

People choose to suppress their feelings due to four reasons. Primarily, it is a lack of courage germinating due to fear of being judged. Second, is not wanting to hurt the one you love so much. Third, is due to the notion that expression is a sign of weakness. And finally, a preference to retain a goody-two-shoes image about themselves, and hence shun from expressing their views clearly.

When a dam holds water, the water pounds against the wall, slowly developing a crack in the wall. Every pound in the present predicts a collapse of the wall in the near future.

Each act of suppression is like putting a scratch in the lens of your relationship. Very soon a mesh of crisscross lines will prevent any good to be visible in the relationship.

The one who suppresses emotions loses peace like the person with food particle stuck in his teeth.

Suppression leads to depression initially and explosion finally.

In the Mahabharata, after the war, Gandhari and Dhritarashtra are reduced

to stinking wells having suppressed the waters of emotions for considerably long, wanting to retain their goody image of themselves. Krishna helped them express themselves and liberated them of their pent-up anger.

He brought in front of Dhritarashtra an iron statue of Bhima. The blind king embraced the statue and pulverised it in his anger. Only when he fully expressed his emotions did he feel peaceful. Shielding Yudhishtira, Krishna deflected the wrath of Gandhari upon himself in the form of a curse that predicted the destruction of his dynasty. Once both had expressed their emotions, in their own violent ways, they could live harmoniously with the Pandavas and love could flow unchoked.

The flip side of frankness of expression is in its bluntness. If suppression is suicide, then wrong expression is like cold-blooded murder. If suppression is like drinking poison, then wrong expression is like throwing acid. By suppressing you hurt yourself, but by wrong expression you hurt the relationship.

On returning from Indraprastha, Duryodhana came back with two frustrations. Rather than suppressing his emotions, he expressed them. Mesmerised by the riches of Yudhishtira, he openly expressed his inability to digest the success of the Pandavas and cheat them of their wealth in a match of dice. And again, he was seething in anger being laughed at by Draupadi. This he expressed by attempting to strip her and laughing at her helpless state. Duryodhana was such that he never suppressed any feeling; he always expressed it wrongly!

While suppression may question your self-image, wrong expression questions your intention.

Between hurtfully suppressing and wrongfully expressing lies the real solution. The secret lies in analysing the behavioural patterns of small children. What they feel, they innocently express immediately. Their innocence makes their every expression right. Before expressing, one needs to contemplate on this crucial question. Is your expression going to serve the relationship or sever the relationship?

Like Duryodhana, Bhima too believed in expressing himself frankly. When Yudhishtira took the decision of gambling his wife away, Bhima went wild hollering that he would burn the hands of Yudhishtira who was foolishly addicted to rolling the dice. Much later during the battle, when Yudhishtira was injured and insulted by Karna, he expected Arjuna to seek revenge by killing Karna that very day. When Arjuna returned without accomplishing that,



he insulted Arjuna by saying that his Gandiva bow was just a showpiece and he was a useless warrior. In both the above examples, though Yudhishtira and Bhima expressed themselves frankly, these are considered as right expressions. Not because there was no hurt involved in them, but because after they spoke harshly, they also begged forgiveness profusely. In keeping their intentions right, they kept their relationship right.

Note that even a right expression may cause hurt in the relationship temporarily and slightly. But it preserves the relationship in the long run. Suppression may hurt the relationship itself in the long run.

Suppression is like a time bomb and right expression is like a Diwali cracker. In suppression, you may not hear a blast immediately, but when it happens there will be no ear left to hear. In right expression, you may immediately hear a loud blast, but it's harmless, only emitting smoke.

Between suppressing unnecessarily and expressing bluntly is a secret path that has to be discovered by examining one's intentions!

Many times, we suppress from expressing our feelings even with the people we love. Fear of being judged could be the primary reason behind it. However, far too many relationships are lost not due to wrong expression but due to suppression of the right expression. The flip side of expression is explosion. By suppressing, you hurt yourself, but by wrong expression, you hurt the relationship. While suppression may question your self-image, wrong expression questions your intention.

The solution lies in contemplating on a crucial question before expressing yourself, the question being—is your expression going to serve the relationship or sever the relationship?

It's possible that even a right expression may cause hurt in the relationship temporarily. But it preserves the relationship in the long run. Suppression may hurt the relationship itself in the long run. Secret is to examine your intentions carefully before you choose to suppress or express.



## \*CONDITIONS APPLY—IN LOVE



In an attempt to make relationships more satisfying, humans tend to put conditions. In business, conditions help to protect self-interest of the risk taking party. But when put in relationships, conditions uncomfortably strangle the growth of the bond.

In fact, conditions and satisfaction are inversely proportional to each other. The more conditions you put in a relationship, less satisfying it tends to be.

Relationships are like a flowing river; conditions are like restricting walls. When held forcibly, water stagnates. Relationships when held with conditions, deteriorate. Conditions in a relationship are like trying to hold down a dragon using many chains. As soon as the dragon is chained, it begins to struggle to break free.

Most look at relationships as happiness enhancers. And to ensure that their happiness quota is met, they strategically place conditions. The story of the Mahabharata begins with such conditional love. King Shantanu fell in love with Ganga who put a condition that he will never question her actions no matter what. Desperately addicted to Ganga's beauty, he agreed to her clause. Only when she began throwing every child born into the river, did Shantanu begin to feel the frustration of that condition. He finally broke the chains by questioning her inhuman acts. Her attachment to her conditions and his need for freedom to express ended that relationship.

Next, King Shantanu fell in love with Satyawati who came with her own set of conditions. She would marry him only if he agreed to make her son the next king. Not wanting to repeat history, the king retreated from entering into the bond. But his son through Ganga intervened and took an oath to fulfil the

conditions of Satyavati to ensure happiness for his father. The condition did give happiness to Satyavati initially, but eventually it led to immense dissatisfaction. That very condition became the cause of her helplessness later in life.

When one is conditioned to happiness, one tries to ensure happiness enhancement by putting conditions. When one is conditioned to satisfaction, one lets relationships flow freely ensuring satisfaction enhancement.

When a bone is broken, a cast holds it in place. Props always indicate a weak limb. When relationships need to be held in place with the props of conditions, it only indicates its weakness. In fact, adding conditions to relationships is like an amateur's experimentation with seasonings in cooking. What is supposed to add taste may actually end up adding bitterness to the relationship!

However, conditions are not always bad. When seen with the lens of self-interest they tend to take an ugly shape. But when seen with the lens of cooperation they may actually enhance bonding.

In the game of love, the question is always, 'Do *I* set the rules or do *we* set the rules?'

In the Mahabharata, we find Draupadi getting married to the five Pandavas. On their wedding day, Narada advised them to mutually set appropriate conditions to make this odd marriage work. Under his guidance, the six of them worked out strict principles that each of them would meticulously follow to ensure harmony in the relationship. Because they had mutually decided this, they strived to adhere to it harmoniously, and managed to make the tricky relationship work wonderfully.

Even a natural process like breathing is governed by certain conditions to ensure harmony. Both the nostrils don't work simultaneously. When conditions are used to ensure harmony in a relationship, those conditions are in sync with nature's laws. When conditions are used to enhance one-sided satisfaction, those conditions are coded by selfishness.

In an attempt to protect their valuables, people tend to use very difficult to open locks. When you want to open it desperately, it just doesn't open. Some locks are so complicated that your valuables remain safely locked forever. Conditions in relationships are like locks. In an attempt to protect a relationship, one may lock it with conditions. If the condition is complicated with self-interest, it may lock the relationship forever. If the condition is in the spirit of cooperation, it may protect the relationship forever.

We will do well to remember that conditions are meant to protect love and not seal love.

The more conditions we put in a relationship, less satisfying it is. We put conditions to ensure happiness, alas, they work like chains trying to hold down a dragon. An impossible task. In fact, a relationship that requires conditions is weak to begin with.

Conditions can be constructive too, if they enhance cooperation. Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandavas is an ideal example of that. The marriage worked because of appropriate conditions of mutual respect and cooperation.

What ultimately decides the future of the relationship is whether the conditions applied have been done so in self-interest or in the spirit of collaboration.



## A COMPLAINT AGAINST COMPLAINING



Many perceive life to be an oil-seed crushing machine into which one is thrown involuntarily. Having no choice to escape from the grind, one has to sweat it out. The only question is, do you look at yourself as a happy oil-seed undergoing a positive transformation? Or do you look at yourself as a petrified oil-seed who is constantly jumping within the grinder to avoid being crushed?

When life looks down at us, we need to look up at someone. Someone who has gone through worse situations. When there is external emotional heat, the only option is to tolerate. When there is internal emotional heat, one looks for inspiration to tolerate. When there is external heat, one looks for a cooler place. When there is internal heat, one looks for cooling people. While ordinary people complain of life's harshness, extraordinary people are busy dealing with them as lifetime opportunities. While ordinary people break stones in frustration, extraordinary people carve out masterpieces.

In the Mahabharata, Yudhishtira faced extreme dejection and frustration when he was exiled, having lost everything he possessed. The sages came to his rescue by narrating the story of a king named Nala who had been cheated of everything he possessed in a gambling match by his own brother. Not only did he lose all his resources but also his handsome persona and he eventually got separated from his wife. Nala then struggled to regain his lost kingdom and reunite with his wife. When Yudhishtira heard about the greatness of Nala's character, he gained confidence that his problem was not unique or unsolvable. Rather than complain, he realised that if Nala could deal with a difficulty that was much greater in magnitude, he definitely could do it, that too gratefully.

Mulling over others' difficulties gives us a positive dimension to suffering.

Positive emotions uplift while negative emotions drain. When we analyse the greatness of others, clarity dawns on our own weaknesses.

What situation we land in may not be in our hands, but whom we take inspiration from in that situation is in our hands. A mind that runs towards a complaining nature is a mind that runs away from responsible nature. Rather than committing suicide in the waters of frustration, one should try to float on the boat of positive inspiration.

An ostrich has undeveloped wings, but it focuses on its long legs to run making itself the fastest runner. A cuckoo is ugly to look at, but it focuses on its voice, making itself the most heard bird. A bat is blind, but it focuses on its ears making itself an accident-free species.

The mind has a tendency to complain about anything that is labelled bad. The trick is to help the mind discover a rare gem of good thought in life's garbage dump of negativity.

In the Ramayana, when Rama was banished by his father, instead of complaining about his destiny, he saw it as an opportunity to teach the citizens of Ayodhya what it means to be an ideal follower. Before becoming a good leader, he used a calamity to teach what is the standard expected of a good follower. When Kaushalya was neglected by her husband, rather than complain, she chose to use her energy positively by building a gurukul where 10,000 students were educated.

Complaining is like scratching your self-esteem with nails of negation. When a lion is attacked, it leaves a permanent emblem of its nails on the enemy's body. Why don't we learn from the lion and rather than scratch one's own self-esteem, leave a mark for the world to get inspired from?

Every time one chooses to complain, one is voluntarily arresting his growth in the jail of self-pity. Every time one resists the desire to complain by meditating on the actions of great sources of inspiration, one is enriching one's own level of self-awareness.

When life tosses you on waves of frustration, learn to ride on them using the surfboard of inspiration!

While ordinary people complain of life's harshness, extraordinary people are busy dealing with them as lifetime opportunities. What also inspires is the knowledge that others are coping successfully with far

greater difficulties. When we analyse the greatness of others, we gain insights about our own weaknesses.

So it's really our choice whom to turn for inspiration in hard times although being in that situation is not our choice. A mind that wants to complain never wants to take responsibility. Every time one chooses to complain, one is voluntarily arresting his growth by getting confined to self-pity. If the mind can discover precious good even in the middle of negativity, it can help build positive energy that can leave a mark on the world.



## DIWALI MEDITATIONS



Let the festival of Diwali usher these six sparklers into your life:

**Determination** – The fourteen years of struggle Rama underwent reveals His determination to install the right value systems in the hearts of Ayodhya's citizens. *Ramarajya* was built on a foundation of won't power (resisting the wrong) in addition to just will power (embracing the right).

**Illuminate** – The lights in every nook and corner of Ayodhya indicated a promise by the citizens that now onward decisions in the city would not be taken during emotional darkness but in the light of knowledge and clarity.

**Winning tip** – By his actions, Bharata showed that winning hearts is more important than winning thrones. The game of life is more important than the game of throne. Relationships have to be prioritised over resource-ships.

**Accommodate** – When Rama was returning to Ayodhya, all the he-monkeys wanted to join Him along with the she-monkeys. Sensing Rama's desire, the *Pushpak Vimana* expanded to accommodate so many. So far, Ravana had used it only for solo pleasure rides. The ability to accommodate all kinds of people in our lives comes from the desire to accommodate.

**Let go** – Rama did not tolerate any insult to Keikeyi and made sure that no one referred to the past even subtly and sarcastically. He decided to let go off the past. In fact, He gave her more attention and love than ever before. Letting go of others' lapses is the best way to constantly remind them of it.

**Indebtedness** – During the coronation ceremony, Sita was crying in remembrance of Jatayu's sacrifice. Be grateful while celebrating, knowing that your success is due to the sacrifices of many.

Diwali essentially means being determined to illuminate our lives by



understanding that you win by accommodating others and by letting go of their lapses while being indebted to the contributions of many.

Diwali sparklers that add shine to your life: Determination that gives the right direction to your life; illuminating yourself with knowledge; prioritising relationships over resources; accommodating people in your life; simply letting go of others' lapses; and remembering sacrifices others have done for you with gratitude.



## ART OF LEADING LEADERS



Creating an empire is easy, creating a succession is difficult. Leading is easy, creating a legacy is difficult. Holding power is easy, empowering is difficult.

When an organisation grows exponentially without planning for leadership succession, there ends up being three types of helpless leaders in it. The first is a Bhishma-type of leader, who has no idea how to deal with a problem he has himself created. The second is a Dhritarashtra-type of leader, who turns a blind eye to the problem and postpones his decisions. The third is a Vidura-type of leader, who can clearly see the problem, who has clear solutions, but lacks empowerment to implement his plan.

When leaders are not ready to be flexible with their style of managing in accordance with the people and situations they are dealing with, they fail miserably in leading and in creating a leadership succession. Because they are personally powerful and intuitive, they somehow pull the show while they are around. The challenge comes when it's time for them to step down. Which cat to bell!

When leaders themselves fail to create a stable succession of fresh leads, new talent has to be brought in from outside the organisation to help salvage the situation. When outside talent comes in with an egoistic agenda in the form of Shakuni, it tends to disrupt the value systems of the original organisation and establish borrowed principles that cloud its growth. When outside talent comes in with holistic growth-driven agenda in the form of Krishna, it tends to first carefully study the present system and develop a leadership-training programme that is harmonious with the existing visionary principles but judiciously tweaking those that have failed so far.

In Krishna's style of leadership hunt, the first step is to find the potential leader very early and observe them closely. Just like it takes tons of ore to produce a grain of gold, leadership material emerges only after followership material is sorted out in tons. When Pandavas were in their early teens, Krishna wrote a letter to Dhritarashtra to take good care of them else he would have to take care of him just like he took care of his uncle Kamsa recently.

The second step is to observe how these potential leaders deal with situations that are challengingly complicated. Here, it's not just important to observe how they deal with it, but also how luck favours them. Krishna knew that challenges drive latent leaders to grow rapidly. After observing the behaviour, psychology, intelligence, and luck factor of the Pandavas during the Bhima poisoning episode, the war with Drupada incident, the burning of lac palace incidence, and the Draupadi swayamvara episode, Krishna froze his talent search.

The third step is to take personal interest in guiding and developing young leaders. Every emerging leader requires feedback that should be specific, constructive, and real time.

Krishna inspired his apprentice to not focus on loss, but to focus on making what they have as superior as possible. He realised that high potential leaders grow in spurts and they must be given that kind of scope for growth. He inspired them to create a heavenly model-town Indraprastha from a barren ghastly Khandavaprastha.

The Shakuni type of leadership training was to encourage fierce competition and flexibly adopting any means to achieve the desired growth-goal. He advocated finding flaws in the competitors and using those flaws as hooks to pull them down. In the process of focusing on the bad in others self-growth was neglected. So much was the focus on achievement that every relationship small or big was lost into the fire of gain. While embracing comforts values were confronted. The combined result was that the Kauravas did not emerge victorious in the Drupada war, Draupadi swayamvara, Gandharva war, Virat war, and the final war.

In essence, there are two types of leadership training programmes, the Kangaroo-type and the Bird-type. In the Kangaroo-type leadership programme, the potential leader is encouraged to make sure no one enters his cosy pouch and he stays put not exiting it at any cost. In the Bird-type leadership programme, the potential leader is pushed off the nest to learn to fly in unknown territories after being taught that discomfort gives strength to the

wings of leadership.

Leadership succession determines the future of an organisation. Without planning succession, an organisation is left with leaders like Bhishma who had no idea how to deal with a problem he himself created; or Dhritarashtra who turned a blind eye to the problem and postponed his decisions; or Vidura who could clearly see the problem, had clear solutions, but lacked empowerment to implement his plan.

When there are no leaders in-house, leaders are imported and end up disrupting the value system of the original organisation and establish borrowed principles that cloud its growth.

The first step in leadership training is to find and hone potential leaders at the earliest. Then, shortlist them based on their ability to deal with sticky situations and finally, take personal interest in guiding and developing young leaders, to focus their efforts on upgrading what they have.

Leadership training model can resemble Kangaroo-type, that gives protection in safe havens, or Bird-type, which gives strength to find wings.



## 7 SECRETS OF INNOVATION



In a world that's changing by the nano-second, *innovate or disintegrate* are the only two options for organisations and individuals at all levels.

Unfortunately innovative ideas don't simply flow by sitting tight on thinking chairs installed to inspire ideation. How does one shift his mindset from limitations of uni-dimensional thinking to the liberty of mental flexibility?

Here are seven secret tips from the life of the flexible dancing god Krishna that teach us how to be innovative and mentally flexible in every aspect of life, be it in business ventures or relationships.

1. **Information** – The first step towards innovation is information. More important than having loads of information is learning from the hen the art of pecking the right piece. Krishna had the information that a king named Muchukunda was sleeping in a cave with a boon that anyone who disturbed his slumber would be burnt to ashes. When he had to kill His enemy named Kalayavana, He simply recalled this information and tactfully caused the unaware foe to wake the sleeping king; thus exterminating His enemy in an innovative way. The clue to solve every problem may be sleeping somewhere. When upgrading one's level of information is a continuous affair, innovation becomes a regular habit.
2. **Contemplation** – Just like a cow chews on grass in a meditative trance, one should chew on a concept from as many angles as possible. To convince Arjuna to fight the war, Krishna spoke the Gita from so many different angles—whether it was *karma kanda*, *karma yoga*, *jnana yoga*, or *bhakti yoga*—Krishna convinced Arjuna that he should do his duty of fighting. Seven hundred verses to prove just one point!

3. **Questioning** – Curiosity is a certified way to remain open to fresh ideas. In the midst of action, one tends to forget the very purpose of the action. Thought provoking questions challenge the intelligence to think about the rationale behind actions. While the whole world glorified Bhishma's vow of lifelong celibacy, Krishna was the only person asking him uncomfortable questions about the purpose of his vow. He had taken a vow to ensure prosperity of Hastinapura and now that very vow had become the cause of disharmony and instability. Krishna was again the only one who questioned the purpose when the village of Vrindavan mechanically performed Indra puja every year. From that questioning began the famous Govardhan puja celebrations.
4. **Riskification** – The first lap to the road of either success or failure begins with a risky step. Most people who don't want to embrace risk actually don't want any tampering on their personal reputation; just like an owl that takes minimal risks by coming out only in the cover of the night and camouflaging itself with the colour of its environment, thus ensuring its safety in the day. Those who disbelieve in the process of riskification lead a safe life but risk an unfulfilled life. In taking the radical decision to build the city of Dwaraka in the middle of the ocean, Krishna took a major risk but eventually created a model city that became the talk of the world. Just like a peacock takes maximum risk by coming out in the broad daylight, in brilliantly attractive plumage of colours, risk takers, by embracing risk, also embrace self-satisfaction due to complete self-expression.
5. **Connection** – Not all solutions lie with oneself. Connection is about borrowing brilliance. Humans are willing to share their best when they experience the power of trust in the relationship. When people are made to feel valued, understood and respected, not only by words but also by body language, trust builds up slowly. Krishna helped grow every person connected with Him, by offering hope and recognising their capacity to achieve greatness. Thus they were eager to help him grow in turn. He expected the best from everyone and people then automatically responded to His body language. Perhaps this is best seen when He appointed His very young but brilliant cousin Uddhava as His personal advisor. This gesture of confidence inspired Uddhava to churn out the best of ideas for the growth of Dwaraka.
6. **Collaboration** – Perhaps the greatest inspiration for innovation is to

understand that you are incomplete. Incompleteness calls for collaboration and collaboration causes cross-pollination of ideas and potencies. Accommodating and encouraging diversity is the hallmark of a great innovator. Innovation happens when one recognises that differences are actually strengths. To eliminate Jarasandha, five diverse personalities worked together separately. Uddhava's intelligence inspired Krishna to collaborate with the Pandavas. Arjuna's enterprising skill and Bhima's immense strength offered the hope to execute the project. But it was impossible without Krishna's stock of information. Krishna advised Bhima to tear Jarasandha's body into half and throw the two halves in opposite directions, because a demoness named Jara created Jarasandha by joining the two halves together mystically.

7. **Celebration** – Innovation is not about success or failure. It's about action. Innovation is about celebrating action. When one learns to accept success and failure equally, innovation is imminent. Within every failure is hidden the seed of success.

When Kalayavana attacked Mathura, Krishna ran away. Initially, it came across as His failure. But because He focused on action and not result of action, He eventually succeeded. When Krishna went as a peace messenger to Hastinapura, it seemed He failed. But actually that failure helped establish a long realm of truth.

Out-of-the-box thinking is easy when you have out of the box dealings in all aspects of life. Every problem in life has to be dealt with differently. Krishna kept freshness in every relationship and dealt with each one uniquely. He terminated every demon that came into Vrindavan according to their weak points. Possibly the most powerful factors that made Krishna so innovative were: living in a natural environment of freshness, a totally positive humorous mindset, and flexibility towards change.

Krishna's most admired signature of innovation is in His style of placing the peacock feather on His crown! No wonder, He is called the god of innovation!

How to innovate rather than disintegrate? When surrounded by

information, pick the right one that is useful in problem solving. Meditate on ideas from all angles, like a cow chews grass. Stimulate your intellect with questions: why you're doing what you're doing, even though you are uncomfortable. Take risks; give self-expression an opportunity for fulfilment. Connect with people. Expect the best from others and they will do their best to help you grow. Accommodate and encourage others' strengths by collaboration. Differences are actually strength. Act, no matter what. Success or failure, both are temporary. Focus on the act, not the result.

A natural environment, a positive attitude, and flexibility in change, these are basics of innovation. The trick to innovation is to treat every problem, every person differently.





## HOW TO DEAL WITH PROVOCATIONS?



Every human has a hot button that is carefully concealed from the world. However careful one may be, every once in a while someone does manage to press the hot button. How does one react when that happens? And instead of pressing the button, what happens when someone hammers it?

When provoked, most humans react either like a hagfish by throwing slimy abusive words or like an electric eel by stinging with physical abuse. Or like an exploding ant by destroying itself by self-abuse.

In the Bhagavata Puran, there is a story of king named Muchukunda who was so great that he was invited by the demigods to lead wars on their behalf. Later he was blessed with a boon of unlimited sleep to rest his tired limbs. While he was asleep, Krishna tricked a demon named Kalayavana to come into the cave and provoke him by kicking him hard. As soon as he was kicked, Muchukunda woke up and burnt the demon to ashes instantly by his yogic powers. Once the anger subsided, guilt of over-reacting took over. Through this episode, Krishna teaches Muchukunda that the ability to handle provocation is the real greatness-tester. One's façade of greatness falls at the first test of provocation.

Generally, people poke and provoke one another for four reasons:

1. To hide their own inferiority.
2. To become happy knowing that just like themselves, others are also immature in dealing with negativity.
3. To escalate their levels of confidence by winning against those who are weaker.

4. To transfer guilt of their own wrongdoing by making another guilty of succumbing to a provocation.

During a health test, one expects a needle prick and responds with tolerance while an unexpected prick of a thorn causes irritation. Similarly, when one accepts provocations as a test of mental strength, the response is patience rather than annoyance.

When Hanuman was captured in Lanka, Ravana's ministers made fun of him and provoked him. Concluding that the tail represents the pride of a monkey, they lit his tail on fire. By taking shelter of prayers and summoning his inner strength, Hanuman did not allow the fire to affect his persona. Every human also has a tail that represents his pride. The moment that tail is set on fire, we tend to overreact and seethe in anger or become vulnerable and try to defend our self. The provocation per se doesn't create as much disturbance as one's inability to handle it coolly like Hanuman.

As soon as one senses a provocation approaching, one should begin an internal dialogue urging oneself not to grab the bait being thrown. Every time we succumb to reacting to a provocation, we become like a vulnerable child helplessly controlled by those weak moments. A feather can be blown away in any direction by the slightest breeze. A football can be kicked away in any direction by the lightest kick. But a rock stays intact no matter how much one blows on it and one kicks it. The game of provocation can be won only by de-escalating it. Don't allow the mind to escalate an ordinary provocation to make you from a respectable hero to a despicable joker.

In the Bhagavata, Bhrigu Muni is out to find who the greatest person in the universe is. He does that by provoking different personalities in different ways and trying to analyse their reactions. After much research, he approaches Lord Vishnu and tries to provoke Him by physically kicking Him on His chest in His own abode. He is shocked when he sees Vishnu totally unaffected and asking him calmly if his feet hurt after kicking His hard chest. Bhrigu concludes that one who understands that the provoker is the one who is weak with insecurity and needs to be compassionately dealt with, he is the one who can never be provoked due to his greatness of vision.

When provoked, don't react like a hagfish abusing verbally, don't react like an electric eel abusing physically, don't react like an exploding ant abusing oneself. Rather become the rare human that responds like a tortoise by protecting oneself under the impenetrable shell of inner strength, internal self-

talk, and a compassionate vision.

Every time one resists succumbing to provocations, it's another milestone covered on the journey of personal evolution.

The ability to handle provocation is the real test of greatness. Reaction to provocation is normally abuse, either towards others or self. When one accepts provocations as a test of mental strength, the response is patience rather than annoyance.

Handle a provocation by de-escalating. Don't let an ordinary provocation get the better of you. It's easy if you understand that the provoker is weak with insecurity and needs your compassion not passion.

Like a tortoise, protect yourself under the impenetrable shell of inner strength, internal self-talk, and a compassionate vision.

Resisting succumbing to provocations implies personal evolution.



## INVISIBLE LEADERSHIP



Many invisible things in this world including oxygen are life sustaining. So is invisible leadership, which is about being a people-centred leader rather than a position-centred leader. Such leaders are experts in hiding themselves while shoving their followers into the limelight of success.

Nothing defines leadership better than vanilla flavour in a cake. Invisible, yet all pervading!

Perhaps this is best personified by Jambavan in the epic the Ramayana. When the monkey army was stuck at the shores of the Indian Ocean with an impossible mission of jumping across the ocean to find Sita, there was immense despair. That is when Jambavan gathered his leadership skills and inspired Hanuman by reminding him of his latent powers and skills. That was a defining moment in Hanuman's life. Such defining moments show us who we really are, they show others who we really are, and they determine who we will become in the future.

Then on, Jambavan remained invisible in the background of the Ramayana and Hanuman went on to become the celebrated hero of the epic. Invisible leadership is about achieving the satisfaction of creating achievers.

Interestingly, the same Hanuman, as he grew older, assumed the role of an invisible leader in the Mahabharata war. While remaining in the background, sitting invisibly on the flag of Arjuna, he inspired Bhima to become the war hero of the Mahabharata.

The highest goal of leadership is to develop leaders and not just gain followers. Just like every fruit has a seed of continuity in it, every leader has to have a master plan of continuing his legacy of leadership. In not allowing

others to grow, a leader unwittingly locks his own growth. Locked leadership is about prioritising one's position. Unlocked leadership is about prioritising people. Growth-oriented leaders are like farmers encouraging their crop to grow; happy to see people grow.

An invisible leader unlocks the growth of his people by (a) facilitating behavioural change, (b) helping them rise to become better human beings, not just better workforce, and (c) giving them the taste of success. Before Jambavan came into Hanuman's life, no one could control Hanuman's power and channelise his unlimited energy in the right direction. So, the sages, out of frustration, ended up cursing him to forget his powers. With Jambavan's inspiration, Hanuman changed from a minister to a hero, he rose to the occasion on the eve of the greatest need and succeeded in the mission impossible.

When a leader succeeds, he impresses the whole world. But when a leader inspires, he impacts the follower's world. For the world, Hanuman is the impressive hero. But for Hanuman, Jambavan is the impacting hero.

An invisible leader acts like a constantly expanding umbrella. The umbrella not only expands in its dimension to accommodate more people but also goes higher to create more room on top. After a certain point, the impact of a leader is not judged by how productive he personally is but by how effectively he develops a new army of super-productive leaders. By not upgrading his role, a leader sits tightly on the lid of the growth of the follower.

An invisible leader does not get locked into the cocoon of position, but breaks free and transforms into a butterfly that inspires growth and creativity.

Leadership is all about being a people-centred leader rather than a position-centred leader. This implies being invisible while putting the spotlight on the team. Invisible leadership is about achieving the satisfaction of creating achievers.

The highest goal of leadership is to develop leaders and not just increase followers. Not allowing others to grow is effectively locking your own growth. Impact of a leader is not judged by how productive he personally is but by how effectively he develops a team of super-efficient leaders.



## PERSONALITY TRAITS TO SYNERGISE



Wish we had a magic wand to make all relationships work real-time! Here is one such thought that might just act as one. It is known as positive chameleonism! For those who thought that chameleons could only be used as negative examples, here is a fresh way of looking at them.

Relationships are all about perspectives. Your perspective of looking at people and your perspective of looking at yourself, carves your ability to forge meaningful relations. Positive chameleonism is about learning to adopt oneself according to the colour of the relationship and situation.

The three queens of Dasaratha in the Ramayana together teach us what is positive chameleonism. The three personalities individually are incomplete ways of dealing with oneself and the world. But when seen together, they holistically teach us how to keep relationships dynamic and more than that, they teach us how to be stable in spite of living with insensitive people.

The first queen Kaushalya is a thought-oriented person. She has learnt to adapt to every situation and relationship by philosophising. The second queen Sumitra is an emotion-oriented person. She has learnt to look at emotional fulfilment as the essence of all relationships. And the third queen Keikeyi is an action-oriented person. She has learnt to observe minutely people's actions and conclude about their intentions.

Aware that her husband doesn't care for her, Kaushalya decided to focus on serving society by running *gurukuls*. Before leaving Ayodhya, Rama did not seek permission from Sumitra. But that never bothered her a bit since she had experienced the love and respect Rama had for her all life through. That emotional fulfilment helped her remain unaffected by the apparent lack of

action on Rama's part in this situation; neither did it impact her relationship with him. Whereas Manthara pointed out to Keikeyi that the action of Dasaratha deciding to coronate Rama in haste without even inviting Bharata and her father was suspicious. This omission in his action made Keikeyi doubt Dasaratha's very intention.

For a Keikeyi-type person, what people do is important. People's behaviour governs her behaviour towards them. For a Sumitra-type person, what people mean to do or say is important. Behaviour doesn't affect her, but intentions do. For a Kaushalya-type person, what she thinks is important. Neither people's behaviour nor their intentions influence her; she chooses to focus on that which gives her satisfaction.

A road roller crushes everything in its way. Similarly, Keikeyi-type of people tend to be intolerant towards others' actions that are inconsistent with their needs.

An ant changes its direction when anything comes its way. So do Sumitra-type of people, who tend to adjust their lives to accommodate the inconsistency of others with a mature understanding that situations in life force people to behave in odd ways.

An eagle flies to a higher dimension when anything comes its way. That's why Kaushalya-type of people focus on those aspects of life that uplift them rather than trying to dirty their hands and their consciousness with conflicts.

Like Keikeyi, do we react seeing wrong behaviour and judge a person? Do we have auto-mode standards of what good behaviour is and don't like to bargain with our expectations? When the mind is clouded with self-focus, there is a tendency to wrongly conclude others' intentions. When we impulsively judge others' behaviour, and compound that with a razor-sharp tongue, we snap relations instantly and permanently. The ego is a permanent beggar, begging cheap coins of attention-oriented action. When someone's action ignores the plea for attention, one tends to lash out in frustration.

Like Sumitra, we have to learn that everything is not black or white, but often shades of grey. Where there is love, there is implicit trust. Even if given every reason to doubt, Sumitra-like people discipline their intelligence not to doubt the intention. They know very well that the day intention is doubted, that day marks the official termination of the relationship.

Kaushalya teaches us to deal with surprises in life. Not everything goes according to our plan, including relationships. Even if we do everything right, there will always be some people who do not reciprocate appropriately. When

the doer in us doesn't get results as expected, the knower in us has to take over. When what we do doesn't work, we have to train our intelligence to accept the realities gratefully.

Keikeyi-type people prefer to focus on project growth. Sumitra-type people prefer to focus on relationship growth. Kaushalya-type people prefer to focus on self-growth.

For success in business transactions, Keikeyi-type personality has to be in action. For success in relationships, Sumitra-type personality is recommended. For handling challenges in both, Kaushalya-type personality is recommended. Unforeseen situations can impede your actions. Insensitive people may affect your relationships. But no one can affect your mindset.

It is not that one of these types of personalities is right and the others are wrong. Each of these personalities has its advantages. The idea is not to be just one of these, but like a positive chameleon, adopt one of these shades according to the need of the hour. That's positive chameleon-ism in action.

Bad behaviour need not inspire you to compete with worse behaviour. When you see bad behaviour, focus on the good intention. When you see bad intention, focus on upgrading your life's priorities.

Perspectives shape relationships. Your perspective of yourself and of others underlines your ability to form relationships.

Perspectives change depending on whether you are thought-oriented, emotion-oriented or action-oriented. For an action-oriented person, what people do is important; being intolerant towards others' actions that are inconsistent with their needs. For an emotion-oriented person, intentions are important; maturely adjusting their lives to accommodate the inconsistency of others. For thought-oriented person, self-satisfaction is important; uplifting themselves rather than struggling with conflicts.

Neither is right or wrong. Each has its advantages, if adapted as per needs.





## A STORY ABOUT COMMUNICATION



Before you communicate, you must connect. Just like when two electronic gadgets are paired, information exchange becomes very quick. Similarly, when two people connect on a personal level, communication becomes effective.

The surest way of connecting to another's heart is through the medium of stories. Storytelling is the art of sowing ideas in the mental terrain of a listener. To convince someone about an idea, one has to connect and to connect one has to communicate straight to the heart of the person. Especially in an era where attention span is the rarest commodity, simple stories do wonders while big jargons fail.

King Janamejaya was just unwilling to hear any wisdom words from sage Jaimini due to lack of time and interest. Jaimini managed to convince him to allow him to communicate his thoughts for a few seconds. Seeing no harm in it, the king permitted. Jaimini gave a teaser of the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. This teaser made Janamejaya so inquisitive that he wanted to know every detail of the story. Jaimini spoke for days together after that and the king sat lapping up every word of the story. When asked for his experience in the end, he said that he felt so much connected with sage Jaimini that he was willing to hear from him for the rest of his life.

People don't want to know facts. There is an overdose of facts in today's technology-driven world. They need inspiration that enables them to develop faith. Faith is more based on feeling than on facts. Stories help one connect to another at the deepest human level and sustain their faith.

In the Mahabharata, Kanika convinced Duryodhana to have faith on the principles of Kanika *neeti* by narrating a story. Through the story of a fox that

tricked its four friends, the tiger, rat, wolf, and mongoose, to part with their share of the hunt by its cunningness, Kanika planted in the mind of Duryodhana the concept of somehow achieving one's selfish goals through diplomacy and manipulations. This story becomes the inspiration for the infamous gambling match.

A simple story can reveal who you are, why you are here, and what is your vision for life. If a story can change your vision of life, it can also give birth to hope. In fact, stories can help you say something without actually saying it. Truth sometimes is unpalatable, especially for those with wrong attitudes. When naked truth looks ugly, the wise know how to cloth it within a story.

In the Mahabharata, King Shalya, who becomes the chariot driver of Karna in his last fight, tells a hilarious story right in the midst of the war. The story is about a boastful crow that often shows off its skills in flying in so many different ways. Once it challenges a swan in flying across the ocean. The swan glides smoothly without speaking a word whereas the crow boasts of its abilities constantly while showing various summersaults. At a certain point the crow tires and is almost about to die, only to be rescued by the swan. Through this story, Shalya subtly hints to the bragging Karna that he was like that crow and Arjuna was like that swan. He only spoke big things and Arjuna believed in doing big things.

Just like a honey-coated medicine is better appreciated, valuable wisdom is better appreciated when stuffed gently within a touching story. Wisdom is much easier to recall when packaged in the right way.

In the Ramayana, Hanuman approaches Sita at the end of the war and requests her for permission to torture-kill all the demonesses who had been harassing her for so many months. Instead of answering him, she tells him a story of a man who had been chased by a tiger and climbs up a tree to save himself. On the tree is a fierce-looking bear that sends shudders down his spine. The bear however offers him protection. When the bear is sleeping, the tiger urges the man to throw the bear down and the man complies. Deftly catching hold of a branch, the bear manages to save himself from the tiger. The tiger now coaxes the bear to shove the ungrateful man down. The bear claimed that just because the man had become ungrateful doesn't mean he should give up his magnanimity. With this small story Hanuman could get a glimpse of Sita's wisdom and greatness even in the horizon of such a painful experience.

Using the handle of stories, gently open the window of people's minds and transfer the wisdom of your heart.

Communication happens with connection. Connection happens with stories. We are drowning in facts, given today's technological environment. Unlike facts, stories have the power to go straight to the heart.

Stories reveal a lot. It can change your vision of life and give birth to hope. When naked truth looks ugly, the wise know how to cloth it within a story. Like a honey-coated medicine, valuable wisdom is better appreciated when stuffed gently within a touching story. Wisdom is much easier to recall when packaged in the right way.



## SCRATCHING THE BAD SIDE OF PEOPLE



Humans are neither good nor bad. They helplessly respond differently according to the way they are treated. Just like when a cat is patted on its head, it mellows down meekly and when it is rubbed on its stomach, it attacks ferociously; similarly, when dealt with encouragement and positivity, people offer their best and when dealt with criticism and fault-finding, the worst surfaces out of them.

Human behaviour is directly connected to their environment. Just like a jeweller feels comfortable exposing his rare diamonds only in a safe environment, only in the right environment do humans prefer exposing their good side. It's only a very rare soul that can behave with equanimity in any season. Most humans tend to reserve their good for the good and exhibit their bad more freely.

In the Mahabharata, when Arjuna went to the heavens, he genuinely appreciated the dancing and singing skills of a gandharva named Chitrasena. The gandharva was so pleased with Arjuna that he decided to teach Arjuna both the skills with their subtlest nuances. Arjuna reciprocated by teaching him martial skills.

A little later, Duryodhana along with his entourage came to a picnic spot in the forest of Dwaitawana where Chitrasena was camping along with his people. Duryodhana haughtily commanded the gandharva to vacate the scenic lakeside picnic spot immediately for his occupation. Chitrasena didn't like the attitude of the Kaurava prince and challenged his authority. A skirmish followed and the gandharva chief bound the helpless Duryodhana.

By pushing the lever of progressive encouragement, one allows the

goodness of others to flow out like a river that flows freely when a dam is thrown open. When we make fault finding as our hobby, we are treating life as a video game where the more people you shoot the more credits you earn in your egoistic library. In such a game the highest winner is the greatest loser. It's an ego booster but a relationship terminator.

When a crow is on the verge of dying, all its associates come together, deriving great joy in pecking at it; thus killing it faster. When a dolphin is on the verge of dying due to being unable to muster the strength to come out of the water to breathe, all its associates come together striving hard to together push it upwards, encouraging it to catch its breath, thus awarding it a few more hours to live. When one derives joy in magnifying the bad in people, one imitates the crow's mindset of active discouragement thus punishing with sharp pecks of negativity. When one's joy lies in magnifying the good in people, one emulates the dolphin mindset of positive affirmation thus awarding the oxygen of positive feedback.

In the Mahabharata, Yudhishtira followed Brihaspati *neeti* that meant, no matter how others behaved he would behave well. Duryodhana followed Kanika *neeti*, which meant it didn't matter how others behaved he would behave badly. The clash was obvious. Krishna timely introduced Yudhishtira to the Sukra *neeti*, which meant, one should follow the path of *dharma* and follow all rules as long as the enemies are also doing so. The moment the enemy deviates, one adopts *adharma* to challenge a deviant enemy.

Unconsciously and unknowingly, everyone in this world is actually following the principles of Sukra *neeti* in one's dealings in this world. One's behaviour is often in tandem with how others behave. If the other behaves well, one tends to behave well and if the other adopts bad behaviour, one tends to adopt that also.

In essence, one's behaviour sets the climate of others' behaviour. People tend to live up to our expectation of them. If we expect them to be good, they comply. If we expect them to be bad, they comply. The positive or negative future of others is often designed in our own minds and constructed by our own actions.

Rather than believing in second-hand information about others, one should learn to listen with one's eyes and heart and catch people doing the right things.

Rather than scanning for defects like a self-appointed quack doctor, one should vaccinate oneself by injecting oneself with the desire to practice affirmative encouragement. When we understand where exactly in the terrain of

people's minds good holes lie and deposit golf balls of encouragement there, we gain victory in relations and are awarded with good behaviour from the human federation of relationships.

Humans respond innately to how they are treated. Encouragement brings out the best in them and criticism, the worst. People tend to live up to our expectation of them. If we expect them to be good, they comply. If we expect them to be bad, they comply.

When, with our eyes and heart, we catch people doing things, when we stop scanning for defects, when we spot their goodness and give them encouragement, then automatically we get good behaviour in all relationships.

This is Sukra *neeti*: if the other behaves well, one tends to behave well and if the other adopts bad behaviour, one tends to adopt that also.



## JEALOUSY—A TERRORIST ATTACK ON SELF



When others attack you, that's cruelty; but when you attack yourself, that's jealousy. A jealous person is a certified worst enemy of himself. A jealous person can be termed as a master self-whipper, heedlessly allowing the termites of jealousy to eat away one's peace of mind.

Jealousy is considered to be triggered by another's growth. In reality, it is triggered by our own failure to grow beyond our psychological childhood. A peacock would be called foolish for brooding over not having strength in its wings to fly high and considering itself a useless bird. Similarly, a person, who attacks himself for not achieving success in one endeavour and concludes that he is useless, is equally foolish.

Jealous people are so psychologically blind that they just cannot understand others' feelings, restricted to the prison of their own feelings as they are. Aptly, in the Mahabharata, two personalities who were incarnations of jealousy were the blind Dhritarashtra and the blindfolded Gandhari. With Dhritarashtra giving himself a low self-rating in every aspect of life just because he was blind, Bhishma felt that he needed a partner who could help him deal with this constantly complaining nature. Unfortunately from the day Gandhari entered the household, by taking a vow to blindfold herself for life, she declared that she had enthroned her own feelings and had no space to share his. Thus began the psychological war between the husband and wife.

What jealous people never understand is that by grading themselves as failures in one aspect of life, they are causing self-inflicted emotional pain.

When they go through such pain, they tend to pass on the pain to others close to them. Jealous people don't like to suffer alone. Gandhari considered herself a failure being married to a blind man. She decided to play with the emotions of Dhritarashtra using the joystick of her actions. To cause him a lifetime of pain, she was ready to self-inflict a lifetime of discomfort by taking that vow.

The natural symptom of the disease of jealousy is fear. Even the most innocent events in a jealous person's life could become trigger points of fear. Since their batteries are charged with high supply of negativity, they feel extremely nervous while witnessing the success of others, as it triggers memories of their own failures. They grade their worthiness based on their failures. One failure is enough to erupt in them fear of inability to compete and fear of rejection by the world. In such times, their mind virtually simulates an environment where every friend is morphed to resemble an enemy. In fact, fearful living becomes so much a normal part of their life that absence of reason to be insecure becomes abnormal and they get paranoid.

When Kunti gave birth to Yudhishtira before her, Gandhari became so filled with jealousy-induced fear that she struck her womb fiercely, transferring the blame for her failure to the baby. Born was a lump of flesh instead of a healthy child. Dhritarashtra was aghast and burned in jealousy towards his brother Pandu who got a son before he did. Not wanting to suffer alone and convinced that Gandhari was to be blamed for his failure to become a father first, Dhritarashtra decided to punish her.

Instead of supporting his wife with her emotional trauma, Dhritarashtra added to it by engaging in union with a maidservant and begetting a son through her. That son, Yuyutsu, remained an emblem of Gandhari's failure throughout her life.

Gandhari had hoped that her yet-to-be-born son would fill the void created by her husband by filling her life with joy and would not be self-centred like his father. When that did not happen, she hoped that her son would procure her the respect of being the queen mother. When that did not happen either and her son died tragically, she began to seek someone to transfer the blame of a lifetime of failures. Her lifetime of emotional needs burst out in the form of cursing Krishna.

A jealous mind cannot be satisfied. It will always seek some reason to remain unsatisfied. Change can only happen when they accept the responsibility of having the disease of jealousy and wanting to get rid of it by consciously working on it. More often than not, such people change not



because they want to change but because they are forced to. Jealous people love to remain under the shower of self-pity. Someone has to yank them out forcefully.

At the culmination of their frustrated life, Vidura interfered in the life of Gandhari and Dhritarashtra in order to help them understand how rigid jealousy had actually made them. With his wisdom, he made them realise that they didn't need to be perfect to be worthwhile. Real success lies in living a life in acceptance of your weakness and not in disturbance due to it. He made them realise that they wanted others to give them what they weren't giving themselves. Contemplating and acting on Vidura's insights, at the fag end of their lives both Gandhari and Dhritarashtra became peaceful with themselves and thus peaceful with the world.

Only when you are peaceful with yourself can you be peaceful with others. No one should expect others to give him what he can't give himself. The counter-balance for jealousy is self-acceptance.

Let's grow from the psychological childhood of jealousy to the mature adulthood of self-acceptance!

Jealousy eats away one's peace of mind. Although considered to be triggered by others' success, jealousy is in fact triggered by our own failure to grow. By branding ourselves as failure, we are inviting pain, for self as well as others. Jealousy comes with not only pain but also fear and dissatisfaction. Jealous people get extremely nervous while witnessing the success of others as it triggers memories of their own failures. Nestled in self-pity, they are never keen on working on this jealous mindset.

The counter-balance for jealousy is self-acceptance. We cannot expect others to give us what we want. The need is to become aware that real success is in accepting the weakness and not getting disturbed.



## DO 'LIKES' MAKE MY LIFE?



The sure-shot formula for a life of misery is to allow others' ratings of your actions determine self-rating.

The way it is impossible to predict the personality and character traits of a kangaroo simply by observing its jump, it is improper to analyse character by observing a single action of an individual.

Unfortunately, humans tend to see themselves through the lens of others' approval. If significant others applaud your actions, you become euphoric. If it's a thumbs down, you emotionally beat yourself to a pulp. All this stems from a headstrong belief that the quality of who you are is determined by the quantity of how talented you are. And then, the quality of being human is replaced by the quantity of being a successful human.

In the Mahabharata, Karna eagerly sought approval from others. He judged his worthiness by his success in exhibiting talent and his success by the ratings others gave to his performance. Just before the final battle of Kurukshetra, Bhishma, the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, was asked to rate the strengths of the heroes on their side. While assigning high ratings to most other warriors, Bhishma rated Karna as an *ardha-rathi*, which meant that he was half a warrior. Bhishma pointed out that Karna had been cursed by his guru Parashurama that when he needed his knowledge the most, he would not be able to recall it. The one who was cursed to be useless during the most important fight was nothing but an *ardha-rathi*. Although Bhishma's point was valid, Karna couldn't take it in the right spirit. The world of Karna's heroism crumbled down; he felt that in declaring him as *ardha-rathi* in war, Bhishma had declared him as good-for-nothing in life! In sheer frustration and to the

shock of others, he declared that he would enter the war field only when Bhishma was dead.

Karna's alarming declaration was not so much of an attack on Bhishma as much as it was on his self-trust. Such deep distrust in oneself arises from the conviction that one is unlovable because everyone else is more desirable due to better talents or facilities.

An insecure person behaves like an extremely hungry person. He seeks attention to mitigate his psychological hunger pangs. He tries to complete his void of incompleteness of self-esteem by filling it with attention and approval of others. For him doing good is not enough. The world has to endorse that he has actually done good, only then he feels better. Even one exception can generate depression.

When you doubt yourself, you hate yourself. And when you hate yourself, you proclaim enmity with yourself. You slowly begin to feel inferior to everyone else, convinced that everyone is out to thrash you. Then a stage comes when even from a smile you learn to decode signs of threat.

Remember, abilities and talents do not necessarily make one worthwhile. And weakness doesn't necessarily make one useless. Peace and joy cannot be purchased by forcing others to love you more but by hating yourself less.

In the beginning of the Mahabharata, when Karna entered the exhibition match as an unwelcome guest, Bhima made fun of him knowing that he was the son of a chariot driver. Karna overreacted to the presumed injustice done by Bhima, without thinking about three important facts: first, what Bhima had said was true, although it was not spoken in the best manner. Second, Karna had no business to barge into a private event uninvited. Third, and more importantly, Bhima was known for his harsh language. He spoke with his own brother Yudhishtira and even Krishna in exactly the same manner when situations got heated up.

This episode reveals Karna's deep-seated insecurities. When we are uncomfortable with ourselves, instead of attending to our shortcomings, we tend to be extra-sensitive in dissecting others' behaviour. By projecting the blame on others, we can avoid and neglect our own personal inadequacies. People don't act in certain ways only to make you insecure. But they do it as a helpless manifestation of their psychophysical nature. Let the Karnas in you not misunderstand the Bhimas in others!

We tend to oscillate between extreme joys and sorrows depending on the applause we get from others. Our worthiness comes from the rating others give for our performance. Such deep distrust in self arises from the conviction that one is unlovable because everyone else is more desirable with better talents. This incompleteness that comes from insecurity has to be filled by getting attention and approval.

Peace and joy cannot be purchased by forcing others to love us more but by hating our self less. When we are not at ease with ourselves, we become extra sensitive to others' behaviour towards us. Blaming others works wonders in covering our inadequacies. But the truth is that not people but you yourself keep you insecure.



## QUALITATIVE UPGRADATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS



When it comes to the question of making relations work for a lifetime, probably the most powerful and handy tool available is forgiveness. Every relationship goes through a patch where it begins to ferment from love to hate. The search is for a process that stops the fermentation from taking place.

When one embraces hate, one forgets. When one embraces love, one forgives. Hatred is like a storm. Every storm always begins with a small speck of dirt. Very soon the entire sky is engulfed with a tornado of a dust storm. Similarly, every hate begins with just a single doubt that has hurt the ego. Very soon every corner of your intellect is covered by a tornado of negative thoughts (about the person who has caused the hurt) till love is just not visible. The feeling of being hurt is the highest when the person who has hurt you the most is the very person you love the most.

Forgiveness is the sign of being concerned about the future and hatred is the sign of being stuck in the past. Harboring hatred means egoistic prosperity and emotional poverty. When you send hate signals to someone who has hurt you, your ego feels massaged at having got back aptly. But the flip side is that your emotions feel hurt, as the relationship of love has been stabbed from your side also. When the virus of hatred enters into your system it leaves you emotionally exhausted. Adopting forgiveness means egoistic depression and emotional prosperity. The ego is bound to feel depressed when you don't retaliate while succumbing to hurt. But the relationship survives the storm of hatred. Forgiving when you are right means you value being right in the

relationship over being right in your opinion.

In the Ramayana, when Rama was chasing the golden deer (realising that it was a demon in disguise), he shot it down. The demon died calling out to Sita and Lakshmana mimicking the voice of Rama. Sita panicked while Lakshmana remained calm. When he didn't even attempt to budge towards helping his brother, Sita insulted him and assassinated his character. Though hurt very deeply Lakshmana paused to ponder over the sudden change of demeanour and vocabulary of his sister-in-law. One moment of thinking gave him the clarity that those words were her concerns for Rama taking the shape of hate words and were simply directed towards instigating him to take timely action. Keeping his screaming ego encaged within the framework of logical thinking, Lakshmana decided to focus on her concern for Rama than on her hatred expressed towards him.

Words of hate are sometimes a desperate call for attention towards a hurt heart. Exhibition of anger in such situations is due to rise in the levels of insecurity. Holding hatred in the heart is like holding super-toxic acids in a flimsy bag. Very soon they will corrode your peace of mind. Better to express it bluntly than to hold it in painfully. When Lakshmana realised Sita's painful predicament, he decided to be kind instead of being right. Though his ego was screaming for release, he decided to forgive her instability that arose due to her insecurity. By wearing the mask of empathy around his mouth, Lakshmana managed to silently save the twenty-five-year-old relationship.

Forgiveness is the colour that a butterfly leaves on the fingers of the child that catch it. It is the fragrance that the musk deer leaves on the hand of the hunter that captures it. It is the taste that the honeybee leaves on the hands of the farmer that breaks its comb. Forgiveness is not a quality you exhibit to help the other person. In actuality it's a beautiful way to honour yourself.

In the Mahabharata, Arjuna killed a plethora of members of the Naga clan. The surviving Naga Takshak developed intense hatred towards the Pandava dynasty and conspired to eliminate Parikshit, who was their last descendent. When Parikshit died being bitten by Takshak, the poison of hatred was transferred to Janamejaya. He in turn organised a huge *sarpa yajna* where millions of snakes from across the planet were dragged into the sacrificial fire. Seeing the continuation of hate between the dynasties, the wise sages advised Janamejaya to stop the *karmic* cycle using the instrument of forgiveness. They explained to him that frustrating moments are nature's way of separating the good from the great. Greatness of a person shines forth when he exhibits great

stability in moments of the greatest instability. Respecting their wise words, Janamejaya put a full stop to the legacy of hatred.

The default setting of the radio of life during angry seasons is to be tuned to the lower frequencies. Unfortunately the frequency-changing knob isn't always easily findable. Therefore, we need the help of a wise radio engineer who can help us find the best higher frequency where the voice of kindness is amplified. By tuning to higher frequencies regularly, one's focus shifts from quantitative growth to qualitative upgradation. By tuning to higher frequencies, one remains far away from the lower frequencies that degrade us.

A person who learns to forgive is simply saying, 'Why should I die of someone else's cancer?'. Hatred makes one unnatural with rigid opinions like frozen ice. Forgiveness allows one to be naturally soft like the water; happy to let go and flow.

Relationships stand the test of time through forgiveness. Forgiveness stops the onslaught of hate. Hate begins small but very soon, every corner of your intellect is covered by negative thoughts about the person who has caused the hurt, till love is just not visible. Forgiving even when you are right means you value the relationship more than your opinion. Holding hatred corrodes peace of mind.

Actually, words of hate indicate a desperate call for attention and insecurity when hurt. At this time you need to show kindness instead of showing you are right. Only a mature mind can show stability in midst of instability.

Forgiveness is the sign of being concerned about the future and hatred is the sign of being stuck to the past.



## COMMUNICATION SUTRAS FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIP



Friendship dies not so much due to communicating in a different language but due to thinking in a different language. So often the language we communicate in is very different from the language we think in. One often tends to think in the language of one's needs but try to show that they are communicating in the language of other's interests. The contradiction in the two dialects creates acids that ultimately burn the fabric of friendship.

Friendship is born in the womb of genuine intentions. The litmus test of friendship shows acidic red if the focus is on self and alkaline blue when the focus is on the friend. When you genuinely try to take care of your friends' needs, they begin to understand your language better. When you remain bottled within the confines of your own needs, you effectively seal all communication.

In the Mahabharata, when Karna shot the *nagastra* arrow at Arjuna, taking aim at his neck, Krishna pressed his feet very hard on the chariot. Understanding the unspoken language of Krishna, the horses instantly kneeled down. The arrow harmlessly knocked the helmet off Arjuna. Shalya, Karna's chariot driver, was furious at him for the mishit. Being an expert warrior himself, he had forewarned Karna to aim at Arjuna's chest instead of his neck. Karna was unable to understand the language of Shalya because he was speaking in the language of his own greatness.

The reason the horses understood the language of Krishna was because he himself put an effort to understand their needs. On the day Arjuna had taken a vow to kill Jayadratha before sunset, by mid-day the horses were extremely



exhausted after a Herculean effort of traversing the entire battlefield. Understanding their condition, Krishna asked Arjuna to build a wall of arrows within which he nourished the horses with fresh grass and water. Not just that, he also rejuvenated them with massage. In the case of Shalya and Karna, there was no such deposit made, and therefore, there was no effort in trying to understand the language of one another. Before pressing people down when situation demands, you have to have caressed them and fed them with genuine love. Then and only then your suggestion will not be considered as an attempt to push down their ego.

According to the type of reciprocation, there are two types of friends: a grabber or a giver. A grabber is often the dominator hiding in the garb of friendship. For a grabber the degree of success of a friendship depends on the degree to which it gives him superiority over others. A grabber exerts powerful forceful communication to control the friendship. A giver, though seemingly a loser, is in reality more a gainer than the grabber. By resisting the temptation to focus on oneself, a giver focuses on solidifying the friendship by making lasting deposits of genuine love and concern. A giver looks at giving not as a strategy but as a long-term investment venture of love. For a giver, success of a friendship depends on the degree to which his individual achievements can have positive impact on others.

Shalya and Karna were very busy grabbers trying to caress their own ego. Therefore, though they communicated in the same language they were thinking in different languages of their own needs, and the message did not get through. In contrast, Krishna acted as a grateful giver expertly trying to place the needs of the horses before his own. Therefore, though they communicated in different languages, they were thinking in the exact same language.

A grabber is like a rabbit. A rabbit has 360-degree vision, allowing it to see objects behind it, but not see objects right in front of it because it has a huge central blind-spot! Similarly, a grabber is expert in complaining about his own needs not being met in the past; but turns a blind eye to meeting others' needs in the present.

Good friendship is like an air pillow. If you take care of it by blowing air into it (taking care of its needs) and not pricking it with a pin (asserting your needs), it will, in turn, ensure your comfort and satisfaction thus serving you and taking care of your needs.

Givers are not always losers and grabbers are not always gainers. In friendship, in giving you gain and in grabbing you lose.

Friendship takes a hit when there is a gap in what we think and what we communicate. The gap is because we often think in the language of our needs but communicate in the language of others' interests. Being unmindful of a friend's needs eventually ends the relationship.

It takes time and effort to understand a friend's need and then give genuine love and care. However, a friend could be a grabber and not a giver. A grabber is an expert in complaining about his own needs not being met in the past; but turns a blind eye to meeting others' needs in the present. On the other hand, by resisting the temptation to focus on self, a giver looks at giving not as a strategy but as a long-term investment venture of love.



## LEADING THROUGH MISTAKES



Leadership is often associated with infallibility. This myth continues unabated till the first visible mistake is made. The after-effect of the first mistake is that the leader's self-confidence comes crumbling down. In essence, true leadership is not about leading without mistakes, but rather leading through mistakes.

Mistakes often act like a crystal maze where the smooth flowing thoughts of a leader get lost. Immediately following the mistake is utter confusion and loss of orientation. The chaos begins by losing confidence in oneself and ends by desperately hunting for a scapegoat to install the virus of guilt, thus conveniently transferring the blame. By shrugging off the responsibility for the mistake, a leader is nailing himself mentally on the cross of his own mistake.

Mistakes when not handled maturely become stinking stigmas on the legacy of leadership. Mistakes when embraced maturely morph into shining medals on the coat of leadership.

When a leader suffers from the leadership-terminal disease of perfectionism, he translates an error into the language of self-devaluation. Self-devaluation is not so much about making a mistake as much as it is about continuously stabbing oneself for a mistake. A good leader should be merciful to himself and allow himself scope for error.

In the Mahabharata, when Duryodhana was taking a stroll around the newly built magical palace of Yudhishtira in Indraprastha, he made a blunder. Mistaking a still pond of water to be hard floor, he confidently stepped into it, ending up in waist-deep water. The scene made everyone around laugh their guts out. The echoing laughter reverberated in his ears and became like a high

scale seismic wave that shook up the building of his self-confidence. This one mistake confused him so much that what followed was an outburst to prove his superiority in every possible way, and in an attempt to shut the laughter still reverberating in his mind he plotted to cause pain to the Pandavas in every possible way.

Leaders with rigid mindset assume that when things go right then it's due to their smartness. The natural corollary is that when things go wrong it's due to their inability. According to them 'they are' their mistakes. Unless one accepts that there are factors beyond human action that are responsible for success or failure, one cannot be at peace with one's mistakes. When people fall into a whirlpool of negative emotions, they are just unready to reach out to hold hands of those who are on stable grounds because they are so busy beating every bit of their self-image. A leader with a rigid mindset cannot adapt to change from self-dependency to upward-dependency.

In the Mahabharata, when Bhima was fighting with Jarasandha, he split him into half several times. But every time the two halves would rejoin and Jarasandha would stand up laughing at him wildly. Every time Bhima failed, Jarasandha's laughter just increased in volume mocking Bhima's helplessness. Reaching his wits' end, Bhima looked up to Krishna dependently, who at that very moment split a piece of straw into half and threw the two halves in opposite directions. Taking cue from Krishna's dramatic action, Bhima yet again tore Jarasandha into half and threw the two portions in opposite directions. That marked the end of Jarasandha's laughter spree.

A leader with a growth mindset labels mistakes as opportunities that increase awareness. When such leaders are thrown in a hurricane of confusion, they grab a sturdy pillar for stable guidance. Instead of beating themselves up for their mistakes, they are humble enough to realise that they are not superhuman to know everything.

In the Ramayana, Dasaratha made the greatest mistake of his life by shooting an arrow at an innocent boy named Shravana Kumar, just by hearing the sound of gurgling water near a river, mistaking him to be an animal drinking water. When the blind helpless parents heard the tragic death of their son, they cursed Dasaratha to die in pain of separation from his own son. That very day Dasaratha came back to his kingdom and banned in Ayodhya the practice of sonic archery. Thus, he saved so many future Dasarathas from shooting over-confident arrows that attract painful curses.

Leaders with a realistic mindset don't add tears to spilt milk. Instead of

uselessly trying to rewind the mistakes of life, one should begin accepting the mistakes of life. By taking ownership of your mistake, you reward yourself and your dependents with hope in yourself. To lament for one's mistake is important, but far more important is to learn from that mistake. To make mistakes does not imply lack of intelligence but a lack of foresight. Not repeating mistakes is a sign of intelligence.

Leaders with a rigid mindset get strangled by their mistakes. Leaders with a growth mindset get enriched by their mistakes. Leaders with a realistic mindset get inspired by their mistakes.

Leaders make mistakes too. After the mistake is made, ineffective leaders look for a scapegoat to put the blame on. By taking responsibility, a leader allows himself that scope of error.

It is a myth that when things go right, it is to the leader's credit and when things go wrong, it implies the leader's inability. In truth, till one accepts that there are factors beyond human action responsible for success or failure, one cannot be at peace with one's mistakes.

A thinking leader considers mistakes as opportunity. To lament for one's mistake is important, but far more important is to learn from that mistake.



## LEADING WITHOUT A TITLE



Perhaps the greatest illusion that a leader lives under is that in order to lead he has to be safely shielded behind a big title. However, a title is like a statue made of soap bubble; good to admire, but not good to lean on. As soon as you rest your hands on the shoulders of a title, it crumbles under the weight of expectations.

When a leader uses the title to remind followers to follow, he becomes a terror. When a leader uses a title to remind him to inspire, he becomes a motivator. Like a painting on a wall, a title gets washed off with rain and wears off with heat. Like stripes on a zebra, inspiration remains bright even in rainy storms of life and sunny heat of calamities.

When a leader enjoys the title, the degree of his happiness depends on the degree to which others follow his orders to perfection. For such a leader celebration means success in controlling others. When a leader enjoys being inspirational, the degree of his happiness depends on the degree to which his followers become achievers. For such a leader celebration means celebrating followers' success.

In the Bhagavata and the Mahabharata, Krishna was a leader with no title. Being a cowherd was no title, nor was being a driver. Krishna had no title, either in Vrindavan, Mathura, or Hastinapura, three places that He revolutionised with His leadership. In Vrindavan, though Nanda was the king, everyone naturally was drawn to Krishna for advice and help during calamities. In Mathura, though He killed Kamsa, He allowed Ugrasena to retain the title of king and He remained his advisor. In Hastinapura, He took a vow not to lift a weapon during the battle and act as a driver of Arjuna. That

vow indicated that Krishna preferred title-less leadership. He showed the world that you don't need weapons (facilities) and positions to lead.

The hunger for power and prestige is addictive like a drug. Before taking on leadership roles one should go through a rigorous de-addiction programme to eliminate that craving. Though a drug takes you high, it eventually leaves you low. Similarly, the craving for power seems to take you high but leaves you low in the eyes of those you lead. Leaders, who heavily depend on titles, come out to bask in glory during happy times and hide themselves sheepishly in bunkers during hostile times. In contrast to this, title-less leaders come out during challenging times and hide themselves during happy times.

Before the war, Krishna spoke the Gita to help Arjuna deal with his negative and depressed mindset. As soon as the war got over Krishna asked Arjuna to get off the chariot first. As a rule, etiquette demands the driver to get off first and assist the warrior to alight. After the confused Arjuna got off, Krishna jumped off the chariot and the entire chariot blew up in flames. Krishna explained to the bewildered Arjuna that the thousands of missiles shot on the chariot had been ineffective because He had been sitting on the chariot. Now that He had decided to abandon the chariot, the chariot burst, unable to contain the aggressive onslaught. The interesting part was that as soon as the war got over and Yudhishtira was installed as king, Krishna silently departed from Hastinapura.

The perfectly title-less leader that He was, Krishna happily helped Arjuna deal with all his pessimism. By speaking the Gita, Krishna helped him deal with negativity thrown at him internally by his mind. By sitting on his chariot, Krishna helped him deal with negativity thrown at him externally by people who hated him. As soon as the happy times came, the title-less leader Krishna walked out of his life. Because He was neither craving for power nor position, Krishna became very high in the eyes of His followers. Though He had no title, He had innumerable loyal, genuine followers.

A leader can identify fake followers as soon as he is stripped off the title. Fake followers follow a title and not a leader. Like counterfeit currency, fake followers are useless when you need them the most.

A title-less leader doesn't overly depend on position but rather on his performance. He understands clearly that position is at best a decoration on the performance. It can't be used as a blanket to hide bad performance or dealings. A peacock is considered the king of birds not because there is a tag on its neck to that affect, but because of the grace with which it carries itself. A leader that

depends on a title follows the model of imposed leadership. A title-less leader follows the model of inspired leadership.

Realising that His leadership is needed at multiple places, Krishna never remained stationary in any singular place attached to His position. He had no insecurity; he was fully aware that He could lead all over again in a totally different place with totally different sets of people. After leading the simple villagers in Vrindavan against oppression by the intruding demons, He led the powerful Yadus in Mathura, helping them overthrow the exploitative Kamsa, and then led the highly complex Kuru dynasty in Hastinapura.

Though Krishna had no title, He was addressed by different names due to his different heroic activities. Because He helped His followers selflessly grow, they gave Him so many titles as a mark of recognition of His title-less leadership.

People need space to grow. Sometimes the title that the leader covets occupies that space and stifles growth of followers. A title-less leader gives people vision and then space to execute that vision and interferes only when they need him. By doing this the leader helps people develop faith to enter the umbrella of his leadership. A title-less leader is like Krishna who lifts the Govardhan hill and creates an inspirational space below for followers to thrive during storms of life under the broad umbrella of His vision.

A leader wanting the support of a heavy title is sure to fall. The title can be used either to terrorise or inspire, depending on whether he wants to control his followers or make his followers achievers.

Leaders, who heavily depend on titles, bask in glory during happy times and hide themselves during hostile times. In contrast to this, title-less leaders come out during challenging times and hide themselves during happy times.

For a title-less leader what is more important is performance. A position is only a decoration and when push comes to shove what matters is performance.





## MAKING LEADERSHIP LAST



Leadership is not about power but about memory. Leadership is not about impressing people but about impacting people. Because people don't remember powerful leaders that have impressed them but remember humble leaders that have impacted them. The impact a leader creates on his people lasts longer than the leader himself.

Leadership is not about fame but about contribution. Most leaders are on a fame hunt. Like desperate hungry beggars, they demand their followers to grant them the charity of fame. Fame is not something that can be begged but has to be earned. When a plethora of satisfied hearts spontaneously shares its gratitude for the leader's contribution, the positive energies converge into the magnificent jewel of lasting fame. Rather than focusing on fame, focus on people and fame will follow.

Leadership is not about winning kingdoms but about winning hearts.

While mediocre leaders focus on building their forts, good leaders build monuments of kindness in people's hearts. When a seed of kindness is sowed, juicy fruits of love and gratitude are reaped. Nameless acts of kindness of a leader bring in silent showers of blessings that sustain the legacy of leadership.

In the Mahabharata, when the Pandavas are in exile, the sages tell Yudhishtira a unique story of leader-follower dynamics. There was a king named Indradyumna who spent a lot of time in the heavenly realms. When his time was up to return to planet earth, he was told that if anyone remembered his good actions, he could return back to the heavens. When the king returned to earth, hundreds of years had passed and no one seemed to even recognise him forget remember his good deeds. He met Markandeya Muni who had lived

for centuries. Though the sage could not recognise Indradyumna, he took him to an owl that had lived much longer than him. The owl also failed to identify him, but sent him to a stork. The stork directed him to a turtle that had outlived all of them. As soon as Indradyumna presented himself to the turtle, the turtle began to profusely thank him. The king was confused. The turtle explained that many centuries back, the king had donated thousands of cows in charity. The number of cows was so high that just by the dust kicked by these cows, a huge pit was created that eventually filled up during rains to form the lake in which the turtle lived now. The turtle continued to say that for all the fishes and living entities in the lake, the kindness of the king was unforgettable and his leadership legacy tales were discussed in the lake till date. King Indradyumna happily returned to the realms of heaven, still unable to remember when exactly he had donated those cows and to whom.

Every leader is trying to increase his likeability quotient. They would do better by increasing the kindness quotient. When a leader does something that the recipient can't repay, the only thing he can offer in reciprocation is gratitude. Gratitude increases likeability. Happiest leaders are those that carefully invest time in others' happiness. Unhappiest leaders are those who spend time making plans on how to inspire the world to invest time in their happiness.

The best way to outlive life is to live in the memories of others. When what you do touches the hearts of those for whom you do, they gift you an eternal life in the realms of their memory. Heroic acts impress the mind, but acts of compassion and kindness touch the heart. The legacy of leadership is left as footprints on the soft shores of compassion.

In the Ramayana, Vishwamitra was eulogising the heroic deeds of Rama to Satananda Rishi. He graphically described how Rama had killed the wild humungous demoness Tataka and had effortlessly subdued the evil brothers Maricha and Subahu. Satananda Rishi was not concerned with such heroism. In fact, he seemed least interested, let alone be impressed. Seeing this Vishwamitra spoke about how Rama had delivered the stone maiden Ahalya from the curse of Gautam Rishi. Instantly Satananda Rishi had tears of appreciation in his eyes. Not just because Ahalya was his own mother and he had spent so many hours helplessly staring at the stone form of his mother. But because for the first time he was seeing a dynamic hero who could also act as a sensitive empathic human.

Knowledge without compassion is actually selfishness. When leader gives

to take, he is not a leader but a trader. When a leader hears unspoken words of a follower, the follower speaks words of gratitude the leader hankers to hear. When a leader shifts his focus from greatness to kindness, the follower shifts him from his short-term memory to his long-term memory.

Leadership is not about being impressive or about fame but about contribution. Rather than focusing on fame or external impressions, focus on people and the rest will follow. The happiest leader is one who invests time in others.

Successful leadership is also about winning hearts. Kindness brings first gratitude and then blessings from followers, an essential for sustaining leadership as well as a legacy. The best way to outlive life is to live in the memories of others.



## UNCERTAINTY REVEALS LEADERSHIP



Uncertainty in life reveals certainty in leadership. Leaders often consider uncertainty and unpredictability to be the greatest enemy of planning and thus effective leadership. Thus by avoiding anything that contributes to uncertainty, they plan meticulously to ensure success.

Uncertainty is like mist. No one creates mist, it happens. The best one can do is equip oneself with penetrating fog lights to see in spite of the mist. The goal of an avid traveller is not to avoid mist but to travel in spite of mist. The goal of an avid leader is not to avoid uncertainty but to lead in the midst of uncertainty. Most humans are underequipped to function in the midst of uncertainty. Leadership is the art of navigating through uncertainty. A leader uses one hand to help him navigate ahead through misty uncertainty, aided by the penetrating fog lights of intelligence, and he uses the other hand to steadily hold the chain of his clueless followers.

In the Mahabharata, Ashwatthama released the Narayanastra at the Pandava army on hearing the agonising news of his father Drona's death. The missile was so powerful that no one was mighty enough to counteract it. In fact, the more the Pandava military tried to resist it, the more its fury increased. At a certain point, the weapon multiplied into thousands of pieces and vehemently attacked from all directions. The Pandava leaders were at their wits' end. Every weapon they were using to counteract, only resulted in increasing the force of the Narayanastra. Utter confusion reigned in the Pandava forces as the leaders grappled clueless. At that moment, Krishna stood up on the chariot and made a shocking announcement. He fervently ordered the Pandava warriors to drop their weapons, jump off their vehicles and fall flat on the ground.

Instantly, every soldier, small and big, dropped his weapons and was flat on the ground offering respects to the astra. Krishna saw that the only one still dancing in anger trying to counteract the weapon was Bhima, who believed that it was cowardice to give up even in midst of the biggest adversity. The weapon, by then, had concentrated its entire fury on Bhima, and Bhima was literally on the verge of extinction. Just at the nick of time, Krishna managed to reach Bhima and wrestled him down. As soon as Bhima lay on the ground in submission, the Narayanastra decreased its fury and soon disappeared totally leaving the Pandava army unscathed. In the midst of celebration, Krishna explained that the only counteraction for the Narayanastra was to submit to it. He revealed that the weapon would never harm anyone who worshipped and took shelter of it.

This is how we can deal with uncertainties. In facing uncertainties in life, the best policy is humility. Humility is not a sign of weakness but a hallmark of strength. Not all problems can be solved with strength. Some problems have to be dealt with acceptance of one's weakness. Leadership is about having the knowledge to discriminate which problems to deal by standing up and which to deal by lying down. Leadership is the art of clarity in giving precise direction in a chaotic atmosphere. When the confusion of uncertainties clogs the minds of followers, a leader thrives in that very chaos because he is celebrating clarity, a by-product of profound knowledge. Leadership is about exploring possibilities beyond the regular box of thinking by constantly upgrading the knowledge quotient. One cannot Google for solutions in the midst of uncertainty. A leader has to rely on wisdom, which is digested knowledge, and not on information, which is scattered knowledge.

On the fourteenth day of the Mahabharata war, when the battle continued beyond the scheduled hours and into the night, Krishna asked Bhima to invoke his son Ghatotkacha, a mystical nocturnal rakshasa. The moment the Kaurava army saw a giant demon wrecking havoc in their camp, they fled in different directions. Every warrior failed in the presence of his mysticism and every weapon failed to penetrate his thick skin. Duryodhana was in panic mode, his army being thwarted right in front of his eyes. It seemed as if his entire lifetime of planning was crushed by this huge uncertainty looming over him. In his attempt to ensure victory and seal his disturbing thoughts, he did the only thing he could think of. He ordered the reluctant Karna to use his Shakti weapon, one he had reserved for Arjuna. Ghatotkacha died, crushing along with him not just thousands of soldiers but also the singular hope of Karna to kill Arjuna. The

uncertainty is not as bothersome as much as the feeling of frustration. Duryodhana got carried away by the feeling of hopelessness and as a result couldn't think straight and forced Karna to give away his greatest hope of winning the war. In times of uncertainty, leaders impose upon their followers to make big sacrifices.

Uninspired leaders see uncertainty as spoiling their plans and destroying their set expectations from life. The inability to plan and control things makes uncertainty frustrating for leaders. Fear is born not so much out of uncertainty as much out of ignorance. Walking on a tight rope is a scary proposal if it is tied across the bottomless Niagara Falls. But if the same rope is tied just two inches above the ground, it does not inspire the same set of feelings.

Uncertainty is like a crusher where the sweetest leadership juices can potentially be crushed out of you if you have a positive mindset guided by rich wisdom. But if drops of negativity are added to one's thoughts, then the best of leadership can become poisonous when crushed by uncertainty.

Life is like a war where many Narayanstras and many Ghatotkachas of uncertainty will be released at us. How we deal with them determines the quality of leadership.

There are two types of leadership styles in the midst of uncertainty: The Krishna-type of leaders, who are apparently only sitting, just driving chariots, and not doing much in routine life, but in moments of uncertainty, when the need is utmost and their managers have no clue about how to deal with a charging problem, they get into action offering precise solutions by calmly churning their wisdom pot. And the Duryodhana-type of leaders, who seem to be always hyperactive in routine times, always micro-managing everyone and everything. But when the need is most for their leadership, they make a hurried decision without complete knowledge and end up temporarily solving the problem by offering the sacrifice of their most obedient followers' desires and aspirations.

When leaders consider uncertainty their enemy, they shudder when it peeps into their life. When leaders consider uncertainty their coach, they gear up for some heavy training. Leadership is like an adventure in the theme park of uncertainty. The best leaders emerge in the environment of uncertainty. Uncertainty forces a leader to think clearly in mayhem. When one masters the art of clear thinking in chaos, then it's child's play to think clearly when there is order. The degree of maturity of the mind of a leader is determined by the degree of his capacity to endure uncertainty.

Uncertainty disrupts planning. The inability to plan and control things is what makes uncertainty frustrating for leaders. The goal for a leader is not to avoid uncertainty but to lead in the midst of uncertainty.

In facing uncertainties in life, the best policy is humility. Not all problems can be solved with strength. Leadership is about having the knowledge to discriminate which problem to deal by standing up and which to deal by lying down.

Leaders like Krishna make their presence felt in the environment of uncertainty. Leaders like Duryodhana make hurried decisions and end up sacrificing their followers. Leadership is the art of giving precise directions with clarity in a chaotic atmosphere.



## OVERCOMING DOUBT THROUGH COURAGE



When a common man looks through the lens of doubt, he sees confusion. When a leader looks through the lens of doubt, he sees opportunity. A good leader knows the art of taking calculated risks in the midst of doubt. In fact, risk taking is at the very heart of leadership.

Whereas doubts paralyse a common man, they encourage a leader to ask probing questions. Right questions in the right manner melt the opaque rocky ice of doubts and transform it into transparent soft liquids of lucid opportunities.

Many times, doubts, like earplugs, prevent you from hearing facts clearly; and blindfold and prevent you from seeing higher prospects clearly. To make it worse, just one single bad experience from the past prevents one from taking even a remote risk in the present. For such leaders, doubts roast the seeds of hope and prevent them from growing into future opportunities. Even when the right people or right opportunities come into your life, you rule them out as disguised disturbances.

Dealing with doubts maturely is the crux of a true leadership saga. Good leaders trust their intuitive observations and back it up with good questions. The deadly combination of these two faculties helps them decide how much calculated risk to take in spite of doubts.

In the Ramayana, Sugriva had a bad experience with his brother Vali and from then on he permanently wore a lens of doubt. He saw everyone that entered his life with that lens. The first time he saw Rama and Lakshmana



entering Kishkinda, he was paranoid with doubt, thinking that Vali had sent two henchmen to hunt him down. He sent the clever and balanced Hanuman to verify his doubt. Hanuman appeared dressed as a beggar. As soon as Rama saw him, He was filled with doubt. What would a beggar do in the forest? Whom would he beg from? Hanuman began asking Rama a series of questions to ascertain who he was. From Hanuman's speech and body language, Rama intuitively understood that this person could be a very valuable asset for Him. After patiently satisfying Hanuman's doubt, Rama asked him a question that shocked him. He asked him how could a beggar wear such costly ornaments. Hanuman wore a jewel around his neck that Lord Brahma had predicted that no human could see. The moment Hanuman saw Rama's ability to recognise the hidden jewel-like qualities in him, all his doubts melted and he clearly saw the greatest opportunities of his life manifest before him.

Sugriva-like leaders allow a legacy of doubts to stall their growth-rate. Such leaders resist change because they are desperately looking for stability. Especially after a major bad experience, they look at any change as destabilising agents. Such people then respond to doubt by inaction. Rama-like leaders understand that environments that are bereft of change are bereft of life. No change means no life. No life means no growth. Such leaders embrace change because they are desperately looking for growth in life. They trust their intuitions to govern their questioning. And they trust their reasoning to govern their actions.

The brightest leaders are spotted in the darkest of hours. When darkness encompasses the life of the ordinary, it freezes their action; whereas it provides the best launch pad for good leaders to emerge and impels them into action. Leadership is not so much about absence of doubt as much as it is about abundance of courage in the presence of doubts.

Doubt creates fear. Courage confronts fear. A leader, who wouldn't want to make his move till all his fears are allayed, will, in all probability, never move. Both under-caution and over-caution lead to failure in leadership. Though a good leader acts courageously, he never acts carelessly.

In the Ramayana, when Vibhishana enters the *vanara* camp and reveals his desire to surrender to Rama, there is confusion among the *vanara* leaders about how to handle him. Rama requests all his chief leaders to share their opinion. Sugriva is the first to blurt out his insecurity. His opinion is that Vibhishana should not only be not accepted but should also not be sent back alive. His argument is that after all how can one trust a stranger demon who

has betrayed his own brother. Most other monkey leaders consent to the opinion of Sugriva though none of them agree that Vibhishana be killed. Finally, Hanuman is asked for his opinion. Hanuman shares his experience of how Vibhishana saved his life when he was a captive in Ravana's court. Considering his kindness, his *dharmic* inclination, and most probably his desire for the Lankan throne, Hanuman feels that he should be accepted as a useful ally. Rama takes into account Hanuman's observation and carefully observes Vibhishana's demeanour. Vibhishana stands with his hands folded in supplication and from his facial expression Rama intuitively feels that he is in a helpless frame of mind and would serve gratefully if he received shelter at this time. Though there was every reason to doubt his intention, Rama decided to take the calculated risk of accepting Vibhishana on his side. When the monkey leaders questioned Rama about the dangers of this decision, Rama stood up and said that he had the courage to face all the consequences and undo all the damage if any.

When Sugriva-like leaders evaluate risks, they are evaluating it within the framework of fear. When Rama-like leaders evaluate risks, they evaluate it within the framework of courage.

A good leader carefully gathers information and calculates risks before allowing his confidence to intuitively inspire him to courageously move to achieve success in an endeavour plagued by doubt.

Courage to do what others fear to even think of is the true hallmark of a leader. Just like an excellent painter combines basic colours to bring out exotic ones, a good leader knows the art of combining his intuition with courage to churn out the best decisions. Just like one cannot lead without risk, one cannot risk without courage. But courage itself requires both caution and confidence. A leader is courageous, but never careless.

A leader is one who sees opportunity in the face of doubt. He discovers opportunity in every change that comes disguised as disturbance. Change drives momentum and action, which in turn drives growth. Though a good leader acts courageously, he never acts carelessly. He evaluates risk in the framework of courage and not fear.

Leadership is not so much about absence of doubt as much as it is about abundance of courage in the presence of doubts.



## THE INVESTIGATION AGAINST ASSUMPTIONS



Of all the relationship killers in the world, assumption is a serial killer. Even after killing millions of relationships, it remains undetected, disguised under different aliases as it is. Sometimes it takes the guise of intuition, sometimes expectations, sometimes under the appearance of being right, and sometimes the shape of bad experiences. Assumptions come out of hiding, cleanly slitting the throat of good healthy relationships and disappear into oblivion, only to appear to its next victim.

By assuming, you are sincerely being insincere to the relationship. For one to be right, it is not mandatory for the other to be wrong. A binary mindset proves to be a conducive operating system for the virus of assumptions to work effectively. The possibility of multiple rights co-existing is the mindset that keeps assumptions at bay.

Every assumption is preceded with an expectation not being met which customarily leads to blaming. Blaming on one side invariably leads to pain on the other side. When pain is unbearable it leads to new assumptions, which in turn leads to a new blame. The new parcel of blame leads to pain on the very side where the game of assumptions originated. False assumptions are the best teachers. Through the medium of dynamic emotional dramas of blame and pain, they teach the art of not assuming irresponsibly.

During the war in the Mahabharata, Karna once brutally injured Yudhishtira both physically and mentally. Nakula and Sahadeva managed to save their elder brother from certain death at the hands of Karna. Yudhishtira

seethed in anger in his tent, and expected Arjuna to take revenge on his behalf. When Arjuna learnt of his elder brother's plight, he immediately ordered Krishna to drive him back to the camp, assuming that his elder brother would need his attention and care at this point of time. As soon as Yudhishtira saw Arjuna enter with Krishna, he, expecting that the revenge had been taken and that Arjuna had come to give him the good news, began to inquire how Arjuna killed Karna.

Arjuna, who had assumed that he should first prioritise concern for his brother's well being over his brother's desire for revenge, didn't have a reply. Yudhishtira, disgusted that Arjuna did not meet his expectations and assuming that Arjuna was fearful of Karna, began criticising Arjuna's cowardliness and blamed him severely, to the extent that he said that their mother should have aborted him while he was in the womb itself. Finally, when Yudhishtira suggested that Arjuna should throw his useless Gandiva bow, the situation reversed completely. Arjuna, then, unsheathed his sword and rushed towards Yudhishtira to lop off his head. He assumed that his brother had relinquished all his good qualities. He blamed him for being useless in war himself and blaming others instead. The very sight of Arjuna lifting a weapon against him caused Yudhishtira unbearable pain. At the nick of time, Krishna caught Arjuna's hands and prevented a mishap.

Yudhishtira's unmet expectations caused him to make assumptions about Arjuna's actions, which led him to blame Arjuna. The blatant blame caused immense pain to Arjuna, who, in turn, made some assumptions and mental blames. Finally, Yudhishtira experienced the very pain he had awarded Arjuna. Thus, assumptions are nothing but mental whips on relationships.

Most people assume others' actions based on the database of their bad experiences. Just by studying one animal from the cat family, one cannot assume how others will behave. Similarly, by analytical study of your past experiences, you cannot assume the inner meaning of people's present actions. Rather than assuming others innocent until proven guilty, we assume others guilty until proven innocent.

Essentially assumptions are nothing but bad habits of the mind. The mind has a natural tendency to assume underrated negatives about everyone around and to pamper overrated positives about one's own capabilities. Real progress is about inspiring the mind to upgrade in its quality of thinking and rating others' actions.

Krishna sees the crack in relationship between Yudhishtira and Arjuna

arising from false assumptions. He tells them two stories. In the first story, He describes the situation of a hunter named Valaka who was repenting after unknowingly killing an animal that was blind. As he neared the blind animal with remorse, flowers rained on him from the heavens and the demigods appeared to Valaka revealing that the blind animal in reality was a ferocious, guise-changing demon that was plotting to destroy the world. Through this story Krishna conveys that not always what seems to be wrong is wrong in reality. In the second story, He describes a scene where four men who were in great fear hide next to the ashram of Sage Kaushika. Following them is a fierce looking man who inquires from the sage their whereabouts. The sage, not wanting to lie, innocently points out in the direction in which they are hiding. The man, who turns out to be a dacoit, mercilessly slaughters the four innocent men. Through this story Krishna conveys to the Pandavas that what seems to be right is not always right. The cruelty of the hunter seemed wrong and the honesty of the sage seemed right. But both, when seen from another perspective, turned out to be exact opposite in results.

An assumption when not clarified with time begins to putrefy relationships. For food to remain fresh, it needs to remain in the right environment of constant refrigeration. Similarly, for relationships to remain fresh, they need to be in the right environment of constant clarifications. The shorter the time gap between initiating an assumption and decoding the fact, the better is the relationship. Even in the deepest of relationships, one should never assume that you intuitively understand the other's intentions clearly.

A deaf ear is an indication of a closed mind. A sealed lip is an indication of bad communication. The combination is a sure-shot indicator of another relationship brutally murdered by the serial killer named assumption.

The sure-shot way to kill relationships is by making assumptions. Assumptions originate from expectations and end with blaming the other.

Assumptions are nothing but bad habits of the mind. The mind has a natural tendency to assume negatives about everyone. Emotional maturity is about inspiring the mind to upgrade its quality of thinking. Only an open mind, which considers the possibility of multiple right answers, can supersede the influence of assumptions.



## X FACTOR INFLUENCING SUCCESS



Most people believe that success doesn't need explanations whereas failure does. No one even attempts to dissect the reasons behind success because it is presumed to be due to one's hard work. Therefore, successful people are less likely to become philosophers because they are busy being doers. While less successful people often sit ruminating about the philosophical import behind their failure.

Pain of failing is more excruciating when it follows a major bout of success. More important than analysing the reasons behind failure, is to analyse the factors behind success. When one realises that every factor governing one's success is not always visible and perceptible, then one automatically realises that one cannot hold himself responsible for his failures either. There is an invisible eluding X factor which influences success and failure like the moon influences the rise and fall of tides in an ocean.

Can talent bring you success? Truth is that talent can only bring you to the bridge of success but cannot help you cross it. It's good attitude that actually helps you cross the bridge. And the fact is, just talent and good attitude are also not enough to help you retain that success. It is character that ensures you stay successful in the long run. And even a perfect amalgam of talent, good attitude, and character is not enough for success in every endeavour! There is an invisible X factor that has to be invoked as a catalyst to ensure that success repeatedly.

In the Mahabharata, just before the war, a mystic named Barbarik was coming towards the battlefield. Krishna intercepted him, disguised as a Brahman. Upon inquiring, Krishna came to know that Barbarik had three

mystical arrows that he could use to wreck havoc in the war. After testing him, Krishna asked him which team was he planning to join. Barbarik spontaneously said the weaker team. Instantly Krishna realised that his choice was totally irrational. To begin with, he would fight for the Pandavas who were weaker and then he would switch sides and fight for the Kauravas when they become weaker. Disguised as a Brahman, Krishna asked Barbarik for charity before he left. Barbarik asked Krishna to choose what charity he wanted. To the shock of Barbarik, Krishna asked him for his head. Barbarik understood that this Brahman could be none other than Krishna. Agreeing to offer his head to Krishna, Barbarik asked for a return favour. He was very eager to witness the entire war in spite of his head being severed from his body. In order to fulfil his desire, Krishna erected his head on a pole on top of a hill that overlooked the battlefield of Kurukshetra. From that vantage point, Barbarik was the sole direct witness to the 18 days of war.

After the Pandavas became victorious, a discussion arose in the Pandava camp as to who was the real hero of the entire war. Was it Bhima or was it Arjuna? When no one could come to a proper conclusion in spite of numerous arguments, they decided to take the opinion of Barbarik who had been a silent observer. When asked, Barbarik surprised them with his conclusion. According to him, neither Bhima nor Arjuna was the real cause of the success of the Pandavas. In fact, he concluded that on both sides, no one was actually fighting. From his vantage point, all he could see was Krishna's Sudarshana Chakra carrying out Krishna's will everyday. The only one who was actually responsible for the victory of the Pandavas and the defeat of the Kauravas was Krishna. The humbled Bhima and Arjuna returned after learning about the X factor that had influenced their success.

The X factor that influences success is known as grace and grace is a by-product of blessings. Success is not just the result of boisterous efforts. Blessings are intangible currency that helps one buy ingredients for success. When efforts are aligned with higher principles, they attract blessings and such blessings usher in grace.

The family business of the Pandavas was to collect blessings. They used every opportunity to collect blessings. While they lived incognito in Virat kingdom, the Kauravas attacked and Arjuna, who was in the form of a eunuch as Brihannalla, faced them single-handedly. Before beginning to fight, he shot two arrows close to the feet of guru Drona and grand-sire Bhishma. And two more arrows whizzed past their ears. Instantly the old wise men recognised the

unmistakable style of Arjuna in seeking blessings and permission from his elders before fighting. Before the battle of Kurukshetra, Yudhishtira got off his chariot and walked all the way to the enemy frontlines and sought blessings from all his elders. As blessings heaped, grace peeped into their lives.

To recognise effort, it requires eyes. To recognise grace, it requires vision. Baby elephants need guidance from mothers to find invisible sources of water in summer. Similarly to see the invisible X factor that governs success, it requires guidance from experienced wise men. These wise men have the ability to condense libraries into a single *sutra*. Through the eyes of a wise man like Barbarik, gifted with vision, Pandavas were enabled to see the invisible X factor of grace that ushered in their success.

Talent alone tends to make one arrogant. Talent and good attitude make one malleable. Talent, good attitude, and character make one trustable. Talent, good attitude, character, and blessings make one capable. Talent, good attitude, character, blessings, and grace make one successful. And if you top that with guidance of the wise then that makes one eternally grateful!

Factors governing one's success are not always visible and perceptible, and therefore, one cannot hold himself responsible for his failures either. Apart from talent, good attitude, and character, there is an invisible elusive X factor which influences success and failure.

The X factor that influences success is grace, which is a by-product of blessings. When efforts are aligned with higher principles, they attract blessings and blessings usher in grace. Blessings are intangible currency that help one buy ingredients for success.





## LEADING ON THE STRENGTH OF DIVERSITY



Idealistic leadership is about sitting in one place and controlling people. Realistic leadership is about moving around and knowing people. Idealistic leaders keep themselves aloof from people. Realistic leaders remain amid people. Idealistic leaders believe in exercising their authority to solve problems. Realistic leaders believe in exercising their love to deal with problems.

Diverse interactions with diverse people in diverse situations create a diverse type of leader who is realistic and wholesome. The wider is the leader's perspective of life, the greater is his ability to be flexible in his leadership style. Most leaders end up being narrow in their implementation style due to their tapered perspective of life.

One of the greatest qualities in leadership is the ability to learn more. Great leaders love the learning process. Knowledge doesn't always come to you. You have to go to it. Unrealistic leaders hate the process of unlearning their judgmental approach towards people. They are pretty much convinced that they have reached a stage where learning is unnecessary. Realistic leadership is about admitting that 'I don't know everything' and approaching everyone and every circumstance with a pre-learning desire. Just like every colour in a rainbow makes a fascinating contribution to the colours of life, every person under the umbrella of leadership makes a fascinating contribution to enhance the colours of leadership.

In the Ramayana, Rama considered the 14 years that he spent in exile to be

his greatest learning experience that upgraded his leadership quotient and shaped him in to being a realistic leader. He met a variety of people and keenly observed a variety of vibrant qualities in them, which he carefully noted down. He fondly appreciated the sincere, loyal friendship of Guha, the selflessness of Jatayu, the advanced wisdom of the detached sages, the dedication of Shabari, the organisational capacity of Sugriva, the leadership maturity of Jambavan, the power combined with innocence of Hanuman, and the dharmic integrity of Vibhishana. Every such interactive learning convinced Rama that spending those fourteen years in the forest was worth every second if this is the quality of upgradation that he was getting to digest. In fact when he met Guha, Sugriva, and Vibhishana, he told them that his father Dasaratha had sent him to the forest on the pretext of exile to actually meet his lost brothers. By living with and studying these people closely, he could understand and empathise with their needs, interests, and concerns. He realised that leadership at such close quarters with people is a totally different experience than sitting on the royal throne of Ayodhya and taking reports.

By welcoming diversity, Rama achieved a broad-spectrum mindset that helped him expand the horizon of his accommodation levels. Just like the ability to eat a variety of foodstuffs is a sign of healthy appetite, digesting diversity in an organisation is the sign of a healthy leader's appetite. Lack of variety in emotions makes relationships boring. Lack of variety in a family makes the environment monotonous. Lack of variety in an organisation makes its growth sluggish. If you study nature carefully, there is no repetition. No two zebras have the same stripe patterns, no two bats emit the same frequency sound, no two butterflies have the exact same design on their wings, and no two humans' fingerprints are ever alike. That being the case, there is more uniqueness in everyone than similarity. The only thing we really have in common is uniqueness. Thus, there is so much to learn and gain from every person we meet. Managing diversity is about welcoming diversity.

Successful leaders understand that interacting with people is akin to reading a moving book on human psychology. Studying books gives you bookish knowledge. Studying people gives you realistic knowledge. When you study books your vocabulary changes. When you study people your perspective changes.

Leaders who are bound to the chair try to make replicas of themselves down the organisation. They cannot handle variety in behaviour or thinking patterns. They prefer followers who don't think but just follow. They show

visible appreciation for those followers who successfully become their photocopies. When they venture into newer territories, they prefer to install their photocopies to head units. In reality they become insecure and nervous in the midst of change and diversity. They prefer a life of predictability. According to them unity in variety is an impossible proposition.

When leaders move around learning the art of appreciating unity in variety and variety in unity, then they make better decisions, their influence increases, and their followers reach peak performance much faster. Since their chair does not bind them, they are free to move and learn to see greatness in others. Such leaders are bold enough to encourage greatness in others. Rather than attempting to make everyone their own photocopies, they focus on worshipping variety in others.

Though Rama won over Vali, he did not install a photocopy of himself from Ayodhya as king of Kishkinda. He made Sugriva the king and Angada the heir to the throne. Though Rama won over Ravana, he installed Vibhishana as the king and not some photocopy of himself from Ayodhya. Rama realised that to rule such diverse cultures like Kishkinda and Lanka, only a local person could do a good job. He was secure enough to avoid duplicating the Ayodhya culture in these territories. He was focused on allowing the existing diversity to thrive. Both Kishkinda and Lanka remained loyal to the throne of Ayodhya from then on, though Ayodhya had no physical dominance over them. By doing that, he taught the world a new style of leadership known as dominance by heart.

When people see the leader accommodating diversity, they tend to make efforts to accommodate his shortcomings. Being different is not a sin but an asset.

King Dasaratha was approachable through his ministers but when Rama became the king, he made sure that anyone could approach him directly. Every interaction he had with people increased his understanding of their needs and his appreciation of variety only escalated. The more he was accessible, the more people felt accountable.

Realistic leaders build the foundation of their empires on their faith in diversity.

Real leadership is the art of extensive interaction with people and exercising love to deal with problems. This is in contrast to ideal

leaders who tend to bypass love and use a judgmental perspective towards people.

Every person in an organisation brings in his uniqueness and such diversity shows the accommodating mindset of leadership. The more accessible a leader is, more accountable his followers are.



## THE DILEMMA OF QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY IN LIFE



While good leaders focus on building massive organisations by quantitative progress, great leaders focus on building a crisp team by qualitative progress. While good leaders are interested in visible growth, great leaders are interested in real growth. In the pursuit of numbers, good leaders settle for mediocrity, while in pursuit of quality great leaders settle only for excellence.

Epic organisations are not built on the power of might but on the power of minds. The quality of any organisation is capped by the quality of minds it hosts. The idea of choosing quality over quantity isn't about not wanting more people, but about wanting people who matter more. Beyond the number game lies the treasure hunt for substance.

Whether it is a student looking for a genuine teacher or a teacher looking for intelligent students, whether it is a leader looking for competent followers or a follower looking for a magnanimous leader, or whether it is in the search for deep meaningful relationships, the criteria to make the choice has to zoom in on quality.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have two interesting stories that illustrate this concept graphically and thought-provokingly. In the Ramayana, Vishwamitra comes to Ayodhya and melting in the presence of the world-renowned sage, King Dasaratha promises to fulfil any desire expressed by the sage. Vishwamitra, as his name denotes, explained that he wanted to perform a sacrifice for the welfare of the world but was being opposed by two powerful demons, Maricha and Subahu, with the help of their rakshasa hordes. He

wanted the help of Dasaratha's first son Rama to help him complete this critical sacrifice. The panicky father, Dasaratha, began to argue with Vishwamitra that Rama was not capable of handling such intense rakshasa hordes that too single-handedly. Dasaratha bargained with the sage that instead of sending Rama, he himself would come to fight against the demons with the formidable army of Ayodhya. No matter how much the king squabbled, the sage was disinterested in the whopping Ayodhyan army and wanted Rama alone.

In the Mahabharata, just before the battle of Kurukshetra, both Duryodhana and Arjuna came to the palace of Krishna at exactly the same time to solicit his help in the impending colossal war. Krishna was fast asleep when they entered. While Duryodhana came first and sat at a seat placed next to the head of Krishna, Arjuna who entered later sat respectfully at the feet of Krishna, admiring his serene sleeping beauty. On waking up Krishna naturally spotted Arjuna first and embraced his friend excitedly. When he realised that Duryodhana was also present in the same room, Krishna immediately realised the purpose for this formal visit. He gave the first choice to Arjuna since He saw him first. Arjuna had to choose between the weaponless Krishna who wouldn't participate in the war or the fully-equipped insurmountable Narayani sena of Krishna. Without even thinking for a second, Arjuna chose the non-participative Krishna. When the high-spirited Duryodhana returned to inform his uncle, the shrewd Shakuni, about the stupid choice of Arjuna, he was in for a shock. Shakuni was clearly disappointed with the choice of his nephew because he understood that the game changer is never an army but the wisdom behind the army.

Both Vishwamitra and Arjuna steadfastly chose quality over quantity. Vishwamitra was playing the role of a teacher and Arjuna was playing the role of a student. As a teacher Vishwamitra recognised great potential in Rama and wanted to train him online. Dasaratha was under the impression that Vishwamitra needed help, but the fact was that Vishwamitra wanted to help by imparting knowledge to Rama. Being an honest and a clear-headed teacher, Vishwamitra recognised his limitations in training great number of students and, therefore, preferred to focus on polishing one single diamond. The impact of that choice was enormous for the future leadership of Ayodhya. Whether in a war or in the battle of life, Arjuna realised that it doesn't matter how many people are following the chariot of your leadership. What really matters is who is steering your chariot. He realised that in the battle of life as you focus on the small obvious fights, you need to choose someone with a broad vision to

see the imperceptible critical combats of life that catch you off guard. The quality of that choice determines the quantity of your progress.

Beyond a certain point, one has to learn to measure the height of his progress by the depth of the quality of choices one makes and not merely by the expanse of the quantity of achievements. When you make qualitative investments then eventually you surely get quantitative results.

Perhaps nothing more can explain the importance of choosing quality over quantity than the fact that out of millions of monkeys that Sugriva sent out in search of mother Sita, Rama only chose to give Hanuman his ring. In fact, Hanuman was the only person in the entire search party that Rama actually gave the description of his wife to. What made Hanuman the right choice for Rama? To sum it up in one word it is: discipline.

The yardstick of self-discipline measures the quality of an individual. The quality of our contribution is determined by the quality of our absorption. The quality of our absorption is determined by the quality of our action. The quality of our action is determined by the quality of our constitution or character. The quality of our constitution is determined by the quality of our value system.

Choosing quality never happens by chance but it happens as a by-product of having lofty intentions. Just like rapid growth of cells does not necessarily mean healthy growth of the body. It could also mean growth of unhealthy cancerous cells. Similarly, in an organisation also quantitative growth doesn't only mean healthy growth.

While a leader needs quality people working for him, he also equally needs quality people guiding him. Just like the strength of a cloth is determined by the quality of the textile fabric it is made up of, the strength of an organisation is determined by the quality of people it is made up of.

By choosing quality both upwards and downwards, a great leader makes room in the organisation for holistic growth.

Quantitative growth or qualitative growth, this marks the difference between good leaders and great ones.

Quantitative growth doesn't only mean healthy growth; it could be cancerous as well. Qualitative decisions bring quantitative results. Choosing quality never happens by chance. It has to be inculcated through self-discipline, character, and value systems.



## CONSTRUCTIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT TEAM BUILDING



Triumphant teams can be built only when individuals become mindful of their limitations. It is possible for individually ineffective people to work together to create collectively effective teams. Just like an individual termite working all life may, at the most, make one hole in wood but when thousands of them work together, they can make an entire colossal tree hollow. Similarly, when isolated weak individuals with complementary skills team up together with awareness that their strength lies in cooperating collectively, they can achieve phenomenal success in geometric proportions by harnessing each other's expertise. Teamwork is about shamelessly borrowing intelligence when one's own falls short, clearly keeping the goal in mind.

Ego spurts in members ensures that teams disintegrate even before they take shape. Just like a river that branches out into multitudes of rivulets loses its existence, teams where members branch out to focus on their individual agendas, never achieve any purpose. Most often people join a team to establish their own stardom. Then team members are used as supporting casts to enhance their image of the hero. The desire to polish the individual image results in ugly scars on the team image. When individual team members see that the team is being used as a platform to showcase one's ego, they start flaunting their own greatness. Then a team becomes like a multi-headed snake with different heads popping up to establish individual one-upmanship over the other heads.

In the Mahabharata, there are fascinating examples of both good and bad teamwork in action. In the battle of Kurushetra, though the Kauravas had a



much larger team, unluckily, it was largely an ego-driven team. The most important generals in the team disliked one another to the point of hatred and they were busy trying to prove themselves to be better than the others, in terms of intelligence, artillery skills, and loyalty. Karna hated Bhishma, Bhishma hated Shakuni, Shakuni hated Karna, Karna hated Shalya, and Shalya hated Bhishma. Most of Duryodhana's energy went in strategic maintenance of peace between the team members than in making strategic plans for the war. In fact, other than Duryodhana and Shakuni, none of them even wanted the war. They were fighting only because they were bound through some remote cause. Daring to dream with a bad team is like hoping to end a nightmare with a smile.

Team building is about synergising the individual egos of the team members into team confidence. When the insecurity of being overshadowed vanishes, then people don't mind subordinating their individual ambitions to focus on team goals. To achieve a big dream you undoubtedly need a big team. Team building is about converting your individual dream into a collective team dream. Without synchronisation of dreams there cannot be building of teams. When conviction of the dream enters then commitment flows out of the team. When people are motivated about the cause they are affiliated to, they work with uncommon zeal to help achieve it, just like a colony of ants that needs to cross an unbridged gap makes an ant-bridge by offering their own bodies as bridges for their teammates to cross. In a similar vein, when team members are motivated to the cause, they are ready to burn themselves in the fire of cooperation.

In the Mahabharata, the establishment of dharma was the cause that helped the kingdom-less Pandavas to raise an impressive army from sheer nothingness. This, combined with their respect for Krishna and Yudhishtira, helped create a remarkable team in the battlefield of Kurukshetra that sent a shiver down the spine of their enemy. There was no negativity within the team and they all chose to direct their collective energies towards destroying the enemies. Once in a while when even a scope of negativity arose in the horizon, Krishna immediately stood up and helped the team deal with it using his profound wisdom. The motivation to achieve the goal was so high that even the youngest most inexperienced member, Abhimanyu, was ready to sacrifice himself. But the more astounding fact was that the oldest and most powerful members like Yudhishtira and Bhima were ready to follow the young lad in his area of expertise while entering the *Chakravyuha*. Every member of the

team bent themselves flexibly like soft twigs in the fire of cooperation towards the establishment of dharma.

Individually powerful and versatile chemicals, when collectively mixed together, can explode lethally. The way chemistry is the science of knowing which chemicals are safe to mix, similarly, team building is the science of studying the chemistry of individuals before safely combining them into a team. When people of reactive chemistries are combined together, there is more explosion of egos than that of ideas. A good team is about diverse talents with matching chemistries. The foundation on which good teams are built is mutual respect between team members. On that foundation of respect is a layer of trust, on top of which the entire team building structure stands. Only in such a stable structure will people be comfortable to let go their egos and focus on performing their expert roles without being insecure with others' superlative contributions. A padlock can only be unlocked by a three-digit combination. Even if you have two numbers right it's insufficient to open it. Every number needs to be just right to unlock the combination. Similarly, the talents of the members of a team are like numbers of a combination padlock. The right combination is needed for the team to perform at its optimum best and unlock its highest potential.

In the Mahabharata, the Pandava team had great respect for each other's talents as well as great mutual trust in each other's intentions. The team chemistries matched unbelievably with occasional sprinkling of Krishna's love formula. Yudhishtira had to never bully his team to follow his orders based on his position. Krishna never boasted about his superiority of knowledge by pointing Arjuna's mistakes in using weapons. Each one in the team had his strengths and his targets prefixed. Their personal agendas only complemented the team goal. No one doubted the others' strengths and no one interfered with the selected targets. Dhristadyumna was born to kill Drona, Shikhandi had waited two births to kill Bhishma, Bhima had vowed to kill all the hundred Kauravas, Sahadev's target was Shakuni, Arjuna was eager to silence Karna, and Nakula had chosen Karna's sons. The team was so much in tune together that they even lied together as a team about Ashwatthama being dead, without ever doubting Krishna's intention.

Team building is a dynamic process. At no point can a team be considered frozen. There has to be flexibility for dynamic changes in team structure according to the need of the hour. In the face of a new unforeseen challenge where the existing team is underequipped to handle in terms of their skill sets,

there has to be dynamic recruitment of new talent. Of course, even when fresh talent seems promisingly vibrant, the parent criterion for recruitment has to definitely be a match in attitudes. With just one wrong entrant, a winning team can be transformed into a losing one. When wrong attitude enters into a team, then team members become like crabs in a basket who become too busy pulling each other down, thus preventing the team from growing and achieving its potential.

In the Mahabharata, on the fourteenth day of the war the battle continued way beyond sunset also. As the warriors fought in the dark holding torches, Krishna included a special entrant into the Pandava side. This was Ghatotkacha, the nocturnal rakshasa son of Bhima. Since rakshasa's strength multiplies at night, Ghatotkacha's entry proved to be a disaster for the Kauravas. The timely induction of a new team member boosted the Pandava morale and gave them an upper hand.

Just before the war, Duryodhana managed to trick Shalya to give his commitment to join the Kaurava forces. The Kaurava prince felt that having Shalya's military force as well as his martial expertise on his side would prove to be a big boon. Unfortunately, although Duryodhana verified his talent, he did not care to ascertain his attitude. Though physically on the side of the Kauravas, mentally and loyalty wise Shalya was on Pandava's side. He didn't miss a chance to criticise the Kauravas and thumb down their morale. And he proved especially nasty when he was forced to drive Karna's chariot.

What begins as an illustrious team potentially culminates into a historic community. Two things help in shaping great teams into landmark communities: clarity in communication and empathy in dealings. Clarity in communication does not guarantee absence of conflicts but minimises them. Along with clarity in communication, if there is empathy in dealings it is possible to resolve conflicts and not dissolve teams.

In the Mahabharata war, at one point Arjuna had a clash with his elder brother Yudhishtira with respect to a wrong expectation. Both felt they were right and the argument began to heat up to the extent of Arjuna drawing out his sword. In the nick of time, Krishna intervened and help both understand the other's point of view. As soon as Krishna helped the brothers see each other's actions from an empathetic point of view, the conflict melted away.

When individuals who are aware of their limitations come together setting aside ego to borrow each other's intelligence in order to pursue a collective dream, then teams are built. When such diversely talented teams with matching

chemistry stay together embracing flexibility with care, consistently and empathetically, then those successful teams become thriving communities.

Building teams is about moulding hearts to thump together.

Dynamics of teamwork and individual efforts differ completely. Strangely, individually ineffective people can together create effective teams. One obstruction in teamwork is the rise of egos, which focus on personal agendas and goals. Only when individual egos get synergised into collective team confidence can team goals become common goals.

Stability in teamwork depends upon diverse talent, mutual respect, and trust. It is further strengthened by clarity in communication and empathy in dealings. In such an environment individual egos melt in the fire of cooperation resulting in superlative team performance.



## KEEPING OLD FRIENDSHIPS INTACT WITH CHANGING TIMES



The test of marriage is tolerance. The test of parenting is values. The test of leadership is inspiration. And the test of friendship is time. When a potter knocks an unbaked pot, it cracks; when time knocks at an unripe friendship it shatters. Making a pot is easy, but preserving it till it reaches its destination is difficult; making friendship is easy, but maintaining it over a long haul of time is difficult.

Adversities are times when one looks towards old relationships for relief. In the excitement of newfound relationships, old ones are often buried deep in the dusty memory lanes. With the advent of adversities in life, a man begins to gaze at all his relationships like a beggar pitifully scanning for a compassionate soul to relieve him of his hunger. In the search engines of our minds, such times often throw up names of old friends as search results. But, unfortunately one tends to use friends as garbage bags to toss in his problems of life. And naturally, once the garbage bag is full, one looks for another to replace the present one. Many times, friendship is eaten away in the quest for relief from our frustrations. Before expecting to be a good friend to others, one needs to be a good friend to oneself. If one is not satisfied with oneself, one tends to look at everyone else as possible tools for satisfying one's needs.

Cultivating friendship is like growing a plant. It grows to the extent it is watered. When a friendship is revisited after ages, it remains at the exact same level at which it was when it was last watered. Unfortunately people expect friendship to grow with age, as if time has been auto-watering it.

In the Mahabharata, the saga of the tragic expectation-driven friendship between Drona and Drupada is graphically described. Both of them studied in the same gurukul during their childhood and had developed a very deep friendship. Drupada loved Drona so much that he once even promised to give half his kingdom to him when he became the king. The childhood promises were forgotten and both continued in the journey of life as destiny had willed. Drupada went on to become a powerful king of the Panchala province and Drona went on to become a poor Brahman who lived by begging. The sight of the pitiable plight of his son Ashwatthama struggling with the basic needs of life, unable to even get a cup of milk, brought tears to Drona's eyes. He decided to revive his old friendship with Drupada and seek his help. He straightaway walked to the now King Drupada and reminded him of his childhood promise and requested him for half the share of the kingdom. The natural defence mechanism of King Drupada came into action and he reacted violently at Drona's impudent request. Far too many people come to exploit powerful leaders by using the tactic of reviving such old forsaken relationships. He said that promises made in childhood were not to be taken seriously. Dead relationships cannot be revived. If Drona wanted some charity, he should humbly accept the charity of a cow that the king was ready to offer. Drona left fuming in anger, promising to come back to seek revenge.

When a hand pump isn't used for a long time, to pull out ground water, some water has to be poured in from the top of the pump, so that the capillary action of the water in the pump attracts the ground water out. Similarly, to revive old memories of old friendship, some new deposits of love have to be poured in. Humans tend to forget events with time but they seldom forget feelings. In order to revive a long lost friendship, one has to create an environment where the old feeling or emotion is rekindled. When there is no investment in a relationship in a long time, the old deposits tend to evaporate and the relationship becomes like an unused pump where love doesn't flow out easily, rather weird unfamiliar sounds surface. With new deposits old memories spring up.

Drona did not bother to make any attempt to make new deposits in that old friendship but rather wanted to make a huge withdrawal. He didn't carry any gifts of love with him, but rather expected Drupada to gift him half his kingdom. By allowing his desperation for wealth to come in between their friendship, Drona exposed his self-interest in reviving this old friendship. For a dormant volcano to erupt, there has to be movements in the earth's tectonic

plates. Similarly, for dormant love to erupt from the heart, there has to be some deep emotional churning taking place.

In the Bhagavata Purana, we find a similar saga of friendship, which demonstrates the fabulous way in which old relationships can be rekindled gently and ushered back to the forefront of your life. Like Drona and Drupada, Sudama and Krishna were thick friends during their gurukul days. Krishna went on to become *Dwarakadhisha* and Sudama remained a poor austere Brahman. Urged by his wife and considering the plight of their emaciated children, Sudama decided to approach his old friend. The first thought that came into Sudama's mind, as soon as he decided to visit his friend, was what gift could he carry for his aristocratic friend. Though the household was bare, his wife managed to get a few handfuls of chipped rice from the neighbourhood which became the gift bundle Sudama carried to meet his old friend. On his way to Dwarka, Sudama felt extremely ashamed at his decision of going to his friend to ask for a favour. He decided to spend some precious, loving moments with Krishna and not ask for anything at all. As soon as Krishna saw Sudama, He burst into happiness. He pulled His friend in to His innermost chambers and seated him on His own bedstead. He happily massaged Sudama's tired feet while His wife Rukmini gracefully fanned him. Forcefully taking the chipped rice from the embarrassed Sudama's hands, Krishna enthusiastically ate all of it. Then they spent hours revelling in fond memories of their younger days together. Krishna began to feel ashamed thinking that He had nothing worthwhile to offer in exchange for the wealth of friendship and love that Sudama had offered Him. Though Sudama hadn't spoken a single word about his sad plight, Krishna intuitively heard the unspoken words of His friend. He silently sent vast riches and commissioned the building of an enormous palace for Sudama. Unaware of Krishna's plan, the innocent Sudama walked out of Dwarka carrying only gratitude in his heart and absolutely no regret for not having asked his friend a favour. Krishna was so happy to get a long-lost friendship back in place and, more than that, for not having embarrassed his friend by offering him some charity.

True friendship is when love doesn't change with changing positions in life. Loving dealings between friends cannot be purchased by money power. No matter how much you are ready to pay, you cannot make a fruit ripen faster. And no matter how much you try, you cannot make a friendship deepen faster. Friendship is the most fragile commodity in the world of fine arts. A good friend communicates even through the unspoken language of silence. A good

friend empathically perceives the unnoticed tears of the heart. Friendship is the opportunity to celebrate the joy of serving one another.

Deep friendship is like a springboard that pushes you up when the world throws you down. Shallow friendship is like a suicide-point that pushes you down when you are right up.

Friendship with bad intention is worse than enmity with the worst intention. While Drona wanted to use a friend, Sudama genuinely tried loving a friend. While Drona and Drupada met only once after so many years, with both of them hardly remembering each other, Krishna and Sudama corresponded regularly through the heart via memory, sending m-mails and m-visits. While Drona visited only to ask a favour making no attempt to revive old emotions, Sudama decided to come to bask in the love of his friend and express gratitude to Krishna for the loving moments they spent together. While Sudama and Krishna's relationship bounced back to where they had left off, Drona and Drupada's relationship went on a downward cascade from this meeting onwards, finally ending with both being brutally killed in the battle of frustrated friendship.

Friendship is a jewel when handled with sensitivity, care, and selfless love, but becomes a jewel on the head of a poisonous snake when handled with insensitivity, egotism, and selfish agendas.

Friendship can be a touchstone that can transform and beautify every aspect of your life when handled delicately. But when handled egocentrically, it can easily become like a heavy stone of hate tied to your neck that can drown you in a salty ocean of frustrated expectations.

Like a plant, friendship, too, needs watering. It cannot flourish otherwise. It remains at the same level in which it was when last watered.

To revive old friendships, new deposits of love have to be made. With new deposits old memories spring up. When Sudama met Krishna after a long time, he only exchanged love with him. He walked out carrying only gratitude for him. Neither did Krishna embarrass him by giving charity. True friendship doesn't change with time.

No matter how much you try, you cannot make a friendship deepen faster. The test of friendship remains time.





## WHEN GOOD IS BAD AND BAD IS GOOD!



Every action has shades of good and bad. What may appear to be a shade of good may actually be a shadow of bad. What may appear to be a shade of bad may actually be vivid colours of good. The discernment of good and bad cannot be based on just observed action but based on the invisible motive behind the action.

Good done with an underlying bad motive is worse than a bad done with an underlying good motive. One can never understand whether another's actions are good or bad unless one understands the internal motive behind the action. Humans put in a lot of effort in covering their bad motives with bright colours of superficial truth.

How long can you sweep down the dust of bad motives under the carpet of superficial truths? The day the carpet is lifted, your whole existence chokes in the dust of bad motives.

In the Ramayana, when Keikeyi was instigated by Manthara to persuade Dasaratha to fulfil his long-standing promise, she cleverly hid her wicked motive behind a veil of truth. After asking the two boons of sending Rama on a fourteen-year exile and coronating her son Bharata in His place as the king of Ayodhya, she began sermonising about the glory of sticking to truth. She cited numerous examples of historic rulers who had literally given up their lives in pursuance of truth. By hiding her iron fist of bad motives under the silken gloves of truth, Keikeyi was constantly smashing Dasaratha's discretionary power, thus forcing him to agree to her whims. By trying to fulfil one truth

Dasaratha ended up creating havoc in the lives of millions of people and destroying the stability of his kingdom.

A little later when Rama is leaving Ayodhya mounted on Sumanthara's chariot, Dasaratha's fragile frame wobbles behind the chariot commanding Sumanthara to stop driving away. Rama immediately orders Sumanthara to drive faster. Sumanthara is in a dilemma, unable to decide which command to follow, so Rama offers an interesting solution. Rama tells the old minister to speed up and when the king inquires from him on returning as to why he didn't follow his command, he could say that in the mayhem he couldn't hear the royal command. When Sumanthara first hears Rama instigating him to speak a lie, he cannot believe his ears. He is unable to comprehend how could *maryada purushottam* Rama, who Himself never spoke a lie, inspire him to speak a lie. That's when he realises that by telling him to speak a lie, Rama was attempting to decrease the pain in His father's heart. For as long as Rama remained in the vision of Dasaratha, the pain would only escalate. Therefore, it was pertinent for Rama to leave Dasaratha's presence at the earliest. In order to facilitate the decrease in the pain of His father, Rama inspired Sumanthara to speak a blatant lie.

By speaking a lie Sumanthara was decreasing pain and by following the truth Dasaratha was awarding pain. If the purpose of truth is achieved by a lie then that lie is truth disguised. When truth is roasted in the fire of selfishness, it becomes barren and can never give birth to hope anymore. Dasaratha's truth destroyed hope in Ayodhya. Sumanthara's lie destroyed pain in a distressed father's heart. A lie that diminishes bad is better than a truth that diminishes good.

Most problems in the world happen because of good people trying to do good blindly, without comprehending that good is supposed to result in good and not bad. Good that results in bad is worse than bad that results in bad. Doing good has to lead to a greater good. Good people need not be subordinate to bad people. Good that makes one weak is actually bad disguised. When bad uses good to do bad it is called duplicity. When good uses bad to do good, it is called diplomacy.

In the Mahabharata, Yudhishtira was conditioned to doing good to others. During his Rajyasuya sacrifice, when there was bloodshed due to Krishna killing Shisupala, Vyasdeva revealed to him that he would be instrumental for a bloody war. Yudhishtira did not want to be held responsible for so much violence, so he instantly took a vow that he would follow every instruction of

his elders without any complaint. He felt that this vow would prevent the fratricidal war that Vyasdeva was predicting. When Duryodhana learnt of this vow, he duplicitously used this conditioning of Yudhishtira to get him to play in the gambling match. During the match Duryodhana perfectly followed every rule that was pre-agreed upon and apparently Yudhishtira did everything he did only with good in his mind. But the result was a terrible bad that ended with the disrobing of Draupadi. Duryodhana using Yudhishtira's goodness to do bad is called deceit. And Yudhishtira's goodness, which made him weak, was actually bad disguised.

A little later in the Mahabharata, when Krishna entered the lives of the Pandavas, he pushed them to break so many rules in the war. He pushed Yudhishtira to lie, he hid the sun with the Sudarshana Chakra, inspired Arjuna to place Shikhandi ahead of him while fighting Bhishma, and instructed Bhima to strike Duryodhana below his waist. In Duryodhana following all the rules, the motive was wrong, and in Krishna breaking all the rules, the motive was right. Krishna's motive being right is established by the fact that after the war, he got nothing out of the war. In fact, whatever army he had, he lost it in the war. His only gain was satisfaction that he had helped establish a kingdom based on dharmic principles. Once dharma was restored, Krishna left Yudhishtira to rule the kingdom according to his goodness approach. He never ever intervened after that.

Krishna used part-time diplomacy to deal with Duryodhana's full-time duplicity.

When good becomes subordinate to bad motives then after short-term peace, long-term chaos prevails. When good resorts to bad to establish good then after a short-term chaos, long-term stability prevails.

Good and bad should ultimately be determined by motive and results more than action and appearance.

Good or bad is perceived not on the basis of observed action but on the invisible motive behind the action. Good done with an underlying bad motive is worse than a bad done with an underlying good motive.

Most problems in the world happen because good people do good blindly, without realising that good ought to result in good and not bad. Good that makes one weak is actually bad disguised.

A lie that helps is better than a truth that hurts.

## AUTHOR PROFILE

Shubha Vilas holds a degree in engineering and law with a specialization in patent law. But in essence, he is an author, a motivational speaker, lifestyle coach, and a storyteller par excellence.

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Shubha Vilas periodically interacts with the youth in premier institutes across the world, inspiring them to live a life based on deeper human values. Close to his heart is his role as a guide and teacher to school children, teaching foundational values through masterful storytelling.

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