Happiness is fragile, only wisdom can make it strong

Happiness is not something which has left anyone untouched. We all know what happiness is. So there’s no need to define happiness. It’s really a blunder to define the basics of life. Because you can’t define it in words. You can’t water it down in definitions. They are much vaster, much bigger, and much greater.

You know feelings can never be captured in words. Hasn’t you felt that there’s so much you want to express but the words are not sufficient enough? It’s the same with happiness. Happiness cannot be conveyed in words or in gestures. Our being is much, much, much, larger than our expressions.

Happiness is something that everyone has experienced. But it is very fragile. Now you are happy. Just one nasty phone call, are you still able to keep your happiness? One nasty phone call and your happiness is gone. Your happiness is fragile.

What is it that can make our happiness stronger? I call that Wisdom. Wisdom brings a different context to our life.

1. Expand your context, broaden your vision and have purpose in life. Focusing your energy on something you find useful, find your purpose. To me the most meaningful thing is bringing happiness in the lives of people, instead of running after happiness. You know it runs further away from you. If you stay, happiness chases you.

Most of the people who are running after happiness, I would say, stay where you are. Just be. You will find that happiness surrounds you. It must comes to you. If you follow joy, misery follows you. If you follow wisdom, joy follows you.

2. Second is commitment. Commitment to the greater goals in life. Then you will be really happy.

3. And the third is compassion. It’s compassion which keeps us in a state of unconditional love, unconditional happiness.

Everyone is seeking happiness – a happiness which doesn’t turn into misery; a love which doesn’t turn into hatred; the perfect action that doesn’t turn into anger and frustration. And that which brings the stability within us, which makes our happiness strong, that, I call wisdom. Wisdom for life. No wisdom, No happiness.

Two problems solved

1. Hygiene for women during menstrual cycle

Solution: 50 low-cost sanitary pad vending machines installed in schools of Latur distt. of Maharashtra

Machine dispenses one napkin at a time after inserting a 5 rupee coin followed by 2 turns of a lever-wheel.

It is suitable for use even in parts of India where there is no electricity.

Each machine can hold 23 pads. These vending machines measure just 1.5X1 feet, cover little space and can be installed in 2 minutes said Jhadav, a local civil engineer who has been a full time volunteer with Art of Living since 2001.

Centres on the outskirts of the city are being run by women to provide convenience. The machinesP are easily filled and are very low maintenance.

Two problems solved

1. Napkin vending machine improves hygiene and tackles absenteeism too

On Internation Women’s Day, Art of Living Foundation installed the first batch of 50 low-cost sanitary napkin vending machines in schools in Latur, thus empowering women in rural India through a unique and effective double-barrel approach to improve hygiene for women and also lowering of school absenteeism due to monthly menstural cycle.

The new and locally developed sanitary napkin vending machine priced at just Rs. 4000 each have already been installed in 50 educational institutions in Latur and the project team on ground in Latur are confident of covering the whole of Maharashtra with this new initiative by the next International Women’s Day.

The word of this wonder machine is already spreading fast across the state. “We have been getting calls from all over the state since we launched our first batch of 50 machines on March 8.”

Latur has for long been known for producing some of the brightest kids due to its excellent educational institutions. Now it has made its mark in another crucial area by taking the lead in ensuring hygiene in the country,” said Jhadav. Jhadav believes that this basic yet essential facility is also likely to have an impact on reducing girls’ drop-out caused by absenteeism during monthly menstrual cycle in schools and higher education institutions in the country. “When monthly cycle starts while girls in school or college, they are faced with an uneasy feeling and not able to rush to a medical store for napkins. This, we believe, will definitely have an impact on their education itself in the long term,” Jhadav said.

Udaan: an initiative for the sex workers in Sonagaini of Kolkatta

Art of Living has started project “Udaan” in the Sonagaini, a red light area of Kolkatta to save the young girls from forced adulthood. Smart Excel program was conducted from 4-7 January 2017 by our teachers Vishal Pai and Ashmita Pai. Fifteen children participated in this program. The program includes yoga, pranayama and games; moral values are unfolded by messages delivered through games and doing small tasks in a group. They learn unity and compassion by doing these group activities and games help them to be happy, energetic and healthy. These children live in an environment which is not very healthy and they face a lot of stress and humiliation because of this profession. They do not get respect from the society and are not treated like other children. The Udaan project was initiated to build a home for these children away from this unhealthy environment. The place is under construction. It is an initiative to provide them a safe home where education and skills training will be imparted to them, so that moving forward they can be part of the mainstream of society and earn their own livelihood and lead a normal and respectful life. Sonagaini has several hundred brothels and is home to almost 1100 sex workers, which includes girls in the age group of 13-20 and eumuchs. These sex workers live in poverty and are often victims of diseases like HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, severe pain, and early ageing.

Seva Times ● Kolktta (West Bengal)
Farmers earn low and could barely earn a living. Saratoli. Lac cultivation is one of their main activities. Through the Art of Living program, I became aware of lac cultivation and was trained in its cultivation. Palash (Butea monosperma) and Kusum (Schleichera oleosa) are two of the lac-producing trees. Vijay Kumar Nag, another villager, shares his experience, "Through the Art of Living, I learned about lac cultivation and was able to cultivate just two trees in the first season. Today, with the support of the Art of Living, I have earned 45,000 rupees from lac cultivation.

The condition of the farmers began to improve and the economy of the village started to grow. Anakul explained, "First, we used to cultivate lac in a traditional way, leading to a low yield. But with the help of the Art of Living, we have learned modern techniques of cultivation, including the use of mulching and proper irrigation, which has increased our yield.

Jobs provided to unemployed youth of Delhi slums in the Retail Sector

Seva Times • Delhi/NCR

In a bid to empower unemployed youth from the slum areas of Delhi, the Art of Living started an awareness campaign among the villagers. The organization provided seeds of host plants to the farmers and trained them in the use of these plants. The economic condition of the farmers improved, and they were able to earn a livelihood.

Interested persons may contact Dr. Sandeep Chauhan at +9188280280 or Mr. Rakesh Mishra at +9711882800.

Rally against atrocities on women

Sanmarg Walk

Salutations to Sangeeta Sinha on Women’s Day

Seva Times • Bangalore (Karnataka)

Afflicted by polio, Sangeeta Sinha battled her illness with determination and brought succor to villagers in Bihar by preventing child marriages.

Recounting her journey, she says, "My objective is to raise awareness about the importance of child marriage. I want these girls to receive formal education and have the potential to explore their dreams. It is painful to see 12-year-old girls doing household chores with babies in their arms. What is even more disturbing is that they are often married off.

Sangeeta has extensively worked in the three districts of Nawada, Gaya, and Vaisali, in Bihar where child marriages are rampant. She has organized various training programs to educate the community about the importance of education and the rights of girls. The programs have been successful in preventing child marriages in many villages of Bihar.

"It is extremely encouraging to see that girls aged 12 and 13 years have vowed not to tie the knot until they reach the marriageable age," adds Sangeeta.

"Finally, girls are speaking up for themselves. They have inspired the village panchayats to change their views.

Organic farming at Bangalore ashram yields a Rich Crop of 'Emperor’s Rice'

Seva Times • Bangalore (Karnataka)

While most of us are familiar with white and brown rice, few of us are aware of Black Rice which is sometimes described with luxurious sounding names like "Forbidden Rice" or "Emperor’s Rice." It is an ancient grain that was once reserved for Chinese royalty. Although somewhat less popular than white or brown rice, black rice is far more superior in terms of its nutritional value and health benefits. The deep black or purple color of this grain is due to the high content of anthocyanin, a powerful antioxidant. It helps prevent a number of common but serious illnesses like diabetes, Alzheimer’s, and cancer.

At the Art of Living International Center in Bangalore, a five-acre patch of land is used exclusively for organic farming. The crop yield from this patch is a source of inspiration to farmers engaged in chemical free farming. Rajkumar who is overseeing the cultivation of black rice at the Bangalore Ashram states that this crop was cultivated with a view to increasing the yield over the current harvest. The plot is 10 acres, and it is estimated that the new crop will yield a rich harvest of 6500 kilograms of black rice, which is often as low as 10% of other rice varieties, but it is really commendable feed indeed!
Nagod - All set to be a Smart Village

542 got Insurance cover, 4 received claims of up to 2 lakh rupees each

Nagod is a small tribal village in Kamrej Taluka of Surat district of Gujarat, with a population of nearly 1400 villagers of whom 70% are labourers who depend on daily wages for their livelihood. The people of this region lived a life bereft of basic amenities completely ignorant of the several schemes offered by the government of India to improve the quality of life in the tribal areas. Many in this region took to drinking alcohol at a very young age, an addiction that had ruined their lives. It was difficult to set foot in the village after sunset as the villagers under the influence of alcohol would be engaged in brawls at every nook and corner. According to a survey more than 100 women in the region had been widowed due to alcohol related deaths.

It was in such a scenario in May 2012 that Art of Living teacher Shyamkumar Gemalsingh Khengar took up the challenge of making Nagod a “model village”. Ahead of him lay the challenging task of weaning the villagers off alcohol, making them socially responsible, providing employment opportunities, improving the infrastructure of the village, encouraging the villagers to adopt organic farming, and making the whole village open defecation free (ODF). Determined to bring about the much needed change in the village, Shyamkumar and his wife Gita moved into this village and set up their home there. As a first step Shyamkumar started making regular visits to the homes of the inhabitants, encouraging them to stay away from alcohol. As awareness increased among the people he introduced the Art of Living programs, which included pranayama, yoga and meditation. Gradually the villagers’ addiction to alcohol gave way to the intoxicating bliss of satsang for which they gathered every Thursday and had a fellows’ meeting every Sunday. Very soon a team of six young villagers from the village who completed the Art of Living Leadership Training Program (YLP) joined hands with Shyamkumar and started educating the people of the area about the importance of clean and green living. They planted saplings and also encouraged other villagers to do the same. This resulted in a number of families improving their homes and surroundings.

In 2015, Nagod was awarded the “Model Village” by the district administration. Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) joined hands with the Art of Living Family and together they worked to improve the quality of life of the villagers. They set up a 60-bed hospital and also educated the villagers about several schemes introduced by the government such as the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana. 542 accounts were opened under these schemes and so far four people have received claims of two lakh rupees each. Support extended to villagers in submitting and procuring of identity cards such as Aadhaar Card, ration card, and voter card. Seven families were given drinking water facilities. Nearly 100 people have received cards under the Ma Amrutam Scheme. A generous donation made by NBI Baldev Bhai Thakur helped in improving the infrastructure of the village and Nagod is now all set to become a “Smart Village.” As a result of the voluntary services rendered by Art of Living volunteer Channabhai Bathore, he was appointed as the Sarpanch on December 2016. After the smart city mission, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) aimed at making villages smart and growth centres of the nation.

Molela village in Rajasthan attracts birds every summer

Bows for water being provided for the birds.

During summers we generally see messages on social media to keep feed for birds and also water on terrace to save them from the heat of the summers. Birds often die during summers due to hot air and scarcity of water. In Molela water bowls for birds are kept and this is celebrated like a festival. 25 volunteers of the Art of Living Foundation fill up the water bowls for the birds. Villagers close by have observed that the variety of birds flying to Molela has also increased. Six years back during the summer season these birds were not to be seen but now these birds are being seen regularly. Sadvh Bora who is the deputy pradhan of Molela village says that due to the initiative taken by the Art of Living they keep water for the birds and over a period of six years the number of birds that visit their village has increased and this makes them very happy.

Waves of positivity sweep across Gujarat

Ahmedabad (Gujarat) • The Rudrapuja is an ancient practice hailed by the Vedic scriptures as one of the most powerful pujas that may be performed for all round prosperity and to remove all evils and attain all desires. The pure and meditative chanting of the Rudrapuja creates positive vibrations transforming negative energy around us in the form of disease, depression, and unhappiness, into peace, prosperity, and joy. Even nature rejoices and flourishes wherever Rudrapuja is performed. Yuuvacharyas of Gujarat brought this ancient practice to the doorstep of Ahmedabad (Gujarat). The yuvacharyas of Bopapur village celebrated holi by installing pots of water for birds in numerous locations in the village driving home the message that it is better to quench the thirst of birds and save them from dying rather than senselessly waste water in the name of celebration. This apart, the Art of Living family organized a function to mark the birth anniversary of Santrithi Phule on 10 March, 2017, in which students preparing for UPSC and MPSC received textbooks and preparation guides free of cost. Nitin Ashoklal, Director of Sai Academy, distributed these books. Youth interested in entering the police services also received guidance from police officers, Abhir Rao and Revatkar, from the nearby Samarapur Police Station.

Holi: A festival of Color, not Water

Holi, a vibrant festival of colors, is celebrated with great enthusiasm and gaiety in India. It marks the beginning of summer. In a spirit of bonhomie people splash each other with color and water. While some are careful to use eco-friendly colors and restrict the wastage of water, others insensitive to the damage they are causing to the environment use chemical based colors and mindlessly waste water - both to play holi and also to wash off all the color afterwards. Not enough can be said about how precious water is. It is the single most important natural resource on the planet and we are quickly running out of it.

Bhopal (Maharashtra) • Holi, the Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (YLP) and the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (YLP) also got together three to four times a month to conduct cleanliness drives. The villagers were educated about several schemes introduced by the government such as the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana. 542 accounts were opened under these schemes and so far four people have received claims of two lakh rupees each. Support extended to villagers in submitting and procuring of identity cards such as Aadhaar Card, ration card, and voter card. Seven families were given drinking water facilities. Nearly 100 people have received cards under the Ma Amrutam Scheme. A generous donation made by NBI Baldev Bhai Thakur helped in improving the infrastructure of the village and Nagod is now all set to become a “Smart Village.” As a result of the voluntary services rendered by Art of Living volunteer Channabhai Bathore, he was appointed as the Sarpanch on December 2016. After the smart city mission, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) aimed at making villages smart and growth centres of the nation.

Holi celebrated by planting saplings.

Jagyaon • Under the leadership of a Youth trainer, Purushottam Vayal, 104 yuvacharyas from Yelalapu, Nandara, Bhatana Wd tree plantation. Sridhar Jawla region celebrated holi with the villagers in a unique and memorable way. On this auspicious day, the yuvacharyas played holi using eco-friendly colours. The villagers said that celebrating holi in this ancient way was an unforgettable experience for them. Yuuvacharyas also spent the day talking to the villagers about the importance of cleanliness, yoga, and meditation among other activities. In Yelalapu, the elders of the village, men, women, youth, and children took out a procession through the entire village, singing bhajans and swaying to the beats of the drums. In Satara district, which is also in the western part of Maharashtra, the Art of Living family celebrated holi in a unique manner by planting trees to mark the occasion. After planting the saplings, they spread mulch on the soil around them to keep the soil moist and help the saplings take root. The Art of Living teacher and sarpanch of the village, Natha Kadam, said that he had thoroughly enjoyed the festival of holi which he spent in the service of the villagers by planting trees.
Transforming Satara

Amol Yevale: An ordinary man relentlessly making leaders and transforming villages since 1998

Amol Yevale was just another ordinary young man content in his business of computers until 1998 when Gurudev’s words, ‘Do not spend your whole life thinking about what you stand to gain. Think of all that you can do and be happy’ gave a new direction to his life. He began travelling to different cities and villages spreading spiritual knowledge through the Happiness Program and sat sansang. He became involved in several projects that addressed problems pertinent to the rural areas like water conservation, animal feed, toilet construction, awareness of Ayurveda, and women’s health and hygiene. He first heard about the concept of model village in the year 2000. Around that time he participated in the Youth Leadership Training Program, a program aimed at grooming youth leaders who will play key roles in changing the rural face of India. After YLTP Amol Yevale went from village to village propagating Gurudev’s concept of a model village. Kapashi village of Kagal Taluk in Maharashtra was one of the first villages that he helped to transform into a model village. He is now developing Mohi, a village in Satara district, into a model village. He is supported by a strong team of nearly 25 teachers of the Art of Living and several yuvacharyas. Together they have completed several projects.

- Women’s self-help group has been formed in Mohi which is engaged in making 100% cotton sanitary napkins.
- Under the aegis of SSIAST, farmers from over 50 villages have been provided training in organic farming and educated about the benefits of rearing native cows and their contribution to organic farming.
- Environment friendly smokeless stoves have been distributed to over 40,000 households spread across 700 villages.
- Soak pit toilets have been constructed in every home in over 100 villages.
- Farmers have been educated about the uses of medicinal plants such as aloe vera, tulsi, shatavari, gudbel, amla, and ashwagandha and their cultivation and several herbal gardens have been developed.
- Sri Sri Model Village Development Board formed by the volunteers has constructed 27 check dams which help in providing drinking water and also water for farming.
- 800 children from 10 villages are receiving stress free and value based education in six branches of Sri Sri Gnan Mandir.

Over the years Amol Yevale has experienced Gurudev’s grace and guidance to the full. His selfless service has brought about tremendous transformation in the villages of this district.

Heroes of Humanity

Ex-Militant is now a Hero

Ramen Deka: Today Deka is held in high reverence in his village and district and holds many offices of importance.

Ramen Deka has had a colorful life having lived many lives in the course of one lifetime - a young idealist, a militant, an escapee, and finally a youth icon. From drilling fear in the heart of his enemies to making paper bags, he has done it and seen it all.

Born in a very poor household in Ramjhuri village, Darrang district of Assam, Deka lost his father when he was just 2 years old. As a youngster the economic and social problems faced by him and many others in his village filled him with rage and he became an easy target for ULFA, a militant organization that was taking the idealistic youth of Assam by storm. A committed and loyal rebel that Deka was, he quickly grew through the ULFA ranks and by 1993 he was the regional chief secretary, district in-charge of ULFA. His militant career landed him in prison twice, the imprisonment doing little to transform him as an individual.

15 August, 1999, Deka and many other militants officially surrendered to the government. Initially they were promised rehabilitation and employment opportunities by the government but it later turned its back on them leaving Deka in the lurch. Neither could he find social acceptance nor did he want to go back to the path he had abandoned. Frustrated and mentally depressed he took to alcohol and a year went by in this stupor. He and other former ex-militia then founded Ex-ULFA Coordination Committee to demand their rights from the government.

The turning point came in Deka’s life in June 2012 when after a decade long struggle the government sent him along with 220 other E x - U L F A members to the Art of Living International Centre for a month long vocational and leadership training program. Deka was initially extremely skeptical but by the end of the training he had transformed completely. Deka became an Art of Living teacher in 2016. Recounting his experience after taking the first Happiness Program Deka said “People were so happy. They had never experienced anything like this. But more than that, they were surprised by the transformation they witnessed in me.”

Deka sums up the difference in his experience of being a militant and a reformer thus, “When I was in ULFA, people showed respect out of fear but now they respect me out of love.”

“I thank Sri Sri Ravi Shankar Guruji for this new life,” says Deka. He also fondly remembers the contribution of Sanjay Kumar (fondly called Sanjay Bihari) a senior Art of Living faculty saying “If he can transform such hard core militants and criminals, then why can’t I do my bit to make this world a better place?”

May Deka’s story inspire and give strength to many such other souls to make a fresh start in life.

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