

IMPACT OF THE ULTIMATE

JAGDISH SINGH DABAS



BlueRoseONE^{.com}
S t o r i e s M a t t e r

New Delhi • London

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

U.K.

Copyright © Jagdish Singh Dabas 2026

All rights reserved by author. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author. Although every precaution has been taken to verify the accuracy of the information contained herein, the publisher assumes no responsibility for any errors or omissions. No liability is assumed for damages that may result from the use of information contained within.

BlueRose Publishers takes no responsibility for any damages, losses, or liabilities that may arise from the use or misuse of the information, products, or services provided in this publication.



For permissions requests or inquiries regarding this publication,
please contact:

BLUEROSE PUBLISHERS

www.BlueRoseONE.com

info@bluerosepublishers.com

+4407342408967

ISBN: 978-93-7018-941-6

Cover design: Daksh

Typesetting: Tanya Raj Upadhyay

First Edition: April 2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am thankful to the world for giving me a life full of experiences, which are worldly as well as spiritual. Above all, I am indebted to Almighty for sending me to this beautiful world, and then to my parents for bringing and raising me on this planet. I am grateful to Late Smt. Jyotsana Dabas for being my life partner and enriching the experiences of my life by 46 years of togetherness.

My acknowledgements to Vinika Chaudhary, my daughter-in-law for arranging the publication of this book, and scrutinizing the text from several points of view.

Recollection of old happenings and minor details would not have been possible without the help of my children Niti, Geetu and Vineet.

I am thankful to my grand-daughter, Aadya Chaudhary for assisting me, in putting all this material into the computer.

Last but not the least, it would be unfair to ignore the name of Mr Tek Ram Dahiya, the most revered person in my life, who made me confident enough to go through complexities of a foreign language i.e. English in my school days. Later on, this language became the source of my bread and butter.

PREFACE

What has prompted me to write this book, are certain incidents which have deep impact on me. I am a firm believer that a superpower exists, which constantly watches and monitors us. I have felt HIM and HE remains always there to help and guide me.

The title of the book has been chosen 'Impact of the Ultimate'. Ultimate to me is synonym to Almighty. I have often felt soft touches of HIM over my head and shoulders, that means for me, HIS support in my day-to-day activities.

These encouraging soft touches have influenced and rejuvenated me time and again and have propelled me to move forward with a positive outlook.

It is not that life has been very kind to me. I have received bashes and bruises from the people in my close proximity. Sometimes a person has to learn hard lesson from a hard teacher.

Here in this book, I may be talking about some insignificant acts that I could do during my different phases of life. These activities are the acts possibly done only by the motivation and the encouragement received from the superpower, who sits up there, deep into the blue sky. I do not take pride or credit in mentioning

them. I believe in verse, 'Mera mujh mey kuch nhi, Sab kuch hai tera' (I do not possess anything in me, everything belongs to HIM). These activities are important to me in certain way that it has taught me compassion and a way, of life to live.

There is a popular saying that if your right-hand leaves something in the palm of a needy person, your left hand must not know. I slightly beg to differ from this concept. Without any ego or self-praise, encourage others to be with you. Someday, you may discover that you have generated a force for helping others. That may be a step towards making this world, a beautiful one. Let others also have the Impact of the Ultimate.

UNDERTAKING

The writer undertakes to bring out the vents and the experiences as they happened. The names of places and characters remain the same. The authenticity of the descriptions, presented here in these episodes remain intact. Hope the readers enjoy them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iii
PREFACE.....	v
UNDERTAKING.....	vii
STORY 1: GET OLD FROM YOUR BODY NOT FROM YOUR HEART.....	1
STORY 2: THE ENGLISH BOOK.....	10
STORY 3: CRUSHED.....	15
STORY 4: PERCEPTION.....	20
STORY 5: APPREHENSIONS CLOUD MIND.....	26
STORY 6: THE REST HOUSE IN THE FOREST.....	34
STORY 7: A PARIKARMA.....	40
STORY 8: A MAN AT THE RED LIGHT.....	48
STORY 9: THE LEMON DRINK.....	52
STORY 10: A SADHU IN JUTE CLOTHES.....	58
STORY 11: CHARITY GONE WRONG.....	68
STORY 12: MAN PROPOSES BUT GOD DISPOSES	73
STORY 13: THE ART OF GIVING.....	78
STORY 14: AT TRIVENI GHAT.....	85
STORY 15: THE CLOUD ON THE TIP.....	96
STORY 16: THE BLANKET.....	102

STORY 17: THE MIND PLAYS GAME.....	108
STORY 18: THE POLICEMAN IN THE RAIN	119
STORY 19: AT LORD KRISHNA’S FEAST	126
STORY 20: A LAD FROM SHANTIES.....	133
STORY 21: THE STONES IN WALKWAY.....	141
STORY 23: A DIAMOND IN DUST	146
STORY 24: MIRACLES THAT CONQUER YOU.....	151
STORY 25: BABA’S COMMAND.....	160
STORY 26 REMEMBRANCES	170
STORY 27: THE SHADES OF COVID.....	178
STORY 28: THE LAST JOURNEY	189
STORY 29: OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE.....	194
STORY 30: BOND WITH THE NIGHTINGALES.....	202
STORY 31: ALLAH’S MERCY	211
STORY 32: DESTINATION, THAT WAS DESTINED TO BE.	216
STORY 33: FACTORS THAT SHOCK AND AMAZE ..	225

STORY 1:

GET OLD FROM YOUR BODY NOT FROM YOUR HEART

When Dhritrastra got old and his hundred Kaurva sons got killed in the epic battle of Krukshetra, at the hands of Pandavas, the minister-in-chief, Vidhur, urged the king Dhritrastra,

“Maharaj, leave aside the greed of ruling the kingdom, your hundred sons have been martyred in the battle. The time has come to proceed for vanprastha to Badri-ka-Ashram.”

The blind king after a deep sigh and a heavy heart replied, “Vidhur, what you say is correct. I must leave the kingdom for vanprastha and let Pandavas rule. I have grown old. I must adhere to your advice, that will be appropriate”. The Epic says that after some time on Vidhur’s advice, the old king along with his queen Gandhari left for Badri-ka-Ashram. Vidhur also left for this place after training Pandavas, about the intricacies

of ruling a kingdom. Here a temple, most revered by Hindus exists today in the valley of Himalayas.

Such is the importance of this beautiful temple and its surroundings, located in the lap of Mother Nature where Adi Ganga, called Alaknanda River flows majestically, showing its mighty presence, cutting across the rocks. This is the place where the equally revered river Saraswati emanates from and then loses its identity to Alaknanda River.

One time experience is so rich, that the mother nature and the aura of the place calls you again and again. This temple is at an altitude of eleven thousand feet. It remains open for visitors only for six months, in a year.

Lord Badrinath has been kind enough in calling me to his temple again and again. Last time's trip in 2018 is permanently etched in my memory.

The whole journey was fantastic and worth enjoying but something was in waiting to happen. It was our last evening of the trip. We had darshanas of the deity and were ready to move out of the temple at nine in the late evening. It was closing time of the temple as well. The lights of the temple were being put off one after another. While descending the staircases, I pointed out to Mr. Wazir Singh at a single illuminating bulb, far away at the top of the mountain on the left-hand side of the temple,

where a Yogi lives and meditates, unaffected and undaunted by the extreme chilly weather. I told him that throughout the year, he lives there, while others move to the places at lesser altitude, like Joshimath or Chamoli in order to escape the biting chilly cold weather which usually runs in minus degrees. Every inch of the landscape, including the temple remains covered with snow from November to April. During this period, it is believed that different god and goddesses come at this sacred place to meet and to have darshan of Lord Badrinath.

Mr. Siwach, the father of my daughter-in-law gave a look at that light on the mountain, which seemed to touch the blue sky, commented, "There might be more severe harsh cold winds considering the high altitude. Even here it is unbearable, what to talk of that place. He must be a true Yogi. (Yogi is a person who defies the laws of nature. External disturbances and conditions do not affect him). Saying this, he made an exit from the temple.

I stopped for my daughter, Geetu and her little four-year son, Kovidh, as they were left behind getting an extra dose of prasad from the pandit. When they came near, an overpowering but very soft female voice fell on my ears, "Have you been there to that Yogi?" Before I could answer, my eyes started searching for this soul. There in the dark, was a young Sadhvi huddled in a corner, shivering with cold and trying to get warmth

from a thin old shawl wrapped around her. She had taken refuge near the outer periphery wall of the temple.

I replied, “No, I could not muster strength to be there, young persons would dare to go, how could I? I took the shield of my age and further said to her, “I have crossed sixty-four and would need an extra strength and courage to reach there.”

“Get old from your body, and not from your heart, you can reach there, provided you have a will to do so.” She further continued, “There is a noble soul on meditation, and he is a treasure of knowledge. He seems to be quite close to Almighty.

“Next time I will.” It was a promise, not to be executed. While talking to her from a distance of approximately fifteen to twenty feet, I felt something unfolding before me, perhaps a soul stirring experience, that would be. That poor soul had nobody to talk with. I felt a soft touch of the ‘Guy in the sky’, who motivated me to pull out a hundred rupee note for onward transmission to her, through little Kovidh. Kovidh hesitated a bit and was reluctant to go alone to that Sadhvi. I told Geetu to escort him, which she did. Sadhvi questioned her about our relationship.

Geetu pointed towards me and said to her, “He is my father and Nana of this kid, my son.”

Sadhvi said, “Well call him here.”

I ascended those four staircases and went up to her with folded hands and asked her, “What can I do for you?”

She said, “I don’t need money, please buy some kuttu atta (flour) and desi ghee (animal fat used as cooking medium) for me from the market. I need ghee to light jyot. (Jyot is an earthen lamp lighted in front of a deity.)

It was past 9 pm, that I confirmed from my wristwatch. Considering her needs, I pulled out another five hundred rupees note and handed over to Geetu for giving it to Sadhvi. She again stressed, “No I don’t need money, get me items to eat and to light the jyot, if you can.” I reasoned with her, “It is past nine, the shops may be closed now. Accept these six hundred rupees and you can get them tomorrow in the morning.” I asked my daughter to hand over the money, Sadhvi didn’t extend her hand to accept the same. My daughter placed the money in the folds of her shawl. She, then spoke in a painful tone, “It would have been better, if you could have purchased it for me, I don’t need money.”

A sense of insecurity and greed not to spend more overpowered me. The mind argued six hundred rupees are enough for a charity, while my heart pulled me aside and reasoned with me to help her more effectively. I wanted to come out of that situation without any delay. We hastily retreated from there because our family

members and relatives had already gone away. I had a last look of that Sadhvi. She had something more to say, but something stopped her, that is what I felt while leaving her there. I could feel and see a daughter in distress.

Extreme cold winds had started striking over our skins as we moved towards Saket restaurant, where we were to take our dinner. This restaurant was likely to get shut for the day at 9.30 pm. We couldn't afford to miss our dinner. We had two small kids. We hurried to Saket, which was at a distance of ten minutes' walk from the temple.

While on the way, Kovidh innocently asked number of unexpected questions, "Nana, (maternal grandfather) who was she? Why was she sitting in the dark? Was that Sadhvi who takes away the children in her jute bag? Why did you pay her?"

In order to douse his anxiety and curiosity, I said, "No son, she is a good lady, we wanted to help her. She doesn't have money to buy things." Here in Delhi, we instil fear in minds of kids. They are likely to venture out all alone from the house without the company of an adult. Little Kovidh had more questions to ask. I found difficult to answer them. My heart started melting away forcing some tears to come out, but by then we had reached Saket.

After enjoying the dinner in cosy surroundings, we again came out to proceed for our lodge which was nearly a kilometre from there. The frosty winds had become more torturous and biting. We had to cover kids in shawls, as we walked in rhythm. I noticed the deep blue sky over our head and the shining stars clearly fixed at their places. Nothing seemed to be more perfect than the work of Mother Nature. It was a full moon night. Despite the night, the symbol of darkness, everything was clear and visible. With a child in my arms, my legs seemed quite heavy. Every forward step was an effort to our destination.

The beds were so chilled, that they appeared to be wet. The body's warmth did raise their temperature after half an hour or so. When the sleep was about to settle on the eyelids, then came the image of that Sadhvi floating into my mind. She must be around thirty years of age or so.

I calculated that about twelve thousand rupees were still in my pocket to reach Delhi, our home state. Then why did that sense of insecurity creep into my mind? Why did that reluctance to spend more, overpowered me? Why did I run away from that poor soul? Another picture that could have been, how it would have looked odd, loitering in the bazaar (market) with that Sadhvi? What would have people said at our back? OR above all, had we gone to the market, she could have raised more

demands thus putting us into inconvenience. Innumerable questions kept coming and going, and my mind was marking their presence in the dark hours of that night. The guilt that was hovering in my head, was being a miser in those crucial moments, when I could have acted more judiciously and opened my wallet a bit more, if required.

We are among our families and friends. We can be support of each other, if need be. But what about that poor soul, who was fighting her destiny all alone.

I wondered what drove this girl to adopt the harsh life of a Sadhvi? Why did she move into the world of renunciation? What could have been the conditions and circumstances that forced her to quit the comfortable family life?

She had a humble voice, devoid of ego, coming deep down from her throat necessitating her to speak out her mind. Her tone reflected some hidden pain, trying to splurge out. I couldn't ask her, because that could drown her in wet pond of unforgettable reflections and sufferings. Moreover, I had no right to stir-up her old stinging memories that would have settled down by now, who knows? Possibly she must have put massive efforts, to eject out some persons out of her remembrances.

The famous poet Gulzar Sahib sums up, "Happiness is like phooljharis. They flare up instantly and then they

die down quickly. Whereas the pain of sore relations burns like embers in ashes, slowly and slowly, never to get extinguished.” Only the smoke reflects on the countenance of the person.

I could make up for a short nap at five, in the early morning. The impact remained for several days, even after getting into the daily routine.

Still longing for HIS forgiveness, for the lost opportunity to help her more effectively. Expecting more soft touches from the GUY IN THE SKY.

The Spirit of a person or the inner self as some may prefer to address it, is very close to Almighty. When it speaks, then God speaks to you. Must listen carefully. Never run away from it or else you are likely to miss the conference, which can change your life for ever.

STORY 2:

THE ENGLISH BOOK

I started my career with teaching middle class sections in a government school. I was posted in a resettlement colony. Teaching English to class sixth was assigned to me. It being a co-education school, the boys used to sit on one side, and the girls were supposed to sit on the other side in the class.

It is customary, as the teacher enters into a class, the students stand up and wish the teacher in a chorus. The teacher would also reciprocate. The next question from the teacher would be, “All right, open your books and where were we yesterday, will somebody tell?” One of the active children would then remind the teacher. The teacher would recollect a bit and would start teaching the class, after taking a note of the students without their books. He would ask them to bring their own book on the next day. This classroom activity of teaching and learning would go on for forty minutes.

Once on such occasion, it was noticed, that a girl sitting in the front row, was without her book. On being questioned, she assured to bring the English Book on the next day. Next day was not so far. Again, she was without her book. She gave an excuse that her father didn't get his salary and he was likely to get it soon. I became somewhat liberal for a few days after that day. Considering it to be an economic crisis for that family, I didn't want her to have a close brush with the hardships of life at such tender age.

On the twentieth second of the month, she was conspicuous by her absence in the front rows, where she used to sit. As I started teaching, I could spot her sitting in the last row and that too without her book. I stopped teaching midway and asked her about the reason for changing her seat. Obviously, she wanted to escape from my sight.

Another girl said, "Sir, she is without her book, she came here to avoid your scolding".

I questioned her, "Why all this? More than twenty days have gone and still, you are without your book. Do you have any new excuse now?"

Tears rolled down her cheeks. Her head lowered downwards. She didn't utter a word. Noticing her condition, I also melted down to some extent. She was constantly wiping her tears with her little fingers. She was

inconsolable. I asked her to come near to me and then I politely said, “Just stop crying and tell me the truth beta (son), what is the real problem.?” She was unable to speak coherently but she said, “Sir my papa has ~~~ lost his job~~~”. My mother says, he is very worried and trying very hard to get a new job. We~~~~don’t have money. If this continues~~we won’t be having meals”. Then again, she couldn’t control herself

“Oh! God forgive me, this is, what I didn’t want her to undergo.” I said these words to myself, making these words inaudible to others. For a moment, I had no words to say and didn’t know, how to react. I drew her closer to me and then asked her to go and wash her face. She was a little girl, eleven years old with innocent and cute face. When she came after washing her face, I could see her red eyes caused by constant weeping. I touched her head softly to console her. Now she was able to gain her posture.

I was deeply shocked by the sense of insecurity in that little girl, and by the poor condition of her family. I recollected myself and assured her, that her father would soon get a better job and that too with a better pay. That was the time, when she raised her head to look at me, with a genuine hope. I could still see her moist eyes. I just closed my eyes for five seconds and asked Almighty to help her and her family, in those hours of distress and uncertainties.

How could I help her besides giving her consolation, was the main issue. I took a book from the boy and looked for its price. It was twelve rupees for an English NCERT book in those days in 1986. I took out rupees fifteen from my wallet and asked her to go along with another girl, to purchase the book from the shop, which was quiet nearby. Both of them came within ten minutes with a new book. I could notice a pleasant smile on her face.

The other girl said, “The shopkeeper charged Rupees fifteen as the book was hard bound. I said, “That’s fine, don’t worry about that.”

Just then an idea came, she might not lose the book. I decided to write her name on the book with her class and section on the front page. I wanted her to be normal. I just said, “Should I write your name on it?” She nodded affirmatively and told her name ‘Razia’. What a beautiful spiritual experience it was. I could notice she was a Muslim girl. Until and unless, you know the name of a person, you can’t judge his/her religion. Adults divide the community of children by giving them the different names according to their wish, custom and religion. God sends them with the similar body and the limbs. Children are the epitome of innocence. The noted poet Gulzar Sahib has very aptly said, “Char kitabein padkar yeh bhi hum jaise ho jayenge,” (After reading a few books, they will be like us). No doubt this is a satirical

comment on adults, who carry the load of hatred and vices in their minds. When they are kids, they chat, study, laugh and play together without any prejudices and inhibitions. Their activities and behaviour come out from the natural flow of the sacred river of humanity. The impact not so healthy, colour their mind, as they grow in numbers of years.

Basically, I being a Hindu, a silly question erupted in my mind, that prior to purchase of this book, had I known her religion, would my behaviour had been the same? The conscience in me at once said, "Yes it would have been the same," I saw the pain of poverty and uncertainty on her face. How could I turn my face from her? She was just like my own child.

God has destined me to grow among these children. Children are the source of inspiration for humanity. They are the bond in between man to man. Making things easy and giving hope to others, is an essential part of spiritual growth.

After few days, she came running happily and told me that her father was able to get a new job in a steel factory. I thanked HIM for being with that child and her family.

I thanked HIM also, for giving me an opportunity for feeling HIS grace and the Divine touch. My faith in HIM grew stronger.

STORY 3:

CRUSHED

The fruits are crushed for their delicious juice. The juice guarantees good health. Accidentally people and animals get crushed under vehicles. It presents a gory sight resulting in a shock for the viewers. God forbid.

Not necessarily in that sense, but one may come across a person totally crushed by the unfortunate circumstances. The degree of sufferings may vary from person to person, but living a life in grinding poverty is horrible. The person becomes dependant on other's mercy. Again, God forbid.

Our family along with some other friendly family, decided to pay visit to Lord Shiva's temple on Manni Koot Parvat, near Rishikesh in Uttarakhand. The temple is small, but it is one of the most revered places of Hindus and is called 'NEEL KANTH MAHADEV' temple. The mythology goes that Lord Shiva had to consume Halahal (poison) emanating out of the churning of the ocean. Halahal, the poison, had its effect

on Lord Shiva's throat, which turned blue and painful thereafter. The 'SHRISTI', the entire world had to be saved, and Lord Shiva did this by consuming this poison. In order to get comfort, Lord Shiva came to this place. It is believed that this place has a soothing and curing effect on the people having health issues. The deity is in form of a throat of a person. Some view it in a form of Shiva lingam.

After paying visit to this temple, we came down to Rishikesh, where we sought rooms in a hotel for one night stay. It was a fine evening with pleasant weather. The constant and uninterrupted flow of the cool breeze motivated us to spend time on the bank of river 'Ganga,' near Laxman Jhoola (a steel roped bridge which vibrates due to the People's movement). The vibes, all over there are very positive due to the constant ringing of the bells from the several temples. Next day, we had to perform puja at another temple. Some puja samagri was required from a provision store. We moved towards a local market. On the right-hand side was a concrete wall keeping the banks of the river away, and on the left-hand side were several shops selling variety of different things catering to the needs of the foreigners and the local people.

We spotted a provision store which had several customers in waiting. The owner of the shop, as it seemed, was occupying the seat on a cushion and was ordering the items to its employees. After the delivery of

the goods, he was handling the cash efficiently. He was in a way, enjoying the brisk sale of his goods. We were also waiting for our turn.

At the other end of the shop was a weak and frail lady waiting for her turn. The pain of poverty and scarcity was writ large on her face. She was draped in an old white saree. God had given her good facial features and curly hair, but she did not appear to be in good health. She was struggling to keep her standing posture. She asked for something from the shopkeeper, who shouted at her, and asked her to wait, as he was busy in dealing with other customers. She sat down taking the support of a water pipeline in order to avoid staggering and fall.

Two customers had a long list of items. Again, twenty minutes passed. We also raised our voice for our items. The shopkeeper half-heartedly announced our items to the boys with the indirect instructions to them, that we can wait for some more time.

The poor lady again rose on her weak limbs and implored, "Seth, the children are small and alone in the house, please have pity on them." The shopkeeper looked over her glasses and again chided her, "Don't you have patience? Wait quietly or go away." She looked helplessly at other customers and again sat down. Her eyes had gone moist and wore an expression of agony. After a while, the customers thinned out. By this time

only two customers remained. I questioned the shopkeeper for keeping her wait for such a long time. He just said, “Sahib she doesn’t have patience to wait.” She again summed up her courage and yearned for her items when those two customers had left. The shopkeeper got irritated and shouted, “Yaar, Pahle Isay Dafa karo, Isney Sir Dard Kar Rakha Hai,” (first get rid of her, she has given headache).

One of the boys began to weigh a kilogram of wheat flour for her and the other boy got busy in weighing some cereal for her. I just started brooding over the possibility that could have affected her. Perhaps she was a deserted lady with her kids, or the destiny must have snatched her husband as she was wearing a white saree (a symbol of a widow here in India). Her voice was crushed to a groan, carrying a deep pain from her heart.

Something moved in me, perhaps a concern for that lady and a soft touch from that ultimate guy in the sky. I pulled out a hundred rupee note and handed over to my daughter for onward transmission to that poor lady. She had no choice but to accept it. Though I secretly handed money over to my daughter, but she knew from where it had come. She looked at me hesitatingly. She had gratitude in her eyes. I turned away my face. Though I wanted to help her with a little more money, but it could give a wrong signal to my wife for splurging money on some other lady. Usually, it is difficult to convince your

better half in such matters. Though I am pretty sure, she knows me very well and cannot misjudge me.

That lady must have waited at least for an hour to get her ration; the shopkeeper rebuked her thrice very badly. In a way, she got crushed thrice for her poverty, as if an Indian being crushed under English boots during the pre-independence era.

One of our family friends, told us while returning from the market back to the hotel, that somebody with a kind heart, must have made an arrangement for that poor lady. Helping the depressed, deprived or the poor in this way, is a common practice in Haridwar and Rishikesh.

Poverty makes a person insignificant in the society. Except taking bruises physically and mentally, the life has nothing to offer.

She remains in my mind, a lady with a frail figure. Her pitiable begging voice tore my heart apart. I, sincerely pray for her and her children. May Almighty be kind to her. I couldn't do more for her, that's the regret that hurts me till now.

I experienced as if drowning in a Samundra Manthan (Churning of the ocean) for a long time, whereas she consumes halahal (poison) every day for her own self and her kid's survival.

STORY 4:

PERCEPTION

More than twenty years have passed, when I used to go to Lajpat Rai Market, opposite Red Fort and near Chandni Chowk, here in Delhi to help my younger brothers in their Electronics business. That was the era of radios, transistors and tape recorders. On our shops, the footfall of the customers was excellent. They kept us very busy till late evening. At that time the Metro train was yet to be introduced in India. Commuting on bike would take half an hour from our Model Town residence to the shop.

Once, on one such occasion, when I was waiting at the Red light on the motorbike, waiting it to turn green, a boy in his early twenties approached me and said, “Sir, can you give me a lift up to I.S.B.T.” Sensing that he might be a student or so, I said, “Oh sure, get on the bike.” He became my pillion rider. The green light soon obliged, and we started for Kashmere gate I.S.B.T (Inter State Bus Terminus). He took liberty and started to

speak, “Sir, We, a batch of thirty students had come from Patiala, Punjab in a college bus on an educational tour to I.I.T Pusa. After attending the workshop, as we started for Patiala from Pusa Institute, the gears of the bus got stuck and the bus would not move. It came out that the gear box would have to be overhauled and it would take at least two days. All the students and our professors left Delhi in the afternoon. I decided to pay a visit to Red Fort. I had never seen Red Fort from inside. I had some luggage also, first I kept it in ISBT’s cloak room, with a view that after visiting Red Fort, I would board the bus in late evening. While travelling in the DTC bus, some rogue element picked my pocket. Now I am penniless, I don’t have money to purchase a bus ticket.”

I questioned him, “Now, what will you do?”

He responded, “I will pick up my luggage from ISBT and then come back to Old Delhi Railway station and will try to board the train without ticket, this is the only option that I have. I hope God will be kind enough, if I escape from the eyes of the Ticket Checker.” He further went on, “If I board a bus, the conductor will definitely deboard me anywhere in the mid of the journey, that would be more horrible and troublesome for me.”

Initially, I thought that this guy may be cooking a story to get some money from me. A question cropped up in my mind, that how should I get to know whether he is a genuine person or a fraudster? Then I recollected

that my wife is also from Patiala, and I also know a little bit about this city in Punjab.

So, I asked him, “Where do you live in Patiala?”

He said, “At present I am putting up in a hostel. I am a student of Thapar College of Engineering.” So far so, he was right.

I said to him, “My wife belongs to Patiala, and her parents live in Lehal Colony.”

He was happy to know, and he said, “Good, that colony is near Harbans theatre.” With this information, he cleared all the scales.

We reached ISBT red light, and I pointed towards the bus terminal. He thanked me and got down from my bike. I had to wait for the green light to turn on. As he was crossing the road, I noticed that the cream-coloured Tee shirt that he was wearing had a printed inscription ‘Thapar’ on its back. This was a confirmation that he was genuinely in need of help. I called him back. He was in the middle of the road and in the traffic, but somehow, he managed to come back safely. For a moment, I was worried for him because Delhi is full of reckless and rash drivers.

Meanwhile, I visualized that his parents would be anxious for his safety in an unknown city. Nobody could think of mobile phones in those times. Only the land

line phones were in vogue. The most important thing was that he could be imprisoned for travelling without ticket in a train. A promising career was at stake.

When he stood before me, I said to him, “Look you must not travel without a ticket, and moreover if you go to the railway station, it is about two kilometres from this place. You will have to walk a long distance with your luggage”.

I further asked, “Have you eaten something? How much is the fare for Patiala, if you go by bus.”

He replied, “Sir, I can remain without food but the ticket costs Rupees forty-five or so.”

I took out my purse and gave him sixty rupees and asked him to go properly with a valid ticket and to eat something. It must have been the year of 1992 or so and the amount of money tendered had a significant value in those days.

He said, “Sir, it doesn’t look nice.”

I convinced him to accept the money. He took my address on his palm with a ball point pen and went away. After a day or two I forgot the incident.

Usually, the trend is that people don’t care to return the money. They take it in their stride and tend to forget it. I was also not expecting the money.

After a month or so, the doorbell rang and there was a postman who handed over a registered letter to me. First of all, I checked the sender's address. It was from Patiala, Punjab. I opened the letter; it had rupees sixty in its fold.

The content of the letter read, "Respected brother, I hope you enjoy good health, I couldn't see your face, as you were wearing a full-face mask helmet. You helped me in the hour of crisis. Not only you took care of my bus ticket but for my food also. I hope you must have got the money.

When my pocket was picked in the bus, I was in a state of trauma. I was ready to take the risk by travelling in the train without a ticket. The five hours journey would have been full of tension for the fear of being caught. Once a person gets convicted, he becomes debarred for a government job which haunts throughout life. Before meeting you, I had developed a perception of Delhi, that it is a city of thieves and thugs and is not at all a safe city for outsiders. I had decided never to visit Delhi in future. Perhaps that was a student's immature perception.

After boarding the bus and getting a comfortable seat, I realised that people like you, also exist in the city, who are always ready to help others without giving a second thought. My perception at the initial stage about Delhi, has changed altogether.

Whenever you come to Patiala to meet your in-laws, I would certainly like to meet you. Again, thanking for your timely help. With regards, yours's younger brother.” Thus ended the letter.

We do not live in vacuum. Our thoughts and actions create impact on others. I realised thereafter that helping somebody may acquire a secondary importance, but the change in perception was much more significant. That young chap must have developed a trait in his character to help others, as he was helped in odd hours.

Being in the teaching profession, throughout my career, I have been inculcating moral values in my students, but this student was from Thapar College Patiala, yet I was successful in changing his negative perception into a positive one. When I went through the letter, a sense of satisfaction and happiness bloomed in me.

Last but not the least, this is something which goes to prove that the concept of Universal brother hood, if kept in mind, can lessen our worries and miseries. It would be a better world to live in, with hearts full of compassion and love.

STORY 5:

APPREHENSIONS CLOUD MIND

It is quite surprising that sometimes, when you assess a person in a particular situation, your assessment may go awry. This probably may cause you to think and analyse your assessment, then you find the reasons for your assessment gone wrong. The causes that emerge out, are your preconceived notions, apprehensions and fear.

Take a situation, where you are stranded in an unfamiliar city and do not know where to go, and then a stranger emerges out from nowhere to help you. You would not open up. You would reason with yourself for the other person's interest in helping you. Helpful and kind persons are a rare species now a days. The fear or the apprehension lurking in your mind, would tell you that the stranger must be having some hidden agenda. You could be the fish being caught from the swirling water.

This happened in the year 1993 when I got a call from my sister from Shillong (Meghalaya). Her husband i.e. my brother-in-law had been promoted to the post of Lt. Colonel. He was posted to this beautiful hill state.

An army gypsy waited for us with two attendants at Guwahati railway station. They identified us by the colour of my shirt and pant. As I had never been to this state, there was much to be seen and clicked in the mind and in the camera. From Guwahati to Shillong, the roads were serpentine and well maintained. As we gained the heights, we could see the farming of pineapples on the slopes of the hills. Most irritating thing to the eyes, were the scars left on soil, after flattening some of the hillocks for their mineral resources. The natural landscape was being brought to its knees. The greed for earning more and more is inherent in the mankind throughout the world. I wondered, why the law enforcing agencies keep their eyes shut or are they hand in glove with the culprits and greedy politicians? I am not aware.

After spending a day or two in Shillong, I and my wife decided to pay a visit to Darjeeling and to the state of Sikkim particularly to see Gangtok. In my school days, I used to watch films of the famous stylish actor Devanand which were usually shot in eastern states at beautiful locations. Some actors like Kapoor family preferred Kashmir.

After spending two nights at Darjeeling, we took a bus destined for Gangtok. At the border of West Bengal and Sikkim, the people other than the native, had to get themselves registered. I produced my I-CARD and was spared from that formality. We felt exalted for being the government servant.

My brother-in-law had made elaborate arrangements for our comfortable stay at Assam Rifles cantonment area at Gangtok. He had directed us to disembark the bus, five kilometres before the main bus stand of Guwahati. It's an open secret, that the weather at hill stations is most unpredictable. In a few minutes, a sunny day may convert into a rainy day. And it so happened. It started raining cats and dogs. Even the windowpanes of the bus became foggy and hazy. I told the bus conductor to drop us at the Assam Rifle's complex gate. He obediently nodded his head in affirmation. After three hours journey or so, when the bus was negotiating a curve on the left side on the hilly road, I noticed the board of the Assam Rifles complex fleeting away on the right-hand side. We were quite helpless; it was not feasible for us to soak ourselves in that torrential rain and that too with some luggage, containing our spare clothes. I looked back at the conductor; he had dozed off. We had no choice, except to get down from the bus at the last stop. Now we had to go back, and for that we required some taxi or an auto.

Luckily when the bus reached at the last stop, the furious rain had turned into light drizzling. With a VIP suitcase in our hand, we were searching for an auto. It was very cloudy, and evening had set in. The traffic was moving with their headlights on. Many taxis and autos stopped on our request, but none was ready to go to our destination. On our right-hand side was the tourist centre, which had closed for the day. There was no one to guide us. The language problem also tried to raise its head. We moved a little further, the road was going downhill. In the present times, the mobile phones have made life easy but in those days, it was yet to be introduced in India. I couldn't contact my brother-in-law in Shillong, for he could have made some arrangements asking somebody to pick us from that place. More than an hour had passed since we deboarded the bus. I was thinking what a strange city it was. Even on the request some taxis didn't stop. Again, the drizzling gained its speed, with the clouds beating their heavy drums.

While we were going all through this, I noticed that a white Maruti Gypsy stopped near us. We moved ahead keeping a safe distance from that SUV. After making some more futile attempts to stop the cabs, my wife drew my attention to that gypsy. She posed a question to me, "Why that gypsy is following us, and the guy sitting in it, is keeping a watch on us. I said to her, "Don't look at him, let's move ahead." I picked up the suitcase and got hold of my wife's hand and moved further. Two or three

taxis stopped, but were not ready to go to our destination, perhaps our destination seemed to be on the outskirts of the city. On their return journey, the cabs might find difficult to find passengers, it could have been the reason, I thought.

The locals have their own language to communicate, but we north Indians speak Hindi and at times English also. These are the foreign languages for the illiterates and lesser educated in north-east states. The educated people can understand and speak English very well. The anxiety was usurping the capacity to think and act.

When you are trapped in this kind of situation and when you have exhausted all your efforts, you tend to take the help of the superpower, having its abode up there in the deep blue sky. My wife again drew my attention towards that Gypsy guy coming closer to us. Again, I tightened the grip of the hand that I held, and looked towards the guy, who was on the steering wheel. That guy was wearing a P cap, a yellow corduroy coat and white pant. That smartly dressed guy with a good personality, came out of his Gypsy and approached us, "I am noticing since long that you are trying for a cab, where do you want to go?" He further probed, "Are you here for the first time." I felt that it will be of no use to pose and pretend the other way. I told him the truth. He just exclaimed, "OK". He stepped in middle of the road and signalled a cab to stop." He spoke to them in their

local language, which we could not follow. The driver of the cab came out, and put another question to him, to which he replied. The driver of the Fiat cab opened the dicky and put our suitcase in it. We were asked by the stranger to board the cab. The cab driver had a friend in the cab. I thanked the guy, and we boarded the cab. Both the persons, the driver and his friend were continuously talking, and we could not understand them. We felt helpless. Now the anxiety of different type had overtaken us. My wife noticed that the doors on either side had no handles to lower the windowpanes or to open the doors of the cab from inside. They could be opened from outside only. We were at the mercy of these two guys. The taxi was speeding up. The windowpanes could not be lowered. In case we had to shout for the help, nobody would hear us. It was a strange situation.

In a hushed tone, I said to my wife, “If anything goes wrong, we will not care for the suitcase, we will try to remain close and fight”. I wanted to remove her fear. I assured her that for these two guys, I was more than sufficient, because both of them were lean and thin. Her duty would be, only to shout for the help, in case there is misadventure from their side.

The mind had started playing games in that odd situation. It wandered in an area, in which it had never gone. Odd situations and happenings started unfolding in the mind. Hindi films have given a sordid picture of

Mumbai, and we carry that perception everywhere. The result is that every new person appears to be a villain or a thug. Our eyes were set on the front windscreen to get the clue of that area, though we were there for the first time. It was again raining heavily; the wipers were moving at a fast speed to lessen the effect of the rain, on the front wind screen. As the taxi took a sharp turn down hill, I spotted the Assam Rifles' board. A much-desired relief came into the sight. All the tension and the anxiety just flew away like the young bird, that soars away high deep into the blue sky, never to be seen again. I secretly thanked Almighty. Our prayers were answered.

The iron gates were wide open. No sentry was there at the entry gate, perhaps due to the heavy rains. Taking a right turn, there was a dim light in a passage in between the two buildings. The driver instructed his friend, who got out of the cab and ran inside, in order to escape the water cascade, coming from the sky. Two jawans came running to us with two umbrellas and a long powerful jeep torch. They took our luggage inside. I paid the cab's bill with a good amount of tip. They got happy and thanked both of us. Then they raced back to their own destination.

We got a comfortable room to stay and were served hot tea with biscuits. Then we recalled the nasty tension and the anxiety that had built up. How we had misjudged that gypsy guy, who was a God sent help for

us. Actually, he was noticing our helplessness since a long time and then, how he turned to our help, is memorable.

Our heads are filled with negative thoughts, and they cloud our mind. They do not permit us to see clearly and judiciously. Daily, the newspaper carries the news of misadventures and mis-happenings with the foreigners and the tourists, who are new to the city. This affects one and all and creates a kind of psychosis in the mind of a tourist or a traveller. The total absence of trust grips the mind. We are not ready to accept the help from a stranger. We start doubting his intentions. The bond of trust takes time to form, especially when you are under an umbrella of suspicion and insecurity clubbed with anxiety.

In this situation, what is desired is to keep your mind cool. Keep your eyes and ears open. Above all, have faith in yourself. Have trust in the 'Guy in the sky'.

My genuine heartfelt good wishes for the gypsy guy, will ever be with him. He remains a source of inspiration for me, and I follow him on his lines and have earned good wishes from the people. Most importantly, I am thankful for the soft touches from that invisible monitoring and guiding super force, who has given me a new direction to help the people, who are new to the city, where I dwell.

STORY 6:

THE REST HOUSE IN THE FOREST

The region of Uttarakhand fulfils the need of physical and spiritual thirst. It is the land of God and goddesses and that is why, it is called 'Dev-bhoomi'. If you go with positive thoughts and with active mind, you will find miracles happening.

We started from Sonprayag after a visit to Triyuginarain temple, where Lord Shiva got married to Mata Sati. Our destination for the day was Chopta, a beautiful camping place in the lap of nature, usually called Gulmarg of Uttarakhand. This place provides an approach for another famous temple called 'Tungnath' which is man made and is at a high altitude of fourteen thousand feet in between the mountains. The journey to this temple is mesmerising.

As we started our journey in good mood, my friend Mr. Gulshan Malohtra signalled us to stop just after

travelling a kilometre. He was in his own Tate Estate SUV which was quite an old vehicle. The metallic bumper of his vehicle had fallen down and was being dragged. He asked Sonu, his son to fix it at the proper place. His son was quite slim with very less muscle mass on his body. It appeared that God had made him with left out material, that HE had in his store. At the age of twenty-two years, his back had a curve similar to the alphabet 'C' in English. His father took out a Gold flake cigarette packet from his pocket and started smoking. I had to help Sonu in lifting and fixing the bumper. A precious hour was lost. After covering thirty kilometres or so, the rear suspension leaf spring of another friend's car broke down. The passengers of his car were adjusted in other vehicles. This friend was my college friend. At GuptKanshi, the leaf spring was got welded and repaired. Another an hour and a half, was wasted. It was the lunch time. We had it. The time at that moment was two o'clock. We started moving ahead. I was just thinking and feeling proud that my Maruti 800 was best maintained, and nothing would go wrong. A loud noise from the rear side of my car drew my attention, the tyre had gone flat. The complete luggage was downloaded for the stepney and then again it was put into the dicky. The deflated tyre was got repaired at the Kund bridge locality. Much of the precious time had been lost in the repairing of the different vehicles. In hills, it is very important to reach at

the proper destination in time to get rooms, especially when you are with ladies and children.

We were physically broken and very tired. We were yearning for a comfortable stay and a good dinner. In normal circumstances, we could have reached Chopta by three at noon. The distance was not so much. Sooner we had to switch on the head lights of the vehicles. We were crossing a very dense forest, which was the habitat of different wild animals. The man eaters of Rudra Prayag, the leopards and tigers are quite famous. The cool breeze was hitting our vehicles. Though we were wearing woollens, we were not feeling cosy. We spotted deer, foxes and mongoose. The kids saw these animals and were curious to see a tiger. I told them that it was about to appear. They got silent out of fear.

At about nine in the late evening, we were at Chopta. We heaved a sigh of relief. We came out of our car and stretched our body. Chopta is a village of thirty to forty families having equal number of huts. There are some prefabricated structures for tourists, belonging to the villagers for renting them out to earn money. The tourists spend a day or two and visit Tungnath temple, which is hardly three kilometres from there, up on the mountain top under the Chandra Shila hill. The way to this temple is laid with Maple trees on both sides. We intended to visit the temple the next day, but for that we required accommodation at Chopta, to spend the night.

As we started the search for rooms, we noticed that already a bus and six cars were parked there. The ladies suggested that dinner can be ordered later on, first priority was to get the rooms as they wanted to use the washrooms. We tried hard to get the rooms. All were full. Not a single room was available. The locals advised us to move towards Chamoli, which was nearly seventy kilometres ahead. For us it was a very tedious task. We were exhausted and drained out, as it was a hard day for us. Moreover, here we had to visit the temple also. Had we moved ahead we would have missed Tungnath temple, a small one but worth visiting.

We talked to Dhabhawala (owner of a food shop), where we intended to take our dinner. He also showed his inability. After much persuasion, he opened his godown where, in one corner were lying lots of pony satchels. Another corner had jute bags full of onion. In the third corner five jute bags containing wheat flour were placed on one another. The fourth corner was occupied by potatoes lying loose. The wheat flour was scattered all over the floor. The owner agreed that he would get it swept, provided we agree to lie down on the floor on mattresses. There was no provision of washrooms. The ladies with us objected and were not ready to compromise on that issue. Our kids had dozed off in the cars.

Across the road, in front of the room was the gate with a bell hanging from an arch that led to Tungnath temple. I stood near the gate for a while and prayed to Lord Shiva for his intervention in solving our problem. I silently reminded HIM that particularly on that day, HE had not been kind enough, but the time had come when we required HIS help urgently. We were not in a city but in a small village amidst high mountains, where accommodation was very limited.

In no time, I got a call from my brother-in-law, Ripu Daman Singh who was standing behind me, “Bhai Sahab, I noticed a PWD rest house, you and your wife have govt. identity cards. You can request them for rooms. It’s just seven kilometres from here. It was in the way when we came here.”

We took a single car and rushed back leaving all others at Chopta. I had missed that PWD rest house while concentrating on the driving on the narrow hilly road. We left Mr. Malhotra with ladies and kids. Away from the main road, a narrow road led us to the PWD rest house. In front of the rest house was a hut in which a guy was cooking meals. Two others were eating.

I enquired the name of the caretaker from them. One of them said, “Sahab, his name is Bhairon Singh.” We shouted his name many times. The gate of the rest house was closed and locked from inside. A middle-aged guy came running with a long torch in his hand.

After much persuasion and pleadings, and after showing our govt. identity cards, he gave rooms to us on the condition that we would have to vacate them at seven in the morning. We agreed to it. The term that attracted him to give room to us, was that we were to give order of dinner for eighteen persons. The guy who was cooking chapatis in the hut was his son. That would be a handsome earning for him. Moreover, for himself he expected a hefty tip.

We had sound sleep and comfortable stay in those rooms. Next morning, the hot geyser water removed the last leg of the fatigue. We were fresh from our head to foot. Outside the building was a well-maintained garden, where the children chose to click the photos. There were beautiful flowers nodding their heads in cool breeze. Actually, that was the place for the stay for ministers and high-ranking officers. The caretaker thanked us for the good tip.

As we raced ahead towards Chopta, to get lord Tungnath's blessings and darshan, I realised that all this became possible, after my genuine prayer to Lord Shiva, coming straight from my heart and reaching to HIM. GOD doesn't disappoint his devotees, provided they have genuine feelings and devotion for HIM.

STORY 7:

A PARIKARMA

A Parikrama is going around a sacred place, chanting Almighty's name or the name of any god or goddesses with devotion, to experience the positivity of aura of that place. In doing so, every human being gets busy either seeking HIM or HIS grace, in terms of anything that he has in his mind.

Shakespeare has said in one of his plays, that this world is a stage. A person has to play his role and then has to quit. On this stage called 'Earth' you meet people of different mind sets, with their own thoughts and beliefs. When you observe them keenly, they leave their print on your mind. People have their own strengths and weaknesses, which in turn makes an individual, different from others.

Greed is the most important trait in a person, which shows the basic instinct of a person to deceive others. People exhibit greed in acquiring the materialistic

treasure and show their true nature by usurping the money or property of others. For this, they can go to any extent. Many a times, the thoughtless customs and the evil designs materialising into sinister acts, cause deep pain and anguish. People tend to be so heartless and indifferent, that they do not feel pain of their own people. People snap the relations in a twist of a moment without giving a second thought. That is what you find in one of the eastern states of India, the proof is Virindavan, and its surroundings, where thousands of old ladies live and roam, deserted by their own kith and kins.

Diwali is the festival of lights. The lights dispel the darkness. This day is followed by Govardhan puja day. The Hindu devotees in hordes are found performing twenty-one kilometres Pari-Karma around Govardhan Parbat (mountain). On the Pari-karma Marg scores of temples have mushroomed in order to fleece the devotees. A very few attract you.

Silently, a group follows the other persons going in the same direction. After covering about sixteen kilometres on bare feet, this group of which the writer is a part, reaches Radha Kund's (pond) round about. Uncountable Mai's (the deserted old ladies from their families) clad in white sarees roam here and there. Their back bent due to their old age, use a tree stem as a walking stick. When they get tired due to fatigue, they

stop and look at you. There are two Kunds, Krishna kund and Radha kund. The devotees while performing the parikrama take a dip to purify themselves in these kunds. The main purpose is to seek blessings of these two divine identities. All Brijwasi wish each other with the name of 'Shree Radha' as 'Radhey Radhey'. The faith and the devotion keep people moving. The faith is unquestionable.

One of the members of this group Sh. Harpal Singh informs that he will be spending fifteen minutes in Bhajan ashram with Mais and Sh. Murari, their caretaker. These Mais have been turnout of their own houses, when their husband died. Their son and the daughter-in-law come and leave them here. Some Mais are even blind and walk with the assistance of others. They belong to the age group between sixty to ninety. Some are even older than that. Their stoop does not allow them to straighten their own body. Their spine has acquired a permanent curve, a symbol of extreme old age.

On Sh. Harpal's suggestion, my legs also seemed to appeal for rest. I readily agreed. Some in the group wanted to continue the journey uninterrupted, so that they could finish Pari-karma as soon as possible. I got a sense of feeling that something important and unique, waits for me to watch and feel.

We separated from the group and entered a small narrow street leading to an open compound in a house. The main gate displayed a board on which was written 'BHAJANASHRAM'. It's a unit and its head quarter is at Virindavan. One could listen to the hymn of scores of voices in unison of old ladies singing 'Radhey Radhey' (the name of lord Shree Krishna's beloved). On seeing us, Sh. Murari Lal, the manager aged around seventy-five years, brought two plastic chairs for us. We desperately needed them. As we lowered our back to sit, we couldn't control ourselves, we just dropped in the chairs with a sense of relief, running through the whole body.

Murari Lal ji asked about our well-being in Brij dialect, "Babuji kaisi harahi hai?" (How the things are going on?)

My friend with folded hands replied, "Very well, by the grace of Radha Rani, we are here".

A Mai clothed in white saree brought two glasses of drinking water, which energised us. A receipt book was brought on our request and my friend paid rupees three thousand as a yearly donation for 'Sadhu Sewa'. A list of regular donors was displayed on the wall. The subscription was meant for two times meals of cooked rice and dal (lentils) for these poor ladies. For reciting bhajans, they are given cash of rupees two per day. The devotees come and give them more cash, biscuits, cloths

and many more things of their daily use, by their own sweet will.

How these ladies manage in this meagre amount was surprising. My friend gave another set of contribution of rupees twelve hundred which were converted into ten rupees currency notes. My friend entered the main hall where the Mais sat in several rows and Radha Rani's photo placed in between them. I saw Mais singing 'Radhey Radhey'. They raised their heads to see, who had come. Harpal started giving rupees ten to each Mai. They eagerly waited for their own turn. Some Mais tried to touch his feet, to which he resented and stepped back, politely telling them not to do so as they were like his own mother. Some of these elderly ladies were familiar to Harpal's family members and their children. They asked, why didn't he bring them. To which he promised to bring them next time. This quietly proved that he had established a strong bond with them. Somehow, it also showed that these ladies missed their own kith and kin especially their own grand children living far away.

Initially, I somewhat hesitated but then I followed on the footsteps of Harpal. He boldly encouraged me. The Mais were sitting on jute coir strips in eight rows. I gave rupees ten to each Mai, sometimes looking at their face stealthily, which was full of gratitude. Some were blind and couldn't see. The other would ask her to

accept the money. They would utter blessings to the donor.

My own mother is also a widow, a frightening chill through a thought, just ran through my mind. My heart sank, tears erupted profusely. My throat got choaked with emotions. The disturbing question was, “How could people have courage to abandon their own mother.” For some time, I was listless.

We came out from Bhajan-ashram after taking a cup of tea. Both of us, again mixed up in the milieu, all walking in the same direction on the last leg of the Parikarma. Harpal Singh started describing, how he got connected to this ashram and its Mais, since some couple of years. How his family supports and encourages him to provide clothes, biscuits, soap cakes, woollen clothes, slippers and many other things for these old and abandoned Mais. He further told how these Mais are attached to his grandchildren. While walking bare foot with others and going through this touching experience, I was getting more liquefied and thinking, how these Mais have immense capacity to hide their own pain of separation from their son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. They shower their own love on children of others and are unable to meet their own. They get separated from them when they need them most, particularly at this age. This is their destiny, always sitting

on the consolation that someday their own, will visit them.

On Durga Puja, the families living there, celebrate this festival with zeal and devotion. The married lady put a bold vermilion bindi on their forehead. They wear costly and gorgeous sarees and dresses, sing and dance to appease the Divine mother. They enjoy lavish dinner while they laugh and gossip. They forget their own old, deserted mother living far away, clad in white saree dependent on others, silently recollecting her own days when she used to celebrate her own life, living with her husband and children. Now there is no one close by, to ask her pain.

While my heart and mind were still engrossed in their condition, Harpal Singh continued with his own experiences. My tears were fulfilling a promise of saline bath to my cheeks and face. They had become difficult to be controlled and to hide. Silently we were moving on the Pari-karma route. The 'Soft Touch' of almighty had landed on my being which had a hidden plan for me.

Since more than twenty years have flown away, I am connected to this ashram along with my old friends. I have added a few of my new friends to this ashram, who visit these Mais on Govardhan Pari-karma day. I live with a promise to remain connected with this ashram, till I have strength in my limbs and body. After that, my son

will fall in line, who still shares this heart melting experience twice a year.

Without any hesitation and reservations, I express my gratitude to HIM for not bringing me into this world in that state, to which these deserted MAIS belong.

STORY 8:

A MAN AT THE RED LIGHT

Some days are eventful, and they leave impression on your mind, otherwise all days seem to appear to be generated from the same time machinery. That is to say that occasionally, some days are different in their character and that is what happened one day.

Delhi Police has become computer literate and professional, as they fired new instructions online for the people for renewal of their arms license. The application was to be submitted online. That was a hit below the belt for me. I, being a senior citizen, do not have much inclination to acquire computer's knowledge. I had to take the help of my son Vineet and my daughter-in-law Vinika to apply for the same. After waiting for three months, the date for the personal appearance along with the relevant papers was sent to me via SMS. The date given was 21st October 2019.

A request was made to Vineet to accompany me to the licensing section on that day, but he had his own

priorities for that day. The youngsters are masters of their own mood. The kind of relation between a son and a father, is such that the son loses his freedom in the company of his father. He has to walk in between the lines. Some would call it a 'generation gap'. A slight resistance and an afterthought became a polite agreement of accompanying me to the licensing section.

What would I do, if the officials ask me to do something on the computer or on my mobile phone, was the hitch. With Vineet accompanying me, this type of fear just blew away.

After getting up at seven in the morning and before taking bed tea, I checked all the documents, and they were in order and adequate. I know very well that it is the characteristic of a worried behaviour, not to become a loser. Fully prepared, we left for DCP's office.

The crowded roads didn't permit us to reach in time at ten in the morning. I rechecked the message, mistakenly the time for appointment was given 10 pm instead of 10.am. I was prepared to meet the officials armed with an excuse that as per their message, I was before time.

Moving over the circular flyover of Sarai kale khan and Barapulla pass, we landed at Lajpat Nagar, near Mool Chand hospital's red light. The needles of the wristwatch were running faster in competition with the acceleration of our four-wheeler. All the cars and other

vehicles stopped in a disciplined manner before the red light. With the engines off for a while, the drivers and the passengers had a free time and usually in this grace period, they take liberty to look at other car's occupants.

Near the flyover stood a man in a very sombre mood, looking downwards at the black charcoal road. He was wearing a grey track suit pyjama only. His upper part of the body was totally without any covering. His body was unreasonably slim. Not that he had made special efforts to contain his body, but the cruel destiny had taken away his two limbs (two hands). Neither could he wear his clothes nor could eat something by himself. It was a shocking sight. He was neither asking for money nor was he trying to draw the attention of others. He just stood silently. In a way, he was trying to keep his integrity intact. I pointed out to my son who had ten rupees note in his shirt's upper pocket, but that wouldn't make any difference, I thought. A two hundred rupees note was added with the earlier currency. I felt that I cannot change the destiny of that person, but my action could make a slight difference. My action could dilute his sombre mood for a while. A slight change on his face would make my day.

Vineet tried to draw his attention by calling him, "O bhai, listen, come here." But that person was lost in his thoughts. Vineet addressed him more loudly. This time he noticed us. He came near our car on the driver's side. Vineet said to him, "Take this money". Before that

person could utter a request, I said to Vineet, “How is that possible? Put money in his pocket. Vineet reacted in shock, “Oh! I am extremely sorry. He got out of the car with much effort as other vehicles were closely parked, waiting for the green light to turn on. Vineet had shown his normal behavioural instinct by asking him to take the money.

The green light obliged all the motorists, and the red light just melted away. The cars started moving and both of us could hear some fleeting words of blessings from him. We both had earned the day.

We fight over petty things, we complain to each other, we just splurge out the money on useless things, but we fail to realise that HE has been very kind and benevolent in keeping us fit and fine. He has kept our limbs intact with our body and that too, to help others. All the pettiness in our mind must slip away, when we are witness to such an unusual experience.

The super force that manifests itself in every human being, guides us to act reasonably. Many a times we fail to act, because we fall in the trap of ‘Second Thought’. The result is, we lose the opportunity to serve others and our soul, which is already eager to establish a connect with HIM.

STORY 9:

THE LEMON DRINK

One of the most important messages in Bhagwat Geeta by Lord Shri Krishna is that nobody can escape the results of his/her own Karmas. They follow you like your own shadow and are bound give the results. Therefore, our karmas should be noble. Bad karmas have their own results; they make a person to suffer backlash sooner or later. Good karmas give us satisfaction and happiness. In our day-to-day activities we must keep this in our mind, this has been said by sages and religious souls.

While coming back from Badrinath ji, we came to know at Joshimath in Uttarakhand that a massive land slide had taken place at Kalia-sour, a place near Rudra-Prayag. We were a team of five cars, two being SUVs were jampacked. One of the SUV was Scorpio that had eight passengers in it and except two, the others were first timers to venture into hills and mountains. They were very excited in coming for this trip, Alok Ranjan, my

friend told so. In total, we were twenty-three pilgrims. The family from Patna had their return tickets booked from New Delhi to Patna for the next day evening. So, it was mandatory to reach Delhi well in time. For that we had to rush. This land slide that we were going to face, was a hurdle in our programme.

Alok Ranjan made a call from that Scorpio and said, “Teen Baj Gaya Hai Sir, Sala Pet Mey Gur Gur Ho Raha Hai. Apke Right Mey Hotel Aa Raha Hai Rok Lijiye”. (Some rumblings and unwanted growling are taking place in the stomach due to hunger, a hotel is in sight on your side, stop the car for food). I was leading the convoy. Though our cars were being safely driven, but we were pretty fast as straight road had come after negotiating lot of curves and hair pin bends. We had put our cars in top gears after a long time, when this request from Alok came. I had to give signal to all cars by raising my right arm to slow down and to stop at the hotel. Actually, at that point of time, the auto machines had also started taking liberty of running freely, that pleasure of driving the car was short lived. The hotel that Alok pointed out, was on a patch of wide plain land surrounded by beautiful garden, having variety of green plants and lot of colourful smiling flowers scattering their pleasant smell in the free air. Now the mountains had moved a little far. Chairs and tables were laid out in open and there we could stretch ourselves in the sun. Some jute woven cots were also laid out. The drivers of the cars

preferred them. Due to constant uninterrupted driving for four hours, we genuinely needed this break. The waiter came and took our order. He told us that the land slide was massive and since four days, the traffic was held up. This tension hit our morale. He informed us that the food would be on our tables in thirty minutes time.

We were on the right-hand side of the road. I noticed a person sitting on a bench on the left side of the road, near a lemon tree. I could see that he had lot of lemons placed in three glass jars, in front of him on the table. This person was engrossed in his own sailings and was unconcerned about his surroundings. His chin was resting on the palms of his both hands. He appeared to be a victim, imprisoned by the chain of thoughts, that were holding up his mind. I wanted to have a second opinion about the land slide, and the shortest possible route for Rishikesh. I rose from my chair and went up to him to break his monotony. He got startled on noticing me. I asked him, if he could sell lemons to me. He said, "These lemons are actually for making the lemon drinks for the tourist, if you want, I can prepare for you". I made a request for two glasses. About the land slide, he informed that our vehicles were the light vehicles. They would easily pass. The problem was for heavy vehicles like buses and trucks. They would also be able to ply by this evening. A big sense of relief was given by him. While he was preparing Shikanji (the lemon drink) with

black salt for me, its yummy taste had already started dancing on my taste buds.

My sixth sense had already indicated that this person was in deep crisis. As he blew away my tension, I also wanted to do something for him. After paying thirty rupees to him for two lemon drinks, I changed the topic and told him about the unprecedented rainfall in the plains. Unknowingly I rubbed him from the wrong side. He pointed in the direction where our team members were sitting. He said, “Look beyond them far away, river Alaknanda is there which comes from Badrinath. After that see those mountains, crossing them, you can reach my village on the other side. The distance is five kilometres from here, where I am sitting right now. The concrete ceiling of my house has developed deep cracks. The water drips in. The rains have created havoc this time. The cement bag costs Rupees two hundred twenty-five in the plains. Here it costs around double the rate due to the increase in the transportation charges in the hill area. I will have to carry each bag on my back and will have to cross the river, when it’s not in spate. This time the tourists have not turned up, so it means no income for us. Survival has really become very difficult this time. How would I feed my children? The shed of the cow has also fallen. The two small children depend on its milk. My wife asks me to do something.” Saying this he abruptly stopped and turned down his face in despair. I told him to have faith in Almighty in the time

of difficulties. I assured him HE would provide relief, sooner than we think.

I left him there to join my team. Midway a plan struck in my mind. We had appointed Alok Ranjan as cashier for the whole team. We all were paying contribution to him as and when required. On reaching there, Alok asked, "Where were you sir and where did you go?" I told him about the situation of the land slide and that our being Light motor vehicles, we would not be facing much problem. Lastly, I told him about the two glasses of the yummy lemon drinks that I had. He at once jumped out from the jute cot, on which he was taking rest, and he invited everybody to join him for the lemon drinks. Nobody declined his offer. Soon the person making Shikanji (lemon drink) was over busy. I went for the third glass. The bill that Alok paid was Rupees six hundred forty.

Sometimes, if you offer money to a stranger, his reaction may not be to your liking, as it may hurt his self-respect. What I did in this situation, was to find an indirect way to help him, and it was according to my conscience, that guided me. This way his dignity remained intact.

Here in Delhi, it is said in business class community, that you never know the timings of death or the arrival of customer at your shop. Both are unpredictable. That

person, near the lemon tree on the roadside stand, must have thought about this popular saying, proving right.

I got some satisfaction after seeing some folds disappearing from his forehead. Some where there, in the deep blue sky, SOMEBODY might be watching me with a smile. I thank HIM for the intuition that I had, and the wonderful experience of HIS grace by the soft touch that he provided to my heart.

STORY 10:

A SADHU IN JUTE CLOTHES

In one of the trips to Badrinath, at the land of Tapasthali of Lord Vishnu, a unique, exceptional, unseen and unbelievable case of renunciation came to light. We planned to spend an extra day at this holy place, to have a proper feel and to see what had not been seen till then.

A guide and a pandit from Devprayag who remains at this place, promised us to take us on a mountain where we could find the footsteps of Lord Vishnu and demon Shastrabahu. Bhasker, is the name, which is quite famous at this place, a simple pure hearted guy, who was to be our guide and the person responsible for introducing us, to a great saint.

He came right at eleven in the morning at our lodge. We followed him. We crossed the mighty and roaring Alaknanda River through a bridge. We came on the other side of the town and started ascending the

mountain through a zig zag trail, which had round pebbles and stones in its fold. Bhasker was telling us how Nur and Narain fought the demon on this mountain. The big rocks bear the footprints of them. Hardly we had covered a distance of three kilometres from our lodge, we came across a Quttia (a form of hut made by one's own labour, using whatever material that is available). It was triangular in shape, supported by two big rocks, protruding out of the soil of the mountain. One rock formed the ceiling and the other formed a wall on right hand side. Some brick and cement work was also done to make it liveable. On the front side, there were two window type small wooden doors, through which the entry could be gained. The Quttia was on the right-hand side of the trail. Bhasker stopped all of us fifty feet short of that Quttia and said, "A Maharaj (saint) lives there in that Quttia, if he comes to know about us, he will certainly stop and would not allow us to move further till we spend at least an hour with him. So, walk very quietly, so that he doesn't get disturbed.

After moving ahead and covering at least two kilometres from that sadhu's abode, we were nearly at the top of the mountain. Bhasker told us that Nur and Narain were the two sons of Lord Vishnu. Shastra-bahu had got blessings from Lord Shiva, that a person who meditates for one thousand years, could only kill him. The demon Shastra-bahu killed every sadhu whosoever was found meditating. Only a few survived. They

complained to Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu found some auspicious days in which he chose to sit on meditation, to gain the fruits of one thousand years in a shorter period. While he was on meditation, the demon appeared there and challenged him to fight. It was intense cold, due to cool breeze and snow fall. Mata Laxmi, Lord Vishnu's wife turned herself into a tree of Indian plum, locally called Beri or Badri. She leaned over Lord Vishnu to cover and protect him from the chilly wind and the snow. Finding the demon disturbing the Lord, Mata Lakshmi asked the demon to face his two sons Nur and Narain. These two children defeated the demon and cut off his all hands except one (this demon was known to have one thousand hands). The demon ran away and took refuge in the protection of Surya Dev (Sun). In Dwapar yuga, Nur incarnated as Arjuna, Narain as Shri Krishna and this demon incarnated as Karna born with a Surya Kavatch (Sun Shield). Badri is referred to Mother goddess Laxmi and her Nath is her husband, Lord Vishnu. This mythological katha (episode) was interesting and captivating and we heard it with rapt attention. These were the famous identities who fought war in Kurukshetra in epic war of Mahabharat.

We spent some time in the fresh cool air, when we saw an American coming alone from the other side of the mountain, He told us that he couldn't cross the mountain on the other side, as it was too steep. He

intended to cross it in his next visit. We saw that this man was a man of grit determination. After that American had gone, whose monotony of thoughts we broke, we also decided to turn back, as it was getting much colder. The dark clouds were also in a way, asking us to move to some safe place, as they had started growling. They had turned quite thunderous after some time.

While returning, the same Quttia had to be crossed silently. Bhasker had his index finger on his lips asking us to be quiet. We moved silently, and then we heard a voice from that Quttia, whose doors were still shut, “Bhasker, you are going quietly without meeting me”. Bhasker at once gave a slap on his forehead and said, “Guru ji, how do you come to know each time, whenever I pass from here?” The sadhu smiled and welcomed us. Bhasker entered into the Quttia. We had to make efforts in entering into it, as it was at a high level from the ground. He talked to Bhasker and started preparing tea for us, though we resisted a little bit. Bhasker told us that he won't allow us to leave without a cup of herbal tea. We had to surrender. He had an old Nutan stove, which had several cotton wicks dipped in kerosene oil. This stove didn't have pump to increase its heat and burning power. It was noiseless and was different from the conventional brass stove.

What we noticed in this Quttia, was that its ceiling was at a height of four feet from the ground. Just opposite to the entrance gate were the photos of some deities. Below them was a tape recorder and fifteen to twenty cassettes.

The most important thing that I had kept secret till now is that this sadhu didn't wear clothes but had a sack of jute bag tied around his body which is conventionally used to store grains or sugar. He had tied a jute strip on his forehead in order to protect himself from the chill of the wind and the intense cold. That had been cut out from a sack. It was an unusual attire that he wore. Usually, the saints wear saffron coloured cotton clothes.

It is also pertinent to mention that the political prisoners in Andaman (Kaala Pani) jail were given jute clothes to wear, as part of the punishment. Those jute clothes used to be very coarse and rough and usually caused skin allergy, itching and rashes on the skin. This used to be the inhuman treatment given to the freedom fighters by the Britishers.

I also started discussion with that sadhu about the weather and my attachment to this place with my number of visits to Badrivishal temple. My aim was to satiate my curiosity in knowing about his unusual dress and his life before becoming a sadhu.

When I decided to stir his memories, I was quite hesitant, but Bhasker with me, I took liberty to ask. Usually, these Sadhus or saints have very unpredictable mood. This sadhu thought for a while and took some time to begin.

Meanwhile I interjected, "We can brush aside this topic if you're uncomfortable."

He said, "Never mind."

He started, "I belong to a town adjacent to Ludhiana. My father had established a cloth shop and was assisted by my elder brother who is married and has two children, studying in a school. I am the younger son of my parents. I graduated from a Ludhiana college. The earnings from the shop were quite sufficient to meet our requirements. One day my father said to Veerji (elder brother), Your younger brother has done graduation. It is difficult to get a govt. job. I want him to assist you. I have grown old. Your mother does not keep good health. I want to spend time with her."

The sadhu said that his brother was ready to accommodate him. After dinner, he told all this to his wife, my sister-in-law (Bhabhi). She responded in a way that he couldn't expect in his darkest dream. The Sadhu looked sad, and he continued, "My Bhabhi had suddenly become angry and in clear terms said, if your father wants that his younger son should also do business, then ask

your father to get a new shop for him and invest money for his younger son. This business at present is yours, you have invested your labour and sweat. He can't be brought in, in this business. You have established this business. It is your good will that counts."

My brother said, "No, you are wrong, my father had bought this shop, and it was his money, that was invested in this shop. This all happened before you came into this house. No doubt, I have put in hard labour, besides my father's efforts. It's my father's name that counts."

My Bhabhi was adamant and was losing her temper even more. The situation was turning ugly. She warned my brother, that if he didn't adhere to her advice, then the peace of the house would be lost. My brother was keeping control over his anger.

He said, "You are not being considerate to my father, he has no money, how and from where, would he arrange money at this old age."

Both of them had hot exchanges in hushed tone. My brother was cautious that his parents wouldn't hear. He was asking his wife to speak in a low tone. My Bhabhi lastly warned that she would leave the house with the two kids, if somebody is inducted in this business. Then both of them felt silent. The light of their room got switched off.

Sadhu said, “I could hear all this through the door in between the two rooms. While I lay in the cot, the parent’s face appeared repeatedly in my mind. My mother was not keeping good health. The words of Bhabhi resounded in my ears ‘the peace of the house will be lost.’ This is what a lady can do. Till three in the early morning, I couldn’t sleep. I went to the kitchen to quench my thirst, where I saw a jute bag emptied a day before. My father had brought grains from the whole sale market. Soon a thought pervaded my mind, that the clothes, I was wearing at that time also belonged to our shop. Then and there I decided to shun the clothes for ever. I made pieces of jute bag, and they became my apparels. At four in the morning, I left the house for the peace of the family.” Then the Sadhu stopped for a while. After some time, I projected my second question, to which he responded looking at the ground, “Yes after a year, I again went to my town, to see my mother’s face. My moustache and beard had grown considerably by that time. The harshness and the chill had turned my skin quiet dark and rigid. It was seven in the morning; I stood in the street outside my house asking for wheat flour as sadhu’s ask. I pushed the door of the house. My old mother was sweeping the floor of the compound, and she called the name of my Veerji and asked him to give something to me. My mother had grown weak, the wrinkles on her face were the telltales of her sufferings, that she had faced due to the separation from her

younger son. She gave a casual look at me and again resumed her work.” THE DUST HAD SETTLED DOWN.

He further said, “I couldn’t wait for long as the worldly attachments had started raising their head. I had already stepped in the world of detachment. Staying there would again rake up, the old issues and controversies, to which I had already said goodbye. I at once slipped away from there.” Sadhu stopped abruptly. A tear had landed from his eye to the floor of that Quttia.

I changed the topic. I asked him, if he could meet me in the evening at Badrinath temple, as I wanted to gift him some original cassettes of devotional songs kept in my Maruti car. By this time the tea had been consumed by us. I offered him a hundred rupee note as a courtesy which he reluctantly accepted on the request of Bhasker.

In the evening, at the temple, he was there at the aarti time. I handed over to him, some of the latest cassettes of rare melodious bhajans, sung by famous devotional song singer ‘Anup Jalota’. Thereafter I introduced him to my family members and then with the whole group. The amazing thing was that he didn’t cast his eyes on any female member. He talked to the male members only, looking straight into their eyes.

At least twenty years have passed, I have visited Badrinath several times. From the main road, I look up at the Charn Paduka mountain and satisfy myself looking at his Quttia, painted in white and having a saffron coloured flag fluttering vigorously in the speedy winds. There lives a great abdicator, who relinquished all his rights for the peace of the family. I point out this thing to every new person, accompanying me on this trip for the first time.

The two wells of tears of his mother must have dried up by now, if she exists in this mean world. She gave birth to a Yogi. Such men are rarely born who have immense inner strength. He set an example by denouncing this materialistic world to give all his space to others. May GOD bestow peace and more inner strength on him.

STORY 11:

CHARITY GONE WRONG

The problem with a person is that he remains a victim of misjudging others. Either he underestimates or overestimates a person. Today on 18th December, 2019, at about 12.30, while I was on my way to the main market of Model Town, Delhi, to receive my two grand kids from the school bus, I saw a middle-aged lady walking ahead of me in the same direction. She didn't appear to be from a family of sound background as her appearance told so. She wasn't bodily fit and was walking in an unusual way. A goods Maruti van came from the opposite side and stopped near her. The driver of that van offered a ten rupee note to her. That lady declined the offer and said, "No, I don't take money, I eat them." Saying this, she opened her palm and showed some batashas (sugar balls) to him, and then she walked away. Somehow directly or indirectly, she also showed lack of normal behaviour, maybe she didn't possess a sound mind. The driver of the van misjudged her in a way, that

she might need money and he must help her. The driver's eyes met mine. His expressions were as if he had the right to offer money and that her duty was to accept. The driver sped away. His quick disappearance from the spot was a definite proof, that he realised his folly and felt much embarrassed.

An identical instance took place, and I put myself in humiliation of an extreme order. I recollect that episode which happened at least ten years back and I suffered repentance for a considerable time. This faded memory at times, at once activates and that picture runs actively through my mind. Let me bring that episode for my valuable readers to read and to gain an insight.

There is an ancient temple on the bank of holy river Ganga, in Rishikesh. The mythology says that goddess Parvati prayed for a long time in this temple to seek Lord Shiva, as her life mate. Her prayers were granted in due course of time. We were also very eager to seek Lord Shiva's blessings. We had to cross through a very congested market to reach that temple. The show cases of the shops depict the articles of common interest. Some of them show semiprecious stones. Some shops sell colourful tee shirts with the images of God and goddesses. The sales boys try to fleece the foreigners. They show little interest in local customers. The foreigners come to this holy place in search of peace and divine blessings. Some roam here in search of drugs. The

marketplace and the streets are busy with local customers, foreigners, sadhus in saffron clothes. The ringing bells give soothing feel.

It was the time for Aarti puja (An aarti is a song sung in praise of the lord or the deity with ringing of the bells). We reached in time and stood right in front of Shiva Lingam. A crowd of devotees entered in the temple through a narrow door, hearing the bells ringing. The pandits performed aarti puja with a zeal. After chanting Vedic mantras, he sprinkled the holy water over the devotees. People started dispersing from there. As we were standing in front, we had to wait for others to exit first. We paid Dakshina to Panditji.

As we were the last to come out of the temple, I saw an aged person, who had a well-built body sitting on the bench, directly under a mango fruit tree near the outside periphery of the outer wall. He had graciously grown old. He had very fair skin. He had white big moustaches which mingled with the white flowing beard. He wore a golden coloured silk kurta and a white pyjama. His eyes were cast on deity inside the temple. Rather we were obstructing his vision. Later, I recollected that he had a divine glow on his face.

Spontaneously, my hand went inside my shirt's pocket and got a five rupee note which I offered him. Taking him to be a Sadhu Mahatma, and without giving a second thought to his personality and status, I

committed the blunder. That person simply and politely said, “Nahi Narain, Nahi.” I realised my misjudgement and the blunder. The word ‘Narain’ is referred to Lord Vishnu, who is preserver of all life on this earth. How could I be Narain. But certainly, it pointed out that he was an exalted soul, who had gained spiritual heights and believed in a popular saying, ‘Na jaane kis roop me Narain mil jaaye.’ (No body knows in whom one may meet the supreme being.)

The answer came from Hindu religion and beliefs, where it is said, that God has manifested every human being in his own image and he dwells in every person. You never know at what point of time, you may meet Narain in the guise of an ordinary person.

This incident happened in Rishikesh, where lot of sadhus and sages’ wander. They ask and expect from you. If you are kind and considerate, then you acquire a bent of mind to shell out something according to your convenience to as many persons as you can.

Sometimes the mind plays trick. I felt extremely sorry for my foolishness. I felt embarrassed, though that exalted one, addressed me respectfully and that too in a very polite manner. He didn’t utter a word that would displease me. It was his greatness and maturity. Who knows, I may have been face to face with some divine identity. Possibility can be that he might have been a

millionaire, and he could appoint several workers like me. It was I, who put him to disrespect.

Till this day, the repentance is so much, that I missed an opportunity of touching his feet and seeking blessings from him. When I narrated this incident to others who were along with me, they said, “No, we didn` t see any such person sitting there.”

May be, this was a game plan by somebody, who sits there in the blue sky watching all of us. Anyway, I am rich by an experience, and I might have met Narain in guise of a person, who knows. Blessed I feel. Thanks to HIM.

STORY 12:

MAN PROPOSES BUT GOD DISPOSES

It is a popular saying that man proposes but God disposes. It means that a person may plan a task and try to accomplish it in his own way. Though it be, but the results are not in the hands of a doer, they are the resultant effect of the supreme power's will. The luck or the fate has also a role to play.

One of my friend Sh. Harpal Singh was on a picnic tour to Nainital and Ranikhet. As they were new to these places, somebody advised them to visit Jageshwar temple, thirty-seven kilometres from Almora. This temple is an ancient temple surrounded by tall pine trees. They went to this place and had Lord Shiva's blessings.

At that time Sh. Amit, my son-in-law was critically ill, due to blood clot in his brain and was admitted in a hospital. My friend Harpal Singh made a call from Jageshwar, when I was in the hospital to look after Amit.

He asked me to hear the ringing of the bells and the prayer that he was addressing to the Lord Shiva. Obviously, he prayed for the quick recovery of my son-in-law. I felt obliged. Amit recovered to much extent though not fully. His speech remains badly affected.

After returning home, Harpal gave a vivid description of that place. The aura and the surroundings of this place as described by him was mesmerising and captivating. I and my wife decided to visit this ancient temple, we also felt blessed. A second visit to this place was accompanied by cousin Sh. Davinder Chaudhary, his wife and his son Deepak. Deepak had a new job and wanted to spend his first pay packet in organising a community lunger(feast) for the devotees of Mahadev and especially for the poor people. We took help of Sh. Vinod Bhatt, who organised the event successfully by arranging a team of cooks and tent. We had to depend on the local tent house.

It was the first of January,2018, the day was carefully chosen, as the devotees come in hordes from far flung areas to seek divine blessings for the new year. It was damn chill; the mother nature had laid the ground with snow carpet. We visited another temple in vicinity. The Goddess Parvati's temple was attention seeking and we got divine mother's blessings as well. A monkey sat on Lord Hanuman's temple, and it allowed us to have darshan after getting batashas (sugar balls). Pandit ji

showed us Kalpvariksh, which was so tall that it was very difficult to bend our neck backwards to judge its complete height. It is said that this tree had power to fulfil the wish of a person in old times.

Bhatt ji guided us to the langar place where it was being given final touch. The first plate of the langar food was offered to the main deity i.e. Mahadev. Then that prasad was mixed into the rest of the food. There were two other parties serving lunger in their colourful tents which they had brought from Moradabad. They had spirit lamps to keep the food hot which we lacked. Time and again we had to take the food to the stove. People who came from far off cities, were initially attracted towards them, while we sat idle.

After being at the temple, people wanted to have langar, though our tent was the first one, but people preferred the other two. Occasionally a few dropped to our tent, we served them with zeal. The organisers of the other two lungers stood in front of our tent and diverted the devotees to their own tents. The situation had become odd.

At 12.00 noon, Pandit Bhatt came to us and hesitatingly asked, if he could ask the local villagers, living there to have the langar. We had no reason to say 'no'. He went to the village and encouraged them to have the langar at the first tent. It was quite surprising that the local people kept themselves away from langar. We

became too busy after this. Poor villagers came in hordes in a very disciplined manner. No doubt the langar was deliciously cooked. We had five dishes. Some of the villagers wanted to take food for their aged and small kids, who were left at home due to extreme chill. Davinder Bhai, my cousin said, “Our aim is to serve them, and they would eat in the evening also, serve them with open heart, whatever they ask for.”

I recollect the three adolescent girls who came in their shiny thin colourful dresses, not wearing woollen pullovers. In those dresses, they seemed to acquire confidence in hiding their poverty and the fear of being turned away. Rather we felt fortunate to serve them. Maybe they were God sent. A strong vibration that mother Goddesses Ma Shakti, Ma Laxmi and Ma Saraswati had come there, to ask their share. We felt blessed and couldn't express our internal joy. By this time at about 1.00 pm, the other two groups had ended their activity. We could see devotees of all cadre coming to our tent to have prasadam, the langar. We also ended at 2.30 p.m.

While we were returning to Almora, we were analysing the arrangement. One thing, we realised thereafter, that Almighty had disposed of each and everything in a very decent way. Deepak had spent nearly forty-six thousand rupees. Our intentions were pure and genuine, the people who are generally ignored, and who

really in the true sense deserve all this, were served sincerely and with purity of heart. For them God had chosen us. We came happy and contented. Another saying from epic Geeta is, 'Do your part and the rest will be taken care of,' says Lord Shri Krishna.

STORY 13:

THE ART OF GIVING

In present times, 'The Art of Living' is the concept given by Sri Sri Ravi Shanker ji, who by his discourses, guides people and his followers in difficult times, how to live and lead life. His constant effort is to make the life simple and easy. The title of this piece of writing 'The Art of Giving' is motivated by the title of his mission 'The Art of Living'. I am sincerely indebted to this great soul, for taking a cue from him.

This episode doesn't include me, and I am nowhere to be seen but the main characters are closely related to me. One of them is my younger brother Minder (Jagvinder Singh), who runs a flourishing business of Electronics goods in Lajpat Rai Market, Delhi. He has deep faith in Lord Shri Krishna and Lord has given him in abundance, a modern house to live in, a good wife (Kiran) and two educated sons involved in the family business, two daughters-in-law having good nature and above all, the two cute granddaughters.

When Minder started his business, some thirty years ago, he worked very hard to establish it and at present, he is the master of an impressive business. It used to appear quite funny when we used to hear him say, “Yaar, what should I do? I have to satisfy customers to convince them and sell items by swearing in the name of God, that I do not fetch even a single rupee out of the deal, whereas the truth is otherwise.” He further told that this happens several times a day. A sense of repentance would occur daily, after getting a hefty sale. Then he would satisfy himself by his own consoling words by commenting, “But what can be done, this is the common practice of the businessman, especially in the whole sale market. I would wonder- false oaths for money! This would make me uncomfortable.

Let me take my respectable readers in the vehicle of thoughts to my village Barwala, in Delhi. I have two uncles (Chachas) residing there with their own families. My father was eldest among them, who retired as gazetted officer. The younger to my father is Chaudhary Liak Ram who spent his life toiling in his agriculture fields. At present he is old and has two sons. They are wealthy and have good business.

The second uncle was Sh. Hukam Singh, who died a long way back. He worked as class IV employee in Delhi Administration. Unfortunately, after getting retired

from his services, his wife, his son and his daughter-in-law died in quick succession.

A time came, when this uncle was all alone in his house with a grandson Bunty. Whatever funds, this uncle got after retirement, was all spent on health issues of his wife and his son. Uncle could hardly make both ends meet in his meagre earnings from his pension and his agriculture fields. He married away his three daughters, which clicked his entire savings.

Then the time came, when his minor grandson Bunty had to be married early, so that at least a bride could take the charge of the house and especially of the kitchen. Bunty wasn't mature enough to start his own career. When he got married, Uncle Hukam Singh now had an additional mouth to feed. The life went on day by day. He was getting old like others. His frail body would not allow him to put hard labour required in fields.

In 2004, uncle had gone penniless. The situation also grew from bad to worse. Finding, no way out, he went to Minder's shop at Lajpat Rai Market. Minder was surprised to see him there; he ordered a cold drink for uncle. Uncle waited for some time and saw Minder, extremely busy in dealing with the retail customers.

In northern part of India, a chacha/Uncle (the younger brother of father) or Tau (the elder brother of

father) is considered at number two, after father's identity. They have the inherent right to interfere in brother's family affairs, whenever a major issue or a concern in relation to the marriages, and other equally important matter is there, as it involves the reputation and integrity of all these families as a whole.

When Minder got a bit relief from his customers, for a very short time, he asked, "Chacha, is everyone fine at home?" Uncle said, "Yes, Beta, I came for a purpose." Minder asked and he said, "Beta, there is problem at home. I need some money." Without giving a second thought, Minder just put his hand in the cash drawer, grabbed as much money as he could and then he thrust it in Chacha's pocket. This act he repeated again. Then looking at uncle, he said, "You need not worry, when you spend all, come without hesitation or just let me know, I will make arrangements and send them to your house." My uncle disclosed this thing to my mother that he got help from Minder, and the money was given to him without any hesitation and without counting the notes. This was very significant.

This act of Minder was beyond my knowledge. Our agriculture land was acquired by Land and Building Department, in Delhi in 2006. My father and my two uncles got compensation in lieu of it. My Chacha (uncle) got one and a half crore of rupees. The fortune had changed. Hukam Singh Chacha came to Minder's house

on Sunday with a blank but signed cheque, to return the money. He said, "Beta, this is for you, fill the cheque and keep it." Minder after a reflection, said, "No Chacha, I won't accept the money, you are like my father, I am happy that you consider me your son and told me about your problem. What's the use of this business, if our elders remain in difficulties." Uncle insisted many a times, but my younger brother, Minder didn't budge away from his position. He just said, "Keep your blessings on me, that's it." Uncle had to retreat.

This episode was related to me personally by my uncle, that Minder didn't accept the money. What I realised thereafter, that it was the unique way of giving and helping. When I had a talk with Minder, he said, "I didn't intend to give him loan, that's why I didn't count the money. Had I counted them, there would have been a feeling that I gave him so much money. Now I do not know, how much was given to Chacha, so taking them back, the question doesn't arise. Moreover, I cannot tell anybody, how much I gave to him.

I have seen Minder giving money to other businessman or to his workers, he counts them twice. I am sure Minder must have earned rich blessings.

I recollect a historical episode of Mughal era. In those times, Akbar was ruling India in sixteenth century. He had nine exceptionally intelligent persons in his court who were expert in various fields. They were

popularly known as Nauratan. Rahim Khan-e-Khana was one of them. He was defence minister after the death of Bairam khan, his own father. Very few people know that he was very kind-hearted. He used to make charities to poor people. He was very famous for his couplets that he wrote. People recite them even today. Sant Tulsidas was another famous figure known for his poetry which has universal appeal. Above all, he wrote an epic ‘Ramayana’ through his godly insights, which can be found in every Hindu household and Sanatan temples. This book is the heart of Hindus. Sant Tulsidas was a spiritual and an exalted soul.

Somebody noticed something about Rahim and made a complaint to Tulsidas and said, “There is something fishy, when Rahim donates, his hand moves up for giving, but his eyes go downwards as if in shame.” It is believed that Sant Tulsidas ji was omniscient. He knew the truth but wanted it from Rahim’s mouth. He wrote two lines on a piece of paper and handed over to that very person, who raised doubt about Rahim’s persona. He asked him to take it to Rahim and to bring the answer to that couplet. Those lines were—*AISI DEVNI DEVJU KIT SEEKHEY HO SAIN ~ JYON JYON KAR UNCHO BADO, TAYON TAYON NEECHE NAIN*. (From where, have you learned this art of giving, O Respected one, ~As your hand goes up in charity, you look downwards).

Rahim wrote in couplet and gave the beautiful answer on the back of that slip. 'DAIN HAR KOI AUR HAI, JO BHEJAT DIN AUR RAIN--- LOG BRAHM HUM PER KAREN, TASSO NEECHE NAIN.' (Giver is someone else (referring to Almighty) who sends in abundance by day and night. People mistake me as a giver, that is why I feel ashamed).

Such is the art of giving. If giving in charity is the flower that blooms, then the art of giving is the sweet fragrance that pervades in air for a long time.

These two cases, mentioned above, are not intended to be drawn parallel, but they certainly project rare and unique way of serving others.

STORY 14:

AT TRIVENI GHAT

In India people take a dip in river Ganga, because it is considered to be a holy river, coming out of the sacred feet of Lord Vishnu popularly known as preserver and landing into the Jattas (long hair) of Lord Shiva. Moreover, it is said and believed that it washes you of your sins. Hindus call it 'Maa Ganga'. It is a river which feeds lakhs of people. Sacred rituals in the Hindu religion are incomplete without it. A Havan or a Yagna is brought to its logical end with Ganga Jal. Its water is holy. At the time, when a Hindu dies due to old age or whatever the reason be, Ganga Jal is put in his/her mouth. It is believed to be a necessary ritual to send his soul to Baikunth Dham (where God resides according to Hindu belief).

On the other side, it is beyond imagination that people also go to commit heinous crime. Even the guy in the sky, may not have a heart, big enough to pardon such persons. Let me begin by talking about the two guys, who

entered my life and remained in close contact with me, for a considerable period of time in my office. They were quite younger to me and were also in the same profession of teaching students in Delhi Administration school. They were quite junior to me. They relied on me to get guidance, aid and advice in professional matters.

The first guy is Robin Singh, a sophisticated guy from Aligarh (U.P), presently working as Assistant Commissioner (Trade Tax). His nature was to talk less. He left his job here in Delhi as Post Graduate Teacher. We were in all six friends, who would enjoy tea and snacks in twenty minutes break. Light-hearted jokes, talks about our own families and the teaching experiences, would form the subject matter of our discussions. As I was senior to them, I enjoyed a considerable amount of respect, and they would pamper me as their elder brother. I would enjoy my position.

Once after the break, when I and Robin Singh were alone in staff room, Robins opened his heart and asked for my blessings. He was going to appear for an interview conducted by U.P Public Service Commission. He had an impression, that because I often visit highly revered temples and holy places, I had the power to bless him which would result in a concrete positive result. I said to him, "Look Robin, I am not a saint or an exalted soul, but an ordinary person with usual short comings. You must seek blessings from your parents." I couldn't

convince him. At last, I advised him to perform Jal Abhishek and to offer some fruits to Lord Shiva's temple on every Monday. Somebody advised him to visit Dargah in Ajmer.

Sometimes miracles do happen. Robin Singh got through. God is great. Sometimes HE raises your position in the eyes of others, although I didn't do anything.

Now comes the second guy, Alok Ranjan from Bihar, with whom I have family relations. After his selection Robin Singh disclosed all this to Alok, who was also an aspirant for Bihar Public Service Commission. He had thrice cleared the written examination of U.P.S.C. but couldn't clear interview due to Hindi background. He lacked fluency in English. He was an exceptionally intelligent guy. You just raise a topic and Alok would be ignited to speak relentlessly providing rarest of rare information on that issue. He was widely read.

Alok was quiet a different guy than Robin Singh. He was a non-believer. He would say, "If by invoking God's mercy or help, I pass my examination or an interview, then I don't want it. My efforts are important, and they will bring success. That's all."

After getting to know about Robin's success, Alok came to me with folded hands and chanted many a

times, Sir, Sir, Sir, and gave a hearty laugh and said, “Arre Hum ko Toh sala Pata Hi Nahi Tha, Dabas Sir, ne Robin Sir ka Uddhar Karva diya, Sir Hum Per Bhi Kripya Kijiye, please.”(I didn’t know, Dabas Sir , is instrumental in Robin’s success, please bless me also). I tried to defend myself, but he didn’t leave me. The same advice was given to him, when he seemed quite adamant and was reluctant to budge away. In Alok’s case, what was important was to convert a nonbeliever to a believer. I instructed him to first accept God’s identity and to have faith in him, then to take his wife and children to Lord Shiva’s temple on every Monday. Almighty heard his prayers and now he is posted as Assistant Commissioner in ‘Woman’s care and child welfare department’ in Patna, Bihar.

Meanwhile, Alok got engaged and was to be married in Patna Bihar. He invited us in his marriage. We were supposed to attend his Baraat. I had little interest in going to Patna. When it came to my knowledge, that here was an opportunity to visit Varanasi and to visit Kashi Vishwanath temple, my interest grew. Somebody pointed out that we can have a dip at Triveni ghat in Allahabad also. Triveni is known to be the confluence(Sangam) of three rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. I couldn’t resist the proposal. Recently the name of Allahabad has been changed to Prayagraj. This place is famous for Kumbh also.

We were in all seven members ready for Alok's baraat. We hired a cab for this long journey. We reached Allahabad around 11.00 p.m. We had to compromise on a sub-standard hotel, not neat and clean.

Next day, Sun rose, we didn't have an iota of knowledge, what would the day have, in store for us. We started in our good spirits after having bed tea. We planned to have lunch in the way, after taking a dip at Triveni ghat at Sangam. The vehicle was parked at the parking site, and we had to move on foot because of vast sand bed near the rivers. The sand was so deep, that it was quite difficult for us to pull out our foot out of the sand and walk. Ultimately, we were on the shore of the river. After much bargain, we hired a boat for the Sangam point.

Little did we know that something very agonising and a disturbing event was to unfold before us. How desperate and helpless we felt on that day, I still cannot forget. We saw devils moving in human form.

Our boat with all six of us, started moving from the shore for the Sangam point, along with other boat. Soon the other boat overtook us, because the load of that boat was much lesser than our boat. That boat had a slim man wearing a kurta and pyjama, a child aged around six to seven years was seated safely next to him. The third passenger was a dark-complexioned lady, whose facial features were good.

In those days the mobiles and the smartphones were yet to be discovered. I had a conventional Nikon camera, and the photos were being shot, covering ourselves and the surroundings. The weather was clear with bright sunshine, and the visibility was also up to the mark.

At Sangam (confluence of rivers), one has to take the help of bamboo boundaries in order to alight from the boat. There was a raised platform built on sandbags where one could stand and take a dip in the water. People were chanting ‘Har Har Gange’ and ‘Om Namah Shivaya’. My height being five feet eleven inches, the water was up to my chest. We spent nearly twenty minutes at this spot.

We decided to return to the shore to carry forward our journey to Patna. The boat man’s eyes were also fixed at shore to fetch new customers. He requested us to hurry up for the return journey. On the same day, we had to reach Patna, and it was still quite far away. Our boat started sailing back to the shore. Another boat in which there were only three passengers in comparison to our boat which had seven, was also returning. It had overtaken us while moving to Sangam. It again tried to overtake us. They seemed to be in a hurry.

Mahender Singh Rana, a young and lively friend, who was accompanying us, noticed something missing in that boat. He asked me with high intensity of curiosity, “Sir, see the small boy in that boat is missing. When they

were heading for Sangam, there were three persons in that boat and now there are only two passengers. Where is that small boy?"

Rana shouted at the boat's man, "O bhai, where is the child, you took to the sangam." The boat's man started looking to other side, pretending that he didn't listen to us. Rana raised his pitch and asked the same question thrice.

Then Rakesh Bawa rose to the occasion and shouted at the boat's man, pointing towards me, he said, "Look, he is from the Police Department, you cannot escape, where is that child?"

This time the boat's man replied, "How do I know? Ask them? (Pointing towards the two passengers in his boat)." He started rowing his boat with double energy. The energy gets doubled when it mixes with fear. Despite the choicest curses and pinching remarks, thrown at them, they didn't utter a word. Their focus was to reach on the shore and run away. Their boat was faster than us due to the light load. We were struggling to get near to them, but in vain. The two passengers in the other boat jumped into the water and didn't wait for the boat to reach at the shore. We didn't know the depth of the water, and we waited for our boat to reach up to the dry land. Holding each other's hand, they didn't even look back. They put their hundred percent energy to escape, while we were struggling in sand to move forward.

It was damn clear that they had intentionally drowned that child, defying the eyes of others. We could spot a lone police constable with a baton stick smoking the Indian cigarette (Bidi) coming leisurely from the opposite side. He must have been inducted in the police department without considering his physical dimensions and fitness. He was quite frail and thin. Even the govt.'s dress seemed to be quite loose on his mortal elements. He was pushing himself in the loose sand with the help of his baton. We shouted at him to stop the couple, but he didn't. We narrated the whole incident to him. He was totally unaffected and unmoved. Strange it was. First of all, we thought that he didn't want to come out of his comfort zone. Instead of running after them, he posed several questions to us, like, who were they? What was their name? From where did they come? To which place they belong to? What relation do you have with them? Did the child belong to them? What was the child's father's name? etc. etc. These were the questions to which we had only one answer, "How do we know?" Lastly, he asked, "Who was the boat's man? We looked back. He had disappeared and mingled with other boat's man. The boat's man must have connived with his passengers and charged a hefty amount for that heinous and unpardonable crime. An advice from that policeman was, "Sahab, you seem to be from a good and reputed family, and to a place far off from here. Do not involve yourself in this, as you are a tourist. It is usual at this

place. Just think, can they escape from the court of Almighty. It is better to forget and move forward, otherwise the police and the court will call you here innumerable times. You will have to spend lot of money and time attending the court and the police station.”

To some extent, he was right. We were thoroughly helpless. We moved ahead for Patna in our vehicle in a very sombre mood. Never before in our life, we felt so disgusted.

Everything had slipped out of our hands like grains of sand. Throughout the day, this unfortunate happening couldn't leave our mind. We were sad to the extreme core, probing and questioning the motive behind the drowning of the innocent child. One of my friends, Mr. Gajraj Singh pointed out the possibilities of two conditions. Either it was the case of usurping the property of that child or the lady must have put the condition to eliminate the child, before the second marriage. In both cases, the child had to lose his life. The irony is that unknowingly, the child must have enjoyed the boat's journey, little knowing that it was his last journey in this treacherous world. Safely, that kid sat in the boat in between the two adults. Hardly did he know that he was in between the two monsters.

This incident remains permanently etched in my memory. We reached at Mohaniya Mor and had to leave the national highway leading to west Bengal. It was

around 4.00 pm., the driver of the cab reminded us that we had skipped our breakfast and lunch. We asked him to stop at the oncoming Ashirwad flour mill godowns, besides them, there was a place where we could have lunch. The two young chaps Mahender Singh Rana and Rakesh Bawa were finding very difficult to forget the day's incident. They said that they both have son of the same age. I found a gift shop adjacent to the place, where we had lunch. I bought two beautiful caps for the two kids and gifted to them. This was done to ease my own sufferings.

As we paid the bill of the lunch, my mobile phone resonated. It was a call from Alok Ranjan from Phool Wari Sharif, Patna, to know where we were at that point of time. He told us to cross Aara, a sub-urban town of Bihar before 8.00p.m., as it was not a safe place. At 8.30 p.m., we were at railway crossing in Aara. Besides other traffic, four motorcycles were ahead of us waiting for the train to pass. We noticed that the pillion riders had rifle with them. Alok had rightly pointed out that this area was infested with Dabangais (People who believe in ideology of 'might is right' and create havoc in ordinary people's life).

At 9.30.p.m. we were at the gate of a two storeyed building, the matrimonial house of our friend Alok Ranjan. Lot of ladies and gents were waiting to welcome us. They were inside the gate of that house.

Alok and his younger brother came out of the gate and said, “Welcome Sir, welcome.” With folded hands, they approached us.

For youngsters they questioned, “Aur Bhai Kaysi Yatra Rahi?” (How was your trip?)

Alok then gleamingly said in a Bihari tone, “Sir, Aaj Toh Sala Light Subah Se Hi Nahin Hai.” (Sir, the light hasn’t come since morning.). He asked us to step in. It would not be exaggerated to say that as we stepped in, the electricity came. All shouted with joy. The house illuminated with colourful lights. Our entry into the house was perfectly in tune with the electricity’s arrival.

Somebody from them said, “Their coming to our house is auspicious, the light has come.”

The entire day’s sadness had diluted in the exchange of pleasantries and courtesies, jokes and light-hearted comments. The overwhelming melancholy could not survive for long, but it still hits occasionally, compelling me to think, that monsters in the guise of humans being, still walk freely.

STORY 15:

THE CLOUD ON THE TIP

When a person makes a wish and that wish gets fulfilled in no time, what would you call? A miracle or God's blessings or incidental. I leave this question to my readers. They may take it, as they wish, it's their own choice.

In 1996, We, the seven friends, who had common interest, decided to undertake a pilgrimage along with our parents to Char-Dham in our own cars. The example in mythology of Sharavan Kumar, who took his blind parents on pilgrimage had motivated us. Covering the area of Yamnotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath in Himalayan region was our moto. Since it was an arduous journey, we had initially decided to spend three nights at Badrinath, our last destination, before returning. The passengers of two cars who felt home sick, left for Delhi a day before. Almighty has his own plans, designs and purposes, which we realise later on. My sixth sense said, "Staying here at such a pious place for an extra day, will

mean something which we cannot apprehend before time. Let's see what the Almighty has in store for us.

On the second last day, of the trip, we slept peacefully. The fatigue of the driving and the journey had reduced to a considerable level. We had darshan of Lord Badrinath in meditative posture. In the afternoon, we enjoyed the bright sunshine at the hotel. The night before had been very cold. In the evening, we decided to participate in the recitation of Vishnu Shastra-Nam in the temple, which we did.

We met two military jawans in olive colour dresses at the entrance of the temple, I started conversation with them. They told me that their whole unit would be coming in a short while, for darshan and would thank Lord Badrinath, for their safe return from the Indo-China border. They had been bracing extreme chilly weather and directly facing the hostile enemy. Then they would be moving to the plain areas and would meet their families. A sense of relief and curiosity to meet their family was writ large on their faces.

The temple of Lord Badrinath has an open wide passage all around, where the devotees take parikramas (Parikrama is moving around the temple and chanting the name of the deity). Besides the open space around the temple, there is an elevated platform on three sides, which is carpeted and is used by devotees to sit and meditate, facing the temple. This place is also used for

group kirtans and religious discourses by spiritually elated.

It was around 8 p.m., late evening, the temple was brightly lit. More jawans started filtering inside the temple with their brass bands. I was bit surprised to see that the hands that hold guns, were holding brass band. Twenty jawans with their instruments, formed two rows leaving a wide gap in between. At one stroke of the Master, they began with Lord Ganesha's Vandana. The tune was melodious. Some jawans started dancing between the two rows. Some Sadhus came and joined them, holding their kamandals in their hands. It was a beautiful mixture of Kesari and olive colour. How could the devotees stop themselves? Some youngsters joined them. The rows of jawans widened to accommodate the public dancing in ecstasy. Sadhus had their own musical instruments like chhenas, chimtas, ektaras and counc. The josh was very high. It was a rare sight to behold and enjoy. It was divine mood pervading in each and every person, whether they were playing instruments or dancing or were mere spectators.

I was so mesmerised that tears began to flow. I felt that this rare experience cannot be, without the presence of divine power. I just closed my eyes and put a prayer in my conscious mind, that if it is true, what I feel, then let HE be kind enough to show his presence, directly or indirectly or by any gesture.

After a few minutes of the request prayer, I heard a bird's sound right on the temple's top. The bird flew from east to north direction, when I looked skyward. Generally, in late evening hours, birds are a rare sight. It was a clear dark blue sky with flags fluttering due to the strong winds. The stars were shining bright. The moon was gracefully spreading its cool light. A small cloud, just of the size, which could be held in the open arms of a person, appeared from the eastern side of the temple and it settled itself on the dome of the temple. It remained there for a long time. It appeared like an umbrella over it. How could a cloud, so small, resist the flowing wind for a considerable time? Lord Badri-Vishal had fulfilled my wish. When I thanked HIM for this, the cloud started moving to the north direction. This divine presence in the form of a cloud, remained before my eyes for fifteen minutes. I felt blessed. The red brown bird did its job of drawing my attention to skyward, otherwise there was no reason to look up.

Just then, we were fortunate to meet Dharmadhikari of the temple Pandit Jagdamba Prasad Sati ji. He took us to the other side of the temple and showed us a new building, which was under construction. He informed us that the next time, when we visit him, he would be in that new building. I again sank in the pool of emotions, realising that these words were from an exalted soul. People do not get even a single chance, throughout their life to visit such a holy place, and this noble person has

said, “When you come next time.....” This means that again I would get a chance to have darshan of Sri Badri-Vishal.

I questioned him, “Will I be lucky to come here again?”

He said confidently, “Why not? I can see, you will certainly come. Look, when you have built a strong building on a strong foundation of faith, with firm walls of your determination and a solid roof of your karmas, then nobody can stop you.” These words still ring into my ears, though much water has flown in Ganges. Pandit Sati ji had rightly predicted.

In those times, I was slightly disturbed due to family problems, to which he said, “Do not involve yourself directly in worldly activities, just see and watch from a distance, how the life unfolds before you, how the people act and react, then the pain will be less. Then he further enlightened me, “Just take HIM in your life. Soon all will be well, today what appears odd to you, tomorrow automatically, it will fall in line. HE is the cause; HE is the doer. Without HIS wish, nothing can move. HE certainly has better designs for you, just wait and see. What is important at this juncture, just keep your faith intact and hope for the good.” These words stand as source of inspiration for me. They keep me moving. At times you get words in your ears from a blessed one, which make your life easy, soothing and less worrisome.

Throughout my return journey to Delhi, I was profusely thanking HIM to have chosen us, for that soulful, divine, stirring, rare and memorable experience at the temple, which unfortunately the passengers of the other two cars that had left for Delhi, a day earlier, had grossly missed.

STORY 16:

THE BLANKET

Every person wants his own world, that too complete in every sense. This is what an ordinary being longs for. I, being not different from this class, wanted a son after getting two daughters. Lord Shiva is benevolent. My wishful thinking materialised in 1987. Since then, more than thirty years have passed, I have committed myself to perform a jalabhishek on every Monday in Lord Shiva's temple. I am a late riser; my day starts pretty late and ends when half of the world seems to be dead, in 'Shakespeare's sense'.

On every Monday morning, I see a middle-aged poor lady waiting outside the temple for alms. She expects only ten rupees on Monday from me. If at all, I miss a Monday and don't go to the temple due to forgetfulness or some preoccupation, she asks for the double amount on the next Monday. I have allowed this liberty to her. I believe that in a sense, she penalises me for being absent from the temple.

On the next day of Deepawali, in the month of November 2019, when I and my son went to Goverdhan for conducting parikrama, I saw that lady early in the morning at 5.00p.m. trudging towards the temple in the dark. Perhaps she had problem in her legs. My son was driving the car, and I pointed at her, and said to him, “Look at that lady, how she walks, it’s a miserable condition. She spends the entire day in front of the temple draped in rags, and she struggles hard against the poverty.”

My son acknowledged and commented, “What can be done, if God wills so?”

Next year came i.e.2020. My hearty wish, to visit Pashupatinath temple in Nepal was fulfilled in the first week of January. A considerable amount had to be spent on Air ticket and other expenses. My second commitment for this month was to pay an Insurance Premium which was a big amount. Both these payments were made. The last commitment was to make the payment to the dentist for RCT. The doctor had already informed that he would charge an amount of Rupees fifteen thousand for his services. The financial situation in the month got much constricted due to these unavoidable expenditures. I, being a retired government servant, have to depend on my pension plus rent from a flat. After meeting out these expenditures, I calculated that an insignificant balance would enrich my wallet.

The tension was how would I stretch this left over amount to cover this month. Then I thought, "HE will take care, why to worry unnecessarily. This is how I reconciled myself and got a sense of relief.

On second Monday of the same month in Jan.2020, as per routine, I went to the temple. After fulfilling the soul's commitment in the Lord's house (temple of Lord Shiva), I came out to proceed for my house, that lady stood there. It was around 8.00p.m. The wintry chill was too much and had turned unbearable. After accepting ten rupees as per routine, she didn't move away. She had something to say but was hesitant. When I had started my scooter she said, "Babuji, this time the winters are unbearable, I need a blanket for my kids." I was not at all prepared for her expectations. As some wise person has said, "Expectations are the cause of miseries." One of the general characteristics of expectations is that, generally, they are bound to fail.

I just ignored her demand and said, "May be not this time, next year for sure." I moved on. Some groaning words fell on my ears, "Babuji, next year is too far, what will happen to my children."

After taking my dinner, I enjoyed gup-shups with my two grand kids. Then I prepared myself to get into the cosy bed with two soft mink blankets over me. These two blankets soon absorbed the chill of the day and gave much needed warmth. This year the freezing

temperatures had broken records of several decades, as per the reports of the newspaper.

As the compatibility of the blankets to the physical body started matching, it started precipitating into a soothing sleep. At that very moment the demand of that poor lady struck my mind, as if some pieces of papers were being flown by a gust of winds, towards my face. The mind grew active and started visualising the lady sleeping with her kids, with inadequate coverings in a shanty. The little kids hurtling into her to get body warmth to defeat the Nature's harshness, above all the poverty. I put my mind to rest with a thought, that my duty is to help a person to the extent, that while helping others, I may get shaken but not ruffled in terms of my fiscal position. Moreover, I was helpless in the month of January 2020, as detailed before.

From Tuesday onwards, I forgot that lady and her demand. I had a final date with the dentist. He did his job to my satisfaction. I handed over Rupees fifteen thousand to him. The dentist counted the money. As I was close to the exit door, he called me and said, "The crown that I have given to your tooth is of a new company, its quality is good, but it costs less, so you can take five thousand rupees back." He handed me the same, I was quite happy and thankful to Almighty, as I hoped this amount would get me through this month.

The joy was short lived, the electricity bill came, and my granddaughter also fell ill.

On third Monday of the month, a five hundred rupee note, and a two hundred rupee note decorated my purse. Again, the demand of that poor lady hit my mind. Then started a dilemma in full intensity to be or not to be. To purchase the blanket would mean to lose the money and to suffer through out the remaining days of the month. The easy solution to the problem, would be to say 'sorry' to that lady. The mind reasoned, she is not my liability. But then the heart said, "Blankets are not luxuries in the month of December to February, they are essentials and are the basic need to survive. Don't be selfish."

Pressing the self-start button of the scooter, it started for the temple situated on the right-hand side turn of the road, just half a kilometre from my house. But this road leading to the temple was blocked by a tent installed by somebody. Turning to left would be a long distance to temple. With no choice left, I had to go through the market, where a shop, Rama cloth house is situated. From there the blanket could be purchased.

After haggling, a blanket of a good quality, which was the last piece available in the shop was purchased. It was destined to go to that poor lady and to her kids. I advised her, "Don't dispose it off to somebody, it is precious." With a glint of happiness in her eyes, she said,

“No, not at all Babuji, now my kids will sleep peacefully.” She held that blanket close to her chest and left immediately for her own house. A new strength had come in her legs, though she still trudged.

The long-time reasoning, the dilemma, the difference between the heart and the mind had ended cordially and abruptly. A task accomplished, provided a much-needed peace and satisfaction in me. The selfishness had to surrender in the larger interest.

What matters is not the amount of charity, but what is significant, is having humility, empathy and the concern for others, who come in contact with us. I went through an important lesson and learning.

STORY 17:

THE MIND PLAYS GAME

Though a man is called a social animal, but he is quite different in comparison to the animals. It is because of his mind, which is more developed than the other living beings on this planet. Almighty has gifted him the power of choice to live and to lead his life in his own way. So different kinds of traits become visible in his actions. Some live for themselves. In that sense, greed can be the trait hidden in such persons. Some work hard, they live for themselves and for others as well. They are called generous. Dealing with a greedy person is often quite difficult, and here I request my readers to travel along with me, to enjoy an experience.

As Delhi, the national capital of India is situated on the banks of river Yamuna, I have to cross the bridge over Yamuna, many a times during a year. Moving along with this river on Ring Road, I would imagine its source and the cities it covers, from Himalayan region till Delhi. I have met this river near ISBT in Delhi, at Faridabad in

Haryana, at Vrindavan near Mathura, at Agra behind Taj and at Allahabad near Triveni Sangam in Uttar Pradesh.

I have seen this river flowing peacefully and at times in spate, showing its Rudra Roop (angry face). Who can forget the year of 1978, when it broke its strong banks and entered into the villages and towns of Delhi. It is difficult to tame the rivers. Every year the people of Flood Department of Delhi Administration, fear its fury in rainy season. It uproots the people and their dwellings who come in its fold. And why not, mythology says that Yamuna, whom Hindus hold in high esteem, is the daughter of God Suryadev (Sun) and sister of Yama (the God of death). Yamnotri, from where the river originates, is one of the most important and revered places for Hindus in Char Dham Yatra. This river is called Moksh Dayani (Bestower of liberation, from birth and death circle).

Totally, out of full curiosity, a trip was planned to Yamnotri, forming a large group of five cars. In those days, nobody had even thought about the internet or the mobile phones. The route to Yamnotri was confirmed from the U.P. tourism office located at Janpath in New Delhi. The state of Uttarakhand had not come in existence in those days. We had two options of the route, our preferred one was through Mussoorie, a beautiful hill station and travelling through the famous Kempty fall, was the star attraction for all of us. This hill station

has kept the British Aura intact till today. The way to the Company Garden, and the garden itself, is worth visiting. The first night was spent at Poornima Hotel in Mussoorie.

Next day we followed the route to Kempty fall which was nearly 14 kilometres from Mussoorie, on chakrata road. The kids in the car shouted with joy on seeing the waterfall. We were eager to explore the unexplored region. After the Kempty fall, the road had gone narrow, bumpy and full of potholes. We had to move slowly and carefully.

After driving our vehicles continuously for more than two hours, we took a break in mid-way, to stretch ourselves and to have a cup of tea to refresh our tired bodies at a road stall. We were drawn to mesmerising scenery of the area, particularly a snow cladded peak of a mountain, far away from where we were. While the children ran around the cars and giggled, we could pull ourselves in snapshots of the cameras. A local resident having several goats and sheep, was perched on a hillock keeping an eye over his flock. We inquired him, about the name of the mountain, that had snow. He informed us that it was Bunder Poonch Parbat, where Lord Hanuman, after burning Ravan `s Lanka, had to dip and keep his tail under snow, for a long time to get rid of the burning sensation. We discussed how the so-called

mythology, is actually the very ancient history, which needs to be probed extensively and exhaustively.

After some rest, we again took to roads in high spirits. After some time, we crossed a small sleepy town called 'Barkot'. Covering around five kilometres from Barkot, we negotiated a sharp turn towards right and we could see from that curve a long queue of cars, taxis and local buses. Our cars were last in queue. The queue was at least one kilometre long. We stepped out of our cars and went further to see the cause of the long queue. A huge boulder from the mountain top, had landed on the road. It had dug the road from the middle and settled there. On the other side of the road was a big deep valley. The dimension of the boulder was just equal to the width of the road. A long queue of variety of vehicles, including busses, trucks, jeeps and passenger cars on the opposite side of the boulder, could also be seen. An Earth mover was on its job and was trying to push away the boulder into deep down the valley. But it couldn't. Rather it settled the boulder more properly on the road. A junior engineer and a contractor were supervising the work. The people were quite liberal in giving their unsolicited advice to them. Noticing the failing efforts of the Earthmover, it was decided to blow it away by the help of the dynamite. It was getting dark. At 5.00p.m., the boulder was pierced into for placing the dynamite sticks. It was announced for the public to move away from there, and to find safe places for themselves, as the

splinters of the rock could go like unguided missiles and hit the people. The public retreated from both the sides and took shelter behind their vehicles. We also walked back to our vehicles and took shield behind a tar coal trawler, which had the ground clearance of nearly ten inches from the ground. Two locals unknown to us stood by us, nearly two feet away from the deep gorge of the valley. A loud blast of that boulder was expected. We took our cameras and focussed them to capture the event. Some people had stuffed their ears. Many, who had less hair on their scalp, were shielding their head by their palms to avoid head injury.

Finally, the blast took place, we took the shot. When we looked around, the two locals were missing. They stood next to us. The question was where were they? A fear engulfed; they must have fallen down into the valley. We looked around for them. After a few moments, we noticed that those two locals, were struggling hard to come out from the undersurface of the trawler. We could not control our laugh. They just looked at us and went away. Then, we left the ladies and the kids in the car and went forward to judge the situation. On reaching there, we found that the situation had turned different. Instead of a huge boulder, now there was a huge deep crater of approximately five feet depth. The darkness had started casting its effect significantly. The transporters were trying to bribe the driver of Earth mover, to level the road, so that they could move ahead. In other words,

they wanted him to work in dark and to put in extra time than his official hours. The driver was refusing to work in dark. His plea was, "Who will look after my family, If I go down the valley along with this earthmover? I will not put my life to risk." People were arguing with the J.E. and the contractor.

We sensed the situation and quickly retreated to our vehicles, as the road clearance was likely to be put for the next day. We rushed back to Barkot, the sleepy town, which had only two small hotels, that provided the rooms for the guests. Considering the numbers of tourist's cars and the buses, the situation was likely to get worse. It was our timely decision to withdraw to Barkot. Moreover, our vehicles were last in the queue. It was easy for us to turn around.

The first hotel that we visited had very small rooms that had stinking smell. They were untidy with damp walls. We approached the second one in haste. All the occupants of our cars stood outside their vehicles. The owner of the hotel sent a boy; we inspected the rooms and found them fit. The room's tariff, as quoted by the owner, was Rupees two hundred and twenty-five per night, per room. I asked him to give all those five rooms to us. He asked, "How many people are you?" I replied around fifteen adults and seven children. He reciprocated without thinking, "No, I cannot give rooms to you." I told him that we can pay more for the extra

persons. He was adamant. The beds were wide and spacious, and we could adjust. The owner, Mr. Rawat was not convinced. I came out dejectedly.

The mind now started playing game, we had to procure those rooms, otherwise it would be very difficult to spend the night under the open sky. The temperature was likely to go down at night. We were already wearing pullovers in the evening. By hook or by crook, we wanted the rooms. Soon the crowd would be coming and asking for the rooms. I took away Jagdish Singh Nain, my friend, to one side and asked him to take his wife and his daughter, who had a plaster on her hand, to get the room. He was instructed, if the hotel owner asks about the total members, he would only say three adults and a child. I sent my mother along with his wife and a child. He came out with a smile on his face. I had already instructed him to pay, whatever he demands. The deal was finalised in Rupees two hundred fifty rupees.

Then I sent my brother-in-Law, Virender Singh. He took away his father and his wife to get the room. This time the deal was finalised in Rupees Two hundred seventy-five. After occupying the room, he came out like a warrior, who had defeated his enemy.

After that my cousin, Davinder went with his two kids and his wife. He got the room in three hundred rupees. The owner was hiking Rupees twenty-five every time. Three rooms were already occupied. My cousin was

holding his smile and advised us to get the other rooms quickly. The situation was likely to get worse, after some time.

Then came the turn of my another relative Ripu Daman Singh, who had to pay Rupees three hundred and twenty-five for a single room. The owner was busy in his hotel eatery business. He forgot to ask about the members. Therefore, four persons were sent inside from the side gate, from where the access to the rooms was direct.

All the team members had secured their rooms for their families, but I and my family were still on the road. I was literally hiding myself from the sight of the hotel owner. Those who got the rooms showed, that they had no relations or were unknown to other room occupants.

Finding me alone on the road, my friend Jagdish Singh Nain had a cruel joke for me, and he said, "Tell me where and on which side of the road should I lay your bed." I told him that time was not appropriate for the joke, he must go and talk to the hotel owner, that his friend, who was left behind, has just arrived, if he could spare the room for him. The owner as per his habit showed his smartness by asking Rupees three hundred and fifty rupees as room rent. I sent my father, my wife and two daughters from the side gate. My tension just blew away. I intentionally remained away from the hotel owner, as he had refused to rent out the rooms to me.

The popular saying 'Out of sight, out of mind' was the funda, and we succeeded. The greed of the owner was quite apparent. He secured hike of Rupees twenty-five every time, while renting out each room.

Our team had gone to the dining room (Dhabba) where the hotel owner sat on one side, at the cash counter. He was collecting the cash from the customers; whosoever ate at his hotel. There was a large table and long benches around it. Our team occupied them. They ordered for the dinner, and I was still roaming outside. Till now, the owner had no clue that we were the members of the same single team. When the food was served, my mother called me, then I entered the Dhaba. The owner was busy in making calculations of a bill, he didn't notice me, when I entered for dinner. When we were having our dinner, the stranded vehicles from the land slide spot had started arriving. People were asking for rooms. At that point of time, he noticed me, and I saw him counting all of us. We didn't pay heed and we rushed back to our rooms after finishing our dinner.

There was a covered veranda outside our rooms. Throughout the night, there was noise in the veranda. People were ready to shell out any amount for a room. When we woke up in the morning on the next day, the entire veranda was covered with people sleeping on a single sheet. Some people were sleeping in their cars outside the two hotels. Some were lying on the grass in

the open. We felt sorry for them, but we could do nothing. At 8.30 a.m., after putting our luggage in our cars, we took our breakfast in the same Dhaba. The hotel owner came to us and asked, "Are you vacating the rooms today?" We, unitedly and in unison said, "Yes, Bhai Sahab.' He knew, he had been befooled. The owner wrapped in a blanket couldn't say anything more. Perhaps after renting out the rooms to us, late in the evening, he must have realised that he could have earned more, but he followed his own greed. The regret must have disturbed him throughout the night, that how wisely, he was manipulated.

Next day, we reached Yamnotri, took bath in a sacred pool of hot spring water, which is known to have been blessed by Suryadev (Sun). We did puja in the temple and enjoyed the beauty of the place. The glacier was still five kilometres away from there, and the track was difficult due to the thick vegetation, and it could not be covered without a proper guide.

After completing this trip, we were back home and at least fifteen days had passed. Some electrical fault occurred in our house. The electrician, Mohan Barthwal (belonging to a village in Uttarakhand) working in Municipal Corporation of Delhi, was called. He used to earn extra bucks, by attending private calls. When he was meddling with electric wires in main switch board of the house, I told him the whole story. He stopped for a while

and with a broad smile looked at me. He lifted his spectacles up, fixed them on his forehead and said, "Do you know, who that person is, whom you be fooled?" I replied, "No, just this much, that he is the owner of Rawat Hotel at Barkot." He further said, "He is my father-in-law. My wife is his eldest daughter. He is an Ex-serviceman." I was shocked and surprised and just exclaimed 'OH'. Then my wife also joined us, and we had a hearty laugh.

I had no explanation to give. No further clarification was required. The two cups of tea with some biscuits and a bit liberal amount for his labour in removing the electrical fault, resolved the matter amicably and in good spirits.

STORY 18:

THE POLICEMAN IN THE RAIN

Sometimes, the things that come out from other's mouth, are hard to believe. We have to consider into account, the credibility of the narrator. Then a question arises why would he lie or exaggerate without any reason or rhyme? Believe it or leave it. It is his experience, not yours, but when others corroborate it, the footprints of authenticity are felt.

What I have to say depends on a logic, that a big country like USA exists on this planet. I haven't been to that country, nor I intend to visit but I know that some of my relatives have been to this country, and they tell lot of things about Americans and their style of living. I have no reason to doubt them, likewise my son had been to Nepal, and he said that Lord Pashupatinath's temple is a grand temple and is worth visiting in Kathmandu. I got an opportunity in the month of January 2020 to visit Nepal and found it true. So, we believe the things which directly happen before our eyes and the episodes which

happened before others also. F-8A, Model Town was the address where my friend Gulshan Kumar used to live. It was my usual practice to go to his home and spend evening with him. It used to be an evening walk and an opportunity to spend some quality time with him. Once we were discussing about the man-made temples at high altitudes, when he said that his neighbour had just returned from Hem Kund Sahib pilgrimage, it was sheer coincidence that the neighbour also dropped in at that moment. My friend Gulshan introduced me to him and urged him to narrate the strange and unbelievable incident, to which this Sikh guy was a witness. Gulshan wanted to have a first-hand account for me. Meanwhile Gulshan's daughter, Sargam, also came from the market. Gulshan requested for tea for three of us.

The Sikh guy now started addressing me and narrated the whole account he said, "Bhai Sahab, we were four friends in our Tata Safari SUV. As you know that this place is revered by Sikhs and Hindus equally. Guru Gobind Singh Ji Maharaj did meditation in ancient times at this place. There is a gurdwara at an altitude of 14000 ft. in front of a Sarovar surrounded by seven hills. Usually, the Sarovar's water remains at a freezing point, but the devotees take dip in it."

I intervened and told him that I had been to this place in 1987, along with my cousin and his family. He appreciated me for being to this holy place, then he

further started by saying, “As you know that this gurdwara is accessible only in the month of April to September, we have been there just a week ago. We completed holy pilgrimage and while returning, we reached Shri Gobind Ghat base camp at 3:00 pm and decided to move towards Delhi on the same day. These are the months of rainy season, here in plains, as well as in the hills. We started from Pandukeshwar where our vehicle was parked. With dense dark clouds, the sky was overcast. The drums of the sky were being beaten loud and thunderous. It was expected that heavy rains would follow. Somehow, we reached Joshimath. One of my friends was hungry and wanted to have something to eat. We stopped in the market and had tea and pakoras.(pieces of vegetables fried in chickpeas paste) Small droplets had started falling which turned into a full-fledged heavy rain. As we were close to Chamoli, it was around 6:45 PM. One of my friends, asked to find some accommodation for the night, as it had grown quite dark and the visibility was getting poorer. All the shops had closed, and the people had gone into hiding. We crossed Chamoli and reached Nandprayag by 8:30 pm. We crossed Nandprayag as well. (Prayag is actually the confluence of rivers. People live near them). There was severe lightning and thunder. We got frightened and we were in a state of shock, but carefully we kept moving. Another apprehension was dangerous landslide which could happen at any time, after all, the nature’s fury is

limitless and untamed. There was no hotel or a lodge nearby. It was our compulsion, that we had to keep moving. Rudra Prayag was still thirty-five kilometres away, and we hoped to find a place there. We had extra headlamps installed on the roof of our vehicle. We switched them on. The visibility was less than twenty meters. Everything appeared white before the head lights. The rain wipers were working at full speed. The laugh, the jokes and the light-hearted comments had gone into deep silence, as the headlights on roof of the vehicle got fused one after the other. The Tata safari was negotiating the road efficiently which had deep potholes. Few small stones fell on our bonnet. We were much worried about the wind shield of our vehicle.”

That Sikh guy continued sensing our deep interest in his verbal account, “I was struggling to have a clear view of the road while driving. It was quite cold inside the vehicle. When we switched on the heater, the fog increased on the windscreen, and when we turned on AC, the windscreen would get cleared, but we had to shiver in cold. The situation was odd and difficult. When Rudra Prayag was around twenty kilometres, a plain area came, we increased our speed. This relief was short lived. Again, the hilly terrain started. It was around 9.30pm. The rain didn’t slow down, but we were driving at a considerable speed with great caution. Suddenly we had to slow down due to a policeman, who gestured by his hand, to slow down and to drive our vehicle on the hill

side. He was standing in the middle of the road completely drenched. The rain was beating hard on his head and face. His face was not clearly visible to us, but he wore the police uniform, that was clear to us. As we moved a bit slow, we could feel the force of the rain, beating the roof top of our vehicle. The pit-pat sound was deafening. We were surprised and amazed to notice the traffic personnel, performing his duty at such a secluded place, and that too at such odd hours. There was no habitation around. He was not even carrying a torch or an umbrella. We had spotted him suddenly, before a turn. I thought, I was cautious enough, otherwise I would have hit him. While I was thinking all this, we had hardly covered less than half a kilometre or so, my friend sitting beside me, shouted very loudly to stop the vehicle. We noticed half of the portion of the road on the valley side was missing, as it had been washed away. A length of about ten to twelve feet of the road had gone down into the valley due to the rain and land slide. A chill ran down our spine. As we had followed the directions of the policeman, we were able to save our lives, otherwise anything untoward could have happened. We thanked 'Wahe Guru' for that and felt obliged to that unknown policeman. The friends sitting in rear seat were now putting pressure to take a hotel. After a few minutes at 10 pm, we spotted a hotel on the outskirts of Rudra Prayag and went inside. We saw a person holding an umbrella, who was smoking in the hotel's balcony.

Perhaps he was the owner of the hotel giving instructions to the assistants, before leaving for his home. After noticing us, he stood behind the counter. The tariff, he quoted, was on the higher side. He was adamant in getting, what he had quoted. We were extremely tired and wanted rest. As he handed the keys of the rooms, we told him about the missing portion of the road and about the policeman, who cautioned us. The manager and the assistant looked at each other and they enquired from us, about the place where we had seen the policeman, and the distance from there. We told them whatever we could. The manager told us, that a few years ago, a traffic policeman was runover by a speeding truck, who died on the spot performing his duty. Since then, lot of people, including the locals and the tourists have spotted him doing his duty in late hours, especially when land slide takes place, or the road is washed away by the torrential rains. He has saved numbers of lives. **He lives in his own death.** You are also lucky, that he warned you in time. We developed cold feet and were left speechless.”

He continued with the last leg of the story, “Next day, the weather was clear with bright sunshine and as we started from the hotel, we were engrossed in our thoughts of the previous day’s happenings. In the evening, we were in Delhi, safe and sound with our families. We had lot to tell them and share our experiences.”

Whatever Gulshan's friend told was the first-hand account. Though it seems to be quite unbelievable, but I do not find any reason to disbelieve this account. This is nature and lot of things happen in the form of miracles, which we don't notice and are likely to miss. I excuse myself from the people, who are too burdened with their own intellectuality and scientific reasoning.

Some wise Urdu poet has said,

“KHUDA US AHSAS KA NAAM HAI,
SAAMNE HO AUR DIKHAYE BE NA DE”

(God is the name of that experience—He may be in front of us but may not be visible to us.)

STORY 19:

AT LORD KRISHNA'S FEAST

After getting fed up with the hectic daily routine of a metro city's life, one needs to rejuvenate at least once in a year. An escape from all sorts of pollution including the air and sound, becomes the necessity for a peaceful energetic life. This can, only be achieved by retreating to a remote village or in the hills. The hills ensure us a close proximity to nature.

The constant flowing cool breeze enlivens the skin, the outer form of the body. The fresh air inhaled gives birth to positivity from within. The chirruping of different birds becomes the part of the mother nature's vibrant song, which soothes the ears and the mind. The clear blue sky presents the glittering stars and the moon, a feast for the eyes. Above all, the much-required leisure promotes a qualitative thinking. The spirit soars high.

For these very gainful movements, a program to visit Manali in Himachal Pradesh, germinated in between the

three friends and their families in summer vacations, when the kids were also fretting for a change.

On the very first day, a major portion of the journey was covered in our cars. We spent a night at Kullu. Next day, we visited Manikaran and bought three wooden boxes of apricot, one for each car, to be brought back to our homes in Delhi. The later part of the day was utilised in covering the distance up to Manali and getting a suitable hotel for three-nights stay. By the next morning our rooms got filled by the smell of the fruits in the boxes. They got overripe. The short shelf life of this fruit was beyond our expectation. We decided to forgo our breakfast and ate apricots to our fulfilment. Fruits can be eaten up to a limit. Rest of them were given to the hotel staff.

After this we got ready for sightseeing. We visited Hadimba temple and Guru Vashisht bath, a pool of water from hot spring. It was around 12:00 pm and we were at wooden royal palace near Manali. It was just an ordinary wooden structure of five to six small rooms. We felt be fooled and realised that it was a simple and cheap trick, to dupe tourist to earn revenue by Himachal tourism. While coming out, we felt deep hunger and strong craving for food. We had parked our cars on the right-hand side of the road. While unlocking our cars, our attention was drawn to a metallic board nailed on a pine tree, which read 'Ancient temple of Lord Shree

Krishna 500 metres ahead'. I called up my friends and put a proposal of visiting that temple, which we expected was quite nearby.

By this time, my friend, Mr Nain informed that children were feeling hungry. There was no hotel nearby, just a small kiosk outside that wooden palace which was a storehouse of some biscuits and snacks. Some potato chips packets were bought and the children got busy. After walking a long-distance uphill on the road, we found another board with an arrow mark and underneath it read 'Way to Krishna temple'. It pointed up on a hill. The hill was totally enriched by cedrous deodar trees. A narrow trail among the green bushes was leading upwards. Some locals informed that the temple was just at a distance of fifteen minutes' walk and was worth visiting. They said that it was a very ancient temple. We summed up our courage and started ascending the hill. After walking up about two kilometres, we got extremely tired and took some rest. My friend Harpal Singh was reluctant to go uphill because he felt much tired. After taking rest for fifteen minutes, a local person returning from the temple encouraged us to move ahead. By this time extreme hunger was drawing our attention. Everyone was complaining about it. We had skipped our breakfast. Some of us were ready to abandon this tiresome journey. My sixth sense told me that if we lose our morale, we would miss something important. I encouraged them a

lot and after much persuasion, all got up and renewed their walk. Finally, we reached at the temple, and it was at the top of the hill.

There was peace all around. It was an ancient Krishna temple, where a yagna was being performed among chanting of Vedic mantras by several priests and pandits. Around a hundred or even more than that, people were sitting peacefully and participating in that ritual. We also sat down peacefully but were disturbed by the unusual deep craving for food. It was around 2:00 pm, the sacred oblation ended. We also went near the Havan Kund, got prasad and blessings from pandits. We paid our offerings to Panditji, and they were pleased. We noticed an old lady in expensive white silk saree with golden border, who was sitting near the Havan Kund. Some persons in white dresses were holding a royal umbrella over that lady. We bid 'Namaste' to her. Later we came to know that she was 'Rajmata' of erstwhile Kullu state. One of the pandit took us to Lord Krishna's vigraha. He told that it was installed by Pandavas in their Agyatvas (Agyatvas is a period when a person has to remain in hiding, as a punishment). Radha's statue was installed later on. The murti of Shree Krishna attracted us, it appeared to be very lively. It was as if HE wanted to convey some message to us. We felt blessed and sat there for some time.

As the hunger was tormenting us, we decided to return. When we came out and were about to start our downhill journey, two sewadars requested us to stop for a while and to let Rajmata go first. Meanwhile a pandit and some other people, had come out along with her to see her off. He cleared the way for her. After she left, one of them requested us to have community feast/ Lunger, specially made for the day. He left away. We didn't know where to go. So, we started going down the hill, for our cars. The hunger had become uncontrollable. The children face expressed that saga as well.

Hardly, we had covered thirty steps or so, when somebody shouted from above, “Bhai Sahab, this is not acceptable, you are refusing Lord Krishna’s Prasad, please come and have it. Look, please don't disappoint us, come all.”

The request seemed so personnel, we could not ignore. We again ascended the thirty steps. The guy took us to the back of the temple, where we were made to sit on long straw/jute mat. Already thirty to forty persons were enjoying Krishna’s lunger Prashad. We were sitting in a long row. The leaf plates (popularly known as Patala) were given to us. Then the boiled rice with all kinds of pulses were served systematically to us. The food was so tasty, that the words cannot express the quality and its taste. I would not hesitate to say that the food that we ate on that day, had a very gratifying taste. Last of all, we

were served yellow sweet rice, containing different dry fruits. We ate according to our capacity. Then we met the same guy, who had made us to stop for the divine food. We expressed our gratitude to him and told him that really, we were very hungry when he called us for the langar prasad(feast).

He folded his hands and said, “Thanks to all of you, our Lord Krishna is very kind. Without his wish and blessings, nothing is possible.”

That person had a long Vermilion spot on his forehead and was wearing a long golden kurta and yellow Pitambari dhoti. He had unique captivating smile on his face.

As we were coming down, I recollected in my thoughts, the unprecedented unique hunger, the exceptional taste of the food and the fulfilment of the body and the soul. I realised thereafter, that this was an act by “ALL MERCIFUL”. He had a special plan for us. We were all witness to Lord Krishna’s Leela on that day. There was no food point on the way, right from that wooden palace. He gave us strength and rare grit to reach at the top of the hill. We were ready to forgo the community feast. He called us again to have food. Then we met a person who seem to be an exulted one. Till this day, I feel, we had a close brush with the divine’s presence, who made us go through the divine experience as well.

Whenever something like described above, takes place, usually the words are felt short.

I wait eagerly for such type of exceptional experiences and Darshans of the persons, who have traces of divinity in them.

STORY 20

A LAD FROM SHANTIES

Probably in the year 1988, when I was posted in a middle school in a resettlement colony, I recollect an episode. Among the staff, we five of us, who were likeminded, became very good friends. One of them was Virender Chauhan. Those were the days, when we enjoyed our teaching job and took our life in our stride. We had aspirations and dreams like an ordinary youth. We possessed the capacity to take the risks as well. The experiences of life were quite less, and we could dare to perform an activity, which after giving a thought in present times, that is in 2020, can be said to be an activity not less than a reckless one, which could have led us in deep trouble.

The students, who were on roll, were from very poor families. The teachers, like us, enjoyed good respect and were addressed as 'GURUJANS' or 'Master Sahab' by other people. The rowdy students were given tight slaps, and nobody including the parents ever objected to it.

They had a clear thought, that it was meant for their children's better future. No doubt the teachers also put their heart and soul in their profession; they would go an extra mile to help the students. Mr Uday Ram was a peaceful old man, deputed as headmaster of the school, whose only expectation was devotion and sincerity from the teachers.

The building of the school was taken care of, by Brijendra Singh, a watchman, who was a young person from the state of Uttar Pradesh. There was a spare room for the Watchmen in the school premises. The room remained occupied by Brijender till he was unmarried. Though the education department is supposed to provide two Watchmen for the school, one for the day and one for the night, but Brijender had to perform both duties in absence of another watchman. Time came when he got married and had a wife. The father-in-law of the bride would not allow the bride to live in the school premises. Brijender's parents lived in Azadpur, just three kilometres away from the school where Brijendra worked. In these circumstances, he had to go to his parents' house, in order to fulfil the duties of a married man. The school remained without a watchman during the night. Some burglaries started taking place in the school. Sometimes the fans were stolen, or the metallic covers of sewers went missing. Several complaints were lodged. The Inquiry officer, of a head constable rank would come and scold Brijender for his negligence in

performing his government duties. Some of the teachers started blaming him, for selling these things in grey market, for earning an extra buck out of those deals. Brijendra got fed up but he could not do anything.

Adjacent to the school boundary, there was an open ground which was slowly and gradually usurped by the Bangladeshi migrants with the connivance of the local political leaders. The police choose to turn blind eye towards them. The episode of burglary and theft increased to an alarming position. Brijendra knew very well about these migrant's role in the loss of property episodes. So, he secretly and unofficially appointed a lad from those shanties to look after the school at night. He hired that boy in a sum of Rupees ₹500 per month for the Watchman's duty. The burglary stopped for some days, while Brijender, the formal Watchman remained on a regular trip to his wife. The watchman would appear at 1:00 PM to close and lock the rooms of the school and would disappear at 6:00 PM leaving the school on the mercy of that small boy, aged 13 years. Usually, the boy would be found sleeping in the corridor early in the morning, covering himself with an untidy old cotton bedsheet to avoid the mosquitoes at night. He would hand over the keys and would disappear. He was usually seen in half sleeve white shirt and a white half pant. We had developed some kind of soft corner for him. The days past uneventful.

After a month or so, Brijender would be seen opening the school's office room in the morning in haste and then disappearing quickly. We couldn't sense the change in the situation. On the fourth day, that lad from the shanties appeared in the school and we were shocked to find a wide deep open wound on his head. He was trying to ward off flies from it, by waving his hand over his own head. He was in deep pain and had swelling over his forehead. The blood had dried up in his hair. This was not clear, how that lad spent those initial three days, since he got hurt. I called up Virender Chauhan, who was a science teacher and was medical In-charge, for minor injuries to students. He had some cotton, few bundles of bandages, Dettol and Soframycin ointment for wounds and cuts and some tablets like Aspro and Crocin.

Virender too examined the wound and said, "Oh! friend, it's too deep". Then he asked the boy, "How did you get it?"

The lad said, "At night, when I was in the school sleeping here in the corridor, some thieves entered the school premises in the dark. When I accosted them, they hit me hard on the head, with a broken piece of wooden leg of a broken desk and then they ran away."

I inquired, "Did you see a doctor?"

The boy in turn said, “No, I don't have money, my Amma (Grandmother) goes to work and there is no one else in the house.”

I didn't have courage to ask about his parents, but when Virender Chauhan asked about them, he said innocently, “I don't know my grandmother says they were left in Bengal.”

I could see the boy was facing the clouds of uncertainties and was quite helpless. Chauhan said, “It is better, if a doctor treats him. Let us call Brijender.” But Brijender was nowhere to be seen. We got worried about the boy.

I pointed out, “If we apply soframycin, he can get well, provided he is not allergic to sulpha drugs. The boy looked curiously and hopefully at us. The strange situation was that, if the boy was taken to a doctor or to a hospital, it was to be a medico legal case. Brijender could lose his job.

Virender Chauhan suggested, “Let us take risk in the name of almighty. We have our good intentions, and HE will be with us. I also agreed. He took consent of the boy and then we proceeded further. We sterilized the scissors and chopped off some of his hair around the wound which had dried blood in them. We cleaned the wound very carefully using the cotton and Dettol and then applied Soframycin ointment to it. A bandage was

tugged around the head. We instructed the boy to come to us before we leave the school, if he suffers uneasiness or pain.

On the next day when he came, some swelling over his forehead had gone. His wound was on healing side. Chauhan had a smile on his face. I also thanked God. Some of our tension had eased. Again, we went through the previous day's process and gave fresh bandage to his wound. This continued for ten days. He recovered more than ninety percent. The swelling on the head and over his eyes had totally disappeared, and he slept peacefully at night. After a few days, this boy had stopped coming to school for his duties. We got worried.

Surprisingly, after some days, a group of ten Bangladeshi migrants came in the school accompanied by an old aged lady. They were asking for the two teachers who had provided medical aid to the child. We remained silent but had apprehensions of all kinds in our mind. The peon went from one room to the other, making an enquiry about it. I went to the headmaster and narrated the whole episode. He wasn't pleased with us, but advised us to remain silent, till he assessed the situation. Our heart was beating fast, praying for mercy to almighty. Our headmaster became busy with them. That lad from the shanties, appeared in the school after ten minutes. I rushed to him and had a look on his head. He had completely recovered, only the outer skin was

very delicate and needed care. He went to those persons and pointed towards us. He said, "They treated me." The whole group headed towards us with folded hands and thanked us profusely, for the act of kindness.

The old lady was the grandmother of that boy, who blessed us in her words, "Allah Aap Dono Per Raham O Karam Banaye Rakhey., Iss Bachche Ko Apne Apna Samjha, Hum Toh Yeh Dekhne Aaye Thye, Woh Kaun Se Farishte Hain, Jara Un Se Mil Toh Lain." (Allah be kind to you, you considered this child as yours. We just came to meet and see the kind persons, who took his care.)

Both of us felt relieved and blessed. We devoted and dedicated our karmas to HIM and took that rare risk. Otherwise, anything could have happened. The medical expert may call this, an act of recklessness. Doctors could have given an anti-tetanus injection as well as stitches over his head, but we couldn't. We did, what we could, in that situation.

Brijender appeared in the school after a week and started inquiring about that lad. The boy had stopped staying in the school at night. The headmaster issued a show cause notice to him, enquiring about his whereabouts, and for his unlawful absence from the school. The case was referred to higher ups. Brijender knew that, that lad had been hit by some scoundrels. He intentionally disappeared from the scene and failed in

providing the medical treatment to the poor boy. He had to face the departmental enquiry.

Till today I and Chauhan, both of us are wonderstruck by our act. We do not know who provided that rare courage to act. It was some greater force that motivated us to become doctors for a few days.

We are thankful to HIM for being with us and especially being with the lad from shanties.

STORY 21

THE STONES IN WALKWAY

Working in the same school, a strong friendship developed in between Sh. Harpal Singh and me. Harpal Singh was planning a visit to Katra to visit the holy shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi. Both of us were enjoying bright sunshine in winter days in the playground of the school, sitting comfortably in our chairs and enjoying the vacant period.

I asked Harpal Singh, “How much would you spend in this trip including the railway ticket`s fair and the tariff of the room for two days?” He thought for a while and then took my help in calculating. In those years of 1988 or 89 the expenditure was estimated rupees two thousand for four members.

Then I put the second question to him, “Have you ever noticed, the poor students both boys and girls suffering and shivering from the morning chill in the morning assembly? if not, then see them tomorrow.”

He asked me to cut short and to come to the main point. I drew his attention to the poorest among the poor. The parents were unable to provide the woollen pullovers and the stockings to the girl students, who wore thin cotton salwar and kameez in those chilly days in the month of January. Some of the boys also suffered.

He responded by saying “Yes, there are so many families from Punjab, who have migrated to this area and are without parents. They have become victim of the terrorism in Khalistan movement in Punjab. Some are being supported either by their grandparents or by some relatives, and they are studying in our school.

Unknowingly, Harpal Singh had added new dimensions to my proposal. I proposed to him that, it would be better if he spares that amount and spends on woollen pullovers for those poor students.

He said, “It’s a great idea, but how much would you contribute? First tell me this.”

I said, “Well! I have kept rupees five hundred for the service of my newly bought car, I can add that amount, to yours. The car can wait.” (In those days rupees five hundred was a considerable amount.) He appreciated and then he turned towards Ram Niwas Sharma, a common friend of ours. He offered to contribute rupees six hundred to the amount. Harpal Singh went to Sadar bazaar (the wholesale market), and he got lot of woollen

pullovers at the rate rupees forty per sweater. He bought some woollen socks also.

Next day we made a survey in the school and identified the students, who had lost their parents in Punjab due to terrorism. Then we picked out the students, who lost their father but had mother to support. Some students were really in need of woollen pullovers. They were also taken into consideration. Students were given pullovers judiciously as per the list. On the very next day of the distribution, some more parents came and pleaded for woollen pullovers, they were literally begging for the support. We told them, that there was no provision from the government's side. It was our personal endeavour. Some were satisfied and went away. Still some poor and needy remained, who had tears in their eyes. They told us their story in Punjab and how they lost their husband in the act of terrorism. We were moved and a second list with the second contribution was made by three of us. The pullovers were again brought and distributed. We were quite overwhelmed, when the students got smile on their face after getting the new pullovers.

We came to know through other teachers, that a drawing teacher belonging to the same locality, was not able to digest this. With the help of other two negative elements, this teacher secretly wrote a complaint to the Education department, alleging that we had side

businesses, and had extra income from them. He also alleged that we had undermined the status of reserved category by donating them woollen pullovers. The third allegation was that generally during the school hours, we skipped out school duties and remained absent to conduct our business.

A surprise checking by the higher authorities confirmed that we were in the school, doing our duties sincerely. The students confirmed that we were regular in the class and put our heart and soul in teaching them.

Then the same charges against us, appeared in a local weekly newspaper of that area. The paper was being printed by a person, who had been in a government job, and was shunted out by the authorities for taking bribe. He was famous for blackmailing the people. This rogue element wanted to further escalate this matter. This was disclosed by some another resident of that area, who was known to us. At that time, we did not want the drawing teacher, the complainant, to have a last laugh.

We went to a local leader of that area, who was a political aspirant. He wanted to fight an election of Vidhan Sabha, as an independent candidate. He heard us carefully and appointed two persons to set that publisher in his right place. This was done duly by him as no fresh trouble cropped up against us. We had to oblige that local leader in the coming elections. The election was won by him with an impressive margin.

One fine morning, the Superintendent from the adjacent school came asking for us, he had a handwritten complaint against us which was definitely the handiwork of that drawing teacher. He listened to us and appreciated our act of helping the poor students. He asked us to submit a well-crafted reply, where our role was to be minimised, just to selecting and identifying the poor students from the classes. The pullovers donated were to be mentioned as 'Gupt Dan' from some person, who did not want to be named and identified. At last, that Superintendent who was appointed as an Inquiry officer, could not stop himself from expressing his personal greed for obliging us. Again, a third contribution of rupees fifteen hundred had to be made among three of us to get rid of that inquiry. The irony is that this contribution was not meant to help the poor students, but to silence a person, who had misrepresented us.

We learnt a lesson that there are some stones hidden in walkways, which pinch and hurt you physically and try to disturb your peace of mind, while you walk. We must take steps carefully. We must not back out from the social service due to the elements, who are ill at ease with other's noble deeds.

These are the people, who have a narrow mind and a very small heart within a shallow body. They are weak enough and they must not be allowed to stop you.

STORY 23:

A DIAMOND IN DUST

In year 1998, in the recess period in school, we had started playing Volleyball. A senior teacher, Mr. Gupta initially gave coaching to us and taught us the rules and regulations of the game. The perfection in the game was reached to such an extent, that at times, we would challenge our mentor, whom we called Bhisham Pitamah (the elder guru of Kauravas and Pandavas) respectably. He would gladly accept the challenge in a very supportive manner. When we would lose the match, he would proudly say ‘Abhi Tum Bachche Ho.’ (Still, you are child) We would enjoy his comment and would say, ‘Kabhi to Bade Honge.’

Once while playing the match, my gold ring slipped out of my finger in the heat of the game, and I didn't notice at that time. The volleyball net was dismantled and taken off from the ground of the school. While returning home, I noticed that I had lost my gold ring. The ring was an expensive one, studded with a precious

stone known as Topaz. I searched it in my almirah and bathroom at home, but it was not to be found. Next day I told my friend Harpal Singh, who made an announcement among the students, in the morning assembly about the lost ring. It was added that whosoever finds it, would be given an honesty certificate and an appropriate reward. Nobody raised hand. I was disappointed and lost the hope.

Next day a woman came in the school and asked for her own daughter who was in the classroom. She was the mother of that student studying in class 7th. The Peon brought her from the class. Then she took out my ring from her purse, and asked for the teacher, who had lost the gold ring. I was assisting the headmaster in his work, while she sat on a bench, placed at some distance in the office.

It was beyond my expectation, when she introduced her daughter to us. She said, "Day before yesterday, my daughter had found it in the playground, and she gave it to me. Both the mother and her daughter were wearing nearly tattered clothes, which were telltale of their poverty. My friend Harpal Singh asked her, "Do you know it's a gold ring, something very costly.

She replied, "Yes, I know it's a gold ring. Our children emulate us. Had I kept the ring, a wrong message would have gone to my daughter. She would be married after some years and would be going to another house. I choose to help her, to become morally strong,

so I decided to return it to the original owner in her presence.

I was curious to know, what the father of that child did for his living. It was told that he was working at a tea stall.

My friend Harpal Singh was also amazed at their honesty. He called me aside and then put a question to me, “What is your assessment, how much your gold ring would fetch, if it is sold to a Goldsmith?”

I said, “It’s weight is worth a tola that would cost at least Rupees four thousand five hundred.”

He said, “This girl deserves a prize of at least 10% of the total amount.”

I readily agreed and paid rupees five hundred for a new dress to that girl. Next day a merit certificate of honesty was given by our headmaster in presence of her father and other students in the morning assembly.

We the teachers, who are considered to be educated, and are known to inculcate moral behaviour in our students, were totally impressed by that uneducated lady for her undaunted high moral character. She not only exhibited high values to her own daughter but also to us. The poverty could not shake her.

As the final examinations were also approaching in near future, the mother of the girl expressed her fear, “My daughter needs some coaching, kindly see that she

gets through her class. The girls grow faster than the boys. A loss of one year would mean much to us. Please take care of her.”

The wish of that strong lady was nearly a command for us. Finally, that was taken care of, by providing an extra coaching to the student and ensuring that she gets through.

Remaining in the government job and later on retiring from a gazetted post, at the age of 62 years in 2015, what I usually used to tell my younger friends, was that one should be morally strong. It is very easy to get illegal money in a government job, to which you are not entitled, but it is very difficult to resist and say ‘NO’ to such money. It’s your real test to show, how morally strong, you stand.

Accepting such money, shows your greed and weak character. Rejecting outright the illicit transaction, presents you as a strong-willed person. You earn a great amount of respect. These traits silently build your character.

Talking about that brave lady, I would say that when you move in a dust storm, who knows while avoiding the dust and turning your face away, you may accidentally cast your eyes on a diamond fallen on the ground and emerging out of the sand, cleared by high velocity winds.

This poor lady was a real gem in the dust of poverty. Hearing a popular ghazal of the famous singer late Sri Jagjit Singh, I was awestruck by a line i.e. 'DILON KE SHAH TOH, AKSARR GARIB HOTE HAIN'.

(The King of hearts are usually the poor people).

STORY 24:

MIRACLES THAT CONQUER YOU

At this age of scientific advancement, thousands of things which are considered to be uncommon, but spectacular also occur. They are difficult to be believed. At times, the impact is so powerful, that it shapes the personality of a person and his way of thinking. The lifestyle automatically changes. The scientists have their own reasonings to convince others. If they find hard to give some reasonable and concrete answer, they will say, 'No, actually you wished to happen in that way, the urge was so strong, it started appearing as a truth'. They would instruct, "Don't find any religious or mythological aspect in it." On the other hand, the people who are spiritually exalted, would say that everything happens for a reason, there is a divine plan hidden in it. I have faith in the later version. Shakespeare in one of his famous plays, says, "Coming events cast their shadow." We notice that the things follow accordingly as they are destined and designed to be.

I have a close friend, Ramesh Bajaj, whom I hold close to my heart, and have an immense respect for him. Besides holding his successful electronic business, he is involved in many social activities as well. Another character of this person is that he is a devoted follower of the divine mother, popularly known as Maa Vaishno Devi. People call her Maa Bhagwati or Mahamai out of their deep and unshakable trust in her. The temple of the divine mother is in a cave in Trikuta hills near Katra, Jammu. This temple was discovered by Raja Gulab Singh in 1846. He donated five lakh rupees for its development. This temple is situated at an altitude of 5200 feet. The popular belief is that Maa Vaishno Devi incarnated as a beautiful Princess in Treta yuga, as a shakti of Mother Parvati, Saraswati and Lakshmi for the welfare of mankind. Lord Gorakhnath sent Bhairav after her, whom she beheaded at the entrance of the cave, where her temple exists at present. Lakhs of followers from Northern India go for her darshan and get their wishes fulfilled. Ramesh Bajaj believes that whatever he is today, is due to the blessings of Mahamai.

Considering his utter devotion, I was curious to know the cause of his strong leanings to the divine mother. If you make a telephone call to him, he will not say 'Hello'. He would respond by saying 'Jai Mata di'. With the help of his friends from the electronics market in Delhi, he was also instrumental in getting built a

tourist complex for the devotees, where food is served free of cost in the morning as well as in the evening.

What Ramesh Bajaj recalled and revealed was quite interesting and astounding. I would like to present the complete version in his own words, which runs as follow, “My father Shri Ram Krishn Bajaj had been visiting Ma Bhagwati`s abode since 1933 along with his friends and their families. He would generally form a group and go there. My parents resided in today`s Pakistan in those days before 1947. During partition my parents moved to India.

It was in 1963, that a group of people involving family members and family friends went to this holy place. In those days, the train would go up to Pathankot only. It would reach here at 7.00 am. From there, the journey would again start for Jammu Katra and would reach there by 6:00 pm in the evening on the same day. In those days, there were only two places to stay at Katra (the base camp). As usual, my father opted for Subhash Dhaba, for a night halt. After getting a restful sleep, we started on foot on a kachcha track (unmetalled road) going through planes for at least three kilometres. After crossing Banganga, the holy river, the hilly track started. Now a days, a concrete and convenient track has been laid, but in those days, it used to be a very difficult track going in a zigzag way, spiralling upwards towards the top of the hill. One had to climb the steep hills using his legs

and sometimes using his two hands also. Literally we can say one had to crawl at many places, holding the rocks and moving up. The chanting would consistently remain on lips 'Jai Mata di.' The twittering of the wild birds would please the ears. At times, devotees' sight would catch a wild animal. The pilgrims would loudly chant 'Jai Mata di' and the returning pilgrims going downwards would reciprocate to it, in the same way to encourage them.

Ramesh Bajaj continued, "In those days, there were no shelters in the midway, one had to find shelter under a tree or under a tent of a tea stall. Tea stalls were also very few.

Since morning, when we started, the weather was initially less cloudy, but slowly and steadily the black clouds started gathering in the sky. Before reaching Aadh Kuwari, the mid way of the journey, it had started raining.

Clouds were doing their job efficiently with a thunderous roar. There was no electricity in midway in those days. The track had turned slippery. Due to heavy pouring, a strange situation had developed, all were in dilemma, whether to abandon the journey and to return to the place from where we had started or to move ahead embracing the inclement weather. Some of the members of our group, had already turned back. Somehow, we were lucky enough and we reached Aadh Kuwari

shivering in cold and all drenched up. After we had taken some food at this place, we got extremely tired. There was no place to rest. The pilgrims were high in number. The children had gone irritated and were ill at ease. They wanted bed to sleep in. It was around 9.00pm. The shop keepers had gas lantern or kerosene lamps to dispel the darkness.

My father took the lead with the new hope and courage. After covering a little distance or in other words, after dragging ourselves due to fatigue, unexpectedly we found a room lit by a candle where some mats were spread on floor with some blankets over them. Nobody was inside the room. This room was on the valley side and not on the hill side of the track. This track ultimately led to the main temple which was still six kilometres away. My father stopped for a while and looked around; nobody was there. He, then thought carefully and decided to take all of us in that room. We took the much-needed rest. A sort of Tempest had raided that area during the night.

After a couple of hours, the ferocity of wind subsided. The beating of the rain also stopped. A slight pit pat noise of the rain drops, showed their presence. My father woke up all of us. It was still pitch dark. Nobody could be seen going up or coming down in those hours. My mother asked the time from my father. After much effort he could see the time in his wristwatch. It

was 3.20am It was difficult to find out the way, but we had started on our yatra. A black dog with golden shining eyes appeared from nowhere and started moving ahead of us. Initially we hesitated after noticing it, but we quietly followed it. Whenever we stopped for a brief rest at the steep incline, it would look back to us with its golden shining eyes to confirm, whether we were following him or not. It would also stop ahead of us. Then it would start wagging its tail, as if asking us to follow him. It was a strange miracle. It became our eyes and showed us the way. We had no doubt it was godsent.

My mother pointed out to my father who just said, “Come on quickly and quietly”. Obviously, he was not prepared to discuss about the captain who was leading us. Perhaps my father was also watching keenly, whatever was happening. Initially I had developed some fear in respect to that animal. As I was just a boy then, it's shining eyes did create a fear in me.

At 6:00 am in the morning, we were at Mata Vaishnu's place. As is the ritual, we took bath in the waterfall, besides Mata's cave, we dressed up in new set of clothes. We noticed that our guide had disappeared. It was nowhere to be seen. After having darshan and blessings, we had some breakfast, and then we decided for our return journey. I started searching for our guide, the vahana of Lord Bhairava. I wanted to see him in the light of the day.

As is customary, Bhairav's temple is visited in the return journey, our next top was supposed to be there. The morning sun had started blessing us. The dark curtain of the night had disappeared. After two hours uphill journey, we sought blessings of Lord Bhaironnath. Our guide, friend and the leader was nowhere to be seen. With the chanting's of Jai Mata di, we were returning downhill towards Katra with lot of gratitude towards divine mother for taking our care.

In our return journey, we had gained speed and a new confidence. We walked cautiously over the slippery patches. The sunshine was very soothing. The air was fresh with the pleasant smell of the forest. The cool breeze had eased in its speed. There was no longer urgency in it. It was noon and we had reached Aadh Kuwari. We stopped for a while and ate our lunch at a Dhaba. My father paid the bill and enquired from its owner, if there was some another route to the downwards journey. The Dhaba owner replied in negative.

My father started talking to my mother, which drew my attention. He said to her, "I was searching for that room, throughout our return journey where that candle was burning, the mats were laid and where we took a short nap and some rest. It was on the valley side, I remember. But surprisingly there is no such room. How it can be? Where had that room gone? There is no other

way, and this is the only track”. Nowadays there are two or three tracks to the shrine but in those days, there used to be only one.”

Ramesh Bajaj further continued, “I also realised that the room where we had taken shelter in the previous stormy night, could not be located in our return journey. What a miracle! It was simply unbelievable. We were wonderstruck, surprised and spell bound. We noticed that the other team members, who had deserted the journey the previous day, now were coming up and chanting loudly ‘Jai Matadi’. We exchanged notes and they were in a hurry, we too were, as we had decided to reach Katra as soon as possible, so that we could have some rest till this party returns.”

Mr Bajaj continued, “These two miracles had deep impact on me. Thereafter, we visited Mahamayi’s Darbar very frequently, say every year. Our family flourished due to Mata’s blessings. We are five brothers. We have our own houses and good businesses. She has given us in abundance. Now come to those miracles. That black dog to which I was referring, guided us in the dead of night, appeared from nowhere. The animals usually get huddled up in a safe corner or at some cozy place in such extreme weather conditions. It was Baba Bhairon's vahana. It showed us the way when we were losing our confidence and will. Secondly that room, which was not to be found on the next day, was divine

Mother's unbelievable act". The Goddess mother took care of her children in those difficult times.

Then Ramesh Bajaj stopped for a while and put a question to me, "What would you say to it?" After a brief thought, I replied, "Yes, we have to believe it, as it is a firsthand account. Your parents had been there several times before 1963. They were very well conversant with the route and its surroundings, up to the divine cave. It is a sheer miracle, the Mother Nature which represents Mata Parvati (Aadi Shakti), plays its role for her devotees.

Ramesh Bajaj said, "Yes, very well said, here I would like to end the answer to your question, why I have developed so much devotion towards Maa Bhagwati. There are lots and lots of question and doubts of some people. What I notice is lack of faith in their heart and mind. Where the reasoning fails, the FAITH germinates. I have my faith intact and would remain strong forever."

Thus, he ended his answer by chanting 'JAI MATA DI.'

STORY 25:

BABA'S COMMAND

A call from Himalayas from Shri Kedarnath Dham, the seat of Lord Shiva is enough to cultivate a fresh energy in my body and soul. This place is such that a visitor who so ever pays his visit at this shrine, gets totally encaptivated by the beauty of nature and the aura that surrounds the temple.

The mythology gives out a wonderful happening which is worth adding to one's knowledge. After ruling their Kingdom, Pandavas together with Draupadi, went in search of Lord Shiva in Himalayas, to seek forgiveness for killing their Kaurav brothers. Rishi Agastya guided them to the direction where Lord Shiva's presence was expected. Mahadev was not pleased with them, so HE wanted to avoid them. Pandavas could not find Lord Shiva in that area. They knew Rishi Agastya could not be wrong. An apprehension overtook their mind, that Lord Shiva wants to ignore them. Pandav brothers were determined to seek forgiveness and please Lord Shiva.

Nakul and Sahdev, the younger Pandav brothers, were wise and intelligent. They asked Bheem to stand tall with his legs apart. They had noticed that some buffaloes and bulls were grazing in the hills. Pandavs had a plan to execute. They decided to drive all the buffaloes and bulls through the gate that Bheem had built by standing tall. They knew that if Lord Shiva had turned into some cattle to avoid them, he would not pass through the gate that Bheem had built. All the animals passed under Bheem's legs but one of them ran astray. All of them ran after that bull. As Bheem was strong, he got hold of hind legs of that bull and pleaded for forgiveness and Lord's darshan. Considering their earnest prayer, Lord Shiva got pleased and obliged them.

This place is Kedarnath Dham in Uttarakhand (a hill state in northern part of India close to Himalayas). In 2016, I was fortunate enough to get a chance to visit this place along with my family members and a relative. Though I had been to this shrine several times, but my main object was to conduct pooja at Triyugi Narayan and Devprayag in the memory of my departed father. Secondly, after the incessant torrential rains for ten days in Kedarnath region, a disaster took place around the shrine on 16th June 2013 in the late evening. A massive landslide occurred at the back of Kedarnath shrine. A loud and deafening Thunder was followed by gushing of huge unimaginable volume of water from Chaurabari taal (Chaurabari taal is the naturally formed lake in the

valley between the mountains at the back of Kedarnath temple. It is approximately three kilometres away from the main shrine). Thousands of men, women and children lost their life. All houses and ashrams were either tossed aside and carried away with the massive unpardonable flow of water or got buried under the sludge. The huge devastation affected physically and emotionally, not only the people of this region, but the devotees from all over India. Those who survived had heart rending stories to tell.

The geographical scenario of that place had changed considerably. I wanted to be a witness to that change. Of course, my devotion to Lord Shiva was also the main reason, for visiting this holy place. Moreover, a story was going around, that how in 2013 a massive Shila, a huge piece of rock of nearly 8 feet height and wide enough to cover the back of the temple, was thrown away by the mighty waters at the back of the Kedarnath temple, which diverted the water flow in 3 directions. Right and left of the temple and the 3rd direction was that the uncontrollable fury of the flood after hitting the Shila was directed towards the sky that fell in front of the temple. The temple stood strong as before. This massive Shila or the rock is now called as Bheem-Shila and is being worshipped.

On this particular visit in 2016, Pandit Narbadeshwar Shukla was waiting for us at the helipad. The puja was duly performed, and we sought the

blessings of Mahadev. We were eager to have a firsthand account and a view of that area. A village in between the journey popularly known as Rambada had no traces left. It just got wiped out.

Pandit Narbadeshwar told his experiences in detail. They was quite horrifying. It was sad to learn that he lost his younger brother in those floods. We paid him dakshina after which he opened up. He informed us that he was planning to marry his daughter in coming winters. Due to his brother's death, it had become difficult to arrange for the gold, that was meant to be given in the marriage to the bridegroom's family. When his brother was alive, both of them had decided to marry their children with their combined earnings. Now Panditji had two families to support. He explained the position of his wife, who had gold for the bride groom's ring and a gold chain, but didn't have gold for the sister-in-law and mother-in-law's earrings. The cost of the gold was beyond their reach. Therefore, he pleaded before us for Rupees twenty-one thousand as donation, to which I showed my inability. My relative, Sh. Ripu Daman Singh was also non-committal on this issue.

In hilly region, the life is too tough, it is the struggle for existence. The poverty is writ large on the faces of people. To find an earning bridegroom, one has to spend a little more for the daughter. From December to March, there is heavy snowfall which confines the people to remain indoors. When the snow melts away, the petty

farming on the slopes of hills and mountains, remains an option. There is no regular income as such, unless a person is in a government job.

Panditji once again said, “I find difficult to arrange gold for those two ladies. This is a constant tension which doesn't allow me to sleep at night. The cost of one tola gold is around Rupees Forty thousand nowadays. Babu, I am in a big difficulty. I am unable to find a solution. Please do something if you can.”

I said to him, “When you come to Delhi, after the Kapat (doors) of the temple close, I will see, what I can do for you. Have faith in Lord Kedar (Lord Shiva/Mahadev). Nothing is impossible for HIM, HE will provide a solution. Don't get disappointed.”

I still remember the moist eyes and a wavering tone of Panditji. Something had struck me. I felt concerned about him.

Suddenly, two persons came running and searching for us. They belonged to the helicopter company. They inquired, if we were four in number with a small child and had come by helicopter. They informed us that the sky was overcast with clouds, and the snow would fall at any time. The service of the helicopter could stop due to this. If we don't hurry up, we can miss the last flight. This will force us to spend a night in minus degree temperature. They advised us to move swiftly towards the helipad. We bade goodbye to Panditji and started

running towards the helipad, which was nearly half a kilometre from there. It was difficult for us to spend a night with a two-year child at the height of 12,000 feet. The chill of the weather was still unbearable at 3:30 pm of the day. The sky was overcast; the rain would definitely stop the helicopter services.

While running towards the helipad, I wanted to have a last look of the shrine. I wanted it to behold in my eyes. When I stopped for a brief moment and turned back, the view of the temple had become slightly hazy. Pandit Ji was still standing there, waving his hand towards us. I responded back and then started moving fast towards the helipad. My relative Ripu Daman Singh and my son Vineet were ahead. After them, my daughter in law with the small kid rapped in a woollen shawl, was also running towards the helipad. I was the last one. It had become difficult for me to run freely with the baggage of request by Panditji, for the donation of Rupees twenty-one thousand. How could I help him? was the question that was constantly troubling my peace of mind, while rushing ahead.

Some wise persons with rich experiences, have time and again said, that expectations are the causes of disappointments. A classic novel by Charles Dickens 'Great Expectations' substantiates this point of view. I was thinking that Panditji will have to embrace a big disappointment, when he comes to Delhi.

While making a running effort to the helipad, just then, the gold chain with 'OM' pendant, that I was wearing around my neck, jumped out from the different layers of clothing, beating my chin and the chest regularly, as if challenging me said, "I can solve your problem, provided you have the courage and the heart to donate me." Then came Mr. Nandlal Malhotra, in my thoughts, an old man with a golden heart, who had counselled me years before, "Look Jagdish, whenever a thought comes into your mind for doing something good, do it at once, without giving a second thought otherwise, that good karma will slip out of your fingers, if you make delay. As the body needs tasty and nutritious food, the soul also needs noble karmas to gain inner strength. He further elaborated that likewise, if an idea crops up to do something unworthy or negative, then postpone it again and again. You can escape from a bad karma in this way."

The helipad was quite nearby. A command from the heart and an urge to help somebody in need flowed intensely. My mind was also battling to restrict the entry of the second thought.

In the scheme of things, a person meets different people in life, some in the guise of the family members or some as relatives and friends. There is a class of people who are outside this purview, but still they matter to you and become member of your extended list of known persons. They impact you. You feel pain in their

sufferings and happiness in their wellbeing. You do a lot for your own family and for the people in close proximity but helping somebody who is in your extended list of known persons, is something that matters.

I stopped a few yards away from the helipad and turned around in the direction of the temple, which now had acquired hazy appearance due to the fog and the distance. I could still see Panditji standing and watching us. I experienced a soft touch of Baba Kedarnath on my head and heart; I got emotionally charged. Tears began to flow from my eyes. I took out the gold chain from my neck and ran towards Panditji.

The guy from the helicopter company shouted at me, “Sahab, why are you going back? Come quickly, it's getting late.”

I responded by saying, “Just wait, I am coming, I forgot something.”

Reaching at the spot where Panditji was standing, I was struggling for the breath and could only utter, Pandit Ji, Shaadi Hai Na Beti ki? (Are you sure of your daughter's marriage).

He spoke, “How can a person lie at the doors of Baba's abode. Hundreds of people had died in 2013, it was the anger of Lord Kedar, which I fear.”

I quickly placed that gold chain in his right-hand palm and said, “I have fulfilled my commitment.

He saw the gold chain in his own palm and said, "Babu, what are you doing?"

I said, "Keep it."

He looked at the temple and I too.

After a pause, he said again, "In what way should I thank you? You have solved my problem. I have no words to express."

While taking leave of him, I said, "With Baba Kedar's blessings, make arrangements for the marriage of your daughter."

My son, daughter-in-law and my relative, were watching me from a far distance. They got a clue what I had done, probably it was their sixth sense.

Vineet said, "Papa, what have you done? These pandits are greedy, they ask for more and more on one pretext or the other, it is too much."

My relative Ripu said, "Bhai Sahab, you could have given a second thought to it. I just said, "No more discussions on it, it was Baba's command, and I obeyed it."

When we reached Delhi, after completing our pilgrimage, ten days had passed, my wife questioned me, "Where is your gold chain that you were wearing?"

I just said, “You know very well, where it is. It won't change place if I tell you.” She did not ask further, she already knew it.

In the month of January 2017, the doorbell of my house in Delhi, rang up. Panditji had come to deliver Prasad after the close of kapat of the shrine. After a cup of hot tea and some snacks, he gave Prasad and his blessings.

He said, “Babu I feel much obliged, and I am unable to express in words. Please accept the marriage invitation card. The marriage will take place in Dehradun in February. Please come with your family and grace the occasion.”

I called my son Vineet and asked him to accept the card, so that he could know, that sometimes the genuine persons are in genuine need. We must not desist from performing a noble deed, with the apprehension that the cheaters are always over there. Vineet accepted the card humbly. The silent message was enough for him, which was delivered effectively.

When GOD gives you an opportunity of doing something good. Grab it. It is HIS kindness, that HE has chosen you. Credit them to increase the score, it is the feast for your soul,” said Mr. Nandlal Malhotra, my mentor.

STORY 26:

REMEMBRANCES

Sometimes small acts give you a big valuable message. These messages, if followed, makes one's life easy and smooth. There are many hardships which one can avoid by simple diligence. Thousands of cases in courts of family litigation, are pending since years and years. The ego of a person grows to such an extent that mutual respect and love get burnt in ire. The relation between a husband and a wife turns into smoke. The result is depression and loneliness. Irreparable loss takes place, whereas, what was required in those cases was a sense of tolerance, patience, understanding and forgiveness.

My cousin Naresh who is twenty-five days elder to me in the matter of age, got married somewhere in 1975. His family was living in Barwala village, here in Delhi. His parents approved a girl named Shakuntala; the bride was brought at groom's house. In those days the bridegroom was not given liberty to see and approve the

girl before the marriage. The decision of parents and the other elders used to be final. So, it was a full tight suspense for Naresh. As the bride entered the house, the ladies in hordes started arriving to see the new arrival. This continued the whole day till the evening. There was mixed reaction among the ladies.

Some said, “She is beautiful and Higher Secondary pass and has brought good amount of dowry.”

Others said, “She is just okay, not so beautiful, she lacks good features. Our brother is more smart and handsome.”

Some elderly ladies, who never miss a chance to create a ruckus in other’s house, had their own agenda to settle their old score. One of them said loudly, “She is not at all worthy for the boy.” This comment was let loose intently when Naresh was nearby. The shot hit the right target.

After some time, Naresh was found to be in a disturbed state of mind. He came to me and said, “Brother I will not keep this girl, if she is not beautiful.”

I was also baffled, because that meant ruining the future of an innocent girl. The sun was setting, when some ladies informed my mother, that Naresh was not happy with this marriage.

There was a single room over the top of the house on the first floor, which could accommodate a broad single cot only. The room was not spacious enough to accommodate a double bed. My cousin sisters took the bride to that room.

My mother, who commanded lot of respect in my uncle's house, also got worried after hearing the comments of other ladies. After ensuring that the bride was alone in the room, she took Naresh to that room and said, "Go inside the room, and meet the bride, then say whatever you want to say."

This was an excellent opportunity for Naresh to see his bride for the first time. He came out of the room with a broad smile after meeting his bride and said, "She is good and acceptable."

As the kaal chakra moved, they became parents of a girl and two boys. Then as the wheel of time moved further, they became the grandparents. Shakuntala suffered from thyroid problem. The problem was too much, and she started losing her own health. She came on the wheelchair and gradually she was bedridden. Ultimately, she lost her life in 2023. My cousin Naresh had lost his wife Shukuntala, with whom he had spent forty-eight years of togetherness. That was a shock for all of us.

At present I am 71 years old and got retired long back. A few days back, I and my friend Harpal Singh Yadav, decided to go and meet him. Just a courtesy call, it was meant to be. This whole family of Naresh had shifted to Sector 24 Rohini, Delhi, from the village. Their family business had grown impressively.

As my Wagon-R stopped in front of their house, the entrance gate automatically opened. Naresh emerged out with his grandson. Seeing both of us alighting from the car. He asked us, "How did you come to know about my birthday?"

We said, "It's just a coincidence, we do not know that today is your birthday."

With a smile on his face, he said, "All right, then come inside and we will celebrate. Naresh and Harpal got busy in their hard drinks, while I was enjoying a cup of coffee with some snacks. After three pegs, Naresh got emotional, when I enquired about his life without his better half. Then he stopped for a while, looked at the hovering ceiling fan, told an incident from his remembrances, which would summarise the character of his wife, Shakuntala.

Naresh said, "Hardly two years had passed after our marriage, Once, I returned from my duty in the mid of the day. I saw my wife and my mother involved in a nasty argument. I asked my wife to stop arguing, but she did

not. Their tempers were running high. I gave a tight slap on my wife's face. She stopped and went inside. I went on the first floor to my room. From balcony, I could see a sense of satisfaction on my mother's face."

Naresh added, "After having my lunch, I took rest for an hour or so. My wife came in the room but did not speak to me. There was some construction work going on in the house, a second phase of staircases on the other side of the house was being laid besides a wall which had a window. This wall was the back portion of another uncle's house. I had decided to shut that window permanently. When I was giving instructions to the labourers, there appeared the face of my (chachi) aunt on the window, who politely requested me to keep the window intact, and not to remove it, because through it, they could know the well-being of each other. I had to yield to her request to keep their bond intact. Somehow it touched me to the core of my heart. On that day, I got a lesson that channels of communication must not be blocked, rather they should be created and maintained."

Naresh continued, "It was around 5:00 PM. My brother-in-law came. I thought he must have been called by my wife to make a complaint against me. After meeting my father, who was enjoying a hookah (an instrument in Indian villages to smoke) with some village elders, sitting outside in the veranda, he came to me and asked about my wellbeing. I gave a fake smile and replied

in affirmative, that I am fine. I just slipped away from there”.

Naresh further added, “I came late in the evening. By that time, my brother-in-law had gone. I waited in the room, and my wife brought dinner for me in one hand, and a lit candle in another hand. The light had gone a few minutes ago, she placed the candle on the metal box and went away. Then she again went down and brought her own dinner, and a glass of hot milk for me.”

He continued, “After she finished her dinner, I asked her, “Did you tell your brother about today’s incident?” She didn’t say anything. I again repeated the question. Before she could answer, the room was lit by the glowing light of the bulb, the electricity had come.

She looked at me with tears in her eyes and she said, “What gain it would bring in telling my brother? I know that I have to spend my life with you. The only pain is that you did not give me an opportunity to clarify myself. I am prepared for another slap, if I am guilty.”

On that day I realised my folly, and the injustice done to her. Since then, around forty years have passed, I have never raised my hand on her. I was lucky to have such a wife who had deep, and profound understanding of relations.”

I saw tears emerging from my cousin’s eyes. He was so overwhelmed, that his throat choked, and he could

not speak further. I took the charge and commented, "You are quite lucky in every sense. In today's time, it is very difficult to find such a life partner, who has such patience, tolerance and good understanding."

While returning to our house, my friend Harpal Singh was thoughtful. He blurted out, "Just notice the simplicity in the relationship of the wife and the husband. Compare it with today's situation, the girls are getting more and more educated, but they lack good understanding and tolerance. We cannot ignore the ever-growing number of matrimonial cases in the courts. The main problem is the clash of egos in between the two. Thirty years ago, the girls were less educated, but they knew the value of relations and they knew how to keep families intact. They were more sensible and more accommodating than the girls of present times. They used to be the pride of their family.

I agreed with him. I felt richer by my cousin's experience, which stimulated me to express it in writing, for the benefit of others.

Let us all pledge to make our life simpler, and more liveable than inviting complexities. Simplicity is godly where the personal interests like greed and deception take back seat. Whereas the complexities, are the satanic knots in the long rope of the life. The smoothness goes away for ever. In personal relations, the ego must not be given space in between the two individuals. It is as simple

as that. Your conscious effort towards positivity makes your life simple and worth living. An honourable learned judge, while giving his judgement in a court expressed his thought in a matrimonial litigation case, said, “Don` t ever think that my way is the highway, there are lot of things which should be ignored and must be forgotten.” I think this is a great mantra to lead a peaceful matrimonial life.

STORY 27:

THE SHADES OF COVID

The laboratory of Wuhan in China, as has been alleged, and to the fact to which I believe the virus of COVID-19 had been generated by the rogues of extreme nature. It was an advancement of chemical warfare which hit the very existence of the mankind. Lakhs of people died a cruel death all over the world. The families whether affluent or poor, had been ripped apart. Many of them lost their bread earners.

The first wave of COVID-19 started somewhere in March 2020, it brought a considerable number of deaths and sufferings for the people. Perfect lockdown in metro cities was observed. The central government took unprecedented steps during the pandemic. Some rogue politicians appeared in the picture, spoke and misguided the followers to go against the government guidelines. They were able to convince the villagers and the illiterates that COVID-19 or popularly known as Corona was nowhere, but was a government propaganda to

harass public, and there was no need to follow the instructions of the central government.

The business or the trade throughout the country was very badly hit. The economy got the big jolt. People started making efforts to regain their ground. In no time the second wave appeared and announced its arrival by inflicting mass casualties. The only relief was that by this time the vaccination had been discovered. The persons who got vaccinated were least affected. Those who could not, suffered the most. As the days passed, the situation became horrible. Again, the same rogue politicians rose to the occasion and advised their followers to avoid vaccination, as it came from the Modi government. Religious congregations which were avoidable, happened due to the uneducated bent of mind of the people. The result was disastrous.

Somehow the year came to an end. People were seen expressing hope for the new year to bring happiness and a positive change in 2021. The colourful masks of different varieties came in vogue. Some ladies were seen with colourful masks matching their apparels. Sensible people preferred N 95 mask as a protective shield. Initially this protected gear was imported from China. Then the home-grown industries rose to the occasion and started manufacturing it under the scheme 'Make in India'. Varieties of hand sanitizers decorated the front counters of general stores, electrical shops and the

chemist shops in the markets. Oxygen cylinders and the necessary medicines were sold in black market. Lakhs of people succumbed to death in second wave of COVID. The situation was so horrible and unimaginable that people could not give a respectable burial or cremation to their loved ones. It was the time of uncertainties all around. Whenever the mobile rang, it was feared that the death of some near or dear would come as an announcement or somebody would come out with a cough or fever symptoms and would ask for their guidance or for a good doctor. Touts appeared at the gate of hospitals, who would ensure hospital beds with oxygen facility, for a hefty commission.

The television channels kept a prying eye on the rogue politicians, who had misguided the people. These politicians were then found, stealthily getting themselves vaccinated, avoiding the public eye. For sure, they must be, what I strongly believe, responsible for thousands of deaths of poor rural people, who ignored vaccination on the behest of their call.

The Covid's second wave struck my family. The alarm bell rang when the breathing system of an individual was getting choked by the virus in the air. My wife, my son, my mother and including myself had to remain in the hospital. Delhi government helpline once rang on the other end. The contact person promised to render help in five minutes for a hospital bed, thereafter

they never picked up the second call. The tall claims made by the state government fell flat on the ground. Some ministers were later found admitted in some prestigious hospital in Delhi and Gurgaon. These rogues didn't have confidence in government hospitals. That was more than enough to justify the situation in Delhi. Ordinary people suffered the most.

Sikhs rose to the occasion and had a unique idea of oxygen lungers. They were on the forefront doing their best and serving the mankind in every possible way. In contrast to it, some people tried to hoard the medicines and most particularly the Remdesivir injections, which were being considered as lifesaving shots in those hard times.

After a failed effort in finding hospital beds for myself and my family, we had to rush to Rewadi town in Haryana, where we got admitted. This hospital had a different story to tell. The untrained staff was struggling hard. Some of them, had no mask or a few of them, who had mask were either wearing it on their lips, or below their nose and chin. One of them tried to put cannula in my arm, they could not. Lot of blood from my arm spilled over the bed sheet. My daughter shouted at them. Another person came and set it right. An oxygen cylinder was brought for my wife. When they operated the flow meter, its plastic bottle, which held some amount of water, for humidity, exploded into small pieces with a

blast sound. The plastic shrapnel of that bottle, fell on our faces. Thank God, it could not do much harm. They had given ample proof of their negligence and unskilled handling of this affair. We had to leave the hospital immediately.

While returning to Delhi, a small hospital in Gurgaon accepted me and my wife as COVID patient. My wife was admitted in ICU, whereas I was given a twin sharing room with another patient. Incidentally the other patient also belonged to the place, from where I come. My son had instructed me to take food in sufficient quantity in hospital, to survive from this disease. I noticed that the other patient in my room ate very less. I told him to eat sufficiently, otherwise, he would not survive. He ignored my pleadings. His condition was worse in comparison to mine. It was the second night. I slept peacefully with oxygen mask on my face. The other guy was suffering from severe cough. Next morning, I was awakened by a junior doctor at 6:00 in the morning and handed over five pills to be swallowed along with some water. I noticed that there was nobody on the other bed.

When I enquired from the doctors, one of them said, "During night, he turned fine and went away to his home.

I said, "How is it possible? His condition was much worse than me."

The other attendant said, "Don't worry, he has changed the hospital and has been shifted away."

I doubt, if he survived.

On the next day, I got a call from my cousin, informing me that one of my other cousins in the village, had expired due to COVID. I was shocked. We had met just 3 months back, when my uncle expired due to old age. On the 3rd day, the junior doctor handed over a spirometer to me. I worked on it. He observed and said, "You don't require oxygen support, and you will be discharged from the hospital today itself." I was concerned for my wife, who would be left alone. Then came another news that my mother's condition had also gone from bad to worse and was being brought to the same hospital. She also joined us in the hospital when I was being discharged. My concern for my wife slightly faded away but I was much worried about my mother due to her age.

From Gurgaon to Delhi, I was brought in an ambulance. All the roads were deserted except the ambulances, which were rushing from one place to the other. No private or government vehicles was there on the road. The ambulances on the roads were signifying a great amount of panic and fear. It was hot noon when I reached home. On hearing the sound of an ambulance, the neighbours came out on their window or balcony to verify the occupant's wellbeing. My brothers helped me

in getting fruits and medicines. My daughter-in-law Vinika looked after me. I came to know that my wife's health had deteriorated and was shifted to Fortis hospital in Gurgaon. That was a cause of concern for me.

A news hit me badly that my elder sister-in-law's only son, Neeraj was no more, leaving behind his young wife, an old mother and two adolescent daughters. Neeraj left this world at the age of Thirty-six years or so. My eyes still hold his ever smiling face. His voice still reverberates in my ears. By this time, I had lost 10 kilograms of weight, and I was struggling to regain my health. After some days, my son also recovered from this disease. Both, my son and daughter-in-law were now busy in looking after my wife, Jyotsana, in Fortis hospital. My two daughters also played significant role in looking after us. This Wuhan generated disease, had not only, impacted the physical bodies and souls, but also degenerated the thinking of people. For the bodies, the doctors have tablets, syrups, and injections and what not, but for the mind and the soul, they don't have prescriptions.

As the days passed, more shocking news invaded us. Three of my office colleagues, who had retired before, had left for their heavenly abode. Undoubtedly, they were also the COVID victims.

The other shades of COVID seemed scattered at different locations. Once at State Bank of India, Model town, Delhi, I was busy at the counter struggling to pay

advance tax in respect to the income tax. The executive was busy in checking the details on the form. A middle-aged lady entered the bank and stood at its gate calling me in a loud voice, “Hey Mister, move away from the counter, I need to be there.”

I did not pay attention. Again, she repeated her bossy type of order. The banker drew my attention towards her. I turned around to look at her and she started teaching me about the COVID guidelines. Though I was quite far away from her, it was she, who came afterwards.

She said, “COVID protocol says, you must maintain at least two yards distance from me, I want to be at the counter, move away from there.”

I first thought, what kind of lady she is? Then I responded intrinsically to her, “Well I won't leave the counter till my work finishes. The distance between you and me is more than six yards. Moreover, I am not interested in lessening the distance in between you and me. It's your choice, if you want to, then you have the liberty to come closer to me.”

The situation slightly turned humorous. Then I modified my comment and said, “It would be better for both of us to maintain a nice distance and it is already there. Just wait for a while, till I finish my work.” She was not ready for more, so she kept quiet. After ten minutes

I left the counter and thanked her, for her cooperation in maintaining the distance, she did not answer and was fuming badly.

While coming back to my house, I was compelled to think about that Lady, who must have proven herself a difficult life partner to her own husband. I wondered if she was maintaining a two yards distance from her husband regularly in these tough times of COVID days. The dark shade of COVID's impact, had affected her. When I told this to my wife who had returned from Fortis hospital and was still dependent on the oxygen cylinder, she instructed me to remain in the house and avoid loitering here and there. She did not enjoy the situation but was terse in her remarks. I was happy in noticing her possessiveness over her husband, that is me.

Another incident that presented a different colourful shade of Covid, was in Odisha. While making an entry at Bhubaneswar airport, a CISF security personnel was checking our Air India tickets. My daughter's son Kovidh (one of the names of Lord Shiva) was standing in line, in front of me. The CISF personnel read the name on the ticket and was shocked to read his name as Kovidh. I said, "No, his name is Kovidh and not COVID. He raised his eyebrows and could not digest the fact. He had several questions to ask. I wanted him to ease down, so I just told him, "Yes, your concern is genuine. It was six years ago that we gave this name to

him. It's one of Lord Shiva's sacred name but considering the pandemic's name so identical and deceptively similar, we have decided to change it."

He took a deep breath and in haste just said, "Yes you must, you must, certainly for the benefit of this child."

Another impact of COVID-19 had presented itself in another new interesting shade. My cousin Mr. Surinder Chaudhary, a retired Professor from FTII, Pune, who happens to be seventy-six years old now, used to make calls to me once or twice in a week, during that awful period. When I used to ask him, how the things were going at his end in Gurgaon? I felt the pressure of COVID on him also.

He would say, "Yaar (friend) I do not know when this COVID will disappear. It has made this life a bloody hell. We cannot move out and meet people. We cannot go to hills for a change. We are getting bored. What's all this?" He would continue with more questions, "Doesn't it hurt you or cause worry to you."

My usual answer would be, "Bro, I believe in a quote, 'What cannot be cured, must be endured.' Except precautions and the jab, there is no solution."

After the hospitalisation and the recovery from Covid, I modified my answer, "Yes it hurts me and

moreover, I and my family have endured it. The Almighty through the doctors, have cured us.”

Hearing this he would say, “Galib Ka Andaz-E-Bayaan Achcha Hai.”

Last but not the least, he would ask, “What do you think, for what period this situation is likely to continue?

I would say, “Till this government, doesn’t decide to push away Covid to some other neighbouring country, the position would remain the same.

Then he would burst into a guffaw for a long time. I would end the discussion with the remarks, “This is the only way to laugh away this disease. Give peace to your mind and to yourself.”

STORY 28:

THE LAST JOURNEY

It's a sorry state of affairs at such site. The mood and the environment that pervades is sombre. Naturally it should, when a person leaves for his ultimate journey. Two sets of people are noticed on such occasion, the ones, deeply attached to that person cry, weep and find difficult to cope up with that situation. The others who have to be there in the capacity of friends or the neighbours, also suffer from grief, but not to that extent. Some are there because the social obligations have to be taken care of.

On one such occasion, when the grandmother of my daughter-in-law, Vinika, died due to liver failure, the urgency of the matter was such, that I along with my daughter-in-law rushed to her parents' house in Gurgaon. My son Vineet was already there.

As we entered their house, we were taken to the room, where she lay peacefully after her hard struggle to

keep her life intact, which ultimately had eluded her. All the doubts, questions, her eagerness for a better health, hope, fear, relations and relationships that form the constituents of life, had just blown away to the unknown world. She lay in eternal peace.

As per her wish, her body was taken to her village Padana in Haryana. Other relatives of Vinika, the uncles and aunts were already there. The last rites were destined to be there.

The really concerned, still had tears in their eyes. Some tried hard to show their grief, particularly those who had not taken care of that old lady, when she was ill and alive. When the village people gathered, they enacted a perfect drama. The hypocrisy was evident when some people rebuked them. People have no problem in wearing different masks compatible to the situation. They seem to possess two different faces under one head. Such hypocrites are great actors, and they belittle the genuine persons. Such personalities are dangerous.

I found a plastic chair and a place near the tractor which provided me, the shade and an escape from the bright sun on that warm day. People were constantly pouring in and were searching for their place and people to talk with.

Some persons, who seemed to be farmers, had white cotton turban on their head, a thin kurta on their chest with dhoti under their belly. A few youngsters were wearing shirt and pant with sports shoes on their feet. They seemed lucky in getting some government job. Some senior members of the community, also made an effort to come with lathi (a tall bamboo stick meant for support in walking). They bid 'Ram Ram' to others. They were responded without zeal in a low tone as per the grim situation. They had come to express their condolences.

The grandfather of Vinika who had lost his wife, sat silently watching his sons and daughters-in-law preparing for the last journey of his wife. Occasionally, he responded to others when somebody consoled him and advised him to remain strong and healthy. Once or twice, he commented, "Bhai sab ne jaana hai, aaj iski bari hai (Brother, everyone has to go, today is her turn)". This is the ultimate truth, that was coming out from that old man's lips. One from the crowd, who must have seen the life closely, responded, "Haan bhai tu theek kahae sae (Yes brother what you say is right)". Those who could not stand for a long time, sat on their haunches on the ground.

Among the crowd that had gathered there, sat an old man dressed in clean white clothes. He sat taking the support of a lathi. He appeared quite peaceful and was constantly gazing towards the dead body, which was at

least fifteen feet away from him. This person bore a light smile on his face and did not talk to any other person. He did not carry a sorrowful expression. He seemed to be in communion with the departed soul of that lady, probably conveying silently through his eyes that 'Do not fear the unknown world. There is peace over there. That world is far better than this. HE (Almighty) bears soft heart for all and would accommodate you conveniently. HE would ensure that you do not suffer and feel the pain, that you have endured in this old, fragmented body. Your journey from this world to that one, would be comfortable, believe me. Till then, rest in peace'.

Not only the humans, but the birds and the animals are also the part of this creation. They also sense out the situation as per their surroundings. They express their feelings in their own way.

On the left side of the compound, were four buffaloes tethered to different Acacia trees. They were ill at ease, seeing so many people gathered in the compound. Despite of the fact, that they had straw in their containers, they had consciously decided to forego it. They were agitatedly looking here and there and sometimes changing their postures to assess the happenings in the house.

The little sparrows perched on the branches of those Acacia trees in the compound took shelter under the tiny leaves. They were assessing the situation by toiling and

turning their heads to-and-fro. They had stopped chirruping after the arrival of the corpse.

A dog appeared on the main gate, wagging his tail unenthusiastically, looked inside the compound, then towards the people and then judged the situation. It stood for a while, and then it decided to look for some other house for a few crumbs of bread.

A cat on the rooftop meowed in a low tone, as if complaining about something, ignored the pigeons, those who took liberty in flying too low over its head.

At 12:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the body of that grand old lady was confined to flames. People came back silently, as if after losing a battle. They washed their hands, feet and their faces under a hand pump, signalling that the unavoidable task of the day that had to be completed, had been brought to its logical end.

STORY 29:

OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

Look keenly and notice that in your every activity, there is a hidden message and an act which Almighty has planned. Wherever you go, whether it's a short trip or a long one, you are likely to meet several people, who would engage you in some kind of activity or you would engage them. Through this engagement of thoughts, both of you are likely to get influenced in one way or the other. In nutshell there is a formation of human connect which works for a long time. In this sense HE is neither a KARTA nor AKARTA. Everything that happens, goes according to HIS wish. Just enjoy and become a witness to the MAYA that he has designed and created.

Recently on 21st November 2020, one of my relative Ripu Daman Singh came to me and expressed his wish to visit Jageshwar temple in Almora district in Uttarakhand. He wanted to oblige his friend Ramesh Malik and his wife. He requested me to accompany them. I decided to take my family along with them in my

own car. I have been at this place several times to pay obeisance at Lord Shiva's temple. This temple is more than thousand years old. My family also needed a suitable outing due to the pandemic COVID-19 restrictions for a long time. The pandemic was not over, but we desperately needed a break, so we decided to conduct this journey under perfect precautions. In order to enter Uttarakhand state, we required E-pass. That was obtained precisely by my son.

We were in search of a suitable place for our stay in Jageshwar, where lot of people go. We found a place at Vradh Jageshwar which is fifteen kilometres away from the main temple of Jageshwar. It was a budget hotel owned by an ex-serviceman on the top of a mountain. There was no other building nearby and so no crowd was expected at this place. On both sides of this mountain, there are beautiful valleys with beautiful view of snow clad peaks of Chau Khamba, Trishul Parvat and Nanda Devi. In the moonlight, the snow appears as a silvery sheet covering the mighty mountains. This place is quite lesser known to the public. This hotel is at 7200 feet above the sea level. One can breathe fresh cool air and can enjoy lonely moments in perfect serene and peaceful surroundings. We required the booking of our rooms in advance. I made a call to that ex-serviceman. The call was picked up by his son. I expected him to answer from Vradh Jageshwar, but he was in Delhi itself at the institute of spinal injuries. That guy informed me

that his father, the ex-serviceman had fallen from a tree while cutting the wood for fire. He got serious internal injuries due to which his spinal cord got affected. He was operated upon a week ago. This was also the part of the information, that after two days, he would be discharged and they would go back. After four days, it was confirmed that they had returned to Vradh Jageshwar and the doctors discharged them early due to the Covid pandemic fear. The doctors had told them that they had done, whatever they could do, and after that physiotherapy had a greater role to play. The son of that ex-serviceman had recorded several exercises in his mobile, because a neuro physiotherapist was difficult to be arranged on the top of the mountain, where that family lived. The son who was looking after that ex-serviceman, sounded quite dismal at that point of time.

Hope is a great thing, which creates positivity and provides the reason to live. It loosens the shackles of despair. His son asked me about the idea of giving Ayurvedic treatment, along with the allopathic medicines. I was not comfortable with his idea. I assured him that on our visit to their place, we would be accompanied by a good neuro physiotherapist, Dr. Vinika. She would guide them about the latest technique, that would help in speedy recovery. Dr. Vinika is my daughter-in-law, dedicated to her profession. One thing that came from his words was, that

they were eagerly waiting for us. Hope had been inculcated.

It took nearly thirteen hours to reach Vradh Jageshwar, through Kaladungi, Nainital and Almora. While travelling, we got two calls from Vradh Jageshwar in order to confirm, if we would be reaching at our destination in time? We were welcomed by them with zeal. They asked about Dr Vinika. They were happy to know that she was with us. She told them that she would be meeting the patient in daytime, on the next day.

We had planned for Rudrabhishek puja under the guidance of Pandit Vinod Bhatt, a Sanskrit scholar on the next morning at Jageshwar. It was a sheer pleasure to sit in open, under the cool Pine trees, at the back of Lord Shiva's temple. This whole area is surrounded by tall green pine trees, which present a regal sight of a beautiful landscape comparable to any good place in Europe. The chanting of shlokas in a bold voice by Panditji, was worth listening. After the puja session, a photo session among the tall trees and the Serpentine Road, fulfilled our wish. Now was the time to go back to Vradh- Jageshwar.

The moment had come to send our Neuro-physiotherapist to see the patient and to affiliate them with the latest technique and exercises. My son accompanied her. After an hour, I also went inside the patient's room, who was very well known to me. I had to remove my facial mask. Recognising me, he folded his

hands. I assured him that he would recover soon, as it was just a matter of time. They were constantly recording the exercises and the other activities, that Dr Vinika had put forth. She had advised them to purchase a leg Sprint and a special Air mattress to avoid the bed sores, which the patient had already developed.

We asked Shreedhar, the son of ex-serviceman to prepare our bill, as our stay of three days duration was over. The script on the bill showed that he was less educated. My son paid the bill. Meanwhile, before leaving, I decided to go and meet the owner, the ex-serviceman. He was lying on a bed with his back exposed to the morning sunlight. The bedsore was clearly visible. He was sleeping. I touched his shoulder, and he turned slightly and looked at me. I said to him, "I have come to meet you, since we are leaving for our home." I further told him, that he must utilise this time for chanting the sacred name of Lord Shiva and Shri Badri Vishal. I continued and said that I look forward in seeing him fully recovered, on our next visit.

He replied in feeble voice, that he was thankful to us, in giving his family an opportunity to serve in these hours of distress and economic need. I assured him that Dr. Vinika would remain in touch with them. The contact numbers had already been exchanged. The feeling of sympathy and empathy had overpowered me. I could not control the rolling tears eager to come out. It was because, Shridhar had told me that the doctors had

informed them, that there were less chances of his recovery. I told them to keep their faith strong and intact in Almighty.

My son Vineet had set the luggage in the car. Bill having been paid; we boarded our vehicles. As we were coming down, Vineet handed over the hotel bill to me. I readily went through the bill and noticed that we had been billed, one thousand rupees extra. It was a totalling error. The digits were not placed properly under one another. One of the figures that would have the rightful place under the digits of hundredth was under the thousandth digit, which caused the miscalculation.

Instinctively, on spotting the mistake, I asked my son to stop the vehicle and then to turn back. I had told him the reason. As it was steep downhill, Vineet began to search for the wide space to turn back. We had covered half a kilometre by then. I dropped into a chain of thoughts. The prime thought was that they needed money. In Delhi, they had to spend a lot at the hospital. Secondly a less number of tourists know about this place. So, occupancy was also rare. Moreover Dr. Vinika had asked them to procure some items for the patient, which were costly.

Meanwhile Vineet had found the space to turn the vehicle back. As he slowed down, I came out of my musings. I told my son that the total was correct, rather

I made a mistake while calculating the total. I asked him to move ahead.

At this point of juncture, asking a return of one thousand rupees would create a sense of guilt and embarrassment for them. I wanted them to move ahead instead of feeling sorry. As I being a retired person an amount of Rupees one thousand is a considerable amount for me. The mind reasoned that Almighty had given me an opportunity to serve that ex-serviceman in crisis, then why to miss it.

Some may call this, an act of foolishness, but the sense of satisfaction that I got, is precious to me. The Guy in the Sky must have smiled and approved my action.

We spent a day in Nainital and stayed at night at Balrampur house, (a palace built in nineteenth century on the court road), because we could not get an accommodation elsewhere. It was a luxurious stay at a very reasonable cost. Perhaps that was a bonus from the Almighty.

On the next day, while returning to Delhi in the evening, we had hardly crossed Kaladungi and were moving towards Moradabad UP, the ring tone of my mobile activated. I handed over my mobile to Dr. Vinika. Shreedhar had some enquiries to make about the leg Sprint and the Air mattress for the patient. He was purchasing them from Haldwani. I was convinced that

the payment, we made at the guest house at Vradh Jageshwar, was being put to proper use.

A few words escaped from my lips, “Lord Jageshwar is great. May THE KINDEST OF ALL, heal the patient in lesser time.

STORY 30:

BOND WITH THE NIGHTINGALES

In the month of June every year, Delhi burns with hot temperature, due to summer season. On one such day in the year 2022, I was cooling myself under the fan and reading the newspaper. My grandson, Kovidh, a very naughty child, drew my attention to a small tree type plant growing in a big earthen pot placed in the home garden. The plant is directly visible through the big glass window of our drawing room.

“Nana, Nana just see the colourful bird having dry twigs in its beak,” said Kovidh. Yes, he was right. A red colour bird with black and grey stripes on its wings, and above all a crown on its head, was busy building a nest in the bower of that small tree. After placing the twigs, it tossed its head around to have a look of the surroundings of the small green leaves.

“Nana, can we go near the nest to have a close look?”
Asked Kovidh.

I replied and said, “Just wait for some time till the bird flies away”.

Kovidh sat peacefully and waited for the bird to disappear. Meanwhile, I called Aadya, my granddaughter, barely 6 years old, who too was amazed to see that bird. On children's insistence we went in the veranda. A pair of Nightingale sat on the nylon rope meant for drying the clothes. They keenly assessed us. We could see the nest of the birds, taking shape on the triangle of the stems, tied by some thread-like substance taken away from a nylon sack. An example of remarkable engineering was there.

I brought the two kids inside. I asked them not to go too close to the nest, and not to make a loud noise, when birds are there. They may feel threatened and would fly away. They may never return. Both the kids listened carefully, and I assumed that they would not violate the code.

Aadya and Kovidh were bit disappointed initially, but when I told them, that one of the Nightingale would lay eggs in the nest, and little chicks would come out of them. They clapped and shouted with joy.

It was one of the fine mornings, that we found the Nightingale sitting comfortably in the nest. The indication was that it had laid the eggs. When it had flown away, I took my grandkids and showed them the

eggs, which were greyish white in colour and oval in shape. The kids wanted to touch them but were forbidden. They were totally awestruck after seeing the eggs.

Now the wait for the chicks grew. As the days were extremely hot, the survival of the chicks would be an issue, I thought. The plant was under the shade of the first floor's balcony, so the direct sunshine would not be there. That may be the reason, why the Nightingale did not prefer their nest on the tall trees in front of our house, which were home to other birds of different feather, big and small.

The mother bird spent her most of the times sitting on eggs. As the schools had closed for the summer vacations, the kids played in the veranda in the morning and at evening hours. In the initial days of laying eggs, the mother Nightingale would get uneasy and would flutter her wings agitatedly, signalling others to move away from there, as she was on an important mission. Slowly and steadily, as the days passed, she got comfortable with Kovid and Aadya.

Daily in the morning, I open the door of the drawing room as a normal practice, so that the cool and fresh air, if any, could invade our rooms. One morning the sound of soft chirpings also sailed in with the gush of wind. The waiting period of more than ten days was over. The chicks had arrived.

When Kovidh and Aadya came to know, they shouted with joy, and their dance would not stop. One thing that I earned and learned at the age of 69 years, from these kids was to celebrate an event with purity and childlike innocence, and that too without any inhibitions. They had given me a mantra to enjoy the life.

The kids wanted to see the birdies. Aadya had a question to ask, “what do Nightingale and her chicks eat.”

Kovidh could not wait to reply, “Burgers and noodles with Pepsi.” Then he laughed heartily.

I said, “Let's be serious, it's a question of general knowledge, they eat worms and insects. Aadya made a sore face and then interjected, “Are Nightingales cruel and non -vegetarian birds?”

I pointed out and said, “Not cruel in the right sense, but yes, it's the nature`s cycle, that you will have to study and understand. Both of you are too young to assimilate all this, if we go in detail.

Aadya said, “Dada not now, some other day.”

The afternoon nap is very precious to me, but my kids enjoy the liberty of disturbing it, which no other family member dares to. They wanted to see the chicks. They repeated their wish. Nightingale was away from the

nest. We stealthily, walked into veranda without making any noise. We peeped into the nest by parting away the green shoots and leaves of the plant.

Kovidh said, “Nana see their eyes are closed, but their beaks are open.”

Aadya’s observation was, “Dada, see, these chicks are thirsty.”

I was just about to respond, when something hit me on my forehead. The mother bird had suddenly made her presence from nowhere. We just ducked in and ran away from there. Our intrusion had been spotted. We were sorry for our liberty, that we had taken. We three of us ran away from there.

This saga continued for number of days. Daily, we used to put some water, some crumbs of bread and biscuits in two plastic bowls for the adult birds. In the morning, we found the bowls emptied and they had to be refilled every day. We were happy to be involved in a selfless service of these two colourful guests.

On Sunday, to our utter shock, at about five o’clock in the evening, Kovidh came running, gasping for breath shouted, “Nana, run fast, see the cat is trying to reach to the chicks, standing on its two legs, it would kill and eat them. I jumped out of the bed and ran outside banging the doors, one after the other. The cat was there, and it had already tilted the nest, but could not reach up to the

chicks. I lost no time and threw a slipper at it. It escaped by jumping to the boundary wall, into the neighbourhood. After a few moments, it was again peeping through the boundary grill. The pair of Nightingale was already hovering over the nest helplessly. I pulled out the garden chair and sat there. Fearing the cat could come again, the two parent birds now sat on the nylon rope, sometimes watching us and sometimes looking at the chicks. Perhaps they were thanking us for the timely action, using the language which had no syllables, no words and no sound.

Kovidh got apprehensive and said, “Nana, this cat must have eaten our biscuits.”

Aadya could not stop saying, “Our teacher says, cats are cunning.”

It was merely 6:00 in the evening, when my son Vineet came and said, “Why are you sitting here, without a fan in such a hot temperature? I narrated the whole episode to him. He also got concerned. Aadya must be talking to him about these birds, as she had lot of tales to tell her father, before going to bed at night. Vineet too enjoyed her verbal descriptions of daily activities.

Vineet said, “Something should be done to protect them. He went inside, changed his clothes, freshened up and brought a shoe box. He tore it’s upper flap and tied two strings at both sides of the box, in such a manner

that it could be hung at a good height. Very delicately and with great caution, he lifted the nest with the two chicks in it and placed it in the shoe box. He hung it far away from its earlier place, at a reasonable height where, leave aside the cat, even the tiger would not reach there. We slept peacefully at night with no tension in mind.

The tension was to begin early in the morning on the next day, when we heard the continuous wailings of the little birds. The pair of nightingales used to come in the morning to feed the little ones. The male bird would perch on the nylon rope, while the mother bird would feed the little birdies, but on that day, they could not find the chicks at their designated place. They could hear the wailings, and they reciprocated by flipping their wings. Unfortunately, they could only look up and down but could not spot out their young ones. After some time, they flew away. The chicks suffered from the pangs of hunger, and the wailing was the proof of it.

A nasty thought germinated in my mind, that I was responsible for the whole situation. The chicks would die of hunger. My intentions were fair and transparent. Now what to do? I was in a state of puzzle. I took out my scooter and brought a dropper from the chemist. I dropped some milk in their open beaks. They got silent for the time being and lowered their head in peace.

The tension of saving the life of the chicks from the cat, and their hunger was casting an adverse effect on me.

Though my eyes were closed for the afternoon nap, but my mind was racing with loads of thoughts.

In the early evening of the same day, I could notice the mother bird, searching for her chicks over the dwarf tree. Feeling tired, it then sat on the nylon rope. I generated the chicks sound from my lips. The helpless mother was puzzled, and its anxiety had grown to the extreme level to meet her chicks. This brought some consistency in her behaviour. It was neither in a mood nor in a hurry to fly away. The bond of trust in between us, allowed her to jump on my left shoulder. I took off the box from its hanging place with my right hand, and brought it down very close to the anxious bird. It saw the chicks in the shoe box and without wasting anytime, it jumped in. I was wonderstruck at the faith, that the bird had reposed in me.

Slowly and carefully, this time I hung the box just over the dwarf tree, near the old place, ensuring their safety from the cunning cat.

The pressure that had nested in my mind, started diffusing like the fog screen which on the rising of the sun, that brings light and the warmth, pushes the fog away from its horizon.

During next few days, the mother bird was taking care of her little ones. Kovidh and Aadya monitored

their activities. The chicks had started beating their wings.

The addiction of reading the newspaper daily in the morning in natural day light, took me to the veranda. To my amazement, the little ones were hopping from one bush to another in our garden. The two adult birds watching them from a distance, were perched over the boundary grill. They were taking short flights as well. My grandkids also appeared and noticed them. They shouted with joy. The little birdies took a long flight, and their parents too followed them. The guests were gone forever.

I removed the shoe box from that site after a day or two, and placed the nest at its original place, amid the leaves of that dwarf tree, as a decoration piece which would keep our remembrances alive.

On the very next day, when I went out to pick up the newspaper from the veranda, the nest was found dismembered on the floor. The cat had expressed its anger and desperation.

STORY 31:

ALLAH'S MERCY

Requesting my son, Vineet to get two air tickets booked for Hyderabad, to visit Lord Shiva's temple, Mallikarjun in Andhra Pradesh, was an act that had a special message to convey. I wanted my son to know that in Hindu religion, it goes as a special credit to son, if he takes his parents or facilitates pilgrimage for them.

I had to work out on all details, where we both, my better half and I could visit other spots in the way, and how we would conduct ourselves. Booking of hotels for the night stay, was taken care of by my eldest daughter, Niti.

As per the itinerary, after paying obeisance at Lord Shiva's temple, Kailasha of South or popularly known as Mallikarjun, I was full of gratitude that with his blessings, I had completed the visits to all twelve jyotirlingas, as per my wish.

Previous to this day, before proceeding to Mallikarjun, we got an opportunity to visit Hyderabad city. Passing by Madina Masjid and Charminar built by Sultan Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah in 1591, in the honour of his wife Bhagmati, we visited the most famous Salarjung Museum. Having a background of being a history student in my graduation days, my special interest was to be, at one of the strongest Fort, built on a granite hill popularly known as Golconda Fort.

Visiting a historical place like a fort, does not make sense unless you are supported by a proper guide. At the main gate of the Fort, a middle-aged man, wearing a skull cap offered us, to be our guide. After haggling, he took us inside and showed us the ground portion of the fort. His description about the fort and its rulers, was quite interesting and absorbing. As we were moving from one portion of the fort to another, I noticed that he was walking a bit slow and had a restricted gait. He would often put his right hand on his left side of the chest, after walking thirty to forty steps. Then he would stop for a while. Making an effort, he took us on the first floor of the Fort and pointed towards the Banjara hills, where the most affluent and the famous live.

Hyderabad city, the new and the old one, was visible from the Fort. Being with us, for two hours or so, the guide pointed towards a temple, built on the top of the fort by the Mughal king, for his Hindu queen. He urged

us to go and visit the temple, as he expressed his inability to cover the steep steps, due to his heart problem.

My wife had got tired after walking a long distance, because usually a Fort covers a vast area, and we were already on the first floor. I comforted her to sit on a parapet for a while. I took my guide aside and gave all the necessary instructions and precautions meant for a heart patient. As a lay man whatever the knowledge, I had from the experts through doctors on media, I delivered to him. He was very careful in listening to me. He slightly opened up and told me, that his wife and children had deserted him and he was all alone and ill. With this, he shook his head in despair. I could understand his pain. I assured him to wait for Allah's mercy and paid him a hefty tip over the mutually agreed fees, considering his requirement of medicines.

While leaving him at the entry gate, I said to him, "Go and talk to your wife in a humble way. If need be, accept your shortcomings and never repeat them for the best interest of yourself, and your family. Peace is precious. Everyone yearns for it. I know they must have done or spoken something, which you don't appreciate. You need to brush them aside, to move on. Take care of yourself by taking their care. Never lose hope, try earnestly and catch up with your family. You will get what you have lost, this is what I feel. There is no place

for ego in close relationship. What I see clearly is, that you miss them a lot.

The guide put an effort to emotionally control himself. He stepped forward and held my hand in his both palms and said, “Aap Ek Nek Dil Aur Achche Insan Hain. Aapne Mujhe Umeed Di Hai. Allah Aapko Naemete Bakshey). You are a kind -hearted and a good human being. You have given me a hope. May God bless you.”

I was concerned about him and my heart remained melted for a long time. While departing from him, I did not look back. I firmly took hold of my wife's hand, and moved ahead in haste to the parking lot, for the tourist cab. Silently in the cab, I set praying for that guy and took notice, that miseries have no preferences. They cast their dark shadow on anyone, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or the geographical boundaries. In reality, people have the same faith, same goodness and the same miseries. Above all, the realisation was that, if we can't help a person in distress or say, if we can't bring the change in their circumstances, then certainly we can at least generate a positivity in them, which would prevent them falling down, into the dark valley of depression.

FAITH AND HOPE ARE THE LAMP POSTS,
THAT PROVIDE ILLUMINATION ON THE ROAD,
MEANT FOR COVERING THIS JOURNEY OF LIFE,
FROM THE FIRST BREATH TO THE LAST ONE.

STORY 32:

DESTINATION, THAT WAS DESTINED TO BE.

A journey to the unknown destination is always submerged in joy, suspense, wonder and the fear of unknown unchallenged forces. It is an unlit street where you have to walk in dark.

After a detailed journey from Delhi by air to Hyderabad, Mallikarjun and Tirupati in Tirumala hills by bus, the time had come to convert this pilgrimage into a pleasure trip. After visiting the golden temple in Vellore, a sense of emotional and spiritual gratification, had taken upon us. We two, my wife and myself, being on this grand journey, had a room booked at Sterling Resort in Vellore. The hotel room was booked online by my daughter for us, thinking that this resort was in the city of Vellore and it would provide convenience and a comfortable stay to the senior citizens. An amount close

to Rupees four thousand had already been transferred to the hotel account.

Coming out of the golden temple's exit gate in Vellore, an auto driver was curious to ask our destination. After a long pause, he turned around and had a conversation with other auto drivers.

Then he said, "There is no Sterling resort in the city of Vellore, as far as I know. It would be better, if it is inquired at the city's main bus stand." I accepted his proposal.

While sitting in auto, we doubly checked the address. There was no change. At the city bus stand, many persons denied having known such resort in Vellore city. Then one of the employees of the state transport corporation, personally wanted to see the complete address in my mobile.

Enlarging the print on the mobile screen, and reading the complete address, he gave a slap on his forehead and said, "How can you find your destination here? It is Nilavoor road, near Murugan temple in Yelagiri in district Vellore. It is ninety kilometres from here, now just see for yourself." The shock of the day stunned us. The whole address was clearly mentioned except the word 'Distt.' which was written in a very feeble and faded manner in very small letters, meant only to be

visible, when the print got enlarged. The damage had been done, and we had fallen prey to their trick.

The direct bus to Yelagiri had already left the depot at 1:30 pm. It was 3:00 o'clock of the noon. We were advised to take the bus from Vellore main bus stand for a suburban town. The name of the suburban town happens to be Tirupathur, if I am not wrong. It was just short of 15 kilometres of our newly found destination, Yelagiri. From Tirupathur, we could get another transport for our place. Initially I did not want to go so far a place for the night's halt, but thinking it to be a journey of two hours, we took the risk.

The bus was a new one, which signified that it would cover the journey in a very less time. Initially, the bus was struggling to get out of the traffic of the Vellore city. We were hopeful that once we are on the highway, it would gain speed. As the bus got free from the city's traffic and was on the highway, the driver started yawning. Even the mopeds and the two wheelers were conveniently overtaking the bus. We silently cursed the driver, who was holding the steering wheel, sitting in an upright position, looked straight on the highway with his half-closed sleepy eyes. He neither cared for the traffic on his right nor on the left. He looked like a stone statue, whose hands moved occasionally due to the vibrations emanating from the body of the bus, due to low acceleration. When the conductor of the bus, came to

put his bag in a locker in the bus cabin, we asked him to tap us, at the nearest point, from where we could get another transport for Yelagiri. He nodded his head twice but did not utter a word. After three hours journey, we could see a triangle junction of the roads, where a sign board displayed an arrow mark to Yelagiri, in the opposite direction to which the bus was moving. The bus was jam packed by that time. I tried to inquire, where to get off. Nobody understood Hindi or the international language. One of the passengers spoke in Tamil, but he pointed forward. We attributed to him saying, 'You still have to go straight' but in fact he meant to say that the next bus stand is close, get down there. After travelling nearly eight kilometres, the terminal of the bus had appeared. It was a very crowded, shabby suburban town where we could not expect a decent hotel for the night stay. People were busy in shopping for their daily needs. The road was preoccupied by the hawkers on both sides, shouting in Tamil. The driver was struggling hard to avoid the crowd and to take the bus inside the terminal.

We were still in the bus watching passengers getting down from the bus. The conductor came and angrily spoke to us in Tamil.

I just reciprocated in Tamil and said, "Tamil illey illey". Telling him that I do not understand Tamil. That hit him hard, because omission on his part was writ large on his face. He had forgotten our request and was

adopting a face- saving attitude. I was losing my temper and thinking, how indifferent these people are. A person like me, always goes an extra mile to help others, for whom our land is unknown. By this time it was 6.30 pm. The street as well as the road lights were on.

The bus driver got off from his seat, stretched out his body with his hands up in the air. He had come out of his slumber ecstasy. He opened the exit door and just jumped out of the bus, without looking down on the ground. He landed on a stray dog, sniffing the ground to find out something useful for his belly. The dog yelled in pain and ran away like a bullet from the gun. The driver fell on his knees and invited scores of comments from the people watching him. Some chose to laugh, and some others could not understand the confusion. The driver, by this time, was fully awake.

It was quarter to seven. A shopkeeper told that the second last bus for Yelagiri was scheduled to come at 7:00 PM and the last one was expected at 8:00 PM. Half an hour passed; the second last bus did not come. Another alternate, the shop keeper gave, was to hire an auto. Our destination was sixteen kilometres from there. The shutters of shops had started rolling down and our tension was brewing up. Suddenly, there was blackout and after five minutes of darkness, once again the light had come. My wife was more tense; she expressed her fear of that lesser- known town, when she saw some

vagabonds, searching for the unattended luggage of the passengers.

We had no option, other than hiring an auto. Out of the three autos, one was ready to take us to Yelagiri, for an amount of Rupees eight hundred. We just got in.

After getting out of the town, he stopped and talked to another auto driver. My wife got a bit apprehensive, because the two drivers were talking in Tamil and we could not get them. It was quarter to eight, quite late in the evening and the anxiety was over taking us. The driver of the auto started again. I prayed to almighty in my heart to be with us, in those odd hours. After covering few miles in the plain area, the hills started, and we could notice the milestones of Yelagiri. As we gained height, the hot air turned into cool breeze. I had not expected a Bajaj Auto rickshaw negotiating with the hills. The driver was racing it in the first gear. The headlight which had shown quite bright for some time, burst away. The driver did not slow down, and he sped in the dark with the same speed, negotiating the sharp turns of the hill. The moon was somewhere there up in the sky, playing hide and seek with the clouds.

The monotony of that situation was broken up by my mobile's ringtone. It was my daughter, asking about the quality of the room in Sterling Resort that she had booked for us.

I just said, “Beta it would be better, if you get your eyesight checked and at this point of time, we are nowhere”. The Sensex of our tension was shooting up because the scanty traffic racing downhill was fast and it took us by surprise, because our vehicle had no head lights. The auto driver had to pocket some nasty comments from other drivers, coming from the opposite direction. To keep up the momentum, the driver had to accelerate fast and had to negotiate with the curves at the same speed.

My wife asked me to check the driver. I said, “No, let him drive, he knows better than us”. Again, my wife a non- technical person, asked, “Why?”

I replied to her in a terse tone, “Jyoti, you will require several classes to understand the statistics of speed, now is not the appropriate time. Some other day, she got the message, and its effect remained for a long time.”

At last, the glowing lamp posts begin to appear, we took a sigh of relief. The God sent auto driver, knew the location of Sterling resort. The poor auto driver had proven his eligibility for three things, first, lot of thanks, then, a fair amount of tip and lastly, the agreed amount of fare.

The smart executive of the hotel led us to our room. It was a nicely maintained spacious room with the

curtains on full wall on the opposite side of the entry gate. we asked him to set aside the curtains so that we could have a view of the balcony. He asked us to stand near the bed. Initially, we could not get his motive, but we obeyed him like good students. He not only set aside the curtains but opened the two big glass doors, giving approach to the balcony. A powerful and cool gush of wind uprooted both of us, and we fell on the bed. We burst into a hearty laugh. My soul mate, who was silent since a long time, enjoyed the situation. The naughty young executive had a secret smile on his face,

He said, "Sir, I hope both of you are fine. I am sorry for opening these doors without warning you. Sometimes the wind is too powerful as you have noticed." Saying this he left away. The tension of the day had blown out like the suppressed air, locked in a balloon. Though we had suffered much anxiety and tension, but at the end of the day, we were thankful to Almighty for being with us and bringing us to Yelagiri, a mini hill station of Tamil Nadu, having beautiful landscapes and gardens.

Sometimes going with the flow of events, without using one's mind, brings you to the beautiful destinations and locations that are unheard of.

On the lighter vein, I beg to submit that whenever I relive that day in my thoughts, it is clear to me; that why Almighty has given one female to every male person in

marriage, to live a life together. Men are usually the confidence builder and the stress bursters, while the females act your confidence slayers and the stress builders. It is the whole game of checks and balances, otherwise men are men, and they are bound to break into pieces, due to their over confidence, that they assimilate in due course.

HAVE A GOOD LAUGH BRO.

STORY 33:

FACTORS THAT SHOCK AND AMAZE

Sometimes circumstances turn out to make you believe certain things, which you start valuing them. This is the after effect of a happening. My father Sh. Kartar Singh left for his heavenly abode in the year 2011, on the next day of Bhaiya dooj festival. In my heart and mind, I had promised that I would go to the best of sacred and religious places, to offer prayers for my father`s departed soul. That's what a son is supposed to do, according to Hindu practices. Moreover, I had decided to accomplish this task, within a year`s time.

For the purpose mentioned above, some of my friends agreed to accompany me. We were eleven persons in two vehicles. One was Mahindra Scorpio, and the other vehicle was Toyota Innova, which was hired for my office friends and their families. In the first vehicle, I and my close friends were there.

Before I give description of this journey, some background of deciding the date of commencement of this yatra is damn important. In those days, there was a guy called Mr X (whose name I would not like to mention, because it may lend undue importance to that person). It was a strange relationship in between us. I liked him, because he was a devotee of Lord Shiva. Whereas I disliked him because, sometimes he practised occult and would unnecessarily boast of himself. (It is believed that Occult is a practice of invoking unnatural forces to achieve the desired result).

While coming back to the main reference, I wanted to start the journey on the last day of Shraad due to the constraint of time. It was difficult to get leave from the office in those days. We had planned to reach the required destination, on the first day of Navratri. Shraad days are not considered auspicious, for beginning a journey or starting something new, because these are the days for Hindus, to remember their departed loved ones and to do some rituals for them. Whereas Navratri days are considered to be auspicious, (these are the days, when nine forms of Divine mother, Durga, is worshipped on each day with zeal and happiness). These nine days come, immediately after the end of the Shraad period.

I thought that starting for God's temple on the last day of Shraad would not matter, because we had true intentions of visiting holy places and had strong faith in

our deity. Moreover, we would be in temple on the first day of Navratri. For this I had consultations with Mr. X, who said, “It would be better, if you start on the first day of Navratri. Twice I asked him on different dates and twice he discouraged me, to start on a Shraad day. My wife and my son refused to accompany me on this pilgrimage. My wife was not feeling well and moreover she did not like going with my office colleges and their families. My son was indispensable due to his new business. Mr. X expressly told me that he would like to accompany me, if we postpone this journey by a few days. I thought that due to his own interest, he was discouraging me, to start the journey on the last day of Sharad.

I contacted a local priest in Sanatan Dharam temple, who told, that there was nothing wrong in starting journey on this day, as we were going for pooja for my late father. Some of my friends accompanying me, were of modern outlook and did not have much faith in all this. They approved the day for beginning this pilgrimage, on the last Shraad day

All my friends assembled at my house, and we started on our journey in good mood. Mr. Nain took the driving seat of our Scorpio (henceforth it would be referred SUV). His driving was intermittently being disturbed by the various calls from his office. I took the charge of the steering wheel and freed him to attend the

official calls, without which he could not do. I wanted to convert the repeated stops of our SUV into a continuous, uninterrupted journey. After covering, the distance of hundred kilometres, we decided to have a tea break.

We stopped adjacent to Khatauli, a sub urban town, near Muzaffar Nagar in UP, where we had burger and cup of coffee. Some of the team members, were from village background and they did not like the menu. They were right. I was wrong because, what should be taken in the evening, was being taken in the morning, as breakfast.

We proceeded further and reached at Kankhal, a place near Haridwar. My mobile rang and he was Mr. X on the other side, who said, "Well, you are on your journey, and you did not pay heed to my advice." This comment was in a terse tone.

I said, "Bhai Saheb, due to paucity of time, we had to proceed on this day."

I cannot forget Mr. X's threatening tone. His speaking in this tone, filled me with an apprehension that something unwanted and undesired would happen or would be generated by someone. After a short while, a scientific outlook overpowered me.

I questioned myself, "What could he do?" I shared my apprehensions with Harpal Singh, my friend.

Harpal Singh said, "If occult has so much power, then what is the need of fighting with the enemy country. India can eliminate Pakistan's forces, without firing a single bullet. There is no substance in occult practices." I was bit convinced and diverted my mind to something else.

We took our lunch at Anjali, a restaurant at Haridwar and moved ahead. We reached Rishikesh. Some of the members had not been to Rishikesh before. I played the role of the tourist guide and started my commentary, describing the various places of religious and historical importance. The plain area was left behind. Our vehicle was negotiating with the sharp curves and bends of the hills. The rainy season had just gone away; leaving its mark on the nature. The trees and shrubs were looking fresh and energetic. Mother Nature had given life to the wild grass and wildflowers. Cool breeze was caressing our faces intermittently. It was giving us, a feel of the approaching winter season. This season of September and October appear to be the best phase, in terms of productivity of Nature's gifts. Lost in thoughts, I was totally unaware about the uncertain future and turning of the events, totally upside down.

As I was on the driving seat of Scorpio, I noticed that all the vehicles moving up had lined up in a queue. We had to wait for fifteen minutes. The downhill traffic was passing by. After some time, our side of the traffic

started moving up, but at a snail's pace. On the right-hand side of the valley, that is on driver's side, more than twenty feet of the road in length and half portion of the width had gone down in the valley due to the landslide. Some stones were put in order, to mark the new outer boundary of the road for the safety. It was quite dangerous, because a very narrow portion of the road remained intact. We carefully crossed that section and put it in our mind, that while returning, we have to keep this part of the road in consideration. Slight carelessness could result in a serious tragedy, resulting in loss of lives. In this situation, the mud or the earth under the charcoal covering, slips away into the valley and a week superficial upper crest of the road remains, which can give way, on the slight pressure of the vehicle's weight.

One of the members inquired, "Where are we putting up for today's night?"

I said, "At Devprayag, some thirty kilometres away from this place." (Devprayag is a sacred place for Hindus, where two mighty rivers, Alaknanda and Bhagirathi meet)

The other friend Mr. Nain, who was having one call after the other on his mobile, was now sitting peacefully in the last row of the vehicle. As the vehicle was taking sharp turns, the mobile connectivity would just go away and would come on its own. When Devprayag was just fourteen kilometres away, Mr. Nain got a call on his

mobile and he shouted at me, “An urgent call for you, take the mobile phone. At that moment, I was in the process of overtaking a truck.

I said to him, “Hold on for a while, because I have to find out a suitable place to park the vehicle, after crossing the bridge,”

He again shouted from the back, “It is the most urgent call. Take it immediately.”

In a huff, I parked the vehicle on the hillside and came out of the vehicle to hear the call properly, as there was signal problem at that location. My son, Vineet was speaking from the other side. He was weeping inconsolably. I heard two words in a cracking sound ‘paralytic stroke’. First of all, I thought my wife was the victim, then my son repeated, “It is Amit, who got a paralytic attack due to brain haemorrhage.” It was difficult to digest. I lost my mind and went back to the SUV. I pulled out my luggage and started asking for a lift from the cars, going downwards towards Rishikesh. My other friends came out of the SUV and asked about the matter. I narrated the talks which I had with my son. I told them, that I had to go back soon due to emergency. I would take a taxi from Rishikesh for Delhi. They were all adamant to forego this journey. I reasoned with them, that instead of going back to Delhi and paying a courtesy call at the hospital, would not be of any use. They must move forward and pray for the wellbeing of my son-in-

law, at the temples. They all agreed. It was decided that the passengers of Innova would continue their journey onwards and our Scorpio would return to Delhi.

Our Scorpio turned back to return. Mr. Nain offered to drive the vehicle. It was considered by all of them, that I may be under mental stress. Recollection of that portion of the road, which had gone down the valley, suddenly hit my mind. It had to be taken care of. I told my concern to Mr. Nain, and he agreed to allow me to drive till that landslide portion of the road was safely covered. I drove the SUV a bit fast, but cautiously, I was looking for that missing portion of the road. No doubt, I was very tense, and it was very difficult for me. After a brief silence, all were speaking up their mind and they were assuring me not to worry, as Almighty is very kind and HE would take care of each and everything, including the health of Amit.

Again, I would like to remind my readers, that while driving, I had that missing portion of the road in my mind, and I was searching for it. As we were coming down hill, the uphill going traffic was almost reduced to nil.

There are many villages scattered in the lap of hills and mountains. They were evident by their lights. Lost in my thoughts, I looked at my wristwatch, it was 8:00 pm. late evening.

Harpal Singh said, “If you don't mind, let's quickly have dinner at Haridwar. Then we will follow our journey without having any break or stop”.

I realised that my hunger had gone away, due to the unfolding of unfortunate happening, but others were feeling hungry. I must respect that.

It was 9.15 pm. We reached at Haridwar. When we were taking our dinner, suddenly I realised that the stretch of the missing portion of the road, did not come in our way. In those days, there was no other road or any bypass. Despite of the fact, that every person was awake and attentive, how is it possible that no one could spot out that portion of the road, which was affected by the land slide? We were all wonderstruck. The restaurant owner also confirmed, about the one and the only road, which goes to Devprayag.

Harpal Singh said, “It is totally unbelievable. This is a miracle which has taken place.” All of us were talking about it.

I thought, “May be, the mother Nature has connived and supported us, to make our journey quick and smooth. The mystery remains till today.

After a quick dinner, we rushed to Delhi, the Scorpio was throwing the distance behind at the speed of 120 kilometres per hour. Occasionally, others were

reminding me to drive slowly. After, we reached Roorkee, Mr. Nain came on the driving seat.

I made a call to my family doctor, Dr. Yugal Swaroop Goel, whom we have deep faith. I apprised him of Amit's position. My son was constantly updating me on the phone. Doctor Goel advised me to have faith in the doctors of the hospital. Some procedure to put a wire in Amit's brain, to remove the clot had to be performed. I was worried. I was eager to hear more and more about Amit's condition.

Around 2:00 o'clock at night we were at Action Balaji Hospital at Paschim Vihar, Delhi. I learned from others, that Mr X had left the hospital, just before we reached there. He had fore told that, that need to put wire, in order to remove the blood clot, would not be felt. Amit would be taken inside the O.T. and would be brought back without the procedure. It so happened. Mr X had earned Kudos. Everyone moved away from the hospital one by one, as the clock was ticking further. My daughter, Niti was weeping inconsolably, and she needed my support. Till then, my brother-in-law Mr. Ripu Daman Singh had taken care of each and everything, including the initial deposit at the hospital.

What went at my back, could not be retrieved, but certainly, I would have been blamed by Mr. X, for starting my pilgrimage on the last day of shraad. No one expressly blamed me for this. I was quite surprised, but

not very sure about the conduct of Mr X. For his own importance, he could go to any extent.

Next day, I came to know that MR. X had advised Amit six months back, to wear a blue sapphire stone in the gold ring, which he assured would bring good luck to Amit. This he advised without reading Amit's horoscope. Had I known this, I would not have allowed Amit to wear that stone. One of my cousin sisters, had a very bad experience of that stone. Though this stone is quite precious, but if it doesn't suit a person, it immediately gives signal like inducing fever or bad dreams, and it can cause something drastic also, if the signals are ignored. The damage had been done in Amit's case. A precious life would not be normal as before.

Moreover, it is unbelievable, that choosing a day for commencement of a religious journey on a Sharad day, would cast such a detrimental effect. I have a firm belief that Almighty saved Amit, who is unable to speak clearly, even after fourteen years of this incident. This all happened in 2012. This is a fact, that I learned a very hard lesson, not to commence a pilgrimage on a Shraad day.

To sum up, there are lot of unsolved mysteries which we have to live with. The second and the foremost lesson is to keep away from those persons who practice

Occult. They have their own agenda and ego, to promote themselves. They can go to any extent, to get fame.

Last but not the least, how can I forget that portion of the road, which had given way, due to the land slide. It was not to be found in our return journey on the very same day.

The tendency of a person is to find an answer to every question or to every riddle. There are certain happenings which become a puzzle or a mystery for us. The exact answer or the justification remains elusive for ever. This is what I call 'NATURE'S POWER.'

TO THE READERS OF THIS BOOK

I am obliged to my readers, who bought this book and read it. It doesn't matter, whether they agree or not, to whatever I have said in these pieces of writing. Still, it is important and valuable for me, that they have given their precious time and spent money on this book, otherwise the life is too hectic, and it is difficult to spare moments for other things.

As already mentioned, this book's content is based on real life experiences, some of them shared with my soul mate, my wife Mrs. Jyotsana Dabas, Retired class I officer, from Central Government, who ultimately left for her heavenly abode on 24th March 2024 after a prolonged illness due to Covid's impact. While penning down the episodes for this book, involving my wife, many a times, I could not control myself, but had to permit the outflow of emotions through tears.

Anyway, my dream gets fulfilled by the printing and circulation of this book. I hope the readers must have enjoyed it.

With Regards

Jagdish Singh Dabas