

Give Me Strength & Gratitude!



As I began to reflect on how our way of living had changed literally overnight when the lockdown was announced in Mumbai, I realised that like most people, I went through various stages of emotions, doubts, and concerns. There were moments of uncertainty, and confusion about the future, the health of loved ones, the suffering around the planet, and concern about the outlook of our family business, our employees... However, early on I was able to distance myself from this constant noise; the diverse opinions and criticism about how the situation should be handled, the influx of information, the endless WhatsApp forwards, and the general sense of panic that I noticed around me.

I began to wonder if this distance was an expression of denial, or if I had become apathetic to what was going on. Why was I not affected like the many around me? Where was the panic? What was my stand amidst the opinions and questions on what was going to happen to the economy?

But deeply honest with myself, I realized that actually I wasn't apathetic or in denial at all. My attention instead was focussed on the things on which I actually had some control, rather than on all the circumstances that were completely out of my hands. I realised that debating various opinions of what should be done was futile because anyway it was not my decision to make. Instead, I tried to shift my focus on how to prepare for the future, externally as well as internally. For instance, I busied myself with working on a practical roadmap despite the uncertainties for our business and investments. I also took the opportunity to finish pending tasks and learned some new skills like baking. Perhaps most importantly, I took the time to enjoy the simplest pleasures such as the chirping of the birds, the sound of the waves, and beautiful clear skies – rare in our city of Mumbai. And my classes of philosophy kept me gainfully engaged, always reminding me to work on myself, helping me to remain centred.

I attribute this approach and attitude to one underlying sentiment that was predominant consistently throughout the period of the lockdown: GRATITUDE. I started thinking about what Gratitude really means...

Despite the confusion externally, I felt thankful that my loved ones and I were safe, thankful for the availability of essential supplies, thankful that I was able to be productive, and enjoy this

time in our home, while many across the globe didn't have a home to confine themselves to. But, is gratitude only to be thankful for what we have or receive? On deeper reflection, I began to see that Gratitude is INDEPENDENT of receiving something. It is a state of being, an attitude towards life which revealed the ability to see the GOOD in each thing; the ability to be thankful even for challenges and difficulties, for it is through them that I might meet strength, new abilities and my own unknown potential.

Instead of being consumed by the negativity and criticism, I was inspired to seek out the GOOD. There were medical workers, security forces, policemen and so many others who had put their lives at risk to safeguard our own. Many individuals were facilitating the supply of essential goods and services, like milkmen, delivery boys, pharmacies and vegetable vendors, ensuring that we had enough food, medical supplies and other essentials. There were many NGOs who had reached out to help those on the streets in large numbers. I observed that neighbours started to reach out to one other, connected more, in order to help each other. Those living alone, and the elderly, were looked after by those less at risk. Friends and family who had not connected for years, reached out to check on one another, offering support or just a listening ear. In each case, I observed the spirit of service, of fulfilling ones human duty, sometimes even at the risk of one's own health and life.

Perhaps from this we can observe that the potential of GOODNESS is deeply embedded in our human nature. Virtues such as empathy, the sentiment of service, kindness and generosity all lie latent within us. It made me wonder why it takes a crisis of this magnitude for us to bring forth this better part of ourselves, if it already exists as our underlying nature. Why do we not express this nature more, in the course of our daily lives? Nevertheless, I was thankful that the pandemic had revealed this truth, this goodness that characterises our human capacity.

With the sentiment of Gratitude, I was able to look at things more deeply, beyond the tangible, to investigate the purpose behind the smallest of things, to search for their essence – for it is in the essence that we may discover the Good! Like many, I asked: Why, despite all the technological and medical advancements that we have today, had something as seemingly small as a virus taken the whole world by surprise, forcing our lives to a standstill. This reflection clarified for me that ultimately, Life is Just; even if it is not always clear at first. We always get what we NEED; sometimes as a favourable circumstance, sometimes as a challenge or a difficult period, and sometimes in the form of a crisis like this. Each can be dealt with as a victim or with the spirit of adventure to learn something new and grow – the choice is ours.

I began to see more clearly that perhaps there is a deep connection, a meaning behind everything that happens to us, individually and collectively. Could the pandemic be nature's invitation for us to pause and reassess the paths we have chosen? Perhaps it is an invitation to re-consider with humility our approach towards life, each other, and towards the planet.

And so, through Gratitude, I found STRENGTH; perhaps they are two sides of the same coin. We need strength to be able to see goodness and justice in every circumstance, to look beyond the surface. With strength, comes the ability to see that however unfavourable a circumstance may seem, it is perhaps something we need, an opportunity to learn and grow. It is strength which allows us to remain centred without giving in to panic, to build inner conviction that while



we have no control over the circumstances that are dealt to us, we can always choose how we respond to them, and not allow them to consume us.

I wonder, as things start normalising post-lockdown, will we forget our learning and reflections from this period? Or perhaps with an inner state of Gratitude, might we delve into our inner Strength to actualize small changes that we have realised are necessary; to always strive to act from the better aspects of ourselves, illuminating the best of our human potential?