

A Moment's Indulgence
September 2010
Rabindranath Tagore

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side ...

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite,
and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

Tagore's request for a moment's indulgence is mine this morning while the world is still shrouded in darkness and silence like a soft blanket lies over our compound. The Prodigal has returned...

I often do wonder if we have any more control over our spiritual orbit around the Son than the earth has over its orbit around the sun. Is this elliptic orbit a necessary part of our relationship with God –gaining in our winters insights and knowledge not possible during the summers and vice versa?

Winter or summer – life goes on ... My decision to personally look after the education of the college students is bearing fruit. I am satisfied with the progress – so far...

All college students are enrolled in their respective colleges pursuing their studies. They received everything they need for that. I visited the college that most of them attend and got a nice reception and a good report about my kids. I also got a pat on the back for being such a fine man. Apparently the kids didn't divulge the whole truth about me. So far I feel pleased with myself but now comes the difficult part - how to persuade them to take their studies seriously - for as a wise man pointed out -

"It is hard for men to labor towards far-off unseen good."

They all want to be free; they chafe at restrictions. They refuse to accept the fact that the leash that constrains them is also the umbilical cord that gives them life support.

Besides the kids in various colleges four young men are in a technical training institute pursuing various trades. Anup's younger brother, Ajay (18), wanted to quit after three days when he could not get the course he wanted i.e. Air-conditioning maintenance and was given welding instead. Joining Anup and me in my room we presented him with the available options – all bad – and he reluctantly decided to go for the welding course. Anup, speaking to me afterwards of his younger brother, wisely stated, "You only really help somebody when you help him to do that which he wants to do."

Later, alone with Ajay, he shyly asked, "How did you find out about that girl?" "In a place like this; are you joking?" Then looking at me seriously he said, "I want to marry her". "Good" I nodded. "Then you better stick to that welding course so you can look after your wife." We had our agreement. Though believing in the institution of marriage, unbidden came to mind the words of Socrates on that subject, "Call no man unhappy till he is married". I refrained from telling him that. Anyhow, things turned out ok for Ajay; he got the course he wanted.

Another time alone with him he said, "Anup has changed very much in the past

few months.” “For the better” I asked. He just nodded. I nodded in agreement. Anup but needed an encouragement – don’t we all - and the Emerge team and other foreigners who visited us, at what I consider a crucial time, were the catalyst that brought some of it about. Yet he is not the only one; all the other college students too are changing and developing – as they receive the help and encouragement they need to grow. That they do as well as they do under the present dormitory conditions – is a miracle.

I never had a role model nor did I want one; it would have restricted me, cramped my style, whatever that is; in a way I would have let somebody else live my life. A lot of people tried and are still trying to make Frank into some other Frank - the end product which they might not like any more than the raw material that now is Frank. Nor is this song writer’s desire mine ... “Give me some sunshine; give me some rain; give me another chance - wana grow up once again.” Once is enough!

Neither did I ever see myself as a role model; it would be a roller coaster model. “Follow Frank to the State of Chaos in the Land of Confusion!” In my relationship to the college students - I suggest – not impose. When I asked Anup what his contribution to the talent show at college was, he replied, “Clapping.” I laughed. Good enough for me. But after a fashion show at the college two weeks earlier where he acted as a model, the teacher sent me a personal text message saying “Anup was great”!

Chatting with one student about his plans after completing his Bachelor in whatever degree - still two years hence - his goals range from further studies to computer technician, to pilot, to musician, to doing some sort of ministry using his education, to ... Well, at least you can’t call him narrow minded.

Eight young people and two families attend various Bible Colleges. Some others we just help with pocket money. Our three pastors too are doing well.

Then there are all our little fellows whose needs need to be met ... “Little boys should be seen not heard” is coined by somebody who either couldn’t hear or had no boys. Listening to the racket outside my window in the late afternoon I ruefully think, “Marconi didn’t invent the first talking machine; he invented the first one you could switch off”. Oh, where is that switch?

When in his college the class teacher asked somebody to sing, the class rooted for Anup. He told the teacher, besides him probably the only Christian in that class, he would not sing a Hindi movie song but only a Christian song and, so he did “Celebrate the victory of the Lord”.

This is what our place is all about. The racket the kids make - is part of that celebration.

I bought a small car – actually I only own one wheel; the other three belong to the bank. Whenever I drive by a bank I honk the horn as a sign of respect the way devout Hindus do when driving by a temple ... But I did want to be mobile again. I love the sense of freedom I missed since the old car was wrecked. It is sheer fun to move about without the need of a driver. Bapu’s big car is a pain to use in the city where Machiavelli’s’ advice to the prince applies, “Any man striving to be good will find his ruin among the many who are not good.” When I told somebody I wanted to drive around India, he shared with me an inscription he saw on a

gravestone.

“Grandfather died peacefully in his sleep;
the three passengers in his car were not so fortunate.”

Bapu arrived in Canada! My faith - vindicated! The subject line of his first e-mail, sent shortly after his arrival, reads, “In good hands!” I am greatly relieved! I am sure he will do well. In Bapu’s absence Yohan will run the show. He looks a bit better maybe being busy takes his mind off his worries and illness of that of his wife and himself. His medical bills are often half of his wages ...

As for me ... Most of the time my privacy only exists behind closed eyelids ... I need some solitude for Frank to catch up with Frank. Bapu’s absence hopefully will give me that. A Taoist proverb expresses my need beautifully.

No one can see their reflection in running water.

It is only in still water that we can see.

And what applies to seeing our reflection applies to seeing God’s - a moment's indulgence to sit by his side - will facilitate that.

Thank you for contributing to the changes that mark the life of our kids, of Bapu, Yohan, Anup, the other college kids and all the other kids. Besides God’s presence, you make this “endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil”- bearable and even enjoyable.

Mega blessings – Frank

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