May 2022

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#### CREATIVE TEAM

*Editorial Team* — Elizabeth Denley, Mamata Venkat, Vanessa Patel, Kashish Kalwani, Christine Prisland, Animesh Anand, Rachel Nelson

Design & Art — Uma Maheswari, Clayton John, Jasmee Mudgal, Ananya Patel, Arati Shedde, Abha Mukherjee, Kanika Raj Singh, Ramya Sriram, Little Whale

*Photography* — Heartfulness Media Team, Ksenia Chernaya, Mike Cox, Karolina Grabowska, Toa Heftiba, Harmoni, Joyce McCown

*Writers* — Ichak Adizes, Daaji, Elizabeth Denley, Clayton John, Ramya Sriram, V. Ramakantha

*Interviewees* — Thomas Bruhn, Charlotte Dufour, Abhay Nene, Sairam Reddy Palicherla, Tami Simon

Support Team — Balaji Iyer, Shreyas Khanjee, Liaa Kumar, Karthik Natarajan, Ashraf Nobi, Jayakumar Parthasarathy, Arjun Reddy, Jatish Seth, Shankar Vasudevan

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CONTRIBUTIONS contributions@heartfulnessmagazine.com

ADVERTISING advertising@heartfulnessmagazine.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS subscriptions@heartfulnessmagazine.com www.heartfulnessmagazine.com/subscriptions

EDITOR — Neeraj Kumar

#### PRINTED BY - Sunil Kumar

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## Celebrating Cultural Diversity

Dear readers,

On May 21, we will celebrate World Day for Cultural Diversity. With the explosion of technology in recent years, we now have a window into the inner workings of many different cultures around the world. Those glimpses have provided us all with a deeper appreciation of the myriad of innovative and traditional ways we can together face our changing world.

To celebrate diversity, we hear from facilitator Charlotte Dufour on managing eco-anxiety, surgeon Abhay Nene on managing back pain, and neuroscientist Thomas Bruhn on life, death, fear, and purpose. We hear from Dr. Adizes on diversity, Elizabeth Denley on the melting pot of her childhood, and Kalyani Adusumilli on East meets West. Dr. V. Ramakantha shares some insights into the science and mythology of the mighty Banyan tree, and Dr. Sairam Reddy describes the potential of hydroponic farming, especially in urban environments. We also celebrate nature through Clayton John's innovative digital collages.

Once again we hear from Tami Simon of Sounds True, who addresses the path of change, and Daaji offers us some practical tips on how to make wise decisions.

Happy reading! The editors























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#### DAAJI

Daaji is the Heartfulness Guide. He is an innovator and researcher, equally at home in the fields of spirituality, science, and the evolution of consciousness. He has taken our understanding of human potential to a new level.



#### **TAMI SIMON**

Tami is the founder of multimedia platform Sounds True and the educational program, *The Inner MBA*. Tami has grown Sounds True into North America's leading publisher of spoken-word spiritual teachings, operating on Integral principles.



#### CHARLOTTE DUFOUR

Charlotte has worked for over 20 years in the field of international cooperation. Today, she is an independent consultant, works with the 4DS group, and bridges Yoga with sustainable development through her social enterprises Narayan, Listening Inspires, and the Listening to the Earth campaign.



#### **THOMAS BRUHN**

Thomas is a physicist at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam, Germany. He is a researcher and a bridge builder, helping experts and change-makers from all sectors of society to come together to explore the topic of sustainability, listen to each other, and develop solutions.



#### **ABHAY NENE**

Dr. Abhay is a highly-valued spinal surgeon from Mumbai. After higher training in orthopedic surgery, he has been the recipient of various international awards throughout the course of his career.



#### **ICHAK ADIZES**

Dr. Adizes is a leading management expert. He has received 21 honorary doctorates and is the author of 27 books that have been translated into 36 languages. He is recognized as one of the top thirty thought leaders of America.

## contributors



#### **ELIZABETH DENLEY**

Elizabeth is a writer, editor, Heartfulness trainer, and facilitator of interactive programs in consciousness and personal development, bringing together the fields of science and spirituality. She is the editor-inchief of Heartfulness Magazine.



#### **KALYANI ADUSUMILLI**

Kalyani is a health law attorney and writer who lives in Houston, Texas, with her husband and two sons. She is a mental health and mindfulness advocate who went on a journey to find happiness, discovered how to help others be happy, and has become a more authentic version of herself.



#### V. RAMAKANTHA

Ramakantha was a Principal Chief Conservator of Forests in the Indian Forest Service. He is an academic, author, and wildlife photographer, who manages species-rich ecosystems in India. He is also a member of the Heartfulness Green initiative at Kanha Shanti Vanam.



SAIRAM REDDY PALICHERLA

Sairam is Co-founder and Director of Research at UrbanKisaan, dedicated to environmentally safe and sustainable agricultural technologies. He has published over 30 articles in international journals, and received multiple awards. He was listed in the top 10 leaders in the Agriculture Industry for the year 2021.



#### **CLAYTON JOHN**

Clayton is an award-winning photographer and video journalist, who has also been a mixed media artist since 2016. He was a finalist in the Fine Art Category of the London International Creative Awards 2021 with *Imaginata Australis*.



#### RAMYA SRIRAM

Ramya is a content and communication specialist, cartoonist, and travel writer who likes to find meaning in the little things that make life wonderful. She creates visual stories for clients and is featured in various magazines and newspapers.

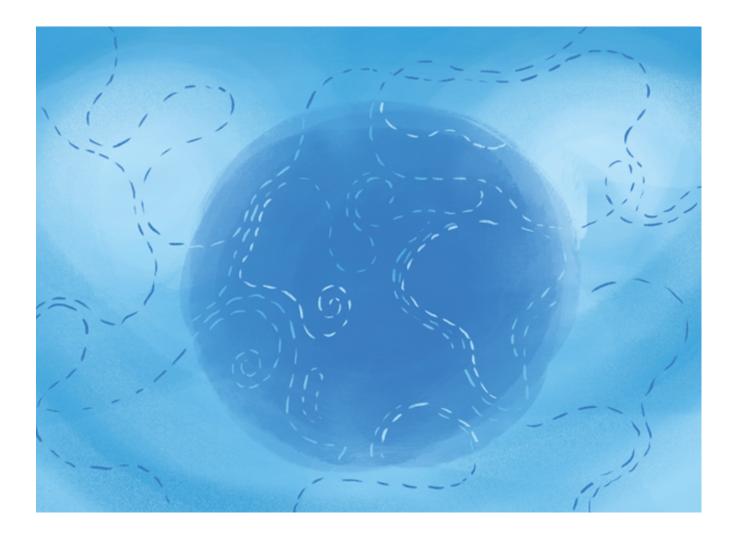
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When we give ourselves compassion, we are opening our hearts in a way that can transform our lives. elin.

#### **KRISTIN NEFF**

Illustration by ANANYA PATEL



Learning to Manage ECO-ANXIETY

CHARLOTTE DUFOUR is a veteran in the fields of international cooperation and sustainable food systems. In part 3 of her interview with KALPANA SAI of the Heartfulness Institute, she focuses on our relationship with the outside world and the environment. Q: When we open our hearts, being sensitive to what's really working for us and what's not, we build a connection with our inner world. At the same time, we need to connect spiritually to the world outside. How can we do that?

It's a very good and difficultto-answer question, because it's quite personal. I am finishing my training to be an instructor of meditation, so I have a little bit of experience. As trainers, we position ourselves as channels for the wisdom. It's not me, Charlotte, teaching, it's the Source. So, our own alignment, which is our own practice, is very important for us to be connected.

I try to listen very attentively when I'm guiding a Yoga class. I try to be very attentive to what's happening inside me, in terms of the sensations of energy and how it flows. I invite those with me to be open to their sensations, knowing they will have their own experience.

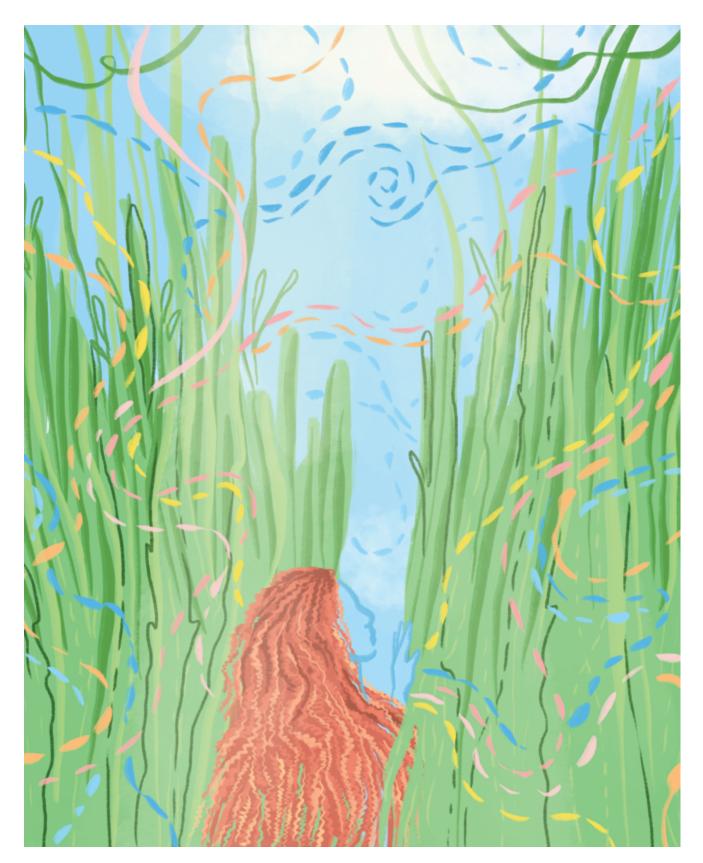
It really helps to be guided by someone. All the great masters had their own gurus, right? They needed gurus even if they were realized masters; they needed guidance and we need it too. If you have a guide, you can constantly reinvite them. Their guidance will help with the outer connection. They hold the key to the inner world.

I'm doing things like journaling, and awareness of the body, in order to recognize physical and emotional tensions. We have a variety of tools at our disposal, and it's a never-ending journey. You can constantly go deeper. Every time I go on a meditation retreat, I feel, "Wow, yet another level." I have friends who've been meditating for thirty or forty years who are still going deeper and having new experiences. It's an exciting path.

Q: This builds on our previous conversation about finding a community, now adding the importance of having a guide who can help, including how to connect with the world around us.

When we are ourselves connected, when we deepen our meditation, then the connection with others becomes more fluid.

When we are ourselves connected, when we deepen our meditation, then the connection with others becomes more fluid.



When we're connected to ourselves, we can be more empathetic, our intuition and our ability to feel where people are, and what they may need, deepens. I've also found that by deepening my meditation I've become much more aware of connections to nature. I've become much more nurturing.

In fact, my meditation practice led me to become one of the founders of "<u>Listening to the Earth</u>." It led to the realization that the challenges of our time are due to humankind's separation from the Earth. We are now reminded that we are one with Nature, the divine creation. We are invited to be in a relationship of love with Nature and our environment.

A friend of mine recently said, "When I choose myself, I choose us." I think this is true because there is always a part of us that is connected to the whole universe.

Q: Elaborating on this, what is eco-anxiety and what is the significance of connecting to Nature?

A lot of news tells us, "With climate change, we won't be able to feed ourselves, there will be huge disasters, it's too late as we've passed the tipping point." So, there's a lot of fear. But we should ask ourselves, "Wait a minute. Who do we think we are?" There's something much greater than us, much wiser than us. When we look at the wisdom of Nature, our body cells, the way everything works, it is mind-blowing. When a woman is with child, she is not doing anything, and yet the cells in her body are multiplying. A being is formed and she's not consciously doing that.

The power that lies in this creation is far beyond our understanding. Science has so much yet to discover, and that gives me hope. I think there's a far greater regenerative capacity in the world than we think. With the challenges we face now, there is an opportunity to remind ourselves of our deep feelings, connection to the rest of creation, and it's part of the evolution of human consciousness on this planet.

I believe that acting from a space of love and joy can happen through our inner connection and the connection to others. We've formed an NGO called "<u>Listening Inspires</u>." We offer workshops on eco-anxiety and a big part of what we offer is, "How can we act from a space of love and joy, rather than a space of fear?" There's a lot of fear and anger in the world, and those are the forces that block us, hurt us. They are the opposite of love.

I believe that acting from a space of love and joy can happen through our inner connection and the connection to others. I truly believe we will make it as humanity. It's just a massive learning opportunity. We've never experienced it before on a global scale, as is happening in this stage of human evolution. But we will be guided, and we will be supported.

#### Q: Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to offer or to add?

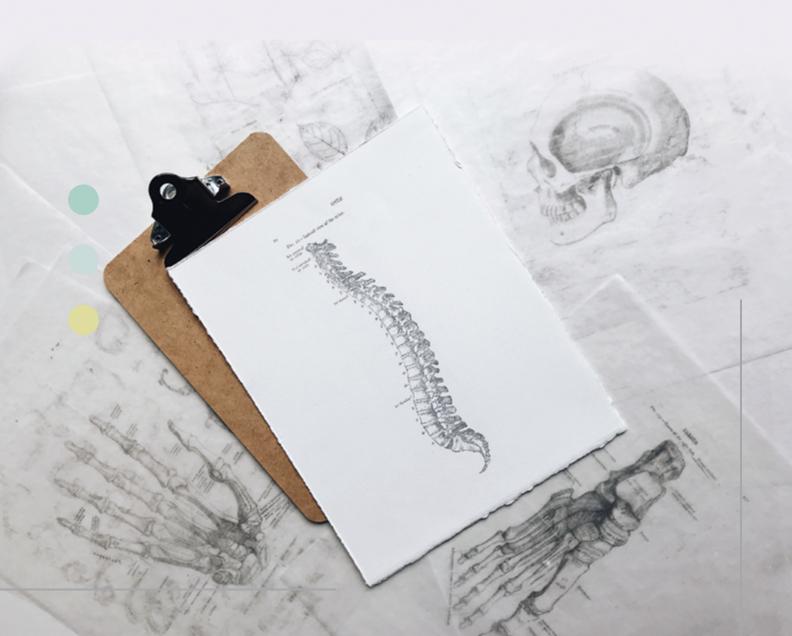
I was just thinking of my gratitude for this conversation. In this phase of our evolution, if we show gratitude and respect, our hearts will be full. Practicing gratitude is key for heartfulness and wellbeing. Thank you. My heart is full and I'm filled with a lot of gratitude.

Illustrations by ANANYA PATEL

### MANAGING

## **Back Pain & Posture**

DR. ABHAY NENE is a Spinal Surgeon from Mumbai, India, who has been the recipient of various international awards throughout his career. He is interviewed here by DR. SNEHAL DESHPANDE of the Heartfulness Institute about back pain – why, how, and what to do?



## What Causes Back Pain?

Q: Dr. Nene, tell us about back pain. What does it encompass?

The world is made up of three kinds of people: those who are having back pain, those who've had back pain, and the rest who will have back pain.

Back pain is one of the top three reasons to consult a doctor worldwide. That's quite telling. It shows us how common it is.

There is often a misconception that back pain is for the rich, or for the urban, but we've done a study where tribal Indians also voted back pain as their biggest problem after infant mortality and malnutrition. Back pain is a huge problem across communities, and across profiles of people.

As a back surgeon, I define two categories of pain. The first comes from the physical structure. The pain comes from bones, joints, muscles, and ligaments. It is physical and mechanical in nature. It is not always urgent, but it is a nuisance.

The second category of pain comes from the neural system, the nervous system. It is more urgent, and so a person often needs to seek medical help.

#### Posture

#### Q: What are the implications of having bad posture?

Take sitting as an activity. Most people are either leaning toward a computer monitor, looking at their mobile, snoozing at the table, or slouching. You might feel that you're chilling in your chair, but you're actually loading your back. Most of us load our backs over days, months, and years on end, without really servicing them. We use our backs for up to eighteen hours a day, and mostly we abuse them.

#### SELF-CARE

There's almost nothing that you do functionally where your back remains straight. That's where posture comes in. If you load your back in a way that it was not designed to take loads, it's gonna wear out faster. Posture is a neutral state in which your body takes loads.

#### Sitting versus Standing Desks

Q: Many people have been talking about standing tables while working from home. What are your views on that?



You have probably heard the statement, "Sitting is the new smoking." The human body was designed to be upright, and the back consists of a central structure which is like the mast of a ship. The muscles around it are the dynamic supporters of the ship. Those two elements together give the back a shape memory. This shape memory loads the back at the disk level. These are the disks that lie between the bones of your back. They are like shape memory pillows. They're supposed to absorb the load, but over time they degenerate.

It is just like using a sofa for many months; eventually it loses its capacity to maintain shape. Similarly, the discs in the lower back begin to degenerate or dehydrate, so your back loses shape memory. When it's put in an awkward shape, it doesn't conform to it but adapts to that shape. If you sit on an old sofa, you sink in. A similar thing happens to your back when it's loaded beyond its capacity.

**Standing:** Please stand up with your back against a wall, and your heels dug in. A neutral posture is when the central line of gravity is perfectly aligned to load your back the least. That's the neutral position of the back.

**Sitting:** When you sit, instantly the lower back curves forwards, because your pelvis tends to



tilt forwards. As soon as that happens, the center line of gravity moves forward and the load on your back doubles or triples, depending on how you're sitting.

The right way to sit is in an imitation of standing, where you're still arching. Your lower back is upright, which is done by engaging your muscles, not sitting passively, but most of us don't sit like that. So that's where standing desks, bar stools or high chairs come into play.

When you stand, you get tired, or your legs hurt, but eventually it's good because it helps you to stand for longer periods. People spend so much money on fancy chairs, but the best chair is your muscles.

#### Can Shoes Prevent Back Pain?

Q: There are specific kinds of shoes designed for walking, running, and everyday use. Can wearing a particular type of shoe help us avoid backache?

For 95% of the population, there's no shoe that can remove back pain. I'm gonna to tell you a little story. A company that is a famous sole manufacturer asked someone to jump from ten feet with a very well-padded shoe, and then asked the person to jump without any shoes at all. The load on the knee and spine was less when he was barefoot.

Your foot is not one block. It's designed with very small hinges.

So, when you land barefoot, your feet nicely absorb the shock so almost nothing lands on the torso. Heavy padded shoes actually take away that movement. Even though they give you a lot of shock absorption, they take away the micro movement in your feet, and that can actually be counterproductive.

So, there's no magic shoe. There are, however, a few things that you may want to remember about shoes. People with flat feet and feet that hurt may do better with shoes that have inner padding which will align their axis together. People who wear tall heels for long hours push their center of gravity forward. They would be well advised to wear them for shorter periods.



Most of us load our backs over days, months, and years on end, without really servicing them.

#### SELF-CARE

#### Job-related Posture Problems

Q: There are some professions with repeated posture-related problems. What are these professions?

It's very telling that an athlete who's running every day, jumping, and doing heavy-duty loaded activities, rarely comes with back pain. But a whitecollar professional, who's sitting on a laptop all day is the most common candidate for back pain. During the pandemic, we all started sitting longer hours. Anyone whose work involves sitting for long hours is likely to suffer from back pain. Of course, athletes and people who engage in heavy lifting can get back pain, especially if they overshoot their capacity.

Also, neck pain is a common postural problem because most people's jobs involve looking down. That includes surgeons, diamond sorters, secretaries, and dentists; basically, anyone who tilts their neck for long hours will have neck problems.

The most common professions are the most sedentary professions. The more active professions don't come with back pain. Now, that's counterintuitive! Something to think about!

#### **Gym Injuries**

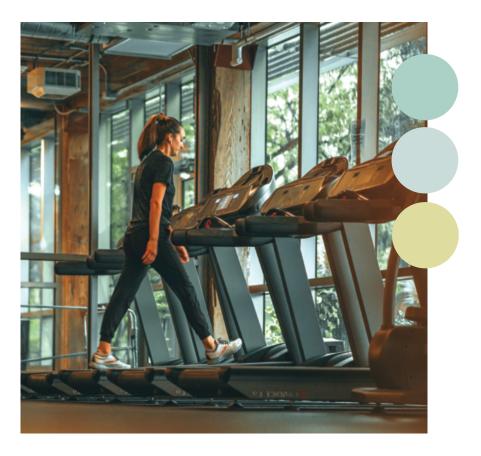
Q: There is another group I also look at – gym enthusiasts. Some come to me with pulled muscles and other related injuries. What would you share with this group?

You have to be aware of your capacity, which means knowing your strain versus pain equation: if you do something that gives you strain, the next day you're okay for another session. The minute you've got pain, you've overshot it.

The other big problem in gyms is compound exercises.

The machines are designed for ergonomic workouts, so the load on your back is not multiplied when you're exercising your arms or legs. Compound exercise, in other words a free workout, for example, a weighted squat, will load your back, your legs, and your glutes. It's a multi-muscle workout. If you're not strong enough, which most of us are not, one of these will give way.

When you're doing a deadlift, for example, your hamstrings, quads, glutes, back, shoulders, arms, everything is loaded, and if they don't all work in unison, the back gives way. The back gets the brunt of it.



#### Lumbar Belts and Cervical Collars

Q: I have seen many people with either a belt around their abdomen or a collar around their neck, while doing everyday activities like going for a walk. What is your viewpoint on the use of collars and belts for neck pain and backache?

A lumbar belt is like a corset, a fake abdominal muscle, which keeps your tummy in. In a way, it gives you the right posture, it keeps your mind on your back, so you're upright. That's okay in the early days, but if you keep using it for longer, two or three things happen: your muscles start to forget that it was their job to hold you up, the belt begins to loosen so it's no longer protecting you, and eventually, you're not able to survive without it.

Long term, it's good to create your own belt. That means having really good strong abs so they become your belt. It is a permanent free belt that stays with you. Learn to walk upright, walk tall, and tuck your tummy in.

The same is true for a cervical collar. The neck has a fixed load of ten pounds, but that load can multiply significantly the minute you start tilting your head forward. A collar allows this distance to remain constant so your head doesn't drop down. In a way it's doing you a service, but things can go wrong, so we don't recommend a collar. First, you get used to it, and without it you'll stoop. Second, you get a universal-sized collar. Your neck isn't a one-size-fits-all; you could have a collar that's too small or too big. It gives you a false sense of security. So, I would also deter you from wearing a collar.

Instead, walk with your chin and vision parallel to the floor, the

back of your head in line with your shoulder blades. When you're upright, your muscles will tire, but they will then learn to adapt to that posture.

So, collars and belts are okay for a short time, but dump them in the long run. Unless you use your muscles, you lose your muscles. Also, if you depend continuously on the belt, you tend to become psychologically dependent.

Q: When is the right time to go for back surgery?

You have to be aware of your capacity, which means knowing your strain versus pain equation: if you do something that gives you strain, the next day you're okay for another session. The minute you've got pain, you've overshot it.

#### SELF-CARE

My professional opinion is that many people who have back pain are generally great candidates for rehabilitation, not surgery. Back pain comes from multiple sources, so you can tackle one or two at best. The surgery we do for back pain ends up stiffening the spine. It is going against nature's principle

My professional opinion is that many people who have back pain are generally great candidates for rehabilitation, not surgery. of mobility. It makes your back stronger but less mobile. It does not necessarily fix your life. Surgery for back pain has a 50% success rate worldwide.

In contrast, people who develop nerve pain are great candidates for surgery, and I would encourage them to have it, because often the pain goes down through the buttock into the leg, and that causes the leg to go numb or weak. It increases leg fatigue, weakness on walking, and so on.

Q: Which allied professionals can help with back pain? First, there are physical therapists, because they know which muscles are weak, and which to strengthen to support the back. A physical therapist knows the physics of back pain, and they start enhancing the muscles without actually damaging the background.

Next are nutritionists. A good nutritionist will help you cut down weight if necessary.

Third, ergonomic experts can see how you place your computers, your workstations, and how you're driving. They are often the lifestyle experts. Overall, I think these professionals help.



## Life, Death, Fear, and Purpose

**THOMAS BRUHN** is a physicist at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam, Germany. He is a researcher and a bridge builder, helping experts and change-makers from all sectors of society to come together to explore the topic of sustainability, listen to each other, and develop solutions.

In part 2 of his conversation with JUDITH NELSON at the Spirit of Humanity Forum in Reykjavik, Iceland, Thomas talks about embracing mortality, finding a purpose, defining our role in the world, and the shift humanity is living through.

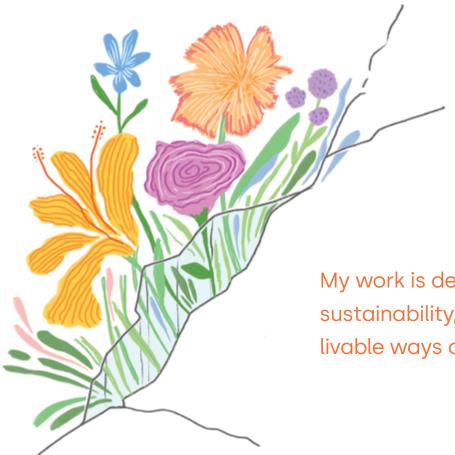
Q: In the Forum, you touched upon having no fear of death. You talked about the way the world is going, making a lot of people quite frightened. Can you tell us about that?

That's a profound topic. When I was nineteen, I did my civil service in a home for the elderly, where people spent the last months of their lives. I really connected with people there. My grandmother died when I was nine years old, but at nineteen I was better able to engage with old people.

Witnessing the final stages of their lives influenced me a lot. What was important for them? What did they reflect upon? Some had a hard time letting go because of unresolved relationships, or some trauma they hadn't worked through. This influenced my own reflection about what kind of life I wanted to live.

At nineteen, you're busy finding out how awesome life is, but it was also important for me to embrace and welcome mortality. I can't say that I'm not afraid of death. I want to experience life, and there is so much I haven't yet lived. At the same time I find comfort in the notion that this existence is finite and impermanent. I can't do anything about it anyway.

The question for me is, "What is the purpose of my time here, and how should it be fulfilled?" That gives me a good orientation and makes me take things less seriously. "What is my contribution? What feels most meaningful?"



My work is dedicated to sustainability, and to more livable ways of life.

Some people have a hedonistic attitude like, "I'm going to die anyway, so let's have a party as long as it lasts." That's not the kind of life I want, but it does help me to be aware it's finite.

My work is dedicated to sustainability, and to more livable ways of life. My life is my responsibility, and if I have lived the wrong life when I leave this world, it's only myself that I'm hurting. I'm also experiencing what's happening in the rest of the world, and there's so much suffering and destruction.

Loss of biodiversity is *de facto* a degradation of the aliveness in this world. It is not easy to say I'm not afraid, because so much is beyond me. I love this

world; it's beautiful. I love humans, and I also love what we can contribute to this world. It's more difficult to come to terms with the current crisis we're experiencing as a globalized civilisation.

Q: Do you have any idea of a way forward through that? I know it's a big question, but what can you contribute going forward? And how do you sustain yourself through all of this?

Ten years ago, my mind was on the big abstract topics like climate change, the technologies to mitigate climate change, global warming, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and so forth. I still see a lot of value in those developments, but I also realize that the world I experience is a manifestation of a certain culture, and this culture is a manifestation of a certain understanding of being human. How do I define what it means to be human? How does that drive me to consume my surroundings, and to sustain my own aliveness? That is a paradox in itself!

In the book *Ishmael*, Daniel Quinn writes, "You are captives of a civilizational system that more or

less compels you to go on destroying the world in order to live." This is a very profound refection for me. How do we define life if it is at the expense of everything around us, even at the expense of ourselves?

In the last ten years, I've gone through a shift in what I see as the next steps, and what my contribution can be. I see a different paradigm and





I want to be a watering can for the plans I see growing as seeds in the middle of concrete environments. I feel like I'm standing in the middle, keeping a crack open so that something can grow. a different culture emerging. Everywhere, there are young people and others who feel that our dominant culture doesn't provide a meaningful life. They are like small islands where different modes of living are practiced. Sometimes I wish I could live the life I experience in these islands, but I cannot. Maybe I am just too much a child of this civilization that is not in harmony.

My contribution is to connect these many islands, because they are often isolated and even suppressed. I enjoy connecting these marginalized change-agents, to give them a certain visibility, to show there is a potential for a different type of human life emerging, while the old one is reaching its limits. That's the role in which I see myself.

When I was fifteen, there was a popular game: "If you were a tool, what type of tool would you be?" I remember saying "a watering can." That's still how I feel twenty years later [Laughs]. I want to be a watering can for the plans I see growing as seeds in the middle of concrete environments. I feel like I'm standing in the middle, keeping a crack open so that something can grow, but I also feel my own limitations because I embody so much of the old paradigm. It's a challenge for me to let go of the way I have grown up. Does that make sense?

Every time I speak about it, I realize it's quite a tension I'm sitting in, but somehow I feel that the tension is exactly my role. It's the right thing for me to be in.

#### Q: Almost like a bridge, perhaps?

Yes, like a bridge or a gatekeeper.

Q: Do you do any practice to sustain your inner world?

Yes and no. There are many practices I find valuable. I have come into contact with different approaches since I was fifteen, but they never became part of my everyday life. Over the past couple of years, I have been practicing Mindfulness and Compassion Meditation, but not like some people do. You could say it's a moment-by-moment practice for me just to stay conscious of, "Am I the being I want to be? How purposeful am I being? How present am I?"

I don't want to push that into a corner of meditation and then go back to my work. When I have written thirty emails in a row, I sometimes notice I'm not writing as compassionately as I did in the beginning. Am I sensitizing myself to the quality I bring to those relationships and to those encounters?

Sometimes it is playing the piano, sometimes it is hiking, or sitting in a meadow and looking at a lake. I don't have a fixed routine, and at the same time I'm drawing on different experiences from people who have shared their practices with me. They are influencing the way I try to be present.

Illustrations by ANANYA PATEL

Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.

STEPHEN R. COVEY



## DEVELOP THE HABIT OF Making Great Decisions

DAAJI challenges us to think about how we make decisions, and shows us how a regular meditation practice can lead us to knowing right from wrong, naturally and easily, by listening to the heart and allowing it to guide our choices. ompound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. He who understands it earns it, he who doesn't, pays it." Sometimes, I think about this quote (often attributed to Einstein) in a different context: making good decisions.

On average, we make hundreds of decisions every day. What to wear? What to eat? How to put aside half an hour to help a loved one in need? What to say to a disgruntled customer? Which stock to buy? When we make good decisions, they have a compounding positive effect on our lives, and when we don't, we suffer the consequences.

Often, we think it's the big decisions that matter most. For example, whom to marry? Which career to choose? And so on. But decision-making is not a oneand-done deal. Decisions form a continuum, where many smaller decisions come before and after the bigger ones. When we steadily improve our batting average in making good decisions, the better we will be in achieving our goals. Meditation will help you improve your batting average. The more meditative your mind becomes, the better the decisions you will make. In 2011, researchers from Virginia Tech asked people to play the Ultimatum Game, which assessed the quality of decision-making<sup>1</sup>. They found that meditators consistently made better decisions and ended up with better outcomes than those in the control group. The meditators were more rational and reflective than those in the control group.

So, *why* does meditation make us better decision makers? There are many reasons and here are three big ones you can validate yourself:

#### A Meditative Mind Escapes The Gravitational Pull of Desires

To enjoy a panoramic view of the New York City skyline, would you prefer the first floor or the rooftop of the Empire State Building? The rooftop offers you a 360-degree view. *Rising above* improves visibility. The same goes for decision-making. To make a good decision, you first need to rise above the noise of your likes and dislikes to get a clear view. Rising above helps you have a better perspective. But what generally happens? The pulls and pushes of desires and emotions create gravity that prevents you from rising, so you see things from a lower perspective, without the whole picture.

Desire precedes any decisionmaking so it's important to acknowledge it. We are all familiar with it. For example, one moment we want to realize God, and the next moment an alert from WhatsApp catches our attention. Before we know it, we are busy watching another kitten video and scavenging the kitchen for a snack, while God patiently waits. See how small decisions sway us away from grand goals?

Meditation helps us rise above the noise and tap into the impulses of the heart that come from the deepest core of our being.

But those impulses, no matter how pure, encounter many layers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Kirk, U. et al., 2011. Interoception Drives Increased Rational Decision-Making in Meditators Playing the Ultimatum Game, *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, Vol. 5, 49. Frontiers.

#### INSPIRATION

of consciousness as they surface. If those layers are filled with imprints of desires, then the heart's impulse loses potency. Think of the gushing up of the mineral kimberlite from the core of the Earth. As it rises, cutting across layers of the Earth, if it's blocked and loses speed it becomes graphite. If it moves unhindered, the same mineral becomes a diamond.

Meditation clears the way for the impulses of the heart to surface unobstructed. When we listen to those impulses and act, the decisions we make are good for us.

#### A Meditative Mind Looks Beyond Bias

In addition to desire, another factor in decision-making is bias. Our understanding and appreciation are based on our conditioning. Brain scientists like David Eagleman and others have done studies that demonstrate bias in people's empathetic responses according to their group allegiance, such as their religion<sup>2</sup>. When bias colors our thinking, we don't see things as they are. We see them as we wish them to be. Like the story of the blindfolded men trying to describe an elephant, we are all blinded by the many veils of our biases.

Meditation removes the veils. It moves us from pre-judging to seeing things as they truly are, so that we can decide based on clear perception.

## A Meditative Mind Is a Discerning Mind

It is well-known that when a person cannot make decisions and hesitates they feel restless. Sometimes you will see people who keep on postponing



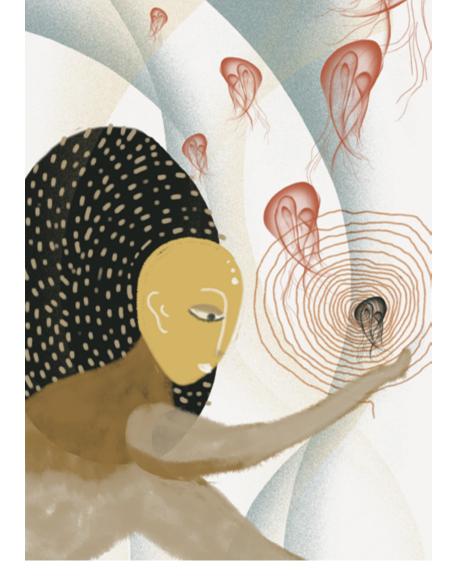
Meditation helps us rise above the noise and tap into the impulses of the heart that come from the deepest core of our being.

<sup>2</sup> Vaughn, D.A. et al., 2018. Empathic Neural Responses Predict Group Allegiance, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, Vol. 12, 302. Frontiers. Meditation clears the way for the impulses of the heart to surface unobstructed.

decisions, even with all the information at their fingertips. What happens? Peace eludes their mind. This inability to make decisions is due to a lack of clarity and discernment (known in Yoga as *Viveka*). Once a person has lost that discernment, it is hard for them to maintain their humanity, because the mind is always confused or turbulent.

One very important gift of a meditation practice is discernment. A meditative mind can quickly discern, "What is good for me? What





is evolutionary for me? What is ennobling for me?" When such clarity exists, decisions are made faster, even with less information.

#### The Guidance of Wisdom

While all meditative practices can improve decision making, Heartfulness offers something more. It helps you leapfrog to the correct decision without all the intermediary steps. As if moving at warp speed, you can look beyond desires, break through biases, and immediately tap into the intuitive guidance of the heart. The reason why the contemplative practices of Heartfulness equip you with decision-making superpower goes back to Maharishi Patanjali's Yoga Sutra:

#### Hridaya chitta samvit

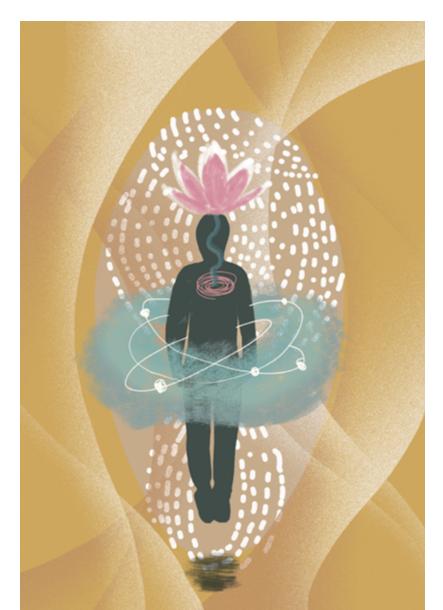
*Hridaya* means heart, *chitta* means consciousness, and *samvit* means wisdom and understanding. When we meditate on the heart, it results in the understanding of the mind and consciousness.

May 2022

#### INSPIRATION

When you meditate on the heart, it creates a hyperloop, a guidance system from within, so that decisions can come to you very fast. It is also a bridge that connects consciousness with the Source.

When you meditate on the heart, it creates a hyperloop, a guidance system from within, so that decisions can come to you very fast. Early on, you may not feel confident in following these insights, but over time, as you listen to the inner guidance, you will develop more confidence in the inner radar. Through meditation, you will be guided from within, especially about what not to do.



Here is a simple exercise:

First, think of a decision you made in your life that you felt was wrong or that you regret.

Now, think of a decision that felt good and right.

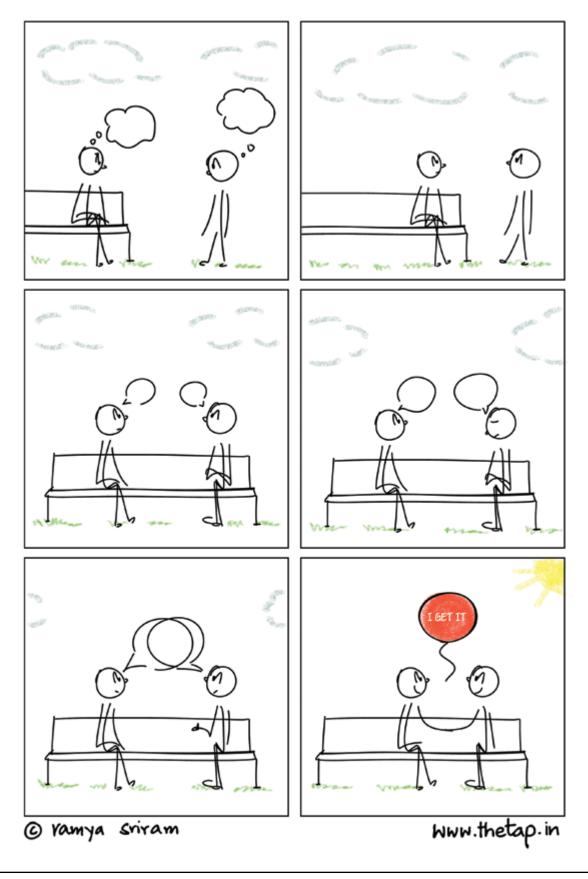
Reflect upon them. What do you discover?

Are you able to see that when the heart guides you, and when your mind agrees with your heart, your decisions are correct? I hope you experience this for yourself.

Coming back to the quote at the beginning of the article, one of my meditation trainers also used an example from finance. He would say, "In finance, we invest principal and we get interest. In meditation, we invest interest and become principled." I pray that you will meditate with ever growing interest and make decisions that are ennobling and evolutionary.

Illustrations by JASMEE MUDGAL

## MENTAL HEALTH

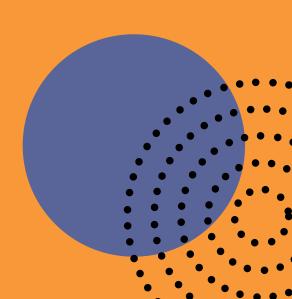




thought in action

Culture is simply a shared way of doing something with a passion.

**BRIAN CHESKY** 





# What Is Your Path of Change?

#### PART 3

**TAMI SIMON** is the founder of multimedia platform, Sounds True, and the educational program, *The Inner MBA*. Tami has grown Sounds True into North America's leading publisher of spoken-word spiritual teachings, and one of the world's first organizations to operate along genuinely integral principles, with the emphasis on "multiple bottom lines" of purpose, profit, people, and planet.

In part 3 of this interview with EMILIE MOGENSEN of the Heartfulness Institute, Tami speaks about bringing transformation through business, somatic spirituality, and emotional intelligence.

### Q: Is business the place to change the world?

I don't really buy into that. I know a lot of business people who say this, and you could make a case, because entrepreneurs are intensely innovative and have great potential when it comes to solving problems. Take, for example, climate change. We certainly can't wait for the political bodies to solve anything, so the business sphere had better come up with some really creative solutions. I'm behind the case.

But I deeply believe that whoever you are, wherever you are, in education, a police officer, or a medical person, that is your place for change. I happen to be a business person. I spend my days with teams to create new products with educational and transformational value.

I want to transform the world. If each one of us took it upon ourselves to say, "This is where I walk, let me transform that," that's powerful. The path of conscious evolution is about committing to our path.

Q: I am inspired by your approach to somatic spirituality, "checking in with your body." I come from a spiritual community and have practiced meditation for 27 years. God bless that. I have also experienced a lot of "spiritual bypassing," both in myself and others. Sometimes the integration with the body is lacking. It's new to me to dive so deep into this embodied spirituality, as we do in your program. Let me also link it to what you said about tricking each other's shadow sides at work, and feelings being the language of the body, according to Dr. Joe Dispenza. Can you put some words on somatic spirituality?

First, thank you for asking. This is something really important to me. When people are first interested in a spiritual path they read a lot of books, and they have a lot of ideas, and that's okay. But it's not the depths that happen in our somatic experience. What I mean by "soma" is what you can sense and feel, not only in your physical body but also in your energy body, which surrounds your physical body.

#### WORKPLACE

It's the space around the heart where you feel in people what is actually going on. You can feel people who have a beautiful and open heart from 50 feet away. They are so bright and vibrant and you just wanna hug them.

Our belly is another energy center, and when the belly is open, that's when you feel someone is really grounded. There's something about that person that is like a mountain – a constancy. I love hiring people who have a very open belly center. It feels like they have a tap root into the Earth.

We also have a head center. That is a big open space, which is unbelievably brilliant. That's where ideas come that are not just a rethread of something else you have read. You may read something in a spiritual book and it will take you somewhere, but when your physical sense of openness in the head center is there, then you're getting downloads, streams of intuition, and light, and possibility, and you don't even know where they come from.

We do our spiritual practices with the awareness of our body and our subtle body, and we start tuning into them. The inner teacher opens up and becomes available. We no longer need to rely on books and teachings because we have an awake intelligent force within We do our spiritual practices with the awareness of our body and our subtle body, and we start tuning into them. The inner teacher opens up and becomes available. We no longer need to rely on books and teachings because we have an awake intelligent force within us. Grounded, openhearted, and original. We operate from an original place.

us. Grounded, openhearted, and original. We operate from an original place.

A better phrase for "spiritual bypass" is "conceptual bypass," because we're invested in concepts rather than present-moment direct experience.

Q: Please talk about your favorite quote from Herman Hesse.

It's a quote that meant a lot to me in my young life. It's from his book, *Demian*: "I wanted only to live in accord with the promptings which came from my true self. Why was that so very difficult?" In the 70s and 80s, being attracted to people of the same gender was something you kept to yourself. So, when I was a teenager, the promptings of my true heart weren't welcome and didn't fit into the rational. My family elevated the rational and was not as interested in intuition and emotions. That made me feel like an outsider. I have siblings, but I always felt outside, like I didn't fit in.

I didn't fit into any of the conventional career paths. It was very difficult to live according to the promptings of my true heart. I'm wired in such a way that if I'm not true to this soul force inside then I can't do it. Either I have to follow through and do the really difficult things or I will hang myself. As I won't hang myself, I have to do the difficult things. It's that intense for me.



#### WORKPLACE

Q: Google defines "emotional intelligence" as "To be able to hold space for your own and other people's emotions." Your team at Sounds True is about 150 employees, so how do you practice emotional intelligence at team meetings when difficult and emotional situations occur?

We can all be skillful about our emotions, both in our intimate and professional lives. We can't just puke all over people when we feel intense emotions, so we have to become processed enough to talk about our emotions and not necessarily from the emotion.

We are holding a bigger space and the emotion is arising in it and holds information. It has intelligence, it's a messenger, and it's important. And if we can talk about it skillfully, without much charge, our emotional intelligence can bring awareness of the person we are speaking with. It's really important to model ourselves with the people in the environment, and to translate as needed, to be well received, so that people can take in the intelligence of what we're saying.

For example, when you're really angry about something, it's almost always better not to say a lot. I have learned this lesson the hard way, like many people. It's better to say, "I'm feeling really angry



right now. I would like some time to sit with this, and I will get back to you when I feel more processed around it." Then, when I'm more processed, I can say, "This anger arose because ... It's clear where I need to draw a boundary. I want to share with you what this boundary is, why it's important to me, and what I am requesting for everyone here on the team."

Q: What do you feel if I say "nothingness"? How can people in a world full of "somethingness" be interested in nothingness?

What I like about the word "nothingness" is that it can't be pinned down. It can't be created as a solid anything. I like the pure openness, like an explosion of pure potential and possibility. As soon as you have a reference to a "something," it's limited. "Nothing" feels unlimited. I can see that it might feel depressing or blank to some people, but I experience it as a burst of light when you say it.

Q: Thank you from the heart, Tami. It was an honor and a dream come true to talk with you. Thank you so very much for your extraordinary work of disseminating spiritual wisdom into the modern world.

#### Thank you.

Illustrations by LITTLEWHALE

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#### JUST THINKING AND FEELING



DR. ICHAK ADIZES is an expert in change management for organizations. Here he shares some thoughts on why we celebrate diversity, cultural and otherwise.

am on a walking machine watching a screen. I am watching CNN. They have a program on diversity. It occurs to me that diversity is approached from a political and ethical angle – that it is politically correct to promote diversity, political in the sense that we are all equal, have the same rights etc., and ethically because it is immoral to discriminate. It occurs to me that a very important point is being missed: diversity is good for us. We should pursue diversity because it is a win-win proposition. It serves our self-interests. How? Start with the assumption that none of us is perfect. Thus, we need others to complement us. But to complement us, those "others" have to be DIFFERENT. Diversity, differences, are necessary for growth, for learning, for synergy. Diversity is the source of learning. Sameness is barren. Embrace diversity not only because it is politically and ethically correct, but because there is so much for you to learn and benefit from.

Years ago, I was listening to a blind person deliver a motivational speech. What impressed me was what he said to the audience: "I am blind from birth. I have a deficiency. But how about you? Do you have any limitation? How about some emotional limitation, or intellectual limitation?"

In other words, we are all "blind" in something. The question is: what are we doing about our limitations? This blind person was telling us how he became a motivational speaker, how he learned to play music in spite of being blind. How about you, me, anyone else? Who is the hero? Who can overcome their own liabilities?

I have a first cousin. His father and my father are brothers. He carries the same name as I do except that he spells it differently in English: Adijes. He was also born blind, and he won the world championship for blind sailing. Yes, there is such a competition that blind people hold annually. One year he won that world championship. He overcame his limits. Does that inspire you? Does that motivate you to overcome your limits too? It sure inspires me.

We learn from diversity because "other" people have, by definition, what we don't have. African American people and Africans in Africa have a soul in their laughter, in their music, in their dance, that we Western whites have lost. Again, diversity enriches. I find gypsies inspiring, too. They live the moment. They know how to enjoy life to its fullest. There is much to learn from them.

For me, this learning does not stop with people who are physically handicapped, and those whose color, religion, or sex is different. We can learn from horses, from dogs, and from stones. Once, when studying a stone, I realized the difference between chronological age and conscious age. We humans can impact our emotional age by being conscious. Stones, trees, and animals have no control over their age. I can be chronologically 75, but feel and act as if I am 45, which I do. I can control my age by what I eat, how stressful my life is, and what I do, etc. When I love what I do, I do not age so fast.

We can learn from everything. The Old Testament says: go to the ant, you lazy bum, and learn from its ways. Diversity is the source of learning. Sameness is barren. Embrace diversity not only because it is politically and ethically correct, but because there is so much for you to learn and benefit from.

Just thinking and feeling, Dr. Ichak Kalderon Adizes

<u>https://www.ichakadizes.com/</u> post/on-diversity If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.

MARGARET MEAD

**5** Aspects of Cultural Diversity

The elting

**ELIZABETH DENLEY** looks back on her childhood, which kindled an awareness and interest in cultural diversity. She offers some key learnings from those formative years that have helped her to embrace the possibility of humanity coming together in kinship, mutual love and respect.

rowing up in a steel town in Australia after the Second World War was a smorgasbord of multicultural diversity. My neighbors and school friends were from many parts of the world, including China, Lebanon, Italy, Greece, Croatia, Israel, Palestine, Russia, Germany, Poland, and the UK. By my teens that had expanded to Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and by my twenties to all countries of the world. Back then, Australia was known as the Lucky Country as there was work for everyone. That does not mean racism and prejudice were absent, especially for Indigenous Australians. As a melting pot it was still a work in progress, with a lot of teething problems that are still being resolved today.

The Steelworks was a place for migrant workers, so over 50% the town's population was composed of new arrivals, and wave after wave from other shores joined the workforce as I grew up. While the adults didn't always get on, we children adapted to each other's ways very quickly. We shared each other's food at lunchtime, climbed the same trees, played softball and netball together, and laughed at jokes and common experiences. By the time I finished school, the first thing I did was travel to other continents to learn more about their richness of culture and history.

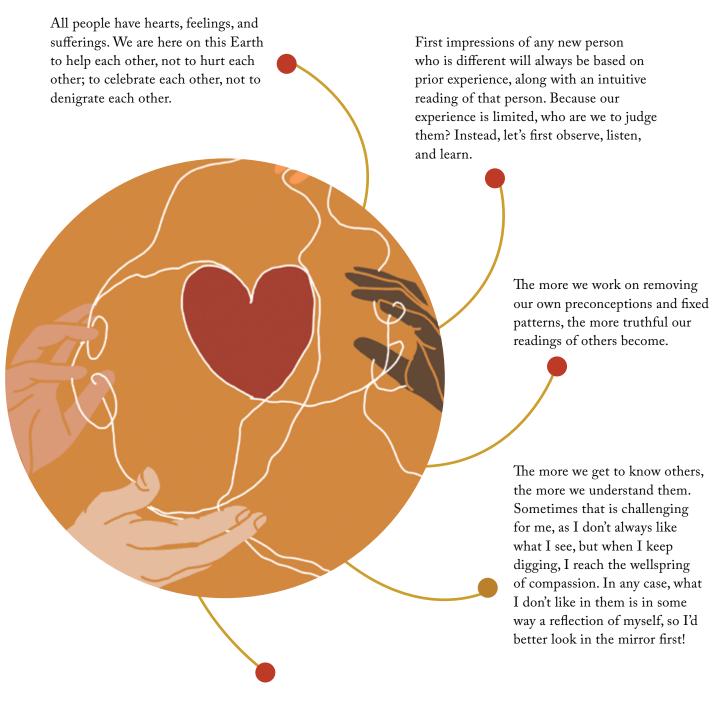
Together we were creating a multicultural society, without realizing how the experience was also forming us. My first experience of pizza was from Stephan Gimpelli's lunchbox in grade 3. My first experience of falafel and hummus was at a neighbor's home, and the backyards of my school friends were filled with bok choy, olive and pomegranate trees, mangoes, and vineyards.

Looking back, I now appreciate with gratitude this formative awakening. The diversity was rich, not only in food, but also in customs, language, religion, and culture.

On top of that, we were thrown together because of the local ethos of doing things in teams. We had to get along: choirs and orchestras, drama, sports, and even academic work were all dependent on teamwork. Our culture didn't encourage individuals to shine – we either all shone together or no one shone.

Of course, there were many things not to like, to rebel against at the time, but looking back, those formative years gave us an openness to people of all cultures. I have since understood that this dynamic is characteristic of new societies, without much hierarchy and tradition. While it has its drawbacks, it is filled with opportunity and possibility.

Recently, I met up with some of my old school friends, and it was a wonderful connection after so many years. I realized that we had shared experiences during a pivotal and formative time in our lives. We had flown in different directions after school – different places, different careers, different family experiences. But our shared story is still there, and we laughed and reminisced about times past in a way that awakened a great sense of belonging. What did that melting pot instill in me about diversity from an early age?



If we are to get through hard times, we will do it better together.

Illustrations by JASMEE MUDGAL



KALYANI ADUSUMILLI grew up in a minority group in the United States, straddling cultures, learning how to fit in, and later learning how to accept the traditions of her heritage. Today, she is watching her children going through the same process, shifting their cultural identity, as they head toward adulthood in the melting pot of a multicultural society.

o I consider myself Indian or American? That's a question Indian-Americans commonly grapple with as they try to navigate the two cultures that influence and impact their lives. "I'm American, Mom!" or "I don't like Indian food!" are sentiments that I've heard frequently from my children. There's my youngest, who once curiously told my sister-inlaw, to her extreme consternation, "I'm not Indian. I'm half-Mexican and half-American!" While I knew that his comment stemmed from the adoration he felt for one of my close friends, who is Mexican, and like his surrogate aunt, I felt guilty, thinking that I had failed to instill in him a sense of pride for his own Indian culture. Then there's my oldest, who traveled to India twice and readily embraced the culture and food as a child. but now avoids Indian food like the plague! He'll squawk about

mild spices in the occasional curry, and then shrug when I watch him munch on hot Cheetos and Takis. Where did I go wrong, I wondered until I considered my own shifting cultural identity, and its gradual progression and transformation from childhood through adulthood.

Born in India and raised there for six years before joining my family in the United States, I naturally identified more with my Indian roots, at first. Not quite fluent in English and accustomed to a different set of societal customs, I had to both learn and unlearn to assimilate into Western culture. No longer could I run freely around town barefoot, nor did I see cows and goats wandering around everywhere unrestrained. But before long, the Western influences took hold of me and I morphed into a fusion of East and West.



My exposure to the American culture came predominantly from mastery of the English language and acculturation, as my parents only spoke English at home. They would later regret that when they recognized I could no longer speak my native tongue fluently.

Yet, my parents did ensure that my sister and I learned Hindu traditions and regularly participated in the local Indian community. I happily took dance lessons in Bharatanatyam, relished our summer trips to India, and ate Indian food daily and without complaint as a young girl.

By the time I was old enough to care about the opinions of my peers, I became self-conscious about my ethnicity. Suddenly, I felt painfully aware of the stares that strangers directed at my mother when she wore a sari at the grocery store, and even more so if I had to appear in public wearing traditional garb. Cringeworthy comments from strangers and friends like, "Is that blood on your forehead?" when seeing the red bindi on my forehead or "What tribe are you from?" fueled my self-consciousness and the feeling that we might as well have been aliens from another planet.

Often, my mother opened the windows when she cooked Indian food because of the pungent aromas in our house, and I remember my anxiety and embarrassment when a young American friend scrunched up her nose, questioning, "What's that smell?" As a minority population, inclusion is paramount. Even to the point of surrendering one's identity.

After four years of bland cuisine at college, I started craving my mom's flavorful South Indian food. I learned how to cook it myself and joined a social networking group for young Indian professionals. I began to truly embrace my ethnicity. Through personal growth and an increasing awareness of how diversity shapes us, I came to embrace my identity as an Indian-American woman and appreciate my rich cultural upbringing.

And so, when I reflect on my American-born children, who have yet to embrace their ethnicity and formulate their identity, I reassure myself that I have given them a good foundation and introduction to their Indian heritage. Since birth, they have had regular exposure to the Hindu culture whether through spending time with grandparents, visiting temples for religious occasions, reading folklore, or eating Indian food (even if they don't always relish it). Yet, they have also had exposure to many other cultures as well - Japanese, Brazilian, Australian, Mexican, and so on. I'm grateful that my son has experienced the Hispanic culture so intimately through my friend.



Only when they learn to appreciate that we are all born different from one another in so many beautiful ways, will they truly celebrate diversity and their own culture.

More importantly, I respect that my kids identify primarily as Americans, as they were born and raised in this country and have been immersed in American society. I have seen my children, nieces and nephews go through similar scenarios to those I did as a child. They gleefully ran into their grandmother's outstretched arms as little kids, but as they grew older, I watched them squirm uncomfortably seeing her familiar round figure, draped in a boldcolored sari, waiting to greet them at the bus stop. While saddened at this sign of passing innocence, I understood, knowing that they too would navigate the complicated

waters of growing up with a mixed cultural heritage, and confident that they would also come to proudly own their cultural identity, by choice and in their own time. Only when they learn to appreciate that we are all born different from one another in so many beautiful ways, will they truly celebrate diversity and their own culture.

So, the next time my college-bound son groans, "Oh no, not Indian food!" or my youngest declares on St. Patrick's Day that he's half-Irish, I'll smile, and patiently continue to watch their cultural journey unfold.

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#### JANE GOODALL

Photography by MONA MISHRA







DR. V. RAMAKANTHA shares some insights into the science, history and mythology of the Banyan tree, also known as the Bengal Fig or Indian Fig. The Banyan is one of those mythical trees that has had an important place in the life and history of the people of India since ancient times. It is also home to many species of birds, animals, and epiphytic plants.

#### Description

The Banyan or Bargad tree, Ficus benghalensis L., is an evergreen with a deeply fluted trunk and horizontal branches that grow to huge proportions. Aptly called Bahu Paada in Sanskrit, meaning a plant with many feet, the Banyan has aerial roots, which grow down and penetrate the soil, supporting the massive weight of its spreading branches. With its canopy of thick, dark-green leaves year-round, the Banyan occupies more and more space every passing year. As flowering and fruiting take place across seasons, it offers food for many species, making it an ideal home for birds and small animals. This colossal ornamental plant is the National Tree of India.

#### The Banyan in Mythology and History

The Banyan is known in Hindu mythology as the tree for fulfilling wishes (*Kalpavriksha*), and the tree of life and fertility. With its unique ability to spread in an ever-widening circle with the help of its aerial roots, the tree achieves a long lifespan. In this world of evanescence, it has become a symbol of stability, constancy, and permanency, and represents immortality.

The Vedic fire ritual known as Yagna, is a process of burning plants and herbal medicines to purify the environment, and the twigs of the Banyan tree are invariably used. The sacredness of the tree also comes from the ancient stories that it was the residing place of Lord Kubera, the god of wealth, and Lord Krishna used to rest on Banyan leaves.

The tribal people of Maharashtra and Telangana, Pardhans, who are traditionally bards and singers, consider the hanging roots of the Banyan tree to be the long and matted hair of their Guru, Jalranda. The story goes that after he passed away, Guru Jalranda was buried under a Palasa tree (Butea monosperma), and later a Banyan tree emerged out of his grave. In a dream, Guru Jalranda In this world of evanescence, the Banyan has become a symbol of stability, constancy, and permanency, and represents immortality.



revealed to his eldest son that the Banyan emerged out of his body, and he commanded that it must be served and revered. Needless to say, Pardhans hold Banyans tree to be sacred and protect them.

For some tribal people of Odisha, the trees are shrines of the gods, and it is sacrilege to cut them. Such belief is prevalent amongst most communities of India.

The Banyan has been introduced into several other countries in Asia. It is considered sacred in the Philippines, where many people believe that it is a home for both benevolent and evil spirits. It is customary not to point a finger directly at a Banyan tree, as it may offend the spirits dwelling in it, a belief often shared in South India. In Indonesia, the Banyan tree has become a symbol for unity and power. There, people have built shrines beneath gigantic Banyan trees.

A colossal Banyan tree begins its life from a minute seed, and as an epiphyte the plant grows on another plant. When the scarlet red fruits of the Banyan are enjoyed by birds and animals, those tiny seeds pass through their alimentary canals unharmed. The seeds germinate in cracks or crevices of other trees, which often results in the hosts' death. It is no wonder that in Buddhist literature the Banyan tree is often used as a metaphor for lust overcoming humans.

In 1989, a Banyan tree in Anantapur District of Telangana State, India, was recorded as the largest tree specimen in the world in the Guinness Book of World Records. Its canopy covered 19,107 m2 (4.721 acres).

#### Ethnomedicinal Uses

Parts of the Banyan are used in traditional medicinal practices, such as Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy. In Ayurveda, it is one of the *Pancha* 



The Banyan plays an important role in the treatment of diabetes, and gynecological and fertility issues.

*Valkala* (five barks) used in treating various human ailments. The Banyan plays an important role in the treatment of diabetes, and gynecological and fertility issues.

The bark is prepared as an infusion to be used as a tonic, while a decoction is used in treating vaginal problems. During pregnancy, the tender leaves are boiled in water and administered orally to strengthen the uterine muscles.

The bark and aerial roots are used in treating diabetes. The decoction is also gargled frequently to counter bad breath and mouth ulcers. The tender aerial roots are chewed and used as a toothbrush.

The aerial roots are also pounded and consumed with buttermilk to cure diarrhea, and the leaf buds are boiled in water for the same purpose. A paste made out of Banyan bark is a remedy for sunburn, as it gives an excellent cooling effect and reduces the burning sensation when applied.

It is considered to be one of the best remedies for controlling hair fall. 300 grams of dried and powdered aerial roots are immersed in one liter of coconut oil for fifteen days. After straining, some of the oil is applied to the scalp before sleeping and is washed out the next morning.

The milky latex of the Banyan is used to overcome bad breath, gum infections, and for strengthening loose teeth. The latex, which is obtained from the leaves or branches, is mixed with honey and applied to the gums, rinsing with lukewarm water after ten minutes.

A few drops of the latex are taken orally with milk in the treatment of bleeding piles. The milky latex is also applied to bruises and cracked soles, and to relieve rheumatic pains. Banyan fruit and its juice are used in rheumatism and also in cases of pain in the muscles and joints of the lower back (lumbago). The leaf powder mixed with coconut oil is applied to wounds. The fruits are eaten raw to cure problems relating to bile production and the bile duct. The seeds are used in curing excessive urination.

Nyagrodhadi Kashayam, Sarivadyasava, Ushirasava, and Paranthyadi Taila are some of the Ayurvedic medicines containing Banyan as a major constituent.

#### What does Science Know About the Banyan Tree?

An article published in the British Journal of Pharmaceutical and Medical Research (Tadulkar, 2015) supports the antirheumatic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-diabetic properties of bark extracts of the Banyan tree. A phytochemical investigation published in the International Journal of Pharmaceutical Research and Analysis (Shiva and Singh, 2018), revealed the presence of as many as 63 phytochemicals (including two new ones) in the tincture of the stem bark of the Banyan.

A number of scientific publications advocate the presence of many phytoconstituents with a wide spectrum of biological activities, justifying the use of different plant parts of the Banyan in combating various diseases, environmental stresses, and maintaining human and animal health. Most authors hold the view that a lot of research is still needed on this important plant.

### The Enigmatic Tree of Ecology

Recent ecological studies have also added to the mystery of this tree. The gigantic Banyan tree is entirely dependent on a miniature wasp for its perpetuation, and the wasp too cannot survive without the Banyan trees. Only one species of wasp, Eupristina masoni, can pollinate the inverted flowers or synconium, which are concealed within the figs. The intricate relationship between the mighty tree and the miniature insect serves as an extraordinary example of adaptation and co-evolution between plants and animals. In fact, the Banyan does not yield viable fruit in cold

A lot of research is still needed on this important plant. countries where the wasp does not exist.

#### Other uses of the Banyan

The wood of the Banyan is used for door panels, well curbs, furniture, and boxes. Paper is made from the bark and the leaves make good fodder. The sap is used to produce shellac, a strong adhesive. It can also be used to make surface-finishers and for polishing brass and copper. In the olden days, during family gatherings and functions, people would eat on *Patravali*, organic disposable plates made with the leaves of selected trees like the Banyan. These plates are still very popular in rural regions of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, and Karnataka. In some parts of Karnataka, Banyan leaves are used for wrapping idli batter, which is later on steamed. The tender leaves of the Banyan are used as food.

#### A Recipe for Banyan Chutney

Chutney made of tender Banyan leaves and other ingredients is an excellent source of Selenium, an element that plays a crucial role in metabolism and thyroid function.

#### Ingredients

Grated coconut	1 cup
Tender Banyan leaves	1/4 cup
Cumin seeds	1 tsp
Peppercorns	1 tsp
Buttermilk	1 cup
Salt to taste	

Heat 2 tbsp of ghee in a pan and add cumin seeds and pepper corns. When they splutter, add Banyan leaves, and fry them over a low flame until they become crisp. Cool the mixture and grind them with coconut, adding a little water. Add the buttermilk. Season with mustard and curry leaves. Add salt to taste. It goes very well with steamed rice.

#### Propagation

Seeds from bird droppings serve as an excellent source for raising new Banyan plants. Branch cuttings can also be planted. There is also translocation – a massive Banyan tree that was rescued and translocated from the Thumkunta area of Hyderabad has bounced back to life in Kanha Shanti Vanam.

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Illustrations by KANIKA RAJ SINGH & JASMEE MUDGAL



oponic

#### SAIRAM REDDY PALICHERLA

is one of the founders of UrbanKisaan, creating a sustainable and safe future using hydroponics. They are creating local micro farms, with a low carbonfootprint, and igniting agri-entrepreneurs to bring positive change for humanity and the planet. Here he speaks with LEAH RICH about the work UrbanKisaan is doing, and Kanha Shanti Vanam as a model for feeding a whole community.

Q: Good morning Dr. Sairam. Thank you for taking the time to speak about hydroponics with us. Let's jump right in. To start, what got you interested in hydroponics?

The interest here at Kanha was led by Daaji. He wanted to explore various non-conventional and sustainable ways of growing food. He has been doing this for the last twenty years, in his backyard in the US. This has been his passion – exploring alternative ways of growing food.

Prior to seventy years ago, food was nutritious and safe, but the quantity was not enough to feed the people of the world. There was a desperate need to increase the productivity, so fertilizers, pesticides and hybrid crops were introduced. This is also when the needs of the

Now we satisfy our hunger but not our nutritional needs. That is where the challenges come. It's time to shift back to local food production – I call it micro farming.

trader came into the picture – transportability, storability, shelf life, and packing in boxes became the focus. This happened at the expense of the nutrient content of the food and the needs of the consumer.

In the last seventy years, there's been a complete shift in food growing. Now we satisfy our hunger but not our nutritional needs. That is where the challenges come. It's time to shift back to local food production – I call it micro farming.

Q: So how does hydroponics fit in? I thought the nutrients in our produce come through the soil, but in hydroponics there is no soil. Can you explain?

Our understanding of the source of a plant's nutrition is



also limited. When testing the nutrition content of crops grown in soil and the same crops grown hydroponically, is there any difference?

When we measure vitamins, minerals, macronutrients, protein, carbohydrate and fat, research shows that plants can take up these nutrients equally well from soil and the liquid formula used in hydroponics. A large body of research shows that there is no difference.

Q: How do you ensure the required nutrients are in the hydroponic formula?



There are three groups of minerals that a plant uses to meet its basic needs: macro minerals, micro minerals and major minerals. These are all present in the hydroponic formula. The rest happens inside the plant. Vitamins are manufactured inside the plant. Plants also require light and sufficient carbon dioxide to grow. Q: So, what about meeting the need for light for plants grown hydroponically?

There are two systems of hydroponics. One uses natural sunlight, for example, a hydroponic tower on a balcony, or a greenhouse The other type is for growing crops indoors, using artificial light. Typically, LED lights are used. They are low power consuming light sources and the beauty of LED is you can define the spectrum of light that they emit.

Plants require different spectra of light for different purposes. For example, photosynthetic activity

requires red light. Hormonal activity requires blue and yellow. We can measure how much light a plant needs for a particular spectrum and provide it using LED lights.

Q: Coming to the individual level, why do you feel is it important for households to grow food hydroponically?

Six or seven years ago, I came across a news article that was published by an agriculture university, showing the levels of pesticides and heavy metals in the food we consume. They went around the city of Hyderabad and collected samples of vegetables from organic stores, supermarkets, roadside shops, and farmer's markets. They analyzed the samples in their laboratory, and to my surprise and agony, all the vegetables were heavily contaminated with heavy metals. 45% of the produce from organic stores was contaminated with pesticides, and 100% was contaminated with heavy metals.

This is because the areas where food was grown were near polluting industries. And the surrounding soil and water body in every city, whether it be a reservoir or a canal is being contaminated by the toxic effluents. This contaminated soil and water is being used to produce the crops we are consuming. So even if produce is grown using an organic methodology, without chemical pesticides and fertilizers, the soil and water used to grow them is polluted. It's impossible to avoid heavy metals like arsenic and lead.



This is where I see a huge need for home growers. And hydroponics is one method we can all use. I call our home growers micro farmers.

Q: What are the advantages of hydroponics? Can you offer some tips and guidelines for people who are reading this and interested in starting a small hydroponics system at home?

It requires very little water, and you can automate it. If you go away on vacation, your crops can be watered while you are away. It doesn't need much space. You can easily grow the leafy greens required for your household. All you need is a roof top or balcony that receives three to four hours of direct sunlight per day. You need four by five feet of space. If outdoor space is not possible, you can use an indoor kit with LED lights.

Now, expanding this to the community level, at Kanha we have enough hydroponically grown produce to meet the demands of the community.

#### Q: Are you aware of other communities setting up similar operations?

This is a growing field. People are overcoming their doubts about hydroponically grown vegetables, as they learn about it and taste the produce. In Singapore, for example, where they have very little land to grow vegetables, they use rooftops to grow their vegetables hydroponically. We call them rooftop farms.

Q: This seems like a replicable model in urban areas worldwide.

Yes, definitely. It is being well accepted worldwide.

On the commercial side, our first farm at Urban Kisaan was a rooftop farm in the heart of the city of Hyderabad. This is where we demonstrated that it can be part of smart city planning.

At Kanha, we have built six rooftop greenhouses. Different systems are being used to grow different types of food. We're growing many types of leafy greens, tomatoes, eggplants, capsicums, and hot peppers. We can grow anything we wish.

The cost of the setup is an investment, but I'm sure in the near future governments will offer incentives and subsidies.

### Q: What about universities and corporations?

SR: University hostels are asking for vertical farms to be installed. And corporates are asking them for their employee restaurants. Generally, they prepare fresh food, such as salads.

Supermarkets are also interested. The indoor kits are being installed in the supermarkets so that



consumers harvest directly from there.

In terms of environmental impact, these initiatives are doing two very important things:

- 1. They are cutting off the logistics component of food production. This reduces the carbon emissions as there is no transportation involved.
- 2. There is no wastage either. In typical farming operations, up to 40% of the food grown is wasted before it reaches the consumer.

Hydroponics is reducing both carbon emissions and wastage.

Earlier we had backyard farming. That is becoming more difficult these days as we don't have much time to devote to it, and there is a lack of space in our urban areas. If you have the space and the time, there is nothing like it. But if you don't, you can try hydroponics as a micro farming option.

It's time to promote micro farming, to decentralize farming. Micro farming cuts down wastage, and allows you to grow safe, nutritious food even in urban high-rise environments.

Q: Dr. Sairam, thank you so much for this eye-opening conversation.

Photographs courtesy of URBANKISAAN

# Annadata Suraksha Abhiyaan

A tailor-made insurance initiative to financially secure farmers and growers against farming risks.

Samunnati has launched this campaign to provide insurance for over 50,000 smallholder farmers who are part of its FPOnEXT program. In the coming year, Samunnati plans to extend this insurance benefit to over 200,000 farmers by amplifying their crowdsourcing campaign in partnership with other ecosystem players.

It is estimated that an average of 2,080 agricultural accidents occur daily, resulting in around 120 fatalities. It goes without saying that damage to the farmers also affects their dependents. With low price realization from their farming business, it becomes even more difficult for the farmers to take care of the hospital expenses and their dependents during these events. Hence, farmers need access to tailor-made insurance coverage. Sadly, for most rural Indians, access to clean drinking water, children's education, and marriage

are still priorities, so many remain unconvinced about the benefits of taking out insurance and are unwilling to pay for it.

Through the Annadata Suraksha Abhiyaan, Samunnati's vision is to insure Indian farmers against the vulnerabilities and risks associated with farming, as well as drive more awareness and adoption of insurance among India's agrarian communities. The insurance will initially provide coverage up to 50,000 Indian Rupees for each farmer and will be offered free of cost via the FPOnEXT platform. It shall cover over a dozen risks, such as accidental death, permanent or partial disablement, accident and hospitalization, fractures, burns, vector borne diseases, and emergency ambulance charges. Children's education and marriage expenses have also been included in the insurance.

Samunnati will act as the facilitator and the promoter of the Annadata Suraksha Abhiyaan, with NAFPO as a supporting partner and a Sattva as implementation partner. It will be launched on 2 October, Gandhi's birth anniversary, as a small tribute to the "Father of the Nation," who set an example by addressing the most needy and vulnerable. Choosing to lead by example, and with the support of its employees, Samunnati has initiated funding the insurance premium of 10,000 farmers for their initial cover. Over the next few months, the plan is to expand the coverage to at least 200,000 farmers. With this campaign, Samunnati's vision is to create a national movement to help free India farmers from the risks that hinder them in their day-to-day life.





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### **AN ART ESSAY**







CLAYTON JOHN writes about his approach to art and spirituality and the techniques he is using to create his latest series, *Imaginata Australis*.

A wise person once told me that the artistic inclination stands just shy of the spiritual. Unfortunately, for many years I perceived that comment in a negative light, construing it to mean something akin to "a pursuit of the artistic is less than ideal and hence pointless." As I've grown older, I've slowly come to see that it is, in fact, the necessary integration of the artistic aspects of myself that permits expansion into the spiritual realm. It is as if the artistic is the apex of the material manifestation, accepting the limitations of that realm. As a consequence, I accept myself as also being limited. This is okay. It means I can fly free into my spiritual

#### CREATIVITY



self. It has been a gift to accept the limited self through art, and in so doing, permit the unlimited self, the spiritual self, to fly unshackled. If, by grace, treasures from the brighter side are brought back, they might be rendered material.

Currently I am creating a series of works that I see as "landscapes of the mind." The series is called *Imaginata Australis*, which translates as

Imaginary Southern Land. It was prompted by the Covid lockdown and the realities of circumscribed travel.

I began to experiment, starting with the creation of backgrounds, for which I use a variety of mediums – plaster, slacked lime, oxide washes and pigment washes. I also began to "build" trees using whatever caught my eye on the permitted daily walks. I would cover these bush pickings with





beeswax, then use metallic gold pigment to rub into the wax, so that a high, golden sheen remained. I would then photograph these tree elements and the created backgrounds. I then bring these together into a digital collage. The fusion of elements that often stand at odds with each other is an aspect that attracts me in life, just as much as in art. Trying to make the disparate whole goes for myself as much as for the world outside.





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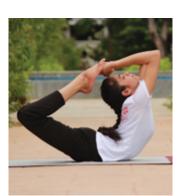
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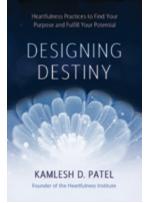
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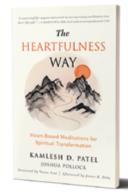
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