

heartfulness

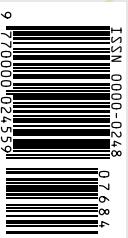
purity weaves destiny

Discovering State
and Condition:
The Two Axes of
Spiritual Evolution

DAAJI

When Fear
Becomes Power:
The Goddess
Who Transforms
Survivors with
Comics
RAM DEVINENI
& PURNIMA
RAMAKRISHNAN

Gut Health,
Immunity, and the
Power of Self-Care
DR. KUNAL DESAI &
DR. VIJAY



Discovery

Presenting a wonderful life journey written by Dr. Ichak K. Adizes

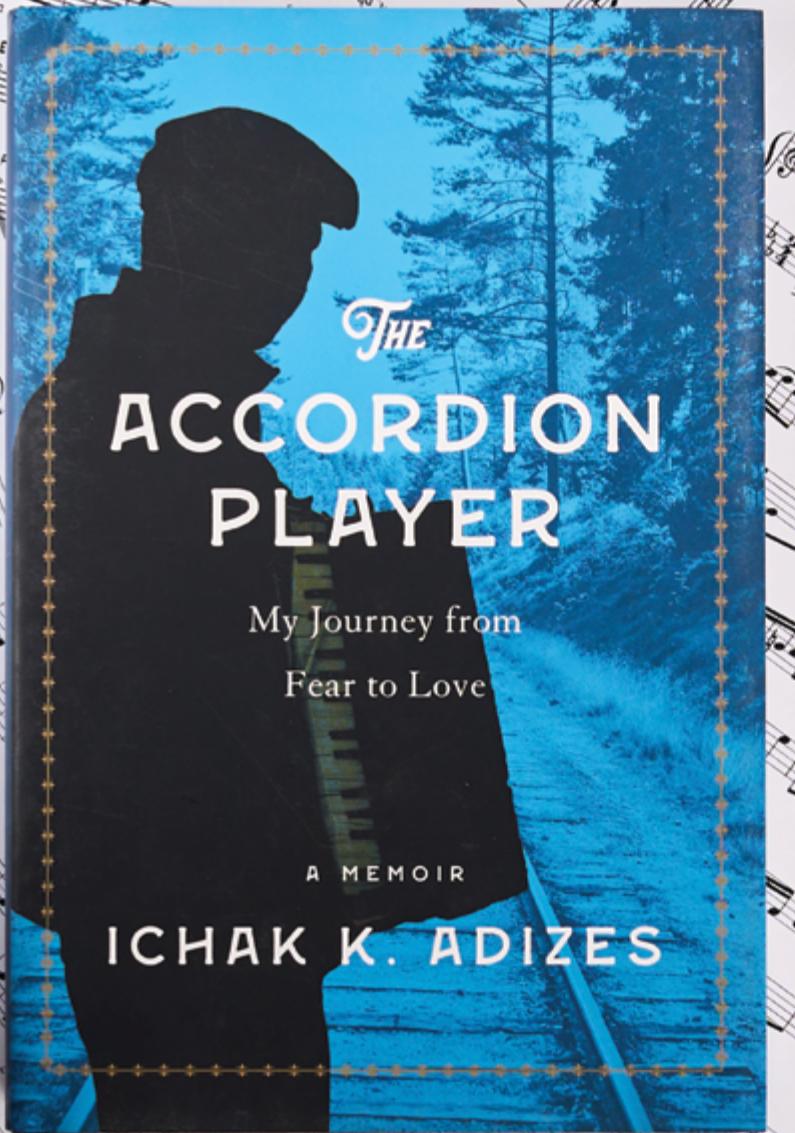
“My heart was in a cage. My life was a long struggle to find happiness, to overcome fear, and to find love I had lost. I did not give up, and that is what my story is about.

—ICHAK K. ADIZES

Seeing every challenge as an opportunity for growth, Dr. Ichak Adizes moved beyond a childhood marked by imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp and immigration to an unfamiliar country to discover the benefits of opening his heart.

Dr. Adizes's personal story is more than a string of external events that propelled him through adversity after adversity to become the insightful, compassionate person he is today. It is also a map of his journey into a heart which, like the accordion that he played to earn a living and put himself through school, ultimately expanded and opened up to the universal truths that connect us all in our humanity.

The Accordion Player is a compelling account of a remarkable life — an unvarnished view of a man whose decision to recognize the value of change and creative conflict allowed him to love. His story reveals the enduring human ability to turn possibility into reality.



Foreword by Daaji

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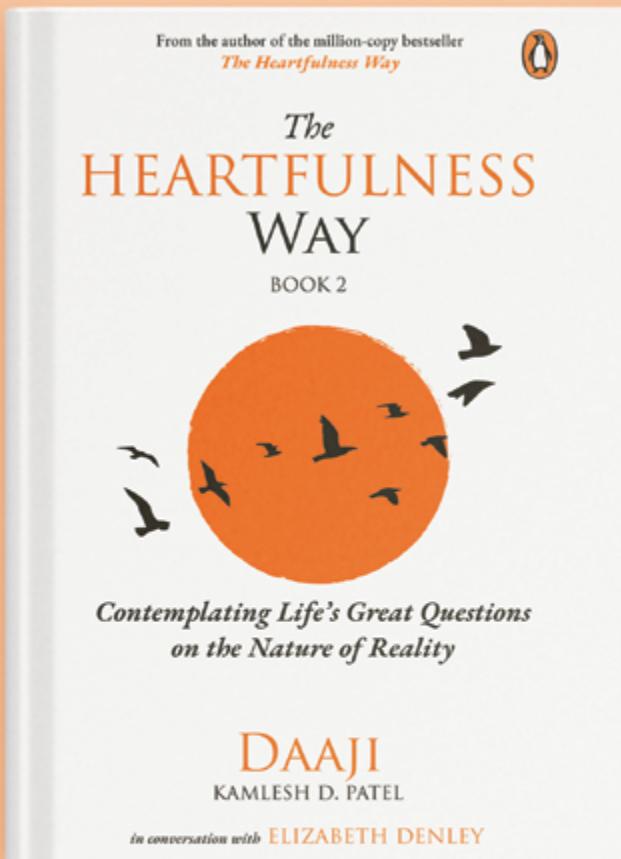


NEW RELEASE

From the author of the million-copy bestseller
The Heartfulness Way

The HEARTFULNESS WAY, BOOK 2

Contemplating Life's Great Questions on the Nature of Reality



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Daaji,
Author,
Global Guide of
Heartfulness



Elizabeth Denley
Author,
Spiritual Trainer in
Heartfulness

In *The Heartfulness Way*, Book 2, Daaji continues with the conversational format that he used so effectively in the previous volume, this time with Elizabeth Denley. Daaji takes us through the journey of expanding consciousness to the ultimate realization of the purpose of human life.

Essentially, *The Heartfulness Way*, Book 2 is a guidebook for any of us wishing to transform from our current state, with all our beliefs, limitations, fears and weaknesses, in order to realize happiness, balance and our full potential in this very lifetime.

Daaji outlines the approach required, which is clear and practical, maps out the journey and provides the practices and tools needed. He sheds light on the obstacles and the solutions to help us overcome them. His approach is simple and experiential and can be practiced by anyone with interest and willingness while working and living a normal family life.

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heartfulness
purity weaves destiny



Discovery

Dear readers,

In this issue, a squirrel's frantic search for shelter ends in an oak tree's hollow where home was waiting all along. We explore the gut's unexpected wisdom and the fig tree's hidden flowers. And we meet a filmmaker who confronts gender violence through comics that braid modern survivor stories with ancient mythology, turning shame into strength. These pieces remind us that discovery isn't always about finding something new—it's learning to see with fresh eyes what has been there all along.

Together, these contributions weave a tapestry of discovery and growth. Daaji shares insights into spiritual evolution, revealing transformation along two axes—state and condition. Liaa Kumar brings us Barnaby the squirrel's journey of patience and self-knowledge. Bhuvaragasamy Rathinasabapathy and Ananthaneni Sreenath reveal the hidden world of fig flowers, whose inward blooms, pollinated by wasps, sustain forests even in scarcity. Brinda Miller's reflections on her mixed-media art reveal a life shaped by creative openness rather than rigid recipes. Dr. Kunal Desai explains the gut as a second brain, a source of immunity, emotion, and clarity. Ravi Venkatesan shows how inner stability makes corporate politics navigable, while Joseph Robinson explores the tension between our longing for peace and our drive to achieve. Janmarie Connor recalls how childhood ocean stories readied her for spiritual surrender. Purnima Ramakrishnan traces Ram Devineni's evolution from filmmaker to comic creator, where mythology empowers survivors to transform fear into strength. Finally, Jagdish Naran introduces Ubuntu—the African wisdom holding that we know ourselves most deeply through one another.

Next month, we explore the theme of "Love." We welcome your submissions at contributions@heartfulnessmagazine.com.

Happy reading and may this journey of discovery inspire your own.
The editors



inside

self-care

Gut Health, Immunity, and the Power of Self-Care

Conversation between Kunal Desai and Vijay

12

Notes on Wanting More

Joseph Robinson

20

inspiration

Discovering State and Condition: The Two Axes of Spiritual Evolution

Daaji

28

When Fear Becomes Power: The Goddess Who Transforms Survivors with Comics

Interview with Ram Devineni

34

environment

Where Flowers Hide—The Mystery of the Fig

Bhuvaragasamy Rathinasabapathy and Ananthaneni Sreenath

64

workplace

Navigating Corporate Politics with Inner Stability and Strategic Awareness

Ravi Venkatesan

48

creativity

Life as Mixed Media

Interview with Brinda Miller

70

relationships

Ubuntu: Discovering Ourselves Through One Another

Jagdish Naran

56

children

Barnaby's New Home

Liaa Kumar

78



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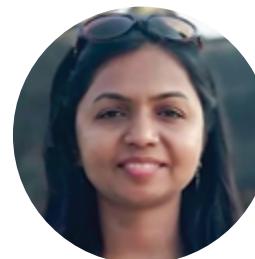
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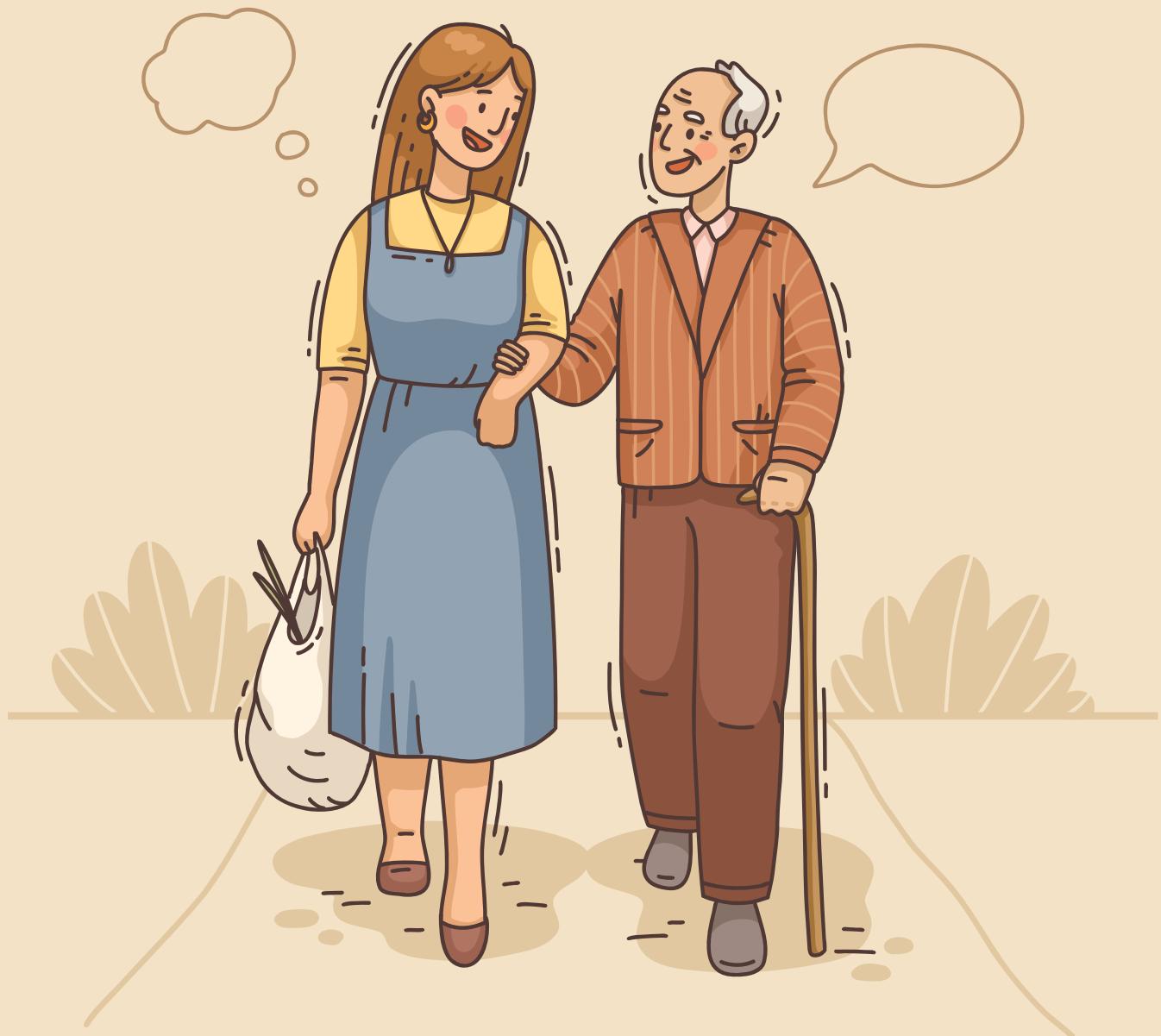
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self-care

“As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands, one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.”

MAYA ANGELOU

Gut Health, Immunity, and the Power of Self-Care

In this conversation, infectious disease specialist **DR. KUNAL DESAI** speaks with homeopath **DR. VIJAY** about how gut health shapes immunity, emotional balance, and overall well-being, highlighting how simple daily habits—from mindful eating to meditation—can support a healthier inner ecosystem.

Dr. Vijay: In today's fast-paced world, we often overlook one of the most intelligent systems within us: our gut. Once dismissed as just a digestive organ, it is now hailed as our second brain, housing trillions of microbes that influence our immunity, mood, metabolism, and overall health. To begin, could you explain what gut health is and why it is so important?

Dr. Kunal Desai: As an infectious disease specialist, when I think of gut health, I think of gut microbes—an area we've been understanding much better over the last ten to twenty years.

If I take you back in history, all physicians took the Hippocratic Oath. Hippocrates, a physician in the fifth century BCE, famously said that all diseases begin in the gut. For a long time, we didn't really understand why. Through recent research into gut microbes, we now see that maintaining normal homeostasis of gut microbes is key to many aspects of health.

This includes the lifestyle diseases we see so often today: obesity, diabetes, kidney disease,

hypertension, dysregulated immune systems, and cancers. All of these are connected to gut health. Because most diseases we face are now lifestyle-related, the gut is considered an epigenetic gateway: we influence it through our environment, thoughts and actions, emotions, and, of course, diet.

From this broader perspective, gut health is one of the keys to maintaining overall well-being.

V: It's interesting that you brought up how the gut influences thoughts and emotions. When we think of thoughts and emotions, we usually think of the brain and heart. Can you explain how this gut–brain connection works?

KD: In everyday life, we often describe it as a "gut feeling," right? For example, before giving a talk or presentation, when we feel anxious, we frequently notice discomfort in our stomachs. My little one will go to the bathroom twice before a tennis tournament. When we feel anxious, something clearly changes in the gut.



Scientifically, we now understand this as the gut-brain axis. Many mental health challenges, such as depression and anxiety, have a documented connection to gut microbes and gut microbial health.

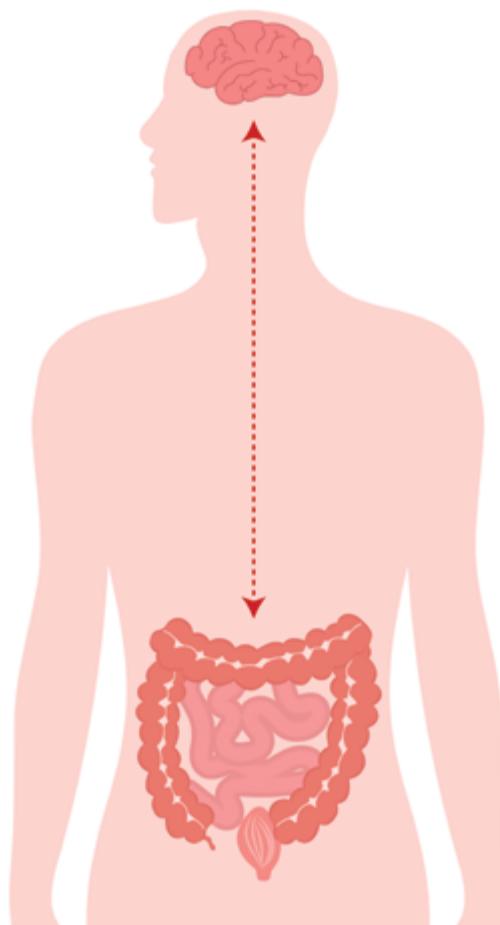
There's a helpful term here: dysbiosis. When gut homeostasis is disturbed—when there's an imbalance between healthy and unhealthy microbes—we call it dysbiosis. It's a subtle process that may not show obvious symptoms, but it's like something happening behind the scenes.

Dysbiosis leads to imbalances that also affect the brain. We even have that saying, especially among married couples, "A man's happiness is through his gut"—feed him something good, and he's happy. It sounds simple, but scientifically, we know that about eighty percent of serotonin is produced in the gut with the help of healthy microbes.

This is one example of how a healthy gut microbiome and hormonal balance influence mental health, mood, and emotions—the essence of the gut-brain axis. It also involves stress hormones, such as steroid hormones. Stress is one of the most common causes of dysbiosis. It is a precursor to many health problems, including mental health issues. The underlying mechanism often goes through this imbalance in gut microbes.

V: Since you've opened up the topic of stress, before we dive deeper into it, what symptoms should someone watch for if they're suffering from an unhealthy gut?

KD: That's a slightly difficult question because it depends on how narrowly we define gut health. From a simple, gut-focused perspective, you would see digestive symptoms—issues with bowel movements, discomfort, or irregularity.



Stress is one of the most common causes of dysbiosis. It is a precursor to many health problems, including mental health issues. The underlying mechanism often goes through this imbalance in gut microbes.

A common example is irritable bowel syndrome. We still don't fully understand it, but we know it's connected to the gut–brain axis and is associated with a person's mental well-being. IBS is a perfect example of how subtle gut dysbiosis can manifest as symptoms.

V: Does stress affect the balance between these negative and positive microbes in the gut?

KD: Yes, stress is considered one of the most common causes. Before going into the negative side, let me outline what a healthy inner environment for these microbes looks like.

Gut health starts from birth. As you rightly said earlier, we carry more microbial genes than human genes. If there are a million human genes in an individual, there may be around a trillion microbial genes.

Most of these microbes live in the gut, which is why we focus on gut health, though microbes also live on the skin and in the respiratory tract. The key aspects of gut microbes are:

1. The balance between healthy and unhealthy microbes, and
2. The diversity of those microbes

Even in agriculture, we talk about biodiversity; similarly, in the gut, higher diversity is better. It begins with the mother's microbial diversity at birth. It is shaped as we grow by our external environment and diet. Different microbes serve different functions, so a richer diversity supports better health.

As we age, both biodiversity and balance decline due to the effects of aging and disease. That's normal physiology. Anything that disturbs it further can cause trouble.

There are three main reasons for disturbance:

1. Stress
2. Non-judicious use of antimicrobials—this begins even with how food is grown. Antimicrobial use in agriculture affects soil biodiversity, which in turn affects us.
3. Diet—the most critical factor

Stress releases corticosteroids and other stress hormones, which negatively impact the gut microbiome. So yes, stress plays a vital role.

V: That's interesting. And since you brought up food while addressing that question, what are some top foods you would recommend that support a healthy gut?

KD: There are two aspects. One is the pre-existing environment, and where your food comes from, which is often outside your control. The other is your diet. One major influence is a high-fiber diet. Fiber is food for healthy microbes; we often call it prebiotic. You can also take probiotics—foods containing live microorganisms, usually fermented foods.

Many South Indian foods are fermented. Yogurt is a fermented food; it helps, though it has limitations. So, one aspect is food that provides living microorganisms, such as yogurt, fermented dishes, kefir in the U.S., and so on.

The second, and probably more important, aspect is keeping existing microbes healthy, so they multiply on their own when we feed them the right food: high-fiber foods like salads, vegetables, and fruits.

I used to primarily advise patients on yogurt or kefir. But as I learned more, I realized a high-fiber diet is the key. If you look at cardiologists'



When you look for probiotics, don't focus only on the number of organisms listed on the label. What matters more is the diversity of organisms—the different strains combined. As I said earlier, diversity is the key, not just numbers.

recommendations for heart health, they also talk about high-fiber diets. One reason is that fiber positively influences the gut microbiome.

V: As you said, over the last few years, terms like prebiotics and probiotics have moved from research labs into our everyday conversations—from yogurt labels to wellness blogs. Beyond the buzz, can you help us understand precisely what prebiotics and probiotics are and how they contribute to our gut health and immunity?

KD: A prebiotic is simply food for these microorganisms, and it usually needs to be rich in fiber. Vegetables and fruits are good examples. Increasing their intake in our diet provides us with prebiotic-rich foods.

Probiotics from food sources have more limited options—yogurt and other fermented foods are the main ones. There are also probiotic supplements available over the counter or from pharmacies, which are fine if chosen wisely.

When you look for probiotics, don't focus only on the number of organisms listed on the label. What matters more is the diversity of organisms—the different strains combined. As I said earlier, diversity is the key, not just numbers.

V: That's interesting! Yes, diversity truly is key. And in a world full of health trends and supplements, it's often the simple, consistent habits that make the biggest difference—especially for gut health, where everything from how we eat to how we manage stress matters. Our daily routines silently shape our internal ecosystem. What are some simple, practical daily habits one can adopt to maintain a healthy and balanced gut?

In my view, a balanced state of mind naturally leads to a more balanced diet. Then it becomes a virtuous cycle that supports a healthy lifestyle. Everything starts with thoughts and feelings, which then lead to action. If we can regulate our thoughts and feelings, it becomes easier to take the right actions with the right understanding.

KD: I see two main aspects. The first is stress management—anything that influences your state of mind and mental well-being. We know that someone with chronic stress is more likely to consume high-carb, less healthy food. That becomes a vicious cycle.

Suppose we tell someone to exercise moderately, but their mental state isn't supportive of it. In that case, exercise feels like a burden, and they won't follow through. So first, we need ways to cultivate good mental well-being.

The second aspect is diet, which we've already discussed. In my view, a balanced state of mind naturally leads to a more balanced diet. Then it becomes a virtuous cycle that supports a healthy lifestyle. Everything starts with thoughts and feelings, which then lead to action. If we can regulate our thoughts and feelings, it becomes easier to take the right actions with the right understanding.

Information is widely available today; implementation is the challenge. Simple meditation practices are a first step to regulating



the mind. Once that is in place, everything else falls into place more easily.

V: It's fascinating that you brought up meditation and its importance. In recent times, practices like meditation have been linked not just to mental peace but also to physical health, including gut function. The mind and gut seem to be in constant resonance. In your experience, does meditation help the gut feel better or function more smoothly?

KD: Definitely. Let's think a little outside the box. We live with millions of microbes, and they resonate with our feelings and emotions.

A simple example: depending on my state of mind and inner balance, I see my kids behaving differently. We've all noticed that our loved ones respond differently when we ourselves are in a good state of mind. That's outside of us. Now imagine that when we are poised and balanced, all the cells within us—including microbes—also resonate with that state. I'm sure there is a positive influence.

Some studies have examined vegan or vegetarian diets combined with meditation practices, measuring their impact on gut microbes.

Though these studies are difficult—because you must control for many factors, such as diet and environment—the limited studies we have show a positive impact.

During COVID, I had a unique vantage point as both an infectious disease specialist and a medical director for employee health. I worked closely with many healthcare workers during the pandemic. One of my observations was that stressed individuals who acquired the infection often had a worse clinical course; they were much sicker. Those who accepted the situation and stayed calmer seemed to do better.

I wondered why, and later came across studies showing that people with better gut microbial homeostasis did better with COVID. Remember, there was no single drug that reliably worked. Outcomes depended mainly on how an individual's immune system responded. People with pre-existing dysbiosis, and therefore an unhealthy gut microbiome, tended to have a more dysregulated immune response. Research also showed the virus presented itself to the gut.

So, if we encounter a disease process in a balanced, calm state of mind, the course of illness can be different compared to when we are anxious and stressed. A simple practice like meditation can change our response to disease! The pandemic gave us a large sample size to observe this.

From these examples, we can see that meditation practices influence immune responses, and gut microbes are central to understanding how that happens.

V: Yes, it certainly does. Thanks for answering that. And that was such a powerful reminder

of how a state of mind can directly influence health.

As you rightly pointed out, during the COVID period, those who stayed calm and centered often fared better than those caught in stress and panic. So, it's a clear reflection of how deeply interconnected our emotional resilience and immune system truly are. Thanks for pointing that out, Dr. Kunal. With this, I think we come to the end. Do you have any closing remarks you'd like to share with us on how we can continue to maintain gut health and, thereby, our mental well-being in the future?

KD: One last thought: the gut is an epigenetic gateway for human health. Genetics are what we inherit from our parents and other factors, but epigenetics—how genes are expressed—is influenced by our habits and lifestyle.

So, if we encounter a disease process in a balanced, calm state of mind, the course of illness can be different compared to when we are anxious and stressed. A simple practice like meditation can change our response to disease!



In today's world, managing daily stress and emotions with a simple heart-based meditation practice can do wonders when applied correctly. It can influence epigenetics.

This reminds me of something Daaji shared about his conversation with Babuji in the Heartfulness tradition: Babuji implied that these practices would influence human genetics. I used to wonder how. Looking at it now, when a simple practice changes our state of mind and being, it influences our epigenetics, and that, in turn, changes our health and well-being.

V: Thanks for sharing that. It deeply reinforces the importance of not just what we eat, but how we feel and how we live each day. How

we take life day by day, how we lead it, is essential in itself. Thank you, Dr. Kunal—your clarity, depth, and practical wisdom have truly helped us look at gut health from a whole new perspective, not just as a medical concept, but as a daily relationship with ourselves. And let's remember that our gut speaks in whispers, and the more we tune in with conscious eating, mindful habits, and self-care, the more vibrant and resilient our health becomes.

Stay curious, stay kind to your body, and let the microbes work their magic!

Notes on Wanting More

JOSEPH ROBINSON reflects on the tension between longing for peace and reaching for more—and what lies beyond that divide.

and most of the people I know, live with a kind of quiet tension. On one hand, there is the sincere desire to be more present, more grounded, less stressed. On the other hand, there is the nearly universal pull to have more, to do more, to become more.

In my own life, this tension has produced no small amount of suffering. My younger self dismissed ambition as shallow—until I found myself broke. As an adult, I am painfully aware that in the rush to push forward, I am sacrificing opportunities to nourish and deepen the relationships that matter most.

Trying to understand this conflict, I eventually realized that while these desires appear contradictory, they both arise from looking at our lives and concluding: “*This is not*

enough.” If we felt truly fulfilled, there would be pressure to neither improve our circumstances nor to escape them. We would simply inhabit the present moment. In this way, the desire for “more” and the desire for “peace” are twin responses to the feeling that our life, as it is, is incomplete.

In response, my first instinct was to pathologize striving as a kind of spiritual immaturity, but that idea didn’t survive much scrutiny. As a father and provider, I’m not sure the impulse to hustle is so maladaptive, and anyway, problems of scarcity are obviously real. When money is tight, relationships are strained, and when our habits have become confining, the impulse to dream bigger, get our act together, and work harder isn’t neurotic—it’s necessary. Moreover, where

would spirituality be without this “drive for more”? Without some internal unsatisfactoriness, how would anyone ever rise above their hedonic tendencies and commit to something larger?

The obvious problem with all this is that if we look closely, most of us can find a voice inside that is never satisfied, no matter what we achieve. This voice flows from our shame, or the belief that something is wrong with us—not for what we’ve done, but for who we are. This shame is one of the deepest and most isolating pains we feel, and our attempts to repress or outrun it tend to distort our lives in powerful ways. And when that distortion meets our natural drive to grow, our striving can easily become just another expression of “I am not enough.”



The obvious problem with all this is that if we look closely, most of us can find a voice inside that is never satisfied, no matter what we achieve. This voice flows from our shame, or the belief that something is wrong with us—not for what we've done, but for who we are.

If we cannot tell the difference between authentic striving—a way of honoring our potential—and neurotic striving—the hustle to outrun “I am not enough”—it is easy to spend years, decades, a lifetime running after something that is not actually the answer. As someone with plenty of experience on this front, I say this with compassion. Hopefully, you find the following distinctions as useful as I do:

Authentic Striving

“I am already enough. Growth is how I express my fullness.”

Aspect	What it Feels Like	What it Looks Like
Motivation	Inspired, curious, self-honoring	Growth aligned with values and joy
Relationship to self	Compassionate, safe, accepting	Kind, encouraging self-talk
Emotional tone	Steady, open, grounded	Enjoying the process
Failure	Feedback, learning	Reflection instead of self-judgment
Discipline	Self-respect, boundaries	Sustainable habits
Success	Celebration, gratitude	Sharing wins without comparison
Nervous system	Regulated, calm, creative	Consistency without burnout

Neurotic Striving

“I am not enough yet. Growth is how I earn love or safety.”

Aspect	What it Feels Like	What it Looks Like
Motivation	Pressure, inadequacy, urgency	Driven by external validation
Relationship to self	Critical, never satisfied	Constant self-monitoring
Emotional tone	Anxiety, tension	All-or-nothing behavior
Failure	Evidence of unworthiness	Hiding, self-blame
Discipline	Punishment, control	Burnout cycles
Success	Short-lived relief	Comparison, craving more
Nervous system	Fight/flight/freeze	Procrastination or overwork

Recognizing the difference is an act of profound honesty. And if that second voice feels familiar, I've found two practices to be especially healing:

Santosha: the practice of contentment

Santosha, the second *niyama* (five observances) found in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, is an inner attitude that affirms:

“Nothing is missing in this moment.” “I can meet life exactly as it is.” “My okay-ness is not dependent on improvement.”

Santosha is sufficiency, equanimity, and non-resistance. It does not require gratitude or positivity. It simply asks us to stop resisting reality and to cultivate contentment in the present moment, regardless of circumstance.

For many of us, it is hard even to comprehend this attitude because it stands in direct opposition to the sense of insufficiency that so many of us feel. In addition, we are so accustomed to identifying with thoughts and contracting around discomfort that the idea of allowing experience to unfold without interference feels foreign.

But by practicing santosha, we become much more aware of the experience of contraction and the particular ways it tends to play

To cultivate santosha, I've found this mantra to be beneficial: *“I am enough. This moment is enough.”*

out in our lives. Armed with this awareness, when the feeling of “not enough” shows up, we can notice it for what it is and perhaps resist the impulse to numb or manage it through control or striving.

To cultivate santosha, I've found this mantra to be beneficial: *“I am enough. This moment is enough.”*

Gratitude: The Heartfulness Way

As Erich Fromm observed, freedom *from* something—in this case, the distortions of shame—is only half of the solution. To



truly purify ambition, our drive to grow must be yoked to a higher goal. As a practitioner of Heartfulness, I understand that goal to be developing an authentic relationship to Being.

Because Being is relational, Daaji teaches that true spirituality isn't about conquering or extinguishing the self; it's about expanding the heart to the point that the self-centeredness at the core of how we relate to the world dissolves.

To help with this task—and strengthen me in my daily struggle with selfishness—I find it healing



to contemplate our fundamental dependence on everything; we have received *so much* from parents and ancestors; from mentors, communities, and social institutions; from culture, language and inherited wisdom; from the biosphere; and ultimately from a Cosmos that makes consciousness, growth, and love possible. What do we owe others for the privilege of not being alone? What do we owe existence for the privilege of being supported so completely? When I ask these questions, the answer explodes in my heart—gratitude. Lifted up by that heart fullness, I forget my narrowness and remember that I am here to serve, which is the essence of *bhakti*—devotion expressed through action. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore: “I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold—service was joy.”

Conclusion: Returning to the Beginning

The tension we began with—the longing for peace and the longing for more—softens when we learn to discern the source of our striving.

Santosha addresses the wound of insufficiency directly: it teaches us to rest in the present without needing life, or ourselves, to be different. Gratitude completes the arc, turning our impulse to strive outward, transforming ambition into a form of service and growth into a quest to connect more authentically to the world.

Together, these practices reveal that presence and aspiration are not opposites. When rooted in enough-ness and oriented toward devotion, striving becomes an expression of being fully alive. Peace is not the absence of growth,

and growth is not the enemy of peace. They meet in the heart that remembers:

Nothing is missing—for Love was always there. And yet there is always room to serve more deeply.

This is the Heartfulness Way.

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 - Numerous players with state level rankings

Eligibility

Age: 8-18 years

Basic badminton knowledge required



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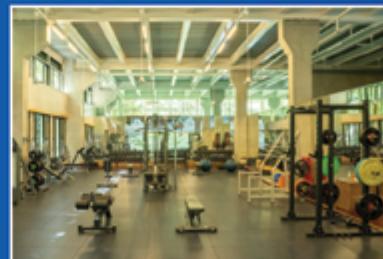
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“Perfection is not attainable,
but if we chase perfection
we can catch excellence.”

VINCE LOMBARDI



Discovering State and Condition: The Two Axes of Spiritual Evolution

DAAJI reflects on the distinction between spiritual state and spiritual condition, revealing how each shapes the seeker's inner evolution.

Spiritual evolution unfolds along two intertwined axes: the deepening of one's spiritual state and the elevation of one's spiritual condition. Though often used interchangeably in casual discourse, these two terms describe fundamentally different movements of the soul. One pertains to the depth of experience, the other to the refinement of being. Together, they chart the inner biography of a seeker walking toward the Source.

To understand this distinction is to understand the very mechanics of transformation in Sahaj Marg—the Heartfulness way.

I. The Spiritual State: The Inner Altitude

In the Heartfulness way, our position in the *yatra* [spiritual journey] corresponds to the highest chakra or subtle point that has been awakened (or “opened”) and transcended. When a chakra opens through meditation and transmission, new possibilities become available to the seeker—new perceptions, sensitivities, and ways of understanding.

A change in state can happen suddenly, like a door opening, marking a shift in inner location—though not necessarily in inner

refinement. However, it is entirely possible for a seeker to be at:

- The second chakra, yet still experience beauty, humility, and sensitivity that exceed their structural position; or
- The seventh chakra—far beyond the second—yet still harbor unresolved heaviness, selfishness, or immaturity.

This discrepancy occurs because “state” represents altitude, while “condition” refers to the atmosphere at that altitude.

Transmission can instantly open a door, while the transformation of one's condition requires walking through, settling into, and living from that new inner space. This contrast between the two explains why two seekers who have "crossed" the same chakras may actually be worlds apart in inner fragrance.

Consider: an airplane that has reached its 30,000-foot cruising altitude battles violent turbulence, while another still ascending at 20,000 feet glides through tranquil skies. The plane at a lower altitude enjoys superior flying conditions despite being less advanced in its journey. Which plane would you rather be on?

II. The Spiritual Condition: The Quality of the Inner Atmosphere

While state represents our position or altitude in our journey, condition reflects the quality, texture, and subtlety of one's inner being. It is not about *where* one is, but *how* one is.

Condition reflects the "climate" of consciousness:

- the level of purity
- the degree of refinement
- the ease of inner flow
- the strength of remembrance
- the softness or hardness of the heart
- the harmony between thought, feeling, and will

To extend our airplane analogy: if the state is the altitude of a mountain terrace, the condition is the visibility, the air's freshness, and the openness of the horizon.

Two terraces at different heights can offer entirely different experiences. A terrace at 5000

feet may be densely covered with fog or frozen; one stands high but sees very little. Another at 4000 feet might offer a breathtaking, unobstructed view—lower on the map but exalted in its lived experience.

Condition, therefore, is not guaranteed by altitude. It must be cultivated, purified, polished, and deserved.

III. The Distinction

One's state advances primarily through meditation and transmission, which open specific points and allow the seeker to move inward on their journey—higher in spiritual altitude means deeper within.

One's condition must be nurtured and developed through cleaning, constant remembrance, attitudinal refinement, and living the *yama-niyama*, the dos and don'ts of the heart, described in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*.

State unfolds, while condition blossoms. Where a state is freely given, the condition must be cultivated by oneself.

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IV. Why This Distinction Matters

- It prevents spiritual vanity: Being at a higher point does not mean being a “higher person.” Altitude without an equally refined condition is like standing on a narrow ledge—the height only increases your vulnerability.
- It preserves humility in the advanced seeker while inspiring continued growth: One realizes: “I may be structurally advanced, but

morally and emotionally I still am an infant.”

- It emphasizes the importance of spiritual living: Condition reflects how we behave, how we love, how we respond, and how we carry the Master in our hearts.
- It explains paradoxes in spiritual history: Even spiritually evolved beings have suffered due to their own unworked emotional or karmic residues. Conversely, simple-hearted seekers with

modest states may carry extraordinary luminosity.

V. How State Deepens

A spiritual state deepens (one advances further on the yatra) when:

- Meditation opens a point (chakra) through inner absorption.
- Transmission changes the vibrational spectrum and awakens dormant capacities.
- Surrender allows the spiritual work to continue without resistance.
- Inner alignment creates a natural flow from point to point.

- The Master's intervention lifts the seeker across thresholds not reachable by personal effort alone.

The deepening of one's state is an initiatory movement, a shift within the architecture of consciousness that marks our progress along the journey.

VI. How Condition Elevates

A spiritual condition elevates through:

- Cleaning, which removes complexities and restores lightness.
- Acceptance of trials, which polishes the heart.
- Simplification of lifestyle, which clears inner clutter.
- Constant remembrance, which maintains a luminous interior.
- Refinement of intention (*irada*), which shapes destiny.
- Devotion without sentimentality, which anchors one to the Master's presence.
- Practice of subtle morality, which creates an environment for divine vibration to settle.

Condition elevates slowly, organically, like the ripening of a fruit, the clearing of the sky, or the mellowing of a soul.



VII. The Interplay Between State and Condition

Though distinct, the two are mutually reinforcing. A refined condition allows deeper states to be entered without distortion. Deeper states provide subtler material from which the condition can be shaped.

But they do not always grow at the same speed.

Often, the Master lifts the seeker's state beyond the level of refinement of the condition, a compassionate strategy that allows the new state to "pull up" the older condition. Such elevation can cause inner friction, the feeling of being stretched beyond one's habitual identity. However, that stretching is the crucible of transformation.

True spiritual progress is the harmonization of state and condition. State without condition is altitude without acclimatization—one reaches heights but cannot breathe freely. Condition without state is like having refinement without any foundation—polished on the surface but lacking spiritual depth.

VIII. The Heartfulness Perspective on Growth

True spiritual progress is the harmonization of state and condition.

State without condition is altitude without acclimatization—one reaches heights but cannot breathe freely. Condition without state is like having refinement without any foundation—polished on the surface but lacking spiritual depth.

The spiritual path aims to unify both so that:

- Height meets purity
- Depth meets clarity
- Experience meets embodiment

A fully evolved seeker is one whose state is exalted and whose condition is transparent, like a high peak crowned with clear skies.

IX. The Long Arc: Condition Prepares Destiny

Finally, in the deeper whisperings of Heartfulness, one finds these subtle lessons:

- State prepares you for the next step.
- Condition prepares you for the next life.
- State changes what you experience.

- Condition changes what you become.

The Master may elevate your state in an instant, but your condition is the soil in which the tree of eternal evolution grows.

Thus, the true measure of attainment is not, “Which point have I crossed?” but rather, “How pure is my heart? How soft are its edges? How universal is its love?”

X. Integration

In the Heartfulness way, the journey unfolds not merely through shifts in inner state but through the refinement of the inner condition that allows those states to be fully expressed. State provides access; condition allows expression. The first opens doors; the second lets the light pass through without distortion.

When both are in harmony, the seeker becomes a transparent instrument of the Divine, and the path becomes not a journey of achievement, but the gentle unfolding of the soul’s original nature.

In her profile of **RAM DEVINENI**, **PURNIMA RAMAKRISHNAN** traces his journey from documentary filmmaker to comic-book innovator and explores how he fused Indian mythology with Augmented Reality to create tools of empowerment and cultural change.



When Fear Becomes Power: The Goddess Who Transforms Survivors with Comics

Sometimes, the most powerful tools for social change come wrapped in unexpected packages. In India, that package arrived in the form of a comic book featuring an ancient goddess, Parvati, walking beside modern survivors, tigers transforming from predators into companions, and Augmented Reality (AR) bringing mythology to life on smartphone screens.

Priya's Shakti is the creation of Ram Devineni, a filmmaker who spent thirteen years building a bridge between India's mythological heritage and urgent contemporary needs. Priya is the protagonist of the series, shaped from the experiences of gender violence survivors that Ram met in Delhi. She appears alongside her tiger companion in a narrative along with various mythological figures. This project draws on familiar themes within Sanatana Dharma: facing fear, building inner strength, and using persuasion to shift understanding.

The single comic book from 2014 has now grown into a movement spanning India, Colombia, and beyond, addressing issues ranging from dignity and justice to climate change and public health. At its heart lies a simple but profound belief: humans must solve their own problems, and culture, not mere law, holds the key to lasting transformation.

Devineni's path to this realization began unexpectedly in December 2012, when he was in New Delhi working on an unrelated documentary project. A tragic incident of gender violence against a woman had sparked massive protests across the city, with young people especially flooding the streets, demanding not just legal reform but a fundamental shift in how society perceived and treated women.

The implication was clear: Victims somehow deserved or provoked what happened to them. For Devineni, who had grown up in the United States despite being born in India, this revealed something profound.

"When I heard that, I knew immediately that the problem was not a legal problem," Devineni recalls. "It was a cultural problem."

Choosing the Right Medium

Devineni's first instinct was to return to familiar territory—to make a documentary. But he realized it would be nearly impossible at that moment, and more critically, if he were to reach young people, it probably wouldn't be through a documentary anyway.

The answer came from his childhood in Eluru, a small, remote village in India. In his childhood days, before television shows and the expansion of media, most of his lens was through comics, especially Indian mythological comic books with Jataka Tales and similar stories.

"We used to have just stacks of them," he recalls. "I would learn about not only Indian mythology, but also about history and cultures from different parts of the world through these comic books. So they were a big influence on me."



Out of curiosity, Devineni attended one of the rallies, where he spoke with a Delhi police officer, asking what he thought about the protests and the situation at hand.

The officer's response stayed with him: No good girl walks home alone at night.



Ram spent six to seven months researching gender violence, speaking with NGOs, experts, and survivors. Their stories shaped the concept that became the comic book.

The Mythology of Fear and Transformation

As Devineni looked back at Indian mythological comics, he noticed a typical pattern in those stories. Humans would often call upon the gods for help when they were in a predicament, and the gods would get involved. Yet in most cases, humans eventually had to solve their own problems.

This observation led him to consider mixing mythology with the story he wanted to tell. He emphasizes that he wasn't trying to promote any faith through



mythological stories, but he realized that faith-based traditions were a powerful vehicle for discussing problems.

When Devineni talked with survivors, he learned that the first stage after a horrible trauma is fear. The fear of what happened to them would keep them from moving forward. That fear came from many factors, of course, the incident itself, but also the fear of repercussions they would face from their family or their community, where they were often perceived as the instigators rather than the victims.

The survivors who overcame those fears transformed themselves from victims to survivors. This is why Devineni consistently uses the word "survivor": a survivor is someone who can eventually, not

necessarily completely overcome that fear, but enough to move ahead with their lives and use it in some way to find justice, to find healing. That transformation was very similar to what he read about Indian mythology.

These wisdom traditions, he discovered, are not as anachronistic as many think. The foundational principles, overcoming fear and building confidence, remain deeply relevant.

Magic in the Sistine Chapel

The integration of AR into the comic books came from an unlikely source and wasn't part of Devineni's initial thinking. One day, while visiting the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, Devineni stood looking at Michelangelo's

frescoes and artwork. Anyone who's been to the Sistine Chapel realizes two things: the artwork is super high up in the ceiling and very difficult to see, and it's broken into square panels that tell different stories about humanity and our relationship with God.

He held his phone up and used the back camera to zoom in so he could see those small panels of stories. Looking at Michelangelo's artwork in the Sistine Chapel, broken into panels, he had a realization: it's literally one of the greatest comic books ever drawn. Comic books are called "sequential art" because they tell a story through a sequence of panels. The Sistine Chapel does the same thing.

Then another idea struck him: he could create a multi-layered overlay on a comic book panel. Initially, Ram didn't know how to achieve this. His visit to the Sistine Chapel occurred in 2012 or 2013, before AR, which can turn a comic book into a pop-up book, was widespread. There's an organic nature to AR and art, especially comics. It just feels right for that medium. Ram found an AR company online and reached out to them. They loved the project.

Ram created different pages where various animations popped out of the comic, allowing people to engage with them. Other parts featured videos or other

stories popping out, stories from survivors, so that people could get more out of it. People could read the comic from page to page without AR, but they could also go back and scan each page with their phones to see all those elements come to life.

It was groundbreaking because no one was doing this in 2013.

"When we showed people this, it was like magic," Devineni recalls. "It was just quite fantastic."

When Survivors Become Co-Creators

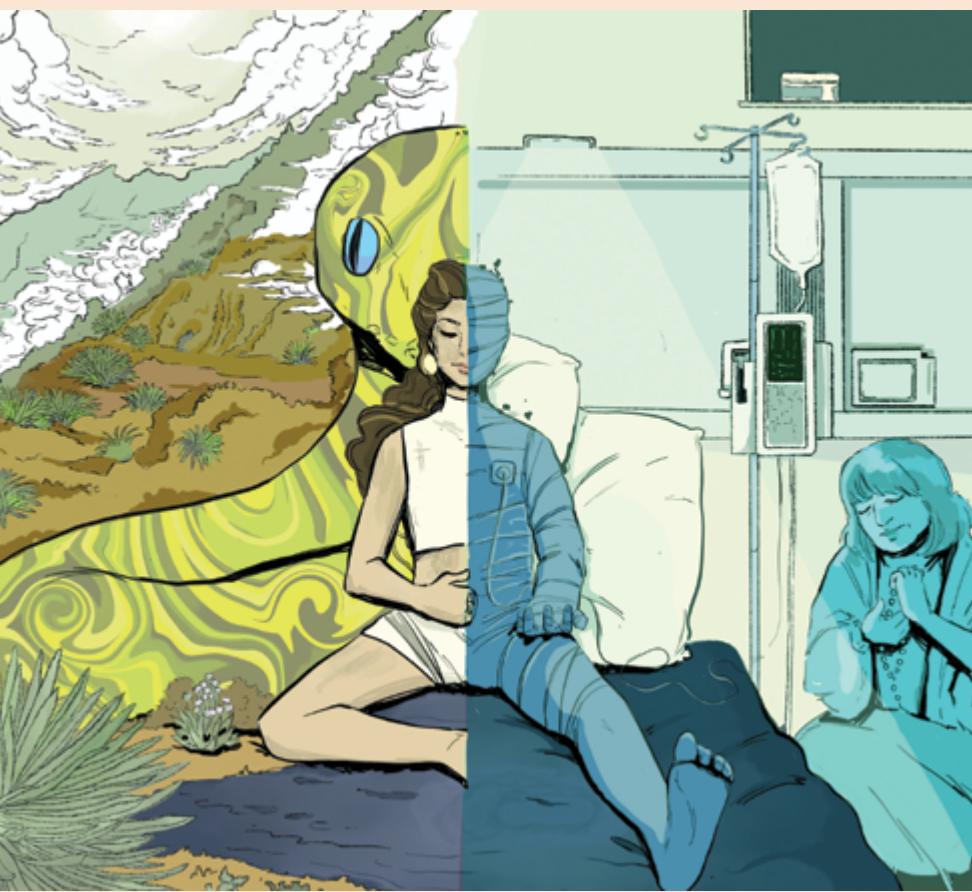
The women whose stories inspired *Priya's Shakti* were integral partners in the creative process and powerful advocates for the work itself. This collaboration began with a foundational decision: the

comics would never depict violence directly. Instead, they would focus on resilience, transformation, and survivors' power to reshape cultural narratives. The emphasis would always be on the journey from trauma to agency.

With the first comic, there were sensitivities around how survivors could share their stories publicly, which required careful navigation and respect for their circumstances.

With their second comic, *Priya's Mirror*, the narrative and timing were different. Many of the acid attack survivors were able to step forward more openly, appearing in the media with the team and speaking about their experiences. They became advocates not only for the comic book but for themselves and their communities.





The survivors were always involved in developing the story and then in its promotion and presentation. The comic book became part of their toolbox, a means to talk about what happened, how they've been transformed, and how they're working to transform society.

Ripples of Change

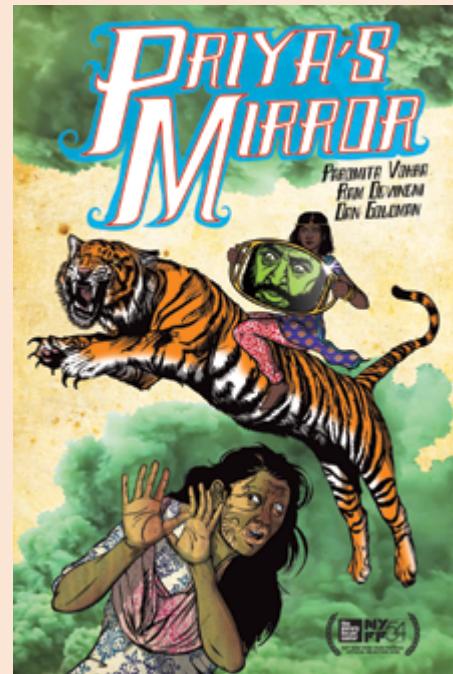
Measuring cultural transformation is less about statistics and more about shifts in consciousness. For Devineni, success revealed itself in unexpected ways.

When *Priya's Shakti* launched in 2014, it sparked conversations that hadn't been happening before.

Media coverage shifted from focusing solely on perpetrators and legal proceedings to exploring the experiences and resilience of survivors themselves. Social media, newspapers, and television began asking different questions, centering different voices.

"That shift in focus felt significant," Devineni reflects.

But the real evolution came with their second comic, *Priya's Mirror*. Learning from their first experience, the team refined their approach. They also expanded their partnerships, collaborating with NGOs focused on similar issues in India, Colombia,



the U.K., and beyond. These organizations embraced the comic as a tool for their own advocacy, education, and community work.

The progression from the first comic to the second showed the power of iteration and learning. Each project deepened Ram's understanding of how to create meaningful impact, amplify voices that needed to be heard, and build resources that communities could claim as their own.

Personal Evolution and Philosophy

Working on these issues for thirteen years across India, Colombia, and beyond, Devineni has gotten very close to survivors' stories. The work is deeply emotional.

"I always thought that I had to do it properly and right," he reflects. "That was very critical to me, to make sure that their stories and their feelings are really understood in the comics."

Through this journey, his own perspective on trauma, healing, empathy, and compassion has evolved considerably.

He says, "These are complicated and very intense words and topics. They have to be really understood properly."

He himself would have never imagined doing these types of comics when he was younger. It wasn't even remotely on his radar; he was making documentaries about entirely different topics.

But he realized that men need to be sensitized to these issues and to

their own role in perpetuating or preventing them. It's imperative that men also speak out and be part of this.

"That's why I think it was very important that we understood when we created these comics, that we were very focused on comic books for young men, especially teenage boys," Devineni explains. "They are the ones that read these comics and comic books in general, and it is important that we create a comic book for teenage boys. That was very critical for me."

Spirituality and Activism

The spiritual dimensions of the storytelling required Devineni to spend an enormous amount of time understanding Indian mythology and its philosophical underpinnings.

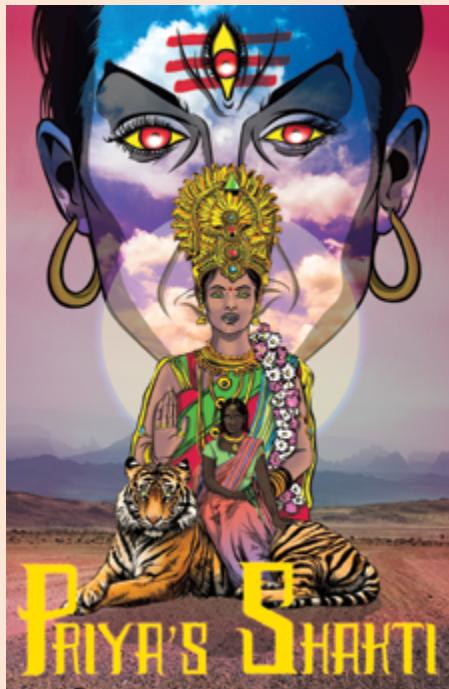
He grew up on Joseph Campbell, the great mythologist who explored comparative mythology and stories from different cultures, inspiring works like Star Wars. Devineni immersed himself in understanding the Indian mythological pantheon, the gods, their motivations, and their stories. He fell in love with and developed deep respect for these narratives, though he acknowledges they carry complexities. They can be very masculine, macho even. But there's also profound truth and honesty in them, especially in stories about conquering fear.

In the first comic book, *Priya's Shakti*, Priya has been cast out of her village and is living in the jungle, being stalked by a tiger. One day, she climbs a tree to hide. The goddess Parvati descends and tells her she must confront the tiger. Priya climbs down, looks the tiger in the eye, and speaks a powerful mantra that transforms the tiger from fear into shakti, power. They become companions, appearing together in all subsequent comics.

The team wove these ancient philosophies and mythologies into Priya's character. This approach differs fundamentally from how Americans approach comic books and superheroes.

Priya is unusual because her power is the power of righteous persuasion that transforms society. This comes from Indian





mythological traditions and the larger philosophical heritage of India, particularly the principles of non-violence. It stands in stark contrast to American comic philosophies centered on confrontation and violence. These comics are the reverse of what we see in American superhero stories.

New Stories, Enduring Themes

As the project evolved, Priya's narratives expanded to embrace other critical issues while maintaining their core philosophy of transformation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, they created *Priya's Mask*, which told the story of a little girl whose mother was

a nurse. The girl overcame her fears and came to understand the sacrifice her mother was making while caring for patients. This comic highlighted women's disproportionate, often unappreciated role as caregivers, offering a different lens on the same theme of unrecognized contributions and quiet heroism.

The series also ventured into environmental storytelling with comics focused on Priya's tiger companion, Sahas. These stories addressed climate change and deforestation, connecting ecological destruction to the broader themes of protection and preservation.

Words of Wisdom for Change Makers

For young people who want to become changemakers through socially driven art, Devineni offers clear guidance.

“Be authentic to your own art,” he emphasizes. “You have to understand where you come from as an artist before you create socially driven artwork. That is the first step to get there.”

He invokes Shakespeare: “Above all, to thine own self be true.” When you want to create something that can have an impact on social issues, it requires sincere commitment and time. He's been doing this for 13 years, and that's not something he did once and

left and moved on from. He kept doing it because making shifts and having an impact takes time.

Sometimes these impacts are very minuscule. It might be a small community, and people should not be discouraged by the small steps that can happen. If you are authentic to your artwork, you won't be discouraged by your results. You will feel more inspired and move forward.

The Mantra That Drives It All

"If Priya herself could deliver a message to readers, what would it be?" I asked.

Devineni doesn't hesitate. The mantra from the first comic book, which Priya spoke, is the message:

"Speak without shame. Stand with me and bring about the change that you want to see."

That is the core of the mantra that they have been following for thirteen years. It's a call to action that refuses silence, rejects shame, and demands transformation, through the uniquely Indian philosophy of righteous persuasion.

Like the ancient stories where humans had to solve their own problems, Priya's message affirms that power lies not with gods or external forces, but within. Every person has the right to walk



through the world without fear. And when fear inevitably appears, it can be transformed into shakti.

The tiger, once a predator, becomes a companion. The survivor becomes a force for change. And a comic book becomes a tool for revolution, one panel, one story, one transformed life at a time.

Priya's Shakti continues to evolve, with new stories that bridge mythology, activism, and contemporary challenges. Learn more at www.priyashakti.com



Discovery Beneath the Surface

JANMARIE CONNOR discovers how childhood tales taught her the art of surrender, which would later guide her spiritual practice.

Long before I had language for an inner life, I was being trained in it. Not intentionally or formally, but through stories that carried a hidden intelligence of their own. Two women in my childhood left distinct impressions. My Great Aunt Peg, from the rugged coast of Donegal, spoke easily of fairies and angels—beings we were taught to watch for in the garden and beneath the bed at night. She read my sister and me countless fairy tales and adventure stories, with a particular fascination for *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*.

My Peruvian mother, born high in the Andes, was grounded in history, mystical Christianity, and the classics. She was especially fond of the book *Kon-Tiki*, named





for Viracocha—the ancient Incan creator god associated with the sun, wind, and the dawn of civilization. The Norwegian explorer and author, Thor Heyerdahl, gave his balsa raft this name to honor the idea that early South American peoples, guided by natural ocean currents and cosmology, may have sailed westward to Polynesia.

Their worlds were different, yet what reached me was not belief, but orientation—toward imagination, wonder, and discovery of the unknown.

As children, we fixated on the outer adventures. We reenacted them endlessly: drawing invisible swords from stone or sailing the seas on improvised rafts, certain we would crash and yet courageously unafraid. What I didn't yet know was that discovery had begun its inward turn, with imagination quietly training me to move forward without certainty, but with trust.

Kon-Tiki eventually emerged as the clearest teacher. Thor Heyerdahl's journey was never about domination of nature but surrender to it. The raft could not be forced toward a destination; it had to yield to ocean currents, trusting that movement itself carried intelligence. Polynesia was not reached by conquest or modern navigation, but by alignment—by allowing the sea to do what it knew how to do.

Only much later did I understand how deeply this story mirrors the inner life. In Heartfulness practice, the same movement occurs, though invisibly. The effort to steer subsides; attention shifts from the restless surface current of thought to a deeper inner flow. Surrender is not collapse, but humility—a willingness to stop interfering with what already knows the way. The heart becomes the raft; consciousness, the ocean.

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Daaji describes this inner process with striking simplicity: meditation begins by gently turning attention inward, allowing the outward momentum of thinking to soften into feeling. Feeling, when held without effort, naturally dissolves into silence. And beyond that silence lies something more subtle still—an expansive presence that cannot be grasped but only allowed. Meditation, understood this way, is not a technique of control but a movement of trust. Just as the *Kon-Tiki* followed currents older than maps, the heart follows an inner current wiser than the mind once we stop demanding direction and simply remain present.

Over time, I came to see that this was never about becoming something new, but about remembering something essential. Just as the *Kon-Tiki* crew trusted ancient currents long before modern certainty, Heartfulness invites trust in an ancient inner movement—one that predates striving, identity, and control. The discovery is not dramatic. It is silent and often unremarkable, yet unmistakably authentic.

The inner voyage, like the ocean crossing, does not promise comfort or clarity at every moment. There are long stretches of not knowing. But there is also a growing confidence that life carries us

when we stop demanding proof. Innocence returns—not as naïveté, but as deep listening.

What once felt like simple imitation—absorbing the worlds offered to me and stepping into them through play—now reveals itself as preparation. Discovery was never about swords or shores. It was about learning how to surrender well—how to float, how to trust the current, and how to remember that beneath the surface restlessness, consciousness is always already moving us home.

Discovery was never about swords or shores. It was about learning how to surrender well—how to float, how to trust the current, and how to remember that beneath the surface restlessness, consciousness is always already moving us home.



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Navigating Corporate Politics with Inner Stability and Strategic Awareness

RAVI VENKATESAN explores how inner stability and strategic awareness allow leaders to navigate corporate politics without losing clarity, authenticity, or influence.



Corporate politics is one of the least discussed yet most influential forces shaping our daily work experience. This article builds on ideas about inner-state management and influence-based leadership that were initially introduced in the *Heartful Leader* and *Heartful Strategist* series to provide a toolkit

for managing organizational politics.

Even talented, motivated individuals often find themselves frustrated—not because of the job itself, but because of the invisible political currents around them. These forces can determine whether ideas are heard, whether

contributions are recognized, and whether one feels inspired or drained.

But understanding politics is not the same as playing politics. It is about perceiving your environment clearly and showing up in a way that is both wise and authentic.

A powerful combination of inner emotional steadiness and external situational awareness allows leaders to navigate politics without losing themselves. This balance is foundational to heart-centered leadership—where clarity, equanimity, and empathy become strategic advantages.

1 Corporate Politics Isn't a Game—It's a Field of Human Behavior

Politics becomes toxic when we view it as a battle. It becomes navigable when we see it as a landscape of human emotions, motivations, fears, and aspirations.

Former PepsiCo CEO Indra Nooyi once shared that her early belief—that great work alone would shine—quickly collided with reality. She learned that understanding people, timing, and influence was just as vital as one's competence.

Microsoft's Satya Nadella also transformed his leadership approach by grounding it in empathy and perceptiveness rather than pure logic. He often notes that listening deeply—to individuals, teams, and the emotional tone of the organization—became a turning point in his career.

Politics becomes less threatening when you see it not as manipulation but as human behavior.



2 The Inner State: Your Most Reliable Political Compass

In leadership, your inner state is often the most decisive factor in how you handle political moments:

- A colleague undermines your idea
- A decision shifts without explanation
- A leader is inconsistent
- A peer becomes territorial
- A project suddenly loses support

If your mind is agitated or reactive, politics feels overwhelming. If your inner state is steady, situations become clearer, calmer, and more solvable.

Heartfulness Meditation supports this steadiness by creating space between stimulus and response. It helps leaders recognize emotional triggers early, regulate reactions, and approach situations with balance.

A centered leader reads subtle cues others miss—tone, intent, interpersonal history, stress levels, and unspoken concerns. This capacity to perceive without emotional distortion is central to strategic thinking, and it is why Daaji, the leader of the Heartfulness movement, emphasizes correct thinking and right understanding.

Former LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner often emphasized that compassionate management is not a moral stance—it is a strategic one. Calm, emotionally aware

leaders make better decisions and inspire more trust.

Inner stability is your most effective antidote to workplace politics.

Calm, emotionally aware leaders make better decisions and inspire more trust.
Inner stability is your most effective antidote to workplace politics.

3 Understanding Culture and Climate: Reading the Field Before You Act

Every organization operates on two layers:

- Culture: the long-standing values, identity, and norms
- Climate: the current emotional atmosphere and power dynamics

Leaders who navigate politics well understand both. Climate is especially important because it changes quickly:

- During reorganizations
- When leadership shifts
- When resources tighten

- When major initiatives are underway
- When competition grows

Former Xerox CEO Ursula Burns learned that her strong personality was misinterpreted in the early culture she entered.

She adapted—not by losing her authenticity, but by understanding her environment more deeply. Her influence grew not because she changed who she was, but because she aligned her approach to fit the cultural and climatic realities.

Reading culture and climate is not political maneuvering. It is strategic perception.



One of the most effective ways to navigate politics is to build broad, genuine relationships across the organization.

4 Situational Intelligence: Seeing the Invisible Currents

Political awareness includes understanding:

- Who holds real influence
- How decisions actually get made
- What motivations drive key players
- Where resistance might come from
- What timing is optimal

Sheryl Sandberg once said that the biggest mistake she made early in her career was pushing ideas without pre-alignment. She later learned to socialize ideas in advance, gather input quietly, and anticipate concerns before stepping into the room.

This approach is political intelligence: the ability to navigate human systems with foresight rather than force.

5 360° Relationships: Your Natural Buffer Against Politics

One of the most effective ways to navigate politics is to build broad, genuine relationships across the organization.

A leader with relationships across teams, levels, and functions has:

- More information
- More support
- Fewer blind spots
- Allies in critical moments
- A more accurate read on dynamics

Tim Cook's rise at Apple was built not on maneuvering but on relationships. Long before becoming CEO, he built trust across engineering, operations, finance, logistics, suppliers, and design. His leadership influence grew because people trusted him everywhere.

Relationship depth reduces political friction dramatically.

6 Collaboration Multiplies Influence

Politics often becomes difficult when leaders isolate themselves, defend turf, or operate solo. Collaboration changes the equation entirely.

A collaborative leader:

- Reduces resistance
- Diffuses tension
- Gathers diverse perspectives
- Earns credibility
- Builds goodwill
- Becomes part of networks rather than outside them

Collaboration is not just a working style—it is a political strategy that operates through generosity rather than power.

7 A Practical Framework: Inner → Outer → Impact

A balanced political toolkit includes both inner and outer mastery:

Inner Mastery

- Heartfulness Meditation
- Emotional self-regulation
- Clarity before action
- Pausing before reacting
- Anchoring decisions in values
- Perceiving others with empathy rather than judgment

Outer Mastery

- Reading culture and climate
- Mapping stakeholders
- Building early alignment
- Choosing timing wisely
- Understanding motivations
- Creating broad, authentic relationships
- Communicating with nuance and heart

When these two dimensions are integrated, politics becomes manageable, even constructive.

You don't avoid politics.

You rise above it—through clarity of mind, steadiness of heart, and skillful, human-centered leadership.

8 The Outcome: Impact without losing yourself

When leaders combine inner steadiness with external awareness:

- Politics loses its emotional sting
- Conflicts are easier to navigate
- Influence arises naturally
- Relationships deepen
- Decisions become wiser
- Well-being improves
- Work becomes more meaningful

Together, these outcomes reflect heart-centered leadership in practice—a way of navigating complexity while remaining authentic, grounded, and deeply effective.

You don't avoid politics. You rise above it—through clarity of mind, steadiness of heart, and skillful, human-centered leadership.



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All Knowledge Stems From the Heart

relationships

“We live in the shelter of each other.”

CELTIC SAYING



Ubuntu: Discovering Ourselves Through One Another

JAGDISH NARAN explores Ubuntu, the timeless truth that we discover ourselves most deeply through one another.

There is a profound truth at the heart of every human being—we are connected in ways deeper than we consciously know. My well-being is incomplete without yours, and my journey is intertwined with yours. In southern Africa, this truth is captured by a single word: *Ubuntu*.

Ubuntu is a Nguni (Zulu/Xhosa) term from Southern Africa meaning humanity to others.” It embodies the interconnectedness of “I am because we are,” emphasizing compassion, community, dignity, and mutual care, where one’s humanity is found through relationships. This humanist ethic fosters sharing, respect, and harmony, becoming a cornerstone of post-apartheid South Africa and shaping its legal and social structures, as advanced

by figures like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu.

Ubuntu has been defined in many ways—I am because we are; a person is a person through other persons; humanity towards others. But Ubuntu is more than a slogan or a gentle philosophy. It is a lived experience of our shared essence—a recognition that we are each a spark of the same divine origin, appearing as many but rooted in One.

As Heartfulness practitioners, we are continuously on a journey of inner discovery. We sit each morning in meditation, allowing transmission to purify and elevate the heart. We meditate together and discover that transformation is not merely an individual event; it

reverberates universally. Each shift in consciousness touches others, sometimes without a word. In this light, Ubuntu is not only a cultural value; it becomes a spiritual truth.

The Discovery of “We”

Modern life often pushes us into an illusion of separateness—my success, my comfort, my spiritual progress, my house, my country, *my, my, my*. We compare, compete, and protect. Even spiritual pursuit can become self-centered if we forget its purpose: To reveal our interconnectedness and expand our capacity to love.

Ubuntu invites us to move from the discovery of “I” to the discovery of “we.” It says: Your joy brings me joy. Your suffering



affects me. Your growth lifts me higher. Your dignity reveals my own.

The heart does not beat alone. It beats in harmony with countless hearts, human and divine. Each act of compassion, each shared moment of presence, contributes to a subtle collective energy—a living field that grows stronger when we connect from the heart.

A Heritage of Shared Humanity

Ubuntu did not start in written texts or philosophical treatises. It arose from community—from people whose survival depended on cooperation, mutual support, and reverence for elders and ancestors. It emerged naturally from living close to the earth.

One person's harvest fed many homes. Wisdom was a collective inheritance.

This way of being is beautifully aligned with the teachings of Heartfulness:

- The heart is our common meeting place.
- Brotherhood is evidence of spiritual evolution.
- Growth is measured by the expansion of love.

As we meditate and refine the heart's subtlety, we discover this: Compassion is not something to cultivate. Compassion is our nature. Ubuntu simply reminds us not to forget.

The Invisible Thread

When people come together with goodwill, compassion, and shared purpose, an energetic presence emerges, sometimes called an *egregore* in subtle consciousness. This is the invisible thread that binds hearts, carrying the shared intentions, love, and care of a group.

In Heartfulness meditation, this subtle field becomes palpable. The atmosphere thickens with peace and tranquility. Our hearts align naturally, as if harmonized by a gentle, unseen current. This is the living essence of Ubuntu—the tangible experience of being connected beyond words. The transformation of one heart uplifts many.



Individuality and Interconnectedness

The modern worldview encourages independence, achievement, and personal identity. There is nothing wrong with this. Each soul is unique and has a purpose to fulfil. But individuality without interconnectedness becomes isolation. Achievement without compassion becomes emptiness.

Ubuntu offers a balance: We rise together, each unique, but never alone.

In meditation, we turn inward to connect with the Source, yet the result of that inwardness is increased love for those around us. A heart that has touched the Divine becomes incapable of indifference. Through this shared field of consciousness, we feel the presence of many hearts lifting together.

Service: The Practice of Ubuntu

At its core, Ubuntu is practical. It is not merely a state of mind—it becomes action: sharing, listening, including, uplifting, protecting, and encouraging.

Service is discovering that we have more to give than we believed. Every act of generosity contributes to the subtle field that binds us, strengthening the energy of compassion and unity. In Heartfulness, service is not a duty; it is a joy. When we serve, we dissolve the barrier between self and other. We stop seeing “them” and recognize “us.”

Discovering the True Self

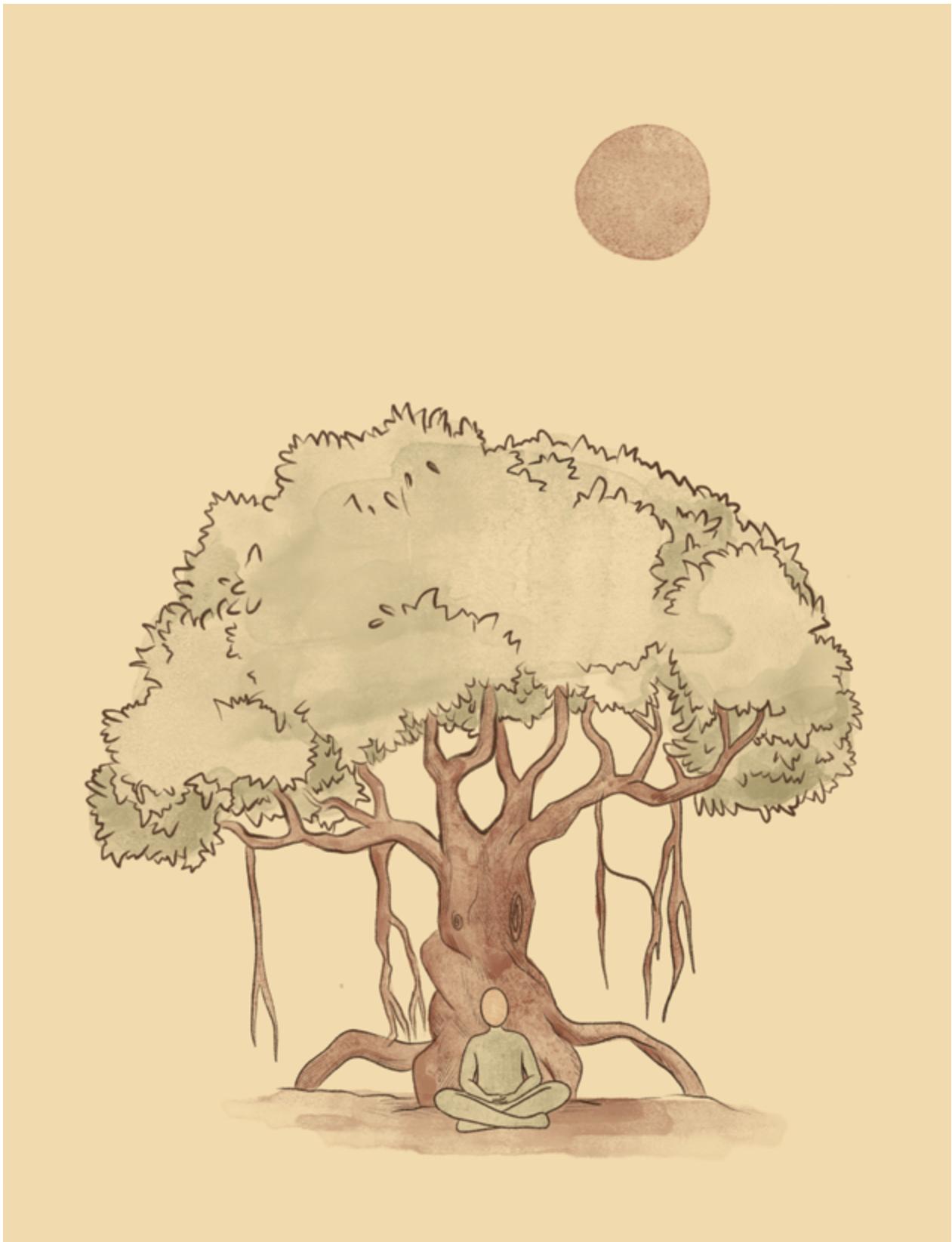
The greatest illusion in life is that we are separate beings. Ubuntu dissolves that illusion. It reveals identity not as a solitary island but as an ecosystem of relationships—with our families, our communities, nature, and the Divine.

Ubuntu leads us inward by leading us outward. It helps us recognize that the divine seed in my heart is the same as the one in yours. When I honor you, I honor the Source that breathes life into both of us.

Through this recognition, the subtle field of shared consciousness amplifies love, empathy, and care. In discovering the humanity of others, we discover our own divinity.



RELATIONSHIPS



A Future Built on Togetherness

The world today is facing difficult questions—inequality, loneliness, ecological destruction, and conflict. Solutions will not emerge through competition or division. They will come from recognizing that the earth, our air, and our future are shared.

Ubuntu offers a spiritual blueprint for human survival:

If you fall, I will help you up.
Because tomorrow, I may need you to help me. This humility is not weakness. It is wisdom.

A Heart-Centered Ubuntu

Heartfulness offers a way to deepen Ubuntu from within:

- Meditation softens the heart.
- Cleaning (rejuvenation) frees us from impressions that block compassion.
- Prayer (inner reflection) expands our love beyond our limited circle.
- Transmission connects us at the level of essence.

Ubuntu becomes not just a cultural legacy but a living spiritual experience—a flowing field of love, compassion, and unity. When a heart is open, Ubuntu flows effortlessly.

A Simple Practice of Discovery

What if every day, we chose one moment for Ubuntu?

- A smile to someone who feels unseen
- A listening ear without rushing to respond
- A gesture of inclusion toward someone left out.
- A sincere wish for another's happiness
- A thought of peace for someone suffering
- A silent prayer for someone in need

These may seem like small actions, but each one strengthens the invisible web of hearts—the subtle energy of togetherness that transforms both giver and receiver.

We Are the Discovery

The theme of this month's issue, "discovery," reminds us that life is not only about exploring the world outside, but the world within. Ubuntu reveals that the most important discovery each of us can make is this:

We belong to one another.

I am not the whole story; you are not the whole story. We are chapters in the same book—one humanity, guided by one divine Heart.

As we meditate, serve, connect, and grow together, may we rediscover what our ancestors knew so well: Love is not optional for human flourishing; it is the foundation of our being.

In discovering you, I discover me.

In discovering us, I discover God.

I am because we are.

We are because He is.

Ubuntu becomes not just a cultural legacy but a living spiritual experience—a flowing field of love, compassion, and unity. When a heart is open, Ubuntu flows effortlessly.

Illustrations by LAKSHMI GADDAM





Where Flowers Hide: The Mystery of the Fig

BHUVARAGASAMY
RATHINASABAPATHY and
ANANTHANENI SREENATH
explore the hidden world of
Ficus—keystone trees whose
secret blooms, faithful wasps,
and unwavering generosity
sustain Kanha's forests
through every season.

Ficus—silent
architects of forest
life, feeding the
forest when times
are scarce.

Ficus—The Keystone of Forest Life

At Kanha Shanti Vanam, 24 species of fig trees (Ficus spp.) thrive, forming the backbone of the forest ecosystem. Often called keystone species, figs provide food and shelter to a wide range of fauna—from birds, bats, and butterflies to monkeys and insects. Their unique year-round fruiting ensures a continuous food supply, sustaining wildlife even during scarce seasons. By nurturing this diversity, the Ficus trees play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance and enriching Kanha's biodiversity.



Photo: Within the fig lies a silent universe—flowers blossoming inwards, tiny fruits forming in darkness, visited by a wasp through one sacred opening.

Why Do Fig Trees Fruit in Pre-Summer?

When the land begins to dry, the figs start to feed. They fruit precisely when scarcity peaks, ensuring no life is left unfed. The summer heat accelerates fruit ripening and dispersal, while the sacred fig wasps emerge exactly on cue. Soon after, the monsoon arrives—and the forest is reborn.

A Bloom the World Cannot See

Figs never show their flowers. They bloom inward, hidden within

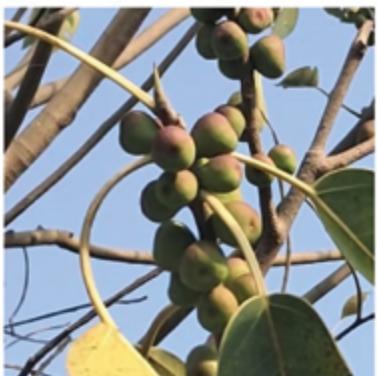
the syconium—a secret universe of hundreds of microscopic flowers. Only one being may enter: a fig wasp, born for this one sacred act.

This is one of evolution's most intimate relationships: one fig and one wasp, forever bound.

Fig-Wasp Mutualism: A Perfect Partnership

Each species of fig tree at Kanha has its own unique pollinator wasp, ensuring precise and effective pollination. Here's how the cycle unfolds:

ENVIRONMENT



Ficus amplissima



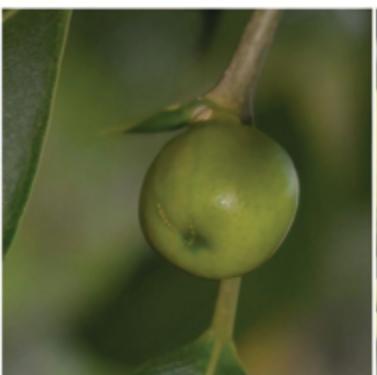
Ficus auriculata



Ficus beddomei



Ficus benghalensis



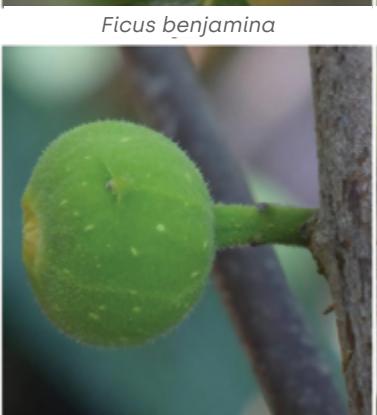
Ficus benjamina



Ficus carica



Ficus drupacea



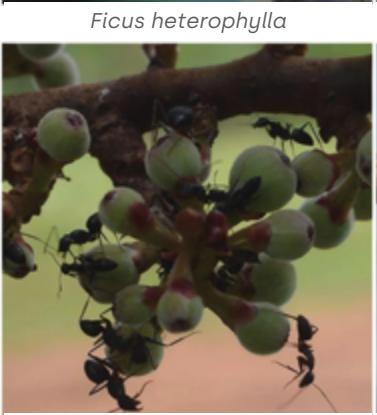
Ficus heterophylla



Ficus hispida



Ficus krishnae



Ficus racemosa



Ficus religiosa

- **Entry Through the Ostiole:** A female fig wasp enters the syconium through a small opening called the ostiole, carrying pollen from another fig tree.
- **Pollination and Egg-Laying:** While depositing eggs inside certain flowers, the wasp inadvertently pollinates others.
- **New Generation Emerges:** The next generation of wasps matures within the fig, males emerging first to mate with the females before they exit, carrying pollen to another fig tree to repeat the cycle.
- **Seed Development:** Flowers that wasps do not use develop into seeds, ensuring the propagation of fig trees.

Fig trees
prepare the
feast before the
forest knows it
needs one.

Fig Highlights from Kanha

Banyan (Ficus benghalensis): a cathedral-like canopy, feeding parakeets, orioles, squirrels, and bats.

Peepal (F. religiosa): ever-fruiting, oxygen-giving, revered across faiths.

Cluster Fig (F. racemosa): trunk-fruiting miracle of streamside forests.

Indian Bat Fig (F. amplissima): beloved by fruit bats, perfect rewilding pioneer.

Elephant Ear Fig (F. auriculata): among the tastiest figs—with leaves large enough to shelter dreams.

Krishna Fig (F. krishnae): sacred, mythic, with butter-cupped leaves of legend.

Most fig fruits are edible, nourishing wildlife and humankind alike. People also value figs for their taste and health benefits. They can be sweet or tangy and are eaten fresh or dried in many dishes. Species like the Common Fig (*Ficus carica*), Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), and Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) all produce useful fruits. Because of their wide variety, fig trees feed both people and wildlife, making them a vital part of tropical and subtropical forests.

Sit beneath a fig tree. Do nothing. Say nothing. Feel the forest breathing through you—in light, in stillness, in love.

Seeds That Travel Beyond Imagination

Birds. Bats. Monkeys. They carry figs, and with them, they support forests. That is why fig saplings are found on temple walls, ruined forts, and forgotten shrines. Where humans abandon, figs begin again.

Sacred, Healing, Timeless

- **Bodhi Tree:** Awakening of the Buddha.
- **Peepal:** Meditation sanctum of the Rishis.
- **Banyan:** Symbol of eternal life.
- **Krishna Buttercup:** Essence of Krishna's Grace.

The *Ficus* is honored in Ayurveda and folklore, and revered as a symbol of stillness. Many meditators report feeling a living peace while sitting beneath its branches.



creativity

“Creativity requires the courage
to let go of certainties.”

ERICH FROMM



Life as Mixed Media

BRINDA MILLER tells **VANESSA PATEL** how her eclectic approach to art mirrors her approach to life and civic leadership.

Vanessa Patel: Brinda, your art practice spans solo exhibitions, private collections, and public murals. How has this creative trajectory evolved?

Brinda Miller: Honestly, it may look like I'm a major planner, but I never planned anything. I always wanted to achieve something, that's for sure, but a lot of it has been intuition and

impulse—call it what you like. The accomplishment was more for myself: to prove to myself that I could do it, that I'm able, and that I have talent. When you are young, you're not so confident, but it gets better over the years.

I was a very shy child; it's also part of the process to learn that it works better to be more outgoing. I see that in my children too, and I

always let them be, because I know they will eventually find their feet and learn from it. Ultimately, it is the talent that speaks, nothing else.

Of course, nowadays you also need PR, a lot of push, and social media. You may or may not agree with it, but the fact is that these are the things that work for you. My mother's family is very cultured and low-key; my father's family, on the other hand, was very flamboyant, and he always used to say to me, "You must go out there and push yourself." That combination really made my career what it is.

VP: Your background includes textiles and drawing and painting at Parsons in New York. What draws you to different media?

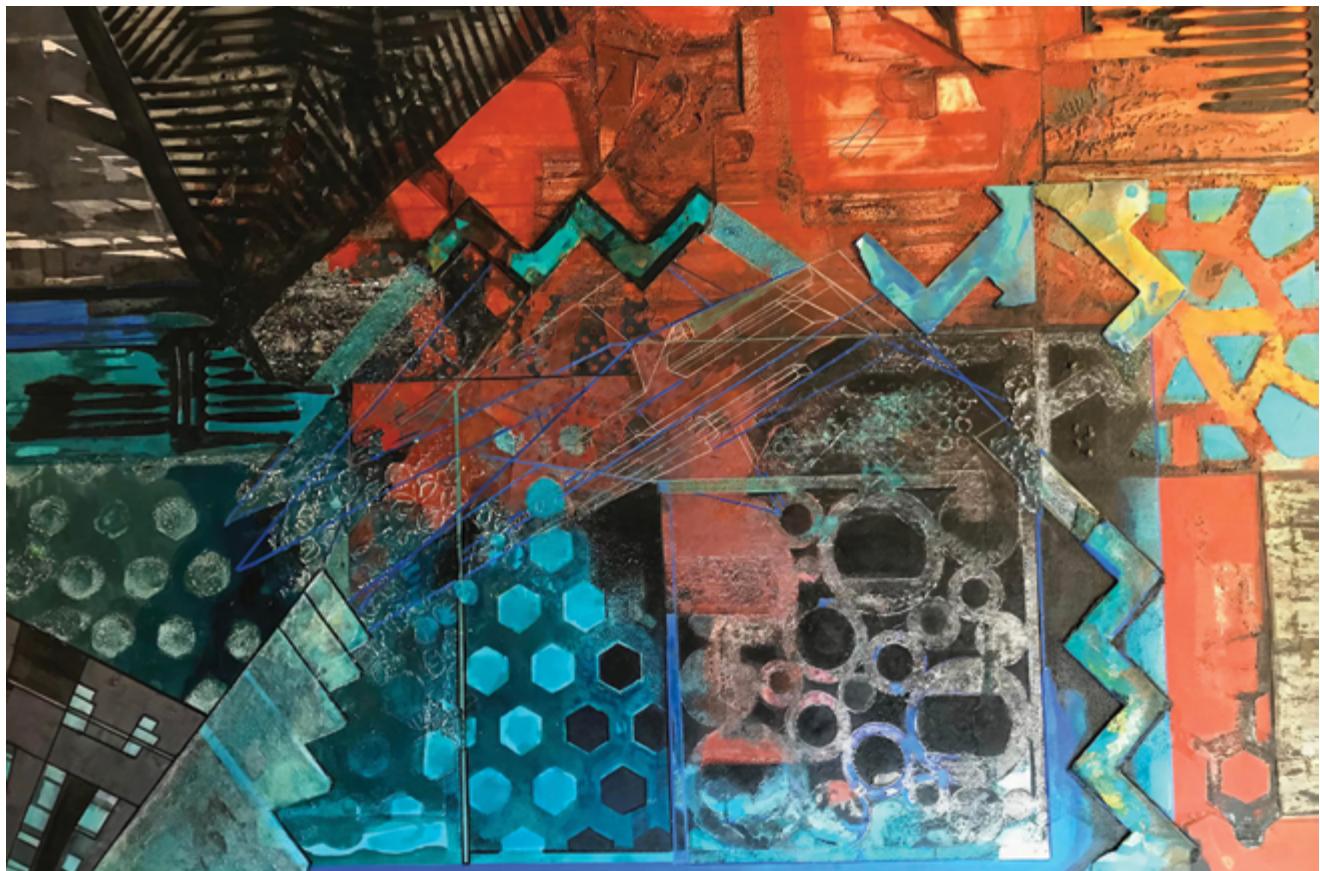
BM: Actually, my creative journey is about mixed media, and I always say that my life imitates my art. A lot of varied things have happened in my life. I'm married to someone from a different community. My parents were also very different. We were never that disciplined, and we didn't even like wearing matching clothes. We mixed and matched everything, and even the food we cooked was never from a recipe. It was always about combining different types of

ingredients. That has been my journey.

It's the same with my art. It could be a piece of cloth or a piece of paper, and then I mix it up and put a lot of paint over it—it's very spontaneous, like how I live my life. It's eclectic. Even the furniture in my home is like that. I have different styles of furniture—some art deco, some modern—and lots of different colors.

I think it has seeped down to my daughters. They are both architects and good artists, which makes it all interesting. Otherwise, I think life would be too boring, so I am one of those who don't follow a

We mixed and matched everything, and even the food we cooked was never from a recipe. It was always about combining different types of ingredients. That has been my journey.



routine. I may wake up late, but at the end of it, I'm totally organized, I feel responsible, and I must see that the work is done. But we are not very time-bound. We are not bound or confined by things; it's a sort of disorganized, organized way of living.

And I'm married to somebody who's the opposite—he's very organized—so it's a good balance, and we make it work.

VP: You have collaborated with many artists. What have you been working on recently?

BM: Yes, I've enjoyed working with many artists. You learn so much from each other, and I'm not one of those people who are territorial about my work. I'd be happy even to share my "secrets."

Recently, I worked in ceramics with the artist Rakhi Kane, and we really hit it off from the beginning, even though we didn't know each other. I don't really need to know beforehand whether I'll be comfortable with a person; part of my job is to make that person comfortable as well. We made some lovely ceramic pieces together, and we recently had a show.

In the past, I've worked with other artists I met at the art camps and workshops I've attended. That's when I really got to know other artists. There's so much to learn and share. We've also had a lot of

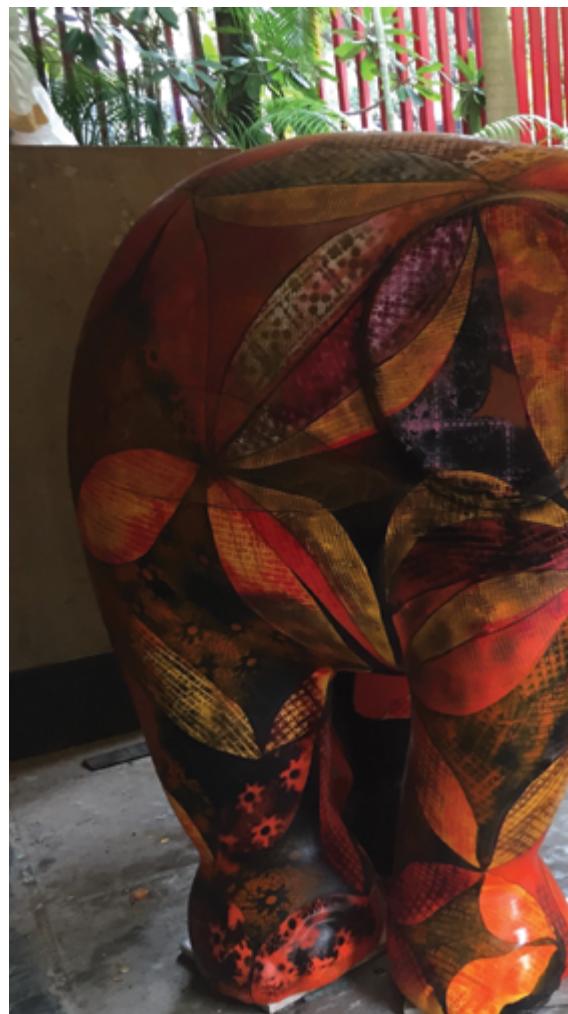
fun together, and I look forward to such projects.

VP: You're an artist who wears many hats. You're a curator, festival director, museum trustee, and mentor for several NGOs. How do you navigate these varied roles?

BM: I wouldn't say there are that many challenges, except for lack of time—it becomes a little difficult to give my attention to everything. I have to say no to many things that I would like to say yes to.

But I do as much as I can because I do have the ability to bring things together. I do this arts festival every year, which takes up half my time. The other half of my time, I love painting. I find it very therapeutic; it's like meditation, so I look at it that way.

Yes, the other half of the time is very stressful, but it gives us a different kind of high. It's not meditative, certainly, but it's something you feel addicted to at the end. It's energizing in a different way. It compels you to do things that you thought you could not do, and at the end of it, you feel, "Wow, I did that! I can do anything!" That feeling comes from organizing the festival, whereas painting is something that I can do with my eyes closed. It's not challenging anymore, I must admit, although I love it!



VP: As director of Kalaghoda Art Festival, India's biggest multicultural art festival, which you've been involved with since 1998, what are your main challenges?

BM: It is getting increasingly challenging, and we're not getting any younger. But somehow, I'm managing, and the people who work with me are amazing; they're so passionate about it.

The audiences are not a problem at all. The audience here in





Mumbai is fantastic. That's what keeps us going, because they come up and say thank you for doing this for us, and they know that we're doing it for them. They're very appreciative.

What is now a very challenging task is the sponsorship part—the fundraising—because we are relatively new to it. Going and asking for money isn't something we like doing, but it's part of the job and requires a certain skill. We could do better.

Earlier, we also had a lot of trouble getting permissions from the local government. I must say it has become much better now; they're very encouraging, and they're looking at it as their own now. That is how all governments should be: supporting their citizens, culture, and heritage. We are the ones who have been doing this and survived so many years,

maybe because we've not had any interference from them either.

VP: Yes, and you've done so much work, even the beautification of the place—you made these beautiful murals at the police café and many other locations around Mumbai, so I'm sure they're quite appreciative of your involvement.

I'm not showing off or anything, but it was just a passion. Having travelled a lot, we've seen how art in public spaces makes such a difference to a city. My father had this initiative, "greening" Mumbai, and to me, making a place green or planting a tree is art. I feel that if you can't put art everywhere, at least make your city beautiful with plantation. That is how we've always been brought up to think, so I think it's in my genes that we appreciate all these things.





VP: And it's a way of giving back to the city, too.

BM: Yes, absolutely! And that's how I started working for the festival—because I wanted to give back something to the city, in a way that was different from the customary ways of lending support, which we do anyway. I wanted to do something creative like this. So, when this festival idea came up, I was very excited. And now, it's been twenty-seven years—imagine that!

VP: You have clearly followed in the family tradition of being

a true citizen. Your father was sheriff of Mumbai, and you have also left your mark on the city in your characteristic style. How do you see the continuation of this legacy?

BM: Oh well, I don't know about the future. Frankly, I don't know who's going to continue this. My daughters are definitely on the same page, but they're also very busy in their careers, so even if they wanted to, where would they find the time? I don't force anything on anyone. And I don't think too much about who's going

to take over from me. When the time comes, it will sort itself out.

VP: Like you, it's something that they may get drawn to and then get involved; I think the passion has to come from within. What about your work with the CSMVS Museum [formerly the Prince of Wales Museum]?

BM: The museum position happened only because they've seen how I work for the Kalaghoda festival. Also, they're in the same "art district," and the museum organizers could see how I was managing so many aspects

of the event. They put me on their Trust, which is a very prestigious thing for me, and I really enjoy doing that work too.

But of course, that's one more role now that I'm playing and a little more work in my life. Similarly, I have been asked to get involved in other initiatives, but I think now this is as much as I can do, and I'm doing as much as I can. The festival is coming up this January, so I'm quite busy now.

VP: Are you creating any art for the festival this year?

BM: No, I never have time for that. This time, they wanted me to do the creatives. However, we have a team for that, and everyone follows a template every year, so it's easier. The theme for this year is *Ahead of the Curve*. We have already reached the twenty-fifth-year milestone, and this is the twenty-sixth year we've been holding the festival. So, now we

are just trying to show how we've gone beyond this milestone.

VP: Congratulations on this achievement! And we wish you continuing success and creative enjoyment in the future. Thank you very much for your time, Brinda.

Artwork by BRINDA MILLER





children

“Children are likely to live up to
what you believe of them.”

LADY BIRD JOHNSON

Barnaby's New Home

LIAA KUMAR follows Barnaby the squirrel on his frantic search for a winter home—and the simple discovery that finally helps him feel at rest.

Barnaby the squirrel was having a very bad day. Winter was only a week away, and he still hadn't found a cozy winter home! By now, all the other forest animals were settling into their warm dens. Barnaby needed to find a new place, stat! But where was a squirrel supposed to find a bed for the winter in this forest? He needed some ideas.

He started scampering through the forest when he came upon a burrow. He stuck his head inside and saw three little bunnies slumbering peacefully. "Oh, that looks nice and warm!" Barnaby thought to himself. "I'll just dig myself a burrow!" Barnaby found a nice little clearing a few feet away and started digging. He dug and dug and dug, until the soft soil turned into a tangle of tough earth, roots, and rocks. But still, the burrow wasn't nearly big enough for him yet. And his poor little paws were so tired and sore. Barnaby huffed and puffed as he wiped sweat from his brow. "Whew! This is going to take way too long. Maybe a burrow isn't the right idea for me," he thought.

He scampered over to the river to get a drink of water. That's when he saw a family of beavers preparing their dam for the colder weather. The thick walls looked like they did a good job of keeping the beavers warm, and it was a lovely, big home. Much bigger than the bunny burrow.

"Well, that's it!" Barnaby thought to himself. "I'll build myself one of those!"





He started running around, dragging as many branches, twigs, and leaves as he could find back to the riverbank. He started piling everything together, trying his best to make it look just like the dam across the river, but every time he built everything up, the wind would blow and knock it all over again.

Barnaby scurried around, trying it one way and then another. But no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get his home to stand up straight. Finally, he got frustrated.

"Oh, what am I going to do!" he exclaimed as he threw the twigs on the ground. He slumped to the ground, disappointed. "I'm never going to find a place to sleep for the winter at this rate."

That's when a beaver slowly made his way across the river. He crawled out onto the riverbank and took a good look at Barnaby's house, or at least what was left of it.

"You know, son," the beaver began, "I've been watching you for a while now from across the way. You've been hard at work on building this uh, 'structure' here. May I ask what it's meant to be?"

Barnaby sighed. "Well, it's *supposed* to be my home for the winter. I tried to make it look just like your house, but it's not going too well."





"Hm," the beaver hummed. "Well, if I know anything about anything, it's that trying to do everything at once often gets you nowhere. And a squirrel like you doesn't have any use for a big old dam for the winter! Maybe a little more patience might help you discover exactly what it is you really need."

Barnaby thought about that as he turned and headed back into the forest. Where did Barnaby truly want to be? He was gazing up at all the towering trees around him when it struck him: "Why, I

want to be in a tree, of course!" he exclaimed.

That's when he spotted a great big ancient oak tree with a strong, deep knoll right in the center. Barnaby hurried up the trunk, eager to take a look. "Oh, I hope there's no one inside already!"

He peered cautiously into the warm, wooden room, and his tail started twitching with joy. "It's perfect! Now I just need to add some final touches."

Barnaby wandered through the forest one last time, picking out the best twigs and bits of moss to take back with him to his new home. Working carefully and patiently, he layered it all together, finding the right spot for every piece, until the whole knoll was soft and warm and very cozy.

"I guess it wasn't so impossible after all!" he exclaimed. "I just needed to take some time to discover what I really needed."

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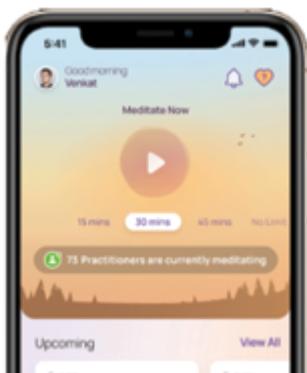
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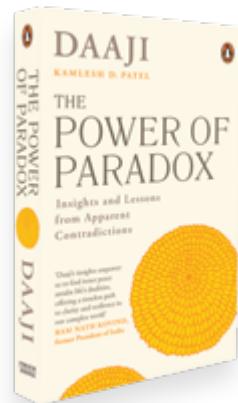


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