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When the Heart Remembers to Give Thanks
DAAJI

The Biology of Compassion
DR. KUNAL DESAI

Storytelling: A Parent's Essential Skill
RAMA DEVAGUPTA

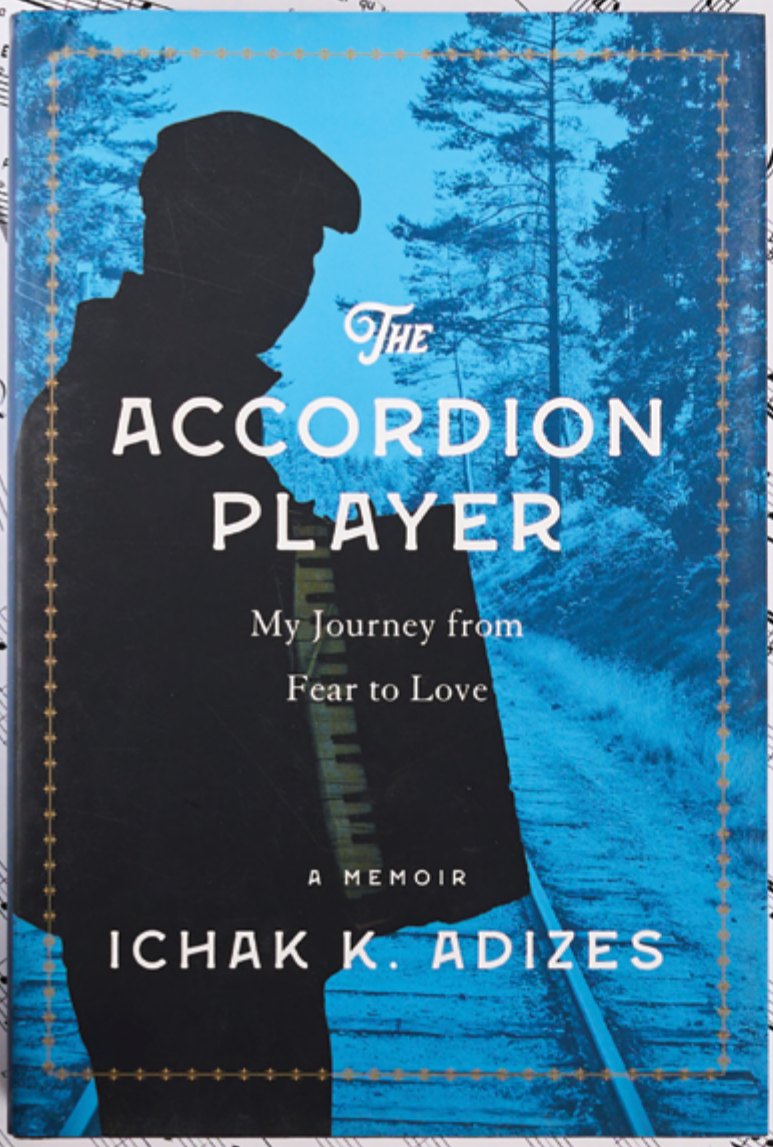




Gratitude

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> 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



Presenting a wonderful life journey written by Dr. 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



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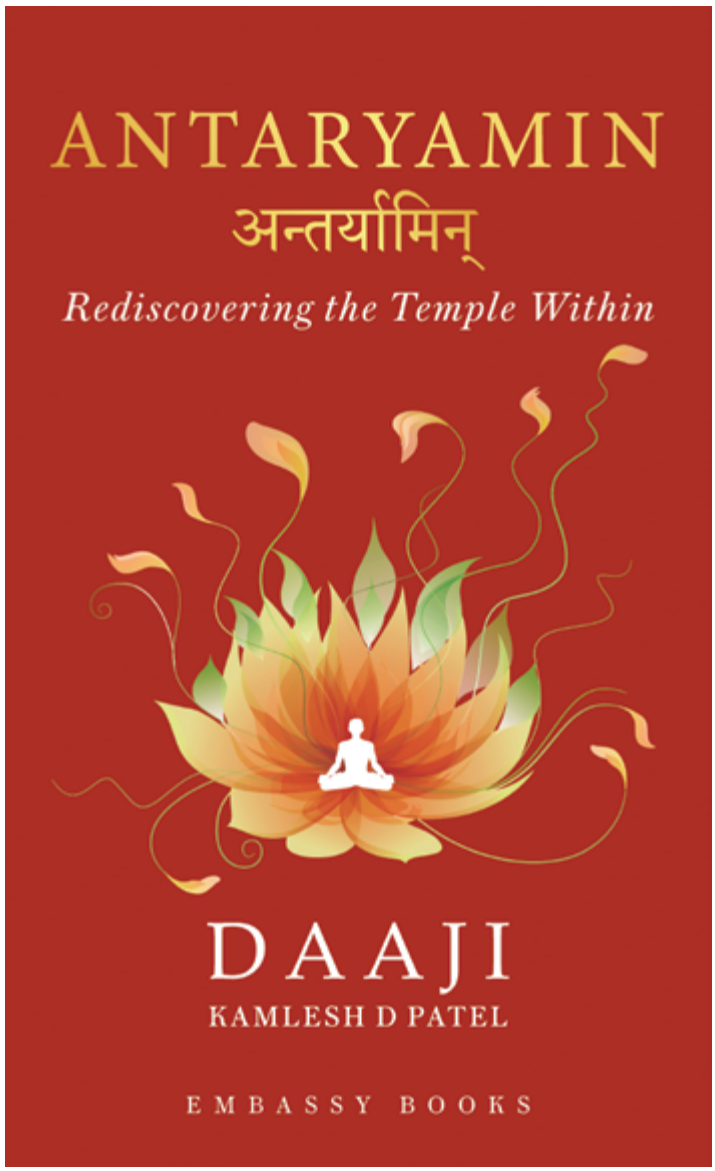
Across the world, a quiet reawakening of spiritual interest is bringing an age-old question into focus: How do we experience Divinity?

In our process of becoming divine, Daaji takes us on a journey from the outer forms and rituals of that search to the inner sanctum of the heart and the Antaryamin, our divine essence.

In *Antaryamin*, Daaji invites us to turn inward—to move beyond the outer forms and rituals of spiritual seeking and discover the sacred presence within the heart. Drawing on ancient wisdom and the living tradition of Sahaj Marg, he offers us a map of our inner landscape and the tools to traverse it. .

Through meditation, evening cleaning and bedtime prayer, the book encourages us to approach our inner life with patience, courage and curiosity. It reminds us that the heart is not a distant destination, but a place we can begin to discover in the midst of ordinary life. .

Whether you are new to meditation or deepening a long-standing practice, Antaryamin is an invitation to pause, look within and begin—or renew—the most personal journey of all.



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Dear readers,

Does gratitude arise because we have something to appreciate, or does appreciation allow us to discover more to be grateful for?

In “When the Heart Remembers to Give Thanks,” Daaji reminds us how easily we overlook the countless contributions that sustain our lives. In “Gratitude: A Quality of the Heart,” Victor Kannan explores how appreciation and awareness reinforce one another, helping gratitude grow into an unconditional quality of the heart. And in “Gratitude and Prayer,” Ichak Adizes explores how rituals of thanksgiving can nurture gratitude and strengthen our relationships with others.

We welcome your reflections, experiences, and other submissions. Please visit heartfulness.org/magazine/contribute or scan the QR code below.

Happy reading,
The editors














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DAAJI

Daaji is the Heartfulness Guide. He is an innovator and researcher, equally at home in the fields of spirituality, science, and the study of consciousness. His work opens new pathways for understanding and experiencing human potential.



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Christine began her spiritual journey at the age of 24 with an overland trip to India, where she met her teacher in 1972. She has been a Heartfulness practitioner and trainer ever since. She has been an editor for 35 years, and also a university administrator at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.



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wellness

"Yoga is a light, which once lit, will never dim.
The better your practice, the brighter the flame."

B. K. S. IYENGAR



Your Muscles Are Talking. **It's Time to Listen.**

Every time you move, your muscles send messages to your brain, your heart, and your metabolism. Here's what they're saying and why it matters.

By **DR. SUREKHA BANDA**

It is 3 p.m. You have been sitting at your desk for hours. Your shoulders feel heavy, your neck is stiff, your lower back is beginning to ache, and your mind has stopped cooperating. The natural response is to reach for another cup of coffee and promise yourself that you will rest properly over the weekend.

But what if your body is asking for something much simpler?

Movement.

Not necessarily a long workout or an intense gym session. Sometimes, it simply wants you to stand up, walk around, and remind your muscles that they are meant to be used.

For a long time, people saw exercise as a way to burn calories, lose weight, or build visible muscle. Those benefits matter, but they tell only part of the story. Muscles are far more active than we once believed. They are not merely structures that help us lift, walk, run, or climb stairs. They also take part in a continuous conversation with the rest of the body.

Your Muscles Do More Than You Think

Whenever muscles contract during physical activity, they release various chemical messengers, including substances known as **myokines**. These molecules can travel through the body and influence tissues and organs, including the brain, liver, fat tissue, and immune system. In simple terms, active muscles don't work in isolation. They are communicating.

Some of these signals are linked to healthier metabolic function and inflammation regulation. Others appear to influence how the body handles glucose and fats. Exercise can also stimulate the release of molecules that may influence brain health and improve mood, memory, and cognitive function.

One molecule that has attracted considerable scientific attention is **irisin**, described in a 2012 *Nature* study as an exercise-associated hormone derived from skeletal muscle.[1] Researchers have studied it for its possible role in communication between muscle and fat tissue and in energy metabolism. The science surrounding irisin and its wider effects continues to evolve, but it has contributed to a fascinating shift in how researchers understand skeletal muscle.

Muscle is more than an engine. It is also a signaling organ. That may help explain why a walk can sometimes make a person feel mentally refreshed even after a tiring day. Physical activity affects both the brain and the body. Regular movement is linked to better mood, improved sleep, and cognitive benefits across age groups.

The familiar feeling of greater mental clarity after moving may therefore have a physiological basis. The body and brain are closely connected, and muscles play an important role in that conversation.

"Muscle is more than an engine.
It is also a signaling organ."



What Happens When Muscles Stop Moving?

Now consider the opposite situation. A person spends eight or ten hours sitting at a desk, drives home, eats dinner, and then settles onto the sofa. The next day, the same pattern begins again. There may be no immediate warning sign. But over time, prolonged inactivity can affect muscle strength, insulin sensitivity, circulation, balance, and overall physical capacity.

This becomes especially important with aging.

Sarcopenia, the age-related loss of muscle mass and strength, can develop gradually. It may begin so quietly that a person barely notices it. A few years later, climbing stairs becomes more tiring. Carrying groceries becomes harder. Getting up from a low chair requires more effort. Balance may decline.

Aging itself is certainly a factor, but inactivity can accelerate the loss of strength and function. That is why maintaining muscle isn't simply about appearance or athletic performance. It is an important part of preserving independence as we grow older.

The good news is that muscles respond to being used.

Strength training does not necessarily mean lifting very heavy weights in a gym. Body-weight exercises, resistance bands, household objects, or appropriately chosen weights can all provide useful resistance. The right approach depends on age, fitness level, and individual health circumstances, but the principle is simple: muscles need regular stimulation.

Maintaining muscle isn't simply about appearance or athletic performance. It is an important part of preserving independence as we grow older.

A Few Practical Habits

Include resistance training two or three times a week, depending on your health and fitness level, with appropriate guidance when necessary. Break up long periods of sitting by standing, walking, or stretching. Even short bouts of movement throughout the day are better than sitting for hours at a stretch.

Nutrition matters too. Muscles need adequate protein and overall nourishment to maintain and repair themselves. A balanced diet that provides sufficient protein, micronutrients, and energy supports the body's ability to preserve muscle tissue.

And then there is sleep—something often treated as optional in a busy life. It should not be.

Recovery is part of training. Exercise provides the stimulus, while adequate rest and nutrition help the body adapt. Consistently poor sleep can affect recovery, energy, appetite, and physical performance.

Healthy muscles are therefore about much more than looking strong. They help us move, maintain balance, preserve independence, and regulate metabolism. They also communicate with other tissues through a complex network of signals that science is still working to understand fully.

So, the next time you stand up from your chair, take a walk, climb a flight of stairs, stretch after a long day, or lift something safely, remember what is really happening.

You are not simply exercising a muscle. You are sending your entire body a message.

Keep moving. Keep your muscles talking. And give your body something healthy to hear.



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About Us

YOGA

Not Something I Do, But Something I Live

Four practitioners share how yoga has changed the way they see themselves, relate to others, and respond to everyday life.

BY **BHUSHAN BHUKTE**



One Practice. Many Journeys. A Way of Being.

What happens when yoga slowly moves beyond the time we spend on the mat?

For some, it begins with an asana. For others, with the breath, meditation, prayer, or simply a search for balance. We may initially approach yoga as a practice [*abhyasa*]—something we do for health, peace, strength, or well-being. But with time, something deeper can happen. Yoga begins to shape how we see ourselves, how we respond to life, and how we meet each moment.

This is the moment yoga becomes more than a practice. It becomes a way of living.

To explore this, the Heartfulness Yoga Academy invited practitioners to share what yoga means to them, how it has changed them, and what they carry from yoga into everyday life. Their answers differ, yet together they reveal something universal: yoga isn't lived only in the moments we practice. It is lived in the moments when life asks us to be present, adaptable, accepting, and aware.



From Practice to Acceptance

For Poonam Patil, yoga gradually became a lifestyle—and, with that, an experience of accepting herself: "*Yoga has been a lifestyle for me. Later I realized it's acceptance of who you are.*"

Her journey began during the COVID-19 lockdown, but yoga's influence went beyond physical practice. It began to change her relationship with her own body.

She describes a shift from body shaming to appreciating her body, from seeing the body as something to be judged to experiencing it as a home.

This change also affected how she responded to life. As she reflects, yoga first changed her nervous system and influenced how she responded to inner and outer circumstances.

For Poonam, one of yoga's most valuable lessons has been flexibility—not simply of the body, but of the mind.

For Poonam, one of yoga's most valuable lessons has been flexibility—not simply of the body, but of the mind.

She carries this adaptability into daily life.

The practice of Brain–Heart Coherence can offer another practical reminder in this process of acceptance. Rather than fighting every uncomfortable emotion, we can learn to recognize what we feel, breathe gently, and meet ourselves with kindness.

Gratitude and compassion need not deny pain or difficulty. They can help us make space to experience them without letting them define our entire response.

Here is one of yoga's fundamental teachings: flexibility is not only about how far the body can move. It is also about how gently the mind can adjust when life does not move according to our expectations.

Yoga as a Bridge Between the Inner and Outer

For Ravi Balla, yoga is a connection—a bridge between the external and internal worlds that helps simplify life.

He describes a growing harmony with nature and a return to simplicity. He reflects on how the natural development of his voice and breathing has helped him make a positive impact on others' lives.

For Ravi, yoga is not confined to the 45 minutes or one hour spent on the mat. Its value lies in bringing the essence of practice into everyday activities, helping us live with greater happiness and peace.

His perspective reminds us that the inner and outer worlds are not separate. The awareness we cultivate within can shape how we speak, act, relate to nature, and touch the lives of others.

A few moments of conscious breathing and heart-centered attention can bridge inner calm and outer action. Before an important conversation, during a demanding task, or when emotions begin to rise, we can pause and respond more mindfully.

This does not mean that we can control every situation or guarantee a particular emotional state. Rather, we develop the capacity to meet circumstances with more presence.

The bridge Ravi describes also connects practice and life, personal well-being and our relationships with the world around us.

When yoga accompanies us through ordinary activities, even the simplest moments can become opportunities to live with greater awareness, simplicity, and peace.







From Routine to Inner Connection

For Rachna Verma, the journey unfolded differently.

In the early years, yoga was largely a routine of asana, pranayama, prayer, and a few moments of stillness at the end of practice. It brought tangible benefits, including physical health and the strength to move through different phases of life.

Yet she discovered yoga's deeper influence when she stopped practicing regularly.

Then she realized how much yoga had held her together—not only physically, but emotionally and intellectually, including how she made decisions.

This recognition changed what yoga meant to her.

Yoga became a way to stay connected with her inner self, which she describes as being connected to the Divine, the Master, or the Ultimate. As she puts it, "Give it any name."

Her journey eventually took her from practitioner to teacher. After witnessing the physical, emotional, and psychological distress of families during the COVID period, she felt moved to become certified as a yoga teacher and share this knowledge with others.

For Rachna, yoga does not end when the practice ends.

The principles cultivated during practice accompany us through the rest of the day. For her, this gradually becomes an ongoing process of working with the mind and ego, ultimately moving toward surrender and devotion.

She connects this understanding with *tapas, svadhyaya*, and *isvara-pranidhana*—discipline, self-study, and surrender.

A regular self-practice that includes gentle breathing, meditation, and cultivating gratitude can support this inward turn. Brain–Heart Coherence, approached as a practical exercise in mindful breathing and emotional awareness, can be one component of that practice—not a replacement for the wider discipline of yoga.

The deeper work is continued self-observation: recognizing habitual reactions, studying our patterns, and gradually aligning our thoughts, words, and actions with our values.

Her journey reminds us that yoga can be both a personal transformation and a call to share what we have discovered with others.

Yoga as Practice—and as the Goal

For me, yoga is both the journey and what it moves toward. It is both the process and the goal—an experiential journey that allows me to reach my true potential.

This perspective brings together two dimensions that can sometimes be separated: practice and experience.

For me, yoga is both the journey and what it moves toward. It is both the process and the goal—an experiential journey that allows me to reach my true potential.

The journey may begin with improving asana, understanding pranayama, or deepening meditation [*dhyana*]. But over time, the practice can open a broader way of seeing life.

Yoga has broadened my perspective and deepened my appreciation for life's beauty, while helping me learn to work in harmony with my own body.

The learning continues beyond formal practice.

One of the most important lessons I carry into daily life is to pause and remain aware—to notice what is happening before responding. That pause creates space: space to observe, to understand, and to choose how to respond. This is also where the practice of Brain–Heart Coherence meaningfully connects with everyday yoga. By cultivating awareness of my breath and emotional responses, I can create space between an experience and my reaction.

This awareness extends into relationships. Yoga has also taught me to approach others with care, respect, and understanding, meeting them where they are. This is another way yoga moves from the mat into life: the practice gradually shapes not only how we hold the body, but also how we hold ourselves in the world.

Daaji reminds us of something even more fundamental:

"There is nowhere to go, nothing to seek. It is already with you."

These journeys differ, yet each offers a glimpse of yoga as more than a formal practice.

One may come seeking physical well-being and discover self-acceptance. Another may begin with asana and pranayama and gradually discover an



inner connection. Someone else may learn the value of pausing, observing, and responding rather than reacting. For another, yoga may become a bridge between inner awareness and outer action, or a path toward teaching, service, and surrender.

And in our own daily self-practice, we may explore the relationship between breath, emotional responses, and physiological regulation through Brain–Heart Coherence. And so, slowly, what we practice becomes how we live.

FROM THE HEARTFULNESS YOGA ACADEMY

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guidance

"Meditation is a way for nourishing and blossoming the divinity within you."

AMIT RAY



When the Heart Remembers to Give Thanks

Gratitude begins with recognizing what we have received and deepens as we learn to transform life's difficulties into opportunities.

BY **DAAJI**

Have you seen how quickly gratitude runs out? The lights go out for 20 minutes, and suddenly we discover what electricity means. A blocked nose makes you appreciate breathing. And when we stub our little toe, we find out this forgotten little guy, who got next to no thanks for a long time, is apparently a key member of the walking department.

Why must we lose something before we recognize its value?

Maybe saying thanks matters less than deeply recognizing what we are thankful for. This is beautifully encapsulated in the Sanskrit word *kṛtajñatā: kṛta*, that which has been done, and *jña*, knowing or recognizing. Gratitude begins with an awareness of what has been done for us.

When we look closely, we find something humbling: very little of what we call "mine" is ours alone. Picture a normal cup of tea. Someone grew the tea. Someone picked it and processed it. Someone carried it. Rain fell, soil helped, sun shone for free. Thousands of visible and invisible contributions came together so we could casually say, "My cup of tea." But if the tea comes five minutes late, this philosophical outlook is liable to vanish.

Such is the ego's arithmetic. It keeps a very accurate record of what we have done for others and a rather inaccurate one of what others have done for us. Maybe someone was kind to us a hundred times and spoke harshly once. What do we remember at bedtime? Usually that one sentence. We replay it, edit it, add extra dialogue that was never said, and by midnight we have made a whole movie out of 12 seconds of conversation.

Gratitude makes amends for this strange accounting. It brings to mind the mother who

Gratitude begins with an awareness of what has been done for us.

cared for us when we were ill, the father who carried burdens without showing them, the teacher whose reprimand proved useful later, the friend who stood by us when nothing could be gained, and thousands of other people whose silent contributions made our lives possible. How glibly we talk of people after they have passed away. What are you waiting for? Flowers given to living hands have a different scent.

Nature goes even further in this lesson. Picture a mango tree. A mango tree receives soil, water, sunlight, perhaps some cow dung, and gives us sweet mangoes in return. Have we ever seen a mango tree asking for mango juice to keep itself going? A coconut tree doesn't need coconut water before it produces coconuts; a cow doesn't need milk before it produces milk. Nature takes the common things and makes them better.

Maybe this is where gratitude touches spirituality. It's not just a question of "What has life given us?" The question is, "What are we turning it into?" If life gives us appreciation, does it automatically bring humility? If it gives us wealth, do we become generous? If it provides knowledge, can it become wisdom? And when life offers us disappointment, criticism, failure, or humiliation, then what?

Anyone can be thankful for mango juice. Spiritual maturity starts when we learn what to do with the manure.

In the fifth maxim, Babuji Maharaj asks us to take miseries as divine blessings for our own good and be thankful. This doesn't mean pain is pleasant. No matter how much we spiritualize these experiences, loss is loss, betrayal is betrayal, and sickness is sickness. The question is different: what is this experience taking away or awakening in us?

When you fail, you rob yourself of a pride that success would have built. A difficult person, however, may reveal impatience cleverly hidden from ourselves. Rejection can show us how much we need approval. Loss can show us how tightly we held onto something that was never meant to be ours forever. Perhaps our enemy has been an unconscious party to our education.

This does not mean you put up with injustice or stay in harmful circumstances. Let us think wisely. But once we have done what needs to be done, must we carry bitterness? Someone can hurt us for five minutes, and we can replay the injury for 15 years. Somewhere along the line, we have to ask: who is carrying on the injury now?

Here, cleaning is valuable. We're not rewriting history or pretending that nothing happened. We're allowing the emotional weight of the event to dissipate. The sting may be removed, but the memory will stay. Maybe one day we'll look back and say, "That hurt, but it changed me." Sometimes we may be grateful for that change later on. The wound has turned into a window.

Another kind of gratitude often comes many years later: gratitude for the prayer that was not answered. We've probably all wanted something desperately at one time or another: a relationship, a position, an opportunity, a particular outcome. We prayed, and nothing happened. At the time, we asked ourselves, "Why doesn't God listen?" Years later, we look back and say, "Thank God that didn't happen."

The closed door may have saved us or led us to something we couldn't see then. This should humble us in our prayers, for we often pray to the Infinite and give Him remarkably specific instructions. "Lord, I am fully yielded to you. Please arrange these seven matters as per my specifications." Maybe we don't always seek Divine Will; sometimes we seek Divine cooperation with our will.

As gratitude matures, so does prayer. It starts with "Give me what I want," moves to "Help me understand what is needed," and ends with simple presence.

Gratitude also humbles the ego, because it undermines our claim of authorship. We say, "I did this by my hard work." And of course effort counts. But who gave us the body, the intelligence, the education, the opportunities, the teachers, the health and circumstances that made the effort possible? Our heart beats about a hundred thousand times a day without sending us a bill. The sun rises; it doesn't look at our credit rating. Those who have never planted a tree still get oxygen from trees.

As gratitude matures, so does prayer. It starts with "Give me what I want," moves to "Help me understand what is needed," and ends with simple presence.

When we recognize this, we don't have to cultivate humility artificially. Gratitude says, "Look how much has been given," and the ego says, "Maybe I was not doing everything alone."

I like the image of an ancient village well, its stone rim grooved by the rope pulled over it thousands of times. The stone is hard, the rope is soft. But even the soft thing will wear away the stone if it keeps pushing against it, again and again.

There is a story about an old woman who came to a well like this every morning. She would draw the first pot of water and pour it back into the well before drawing the water she needed. A little boy watched her and thought, "Why did she waste that first pot?" Much later in his life, he understood. The wee pot of water was not required for the well. She sent it back so that her hands would remember where the water came from.

Perhaps that's the way of gratitude. Does God require our thanks? One little "thank you"—what can it add to the Infinite? God does not need the prayer; we do. It keeps the heart from forgetting where the water comes from.

We are thankful first for something: family, health, success, help, an answered prayer. Then thankfulness grows, and we give thanks even for what is denied, or perhaps taken away. In spiritual practice, sometimes nothing special happens externally, but the heart still feels full after meditation. There is nothing but gratitude.





Around this time, gratitude doesn't depend on anything that happens in life. It becomes an independent, inner state, ripening naturally into remembrance and love.

How does a flower thank the sun? By flowering. How does a tree thank the earth? By bearing fruit. Perhaps our greatest gratitude is not expressed in words, but in what we become. If meditation makes us more loving, if cleaning impressions [*samskaras*] lightens yesterday's resentment, if prayer reduces our demands and enlarges acceptance, and if remembrance of God makes our presence gentler, then gratitude is already expressing itself through our life.

Perhaps the more profound question is not, "Have I been given enough to be grateful?" We have too many reasons to count. The real question is, "What has life given us, and what are we doing with it?" The mango tree receives common water, sunlight, soil, even manure—and gives lush sweetness without fanfare. Maybe we too can learn to do that.

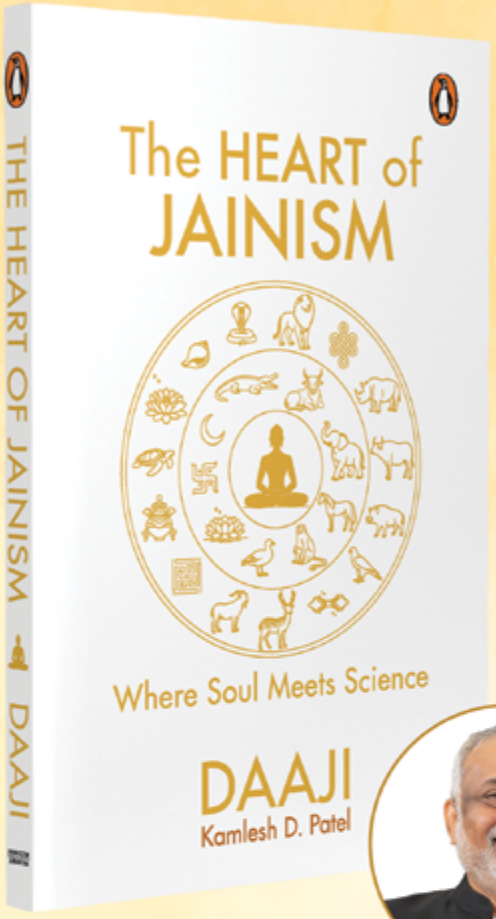
And then there is something more fundamental. Let's think about the life force for a moment. It has been with us since we came into this world, supporting every breath, heartbeat, movement, thought, and experience. It doesn't ask for recognition, doesn't announce its presence. We do not know how long it will stay with us, yet how often do we even stop to notice it, let alone be grateful for it?

Perhaps gratitude begins there: in remembering that before we own, achieve, love, or pray, life itself has already been given. And perhaps the best way to say thank you is to live in such a way that this gift is not wasted.

FROM DAAJI

Daaji is the global guide of Heartfulness and president of Shri Ram Chandra Mission.

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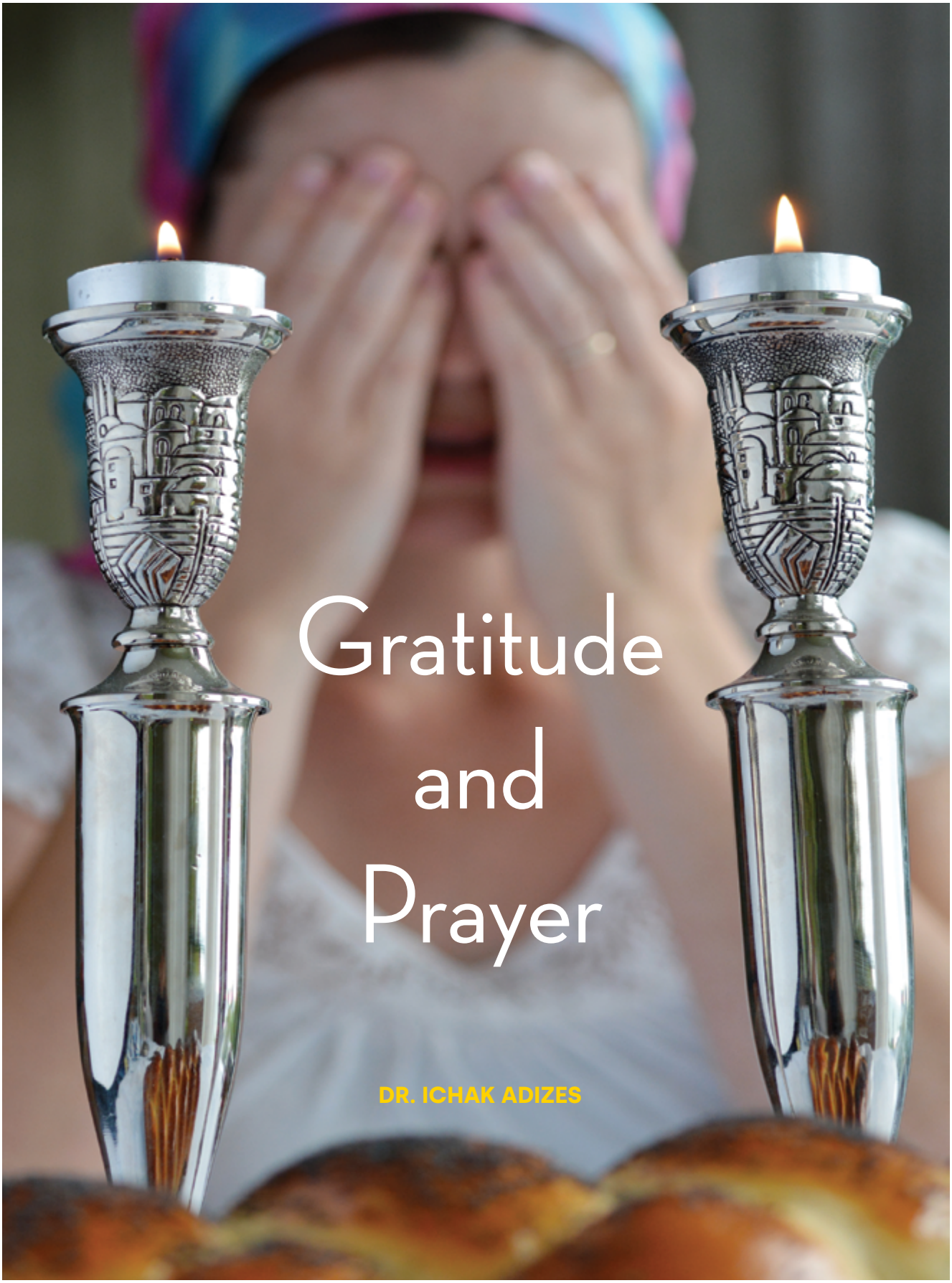
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leadership

"Listen with curiosity. Speak with honesty. Act with integrity."

ROY T. BENNETT



Gratitude and Prayer

DR. ICHAK ADIZES

was born into a secular family. I never learned any prayers. I did not learn any of the rituals of the Jewish religion. But I was intrigued and willing to do the best I could to join my "tribe," wherever in the world they may be.

Today I have been thinking about the Sabbath, about the Friday evening dinner, about the prayer before the meal. I arrived at some insights I want to share with you.

What is the prayer all about? What is the Sabbath all about?

It is about showing gratitude, about taking time to integrate and express our love for each other and to the world.

All week long we work. We struggle. We have conflicts. But for one day, one day, we stop. We show gratitude to God and to each other. And we integrate ourselves, the family, and the community.

On the Sabbath day, we integrate ourselves first by stopping work. We make the time to reflect, to pay attention. We do not drive, which means we stay around the home for the family. We do not cook, so the lady of the house can also rest and integrate.

It is this rest that distinguishes us from all other living things. Trees do not differentiate between one day and another. Neither do animals. We do – that is what makes us human. Humans are conscious. They can distinguish between the secular and the holy. Through self-discipline. By being conscious. We thank God for making us different from all other animals, for making us human.

Humans are conscious. They can distinguish between the secular and the holy. Through self-discipline. By being conscious. We thank God for making us different from all other animals, for making us human.

The Friday evening prayer is a thank you to God for showing us how to act, like all good leaders should, by example: God created the world in six days and, on the seventh day, rested. God is endlessly powerful. Does God need to rest? God was offering a personal example for us to follow. He was inviting us to take a rest.

The word "shalom" means peace, and there is no peace unless you are integrated.

If you analyze the prayer, what does it really express in many different ways? Gratitude.

We thank God for showing us the way to be human. We thank God for a creation that produces the bread that feeds us, for leading us out of slavery in Egypt, for making us free people. The prayer sung at the end of the meal is full of gratitude for God feeding not only us, but all the people in the world without expecting anything in return. The prayer is, *"Ha zan et ha olam kulo be hen be hesed u ve rahamim."*

In that prayer is more than a demonstration of gratitude. The gratitude is accompanied by a ritual of integration. We bless a glass of wine and all at the table share the glass. We *share*. The head of the table carves pieces of the special bread, the *challah*, and shares it with all the people around the table.

So, the Sabbath is not just a day of rest. It is a day of integration and showing gratitude.

On Friday evening, the whole family gets together around the table. Before anything else, the father sings a song of praise to his wife in front of the whole family, appreciating her for who she is. There are two words that describe her values: she is "*Ezer ke neged,*" which means "Helpful against." This is kind of strange, is it not? How can she be helpful if she is against? Well, think about it. Do you realize that when you lean on something, it is working against you? If it did not push back, you would fall. Her advice and her wisdom support can be leaned upon. So, we listen to the wife. We respect her. We acknowledge her. We appreciate her.

In the Sephardic tradition, the father says, "*Bendichas manos,*" which means, "Blessed are the hands that prepared our meal."

The mother responds, "*Bendichas bokas*," which means, "Blessed are the mouths that will eat it."

What do you hear? Again and again, *gratitude*. Appreciation. Respect. The father and the mother walk around the table, put their hands on the heads of each of the children and bless them. In the Sephardic tradition, the children, regardless of age, kiss the father's hand, the hand that fed them. Then, he goes to his wife and kisses her. Do you see the respect? The expression of love? The integration?

If you go to the synagogue on Friday evening and listen to the prayers, you will hear that they all share a common denominator: Gratitude. They thank God for keeping us healthy, for healing the sick, for freeing the prisoners, for freeing us from slavery. At the end of the prayers, people hug each other, shake hands, and say, "*Shabbat Shalom*." *Shalom* comes from the word "*shalem,*"

which means "whole." What is whole if not fully integrated? The word 'shalom' means peace, and there is no peace unless you are integrated. "Peace," meaning no more wars. No more fights. No more conflict. Peace.

On the Sabbath, the whole family goes to the synagogue. You can see the father walking – not driving, but walking – to the synagogue, holding the hands of his children. In the synagogue, the whole community becomes integrated. Because one walks to the house of prayer on the Sabbath, Jewish people often live in proximity to their synagogue. That, to me, is community building. They know each other. They bless each other.

Ahad Ha'am, a Jewish author, said, "More than the Jews have kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept the Jews." The Sabbath has kept the Jewish people together, integrated.

A day to show gratitude, to integrate, and to express love is all that is needed to have peace. And what more can we wish for?

Peace to us all,
Ichak Kalderon Adizes





Reprinted with permission from *Why a Sabbath?* at http://www.ichakadizes.com/why-a-sabbath/

practice

"A wonderful gift that a Yoga teacher can give a student is to help them realize they are adequate and full."

PATRICIA WALDEN





CONNECTION

Prayer connects us with the Source through humility, supplicancy, innocence, and insignificance.

BY N. S. NAGARAJA

> Lastly the most important and unfailing means of success is the prayer. It connects our link with God to whom we surrender ourselves with love and devotion. In prayer we stand before Him as an humble suppliant presenting to Him our true state and completely resigning ourselves to His will.
>
> —Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 1, pp. 41–42.

Babuji calls prayer "the most important and unfailing means of success," and in the very next line he tells us why: "It connects our link with God." In his view, prayer is not a request, a ritual, or a recitation. It is a connection.

Most of us live without feeling this connection. When we are occupied with sorrow or excitement, our awareness narrows to a single point, and the world around us seems to disappear. This narrowing is our default setting. We live as a body-mind complex, connected strongly to ourselves, a little to family and friends, and only vaguely to the Source from which everything came. We have not lost the connection. We have simply stopped being aware of it. Prayer is how we become aware of it again.

In this series, Connection is the C in SACRED: the living link between the practitioner and the Source, through which the current of Divinity flows. Prayer is where that link is made.

The Switch

A simple way to understand prayer is to think of a switch. The power is always there. The wiring is already in place. Close the circuit, and the light comes on.

Babuji explains the principle in his *Commentary on the Ten Maxims*. The central point, the Source, "was already rooted deep in all the beings," and prayer turns our attention toward it:



> In prayer we try to reach up to that central point. This is however possible only when we create a similar state within. This requires practice. It can be attained by resigning ourselves to the divine will which is absolutely simple and tranquil. Apparently it seems to be very difficult, though in fact it is not so. It is not difficult for those who aspire for it. When a man creates in himself a strong craving for the Absolute, he is indeed in a state of prayer… Whenever a man enters into that state even for a moment, his prayer is granted but it requires continued practice to accomplish it.
>
> — Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 1, p. 208.

"Whenever a man enters into that state even for a moment, his prayer is granted." That is the switch. The connection does not have to be earned over years before it works. It responds the moment the inner condition matches. What takes years is learning to enter that state at will and to stay in it.

Daaji describes what that inner condition is through an electrical image of his own:

> The process is so simple, so beautiful, and so scientific. The attitudes of humility, supplicancy, innocence, and insignificance create a vacuum in the heart so that the current from the Source flows in and enlivens the connection, just as electrical current flows from the positive to the negative pole in an electrical wire. Our job is to create the negative polarity by allowing a receptive, yielding state within the heart. If we are not yielding, if our attitude is strong or demanding, with self-importance or force, then no vacuum is created in the heart, so

there is no flow. It is a natural phenomenon, and our manner creates the condition for the flow to be activated or not.

—Daaji, *Designing Destiny,* p. 47.

The Source is the positive pole and the heart is the negative pole. Our attitude is the switch: when the heart yields, the vacuum forms and the current flows; when it asserts itself, nothing flows. Daaji gives this vacuum its proper name: "That state of vacuity or negation also establishes a relationship of devotion with the Divine" (Designing Destiny, p. 46). Babuji describes the same law in his own words:

Human perfection lies in realising the Master as Master in true sense, and oneself as His slave devoted entirely to His service. By doing so one creates in himself a state of negation which attracts His direct attention and establishes a link with Him.

—Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 1, p. 230.

What Creates the Vacuum?

Daaji identifies four attitudes that create the vacuum in the heart: humility, supplicancy, innocence, and insignificance.

Humility

Humility is the most sublimated state of ego. Humility is not flattery or servility. Instead, humility is a sign of great self-awareness, where you are aware of your smallness in front of a much bigger ideal.

—Daaji, *Spiritual Anatomy,* p. 65.

The Source is the positive pole and the heart is the negative pole. Our attitude is the switch: when the heart yields, the vacuum forms and the current flows; when it asserts itself, nothing flows.

Humility does not imply a lack of confidence. We recognize ourselves as instruments of something greater, allowing that power to work through us. The word comes from the Latin humus, earth or ground. To be humble is to stand close to the ground. The ego isn't destroyed; it's brought low and put in its proper place, as a servant. Humility is not low self-esteem. It is an accurate sense of scale: I am small before the ideal, and the work is done through me, not by me. In the Bhagavad Gita, *amanitvam*, freedom from pride, comes first in the list of qualities of true knowledge.

Humility is the ego sublimated: an accurate awareness of one's smallness before the ideal, and of being an instrument, not the doer.

Supplicancy

Babuji describes the supplicant as one who stands before Him "presenting to Him our true state and completely resigning ourselves to His will." In his tenth maxim, he describes the mood itself:

There is such a tender softness in it as cannot be translated in words, and which reveals his feelings of true supplicancy. That means that

> the impediments present in him are removed and the weight thereof has been set aside.
>
> —Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 1, pp. 230–31.

Daaji describes the feeling at its root as "a kind of helplessness, a feeling that, 'Without Thy help, I cannot reach the destination'" (*The Heartfulness Way,* Vol. 2, p. 81).

The Latin *supplicare* consists of sub, under, and *plicare*, to fold or bend. Supplication has long been associated with bending or kneeling before someone greater than oneself. Supplicancy is not begging for things. Babuji calls praying "for petty worldly ends" a folly. It is presenting our true state honestly, admitting we cannot get there alone, and resigning ourselves to His will. This is why even the word "please" is too heavy: supplicancy offers itself and does not demand.

> *Supplicancy is the heart bent in need: offering its true state, admitting its helplessness, and resigning itself to His will without demand.*

Innocence

Babuji ties innocence directly to the attitudes before it:

> The feeling of humility, which may as well be expressed as a state of supplicancy, covers within it the condition of innocence. One who attains it has in a way attained all, though apparently it may not seem to be so.
>
> —Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 1, p. 231.

The one who prays in this mood, he says, "assumes a state of absolute purity like that of the divine currents which are absolutely free from *mala* (impurities), *vikshep* (unreal projections) and *avarana* (layers of grossness)."

Innocence in prayer is the heart without calculation: no hidden motive, no bargaining with God, no projecting of what should happen. It is a child's openness. It is not naivety or ignorance; it is simplicity that has nothing to hide.

The word comes from the Latin *in*, not, and *nocere*, to harm. Its first meaning was harmlessness, close to *ahimsa*. Later it came to mean freedom from guile. Innocence in prayer is the heart without calculation: no hidden motive, no bargaining with God, no projecting of what should happen. It is a child's openness. It is not naivety or ignorance; it is simplicity that has nothing to hide.

> *Innocence is the heart free of guile and calculation: open and harmless, like a child before its parent.*



Insignificance

> It was the condition of insignificance (abhoodhiyat, or subdued state)… In this state one doesn't care about things like respect, disrespect, and so on. One is centered in Thou, and that's where the attention rests.
>
> —Daaji, *Spiritual Anatomy*, p. 220.

Daaji is careful to say what it is not: "It's not a comparative state where one thinks of themselves as insignificant by beating down one's ego. The inner softness of the heart is such that the idea of any form of comparison is lost." He reads Hanumaan's name as an example: *hanu*, without, and *maan*, respect, "one who doesn't care for one's own maan or apmaan (respect or disrespect)."

Abhoodhiyat, more commonly written '*ubudiyya*, comes from the Arabic '*abd*, servant, and names the station of pure servanthood. The English word comes from significare, to make a sign. To be insignificant, in this sense, is to stop making signs of oneself and stop needing to be noticed. Daaji describes insignificance as where the qualities of prayer lead: purity, innocence, humility, and longing, he says, "help us arrive at a subdued state akin to utmost insignificance" (*The Heartfulness Way*, Vol. 2, p. 81).

> *Insignificance is the self without comparison: no longer making signs of itself, indifferent to respect and disrespect, with attention resting wholly in Thou.*

From Posture to State

As we saw in the article on attitude, an attitude always begins as a posture. These four are no exception: each word describes a way of holding the body before it describes a state of the heart.

It was the condition of insignificance (abhoodhiyat, or subdued state)... In this state one doesn't care about things like respect, disrespect, and so on. One is centered in Thou, and that's where the attention rests.
—Daaji, *Spiritual Anatomy*, p. 220.

To be humble is to be close to the ground. To be a supplicant is to bend. To be innocent is to stand like a child. To be insignificant is to make no sign of oneself.

Prayer is where we take this posture every day. When we sit for the Heartfulness Prayer, we assume it on purpose, outwardly and inwardly, often before we truly feel it. That is not pretense, and it is not beating ourselves down. It is how attitude is learned. A posture held with sincerity draws the inner state toward it, until one day the bowing is no longer something we do but something we are. Then the four are no longer four. They are one posture of the heart seen from four sides, and the heart is empty enough for the current to flow. This is exactly what the Heartfulness Prayer is designed to do.

The Prayer Itself

Babuji introduces the Heartfulness Prayer in his commentary on the second maxim. Just before it, he describes the state of negation as "the very Reality itself." He then explains that he considers the following prayer to be essential for an abhyasi:

> O Master! Thou art the real goal of human life;
> we are yet but slaves of wishes putting bar to our advancement.
> Thou art the only God and power to bring us up to that stage.
>
> —Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 1, pp. 207–8.

Each line does part of the work of opening the heart.

- "**Thou art the real goal of human life**" fixes the direction. Without a goal, the current has nowhere to go.
- "**We are yet but slaves of wishes putting bar to our advancement**" names what fills the heart and blocks the flow: our wishes and our self-importance.
- "**Thou art the only God and power to bring us up to that stage**" expresses surrender and creates the vacuum.

Daaji calls the words a springboard. They are meant to invoke the feeling beneath them. Eventually, he says, "there will be no words at all, and a total acceptance of whatever the present moment gives" (*Designing Destiny,* p. 50).

Prayer and Sankalpa

The attitudes close the circuit. Sankalpa gives the current its direction. In *Designing Destiny,* Daaji describes these two vital things coming together in prayer:

> On the one hand, prayer connects you with your highest Self through the heart, to dive so deep that you connect with the Source of everything. On the other hand, it uses the power of thought or suggestion to bring about change, and this we call sankalpa in Yoga.
>
> —Daaji, *Designing Destiny*, p. 51.



Connection is what makes sankalpa potent. And sankalpa is what keeps returning us to connection when we drift. Each gives life to the other. A thought offered from a connected heart, Daaji says, "is no longer from our own individual level. It becomes a key to unlock evolution, to bring about transformation" (*Designing Destiny*, p. 52).

Keeping the Switch On

Prayer is not meant to connect us only for the few minutes we sit. Daaji describes how, as the prayer is mastered, "the inner connection is always there," whether we are studying, eating breakfast, or with friends—a 24–hour business that needs less and less time (*Designing Destiny,* p. 52). What begins as a few seconds of prayer at night slowly becomes a prayerful state that never switches off.

Where the Connection Leads

The link that prayer opens to the Source does not just stay between seeker and Source. Babuji describes where it led in his own life:

> "…I felt his light alone shining in every heart, whether that of a friend or foe. The result was that finally I began to feel my own self in every being."
>
> —Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 2, p. 248.

When the connection to the Source is open, the connection to everyone else becomes visible on its own. We are brethren because we come from the same central point.

Babuji's Basant Panchami message of 1982 brings an insight into this:

> "We are all brethren connected intellectually, morally, and spiritually — the main goal of human life. This and that have gone now. There remains the purity alone in all His work and environment which weaves the spiritual destiny of the persons with the Ultimate."
>
> —Babuji, *Complete Works of Ram Chandra*, vol. 3, p. 483.

When the connection to the Source is open, the connection to everyone else becomes visible on its own. We are brethren because we come from the same central point.

Closing

Babuji called prayer the most important and unfailing means of success, because it connects us to God. The power was never missing. The wiring was always there. What prayer changes is the condition of the heart. Humility, supplicancy, innocence, and insignificance create the vacuum, and the current flows. Remembrance keeps it flowing through the day. In time, the sorting of life into this and that falls away, and what remains, in Babuji's words, is "purity alone in all His work and environment which weaves the spiritual destiny of the persons with the Ultimate."

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FROM HEARTFULNESS INSTITUTE

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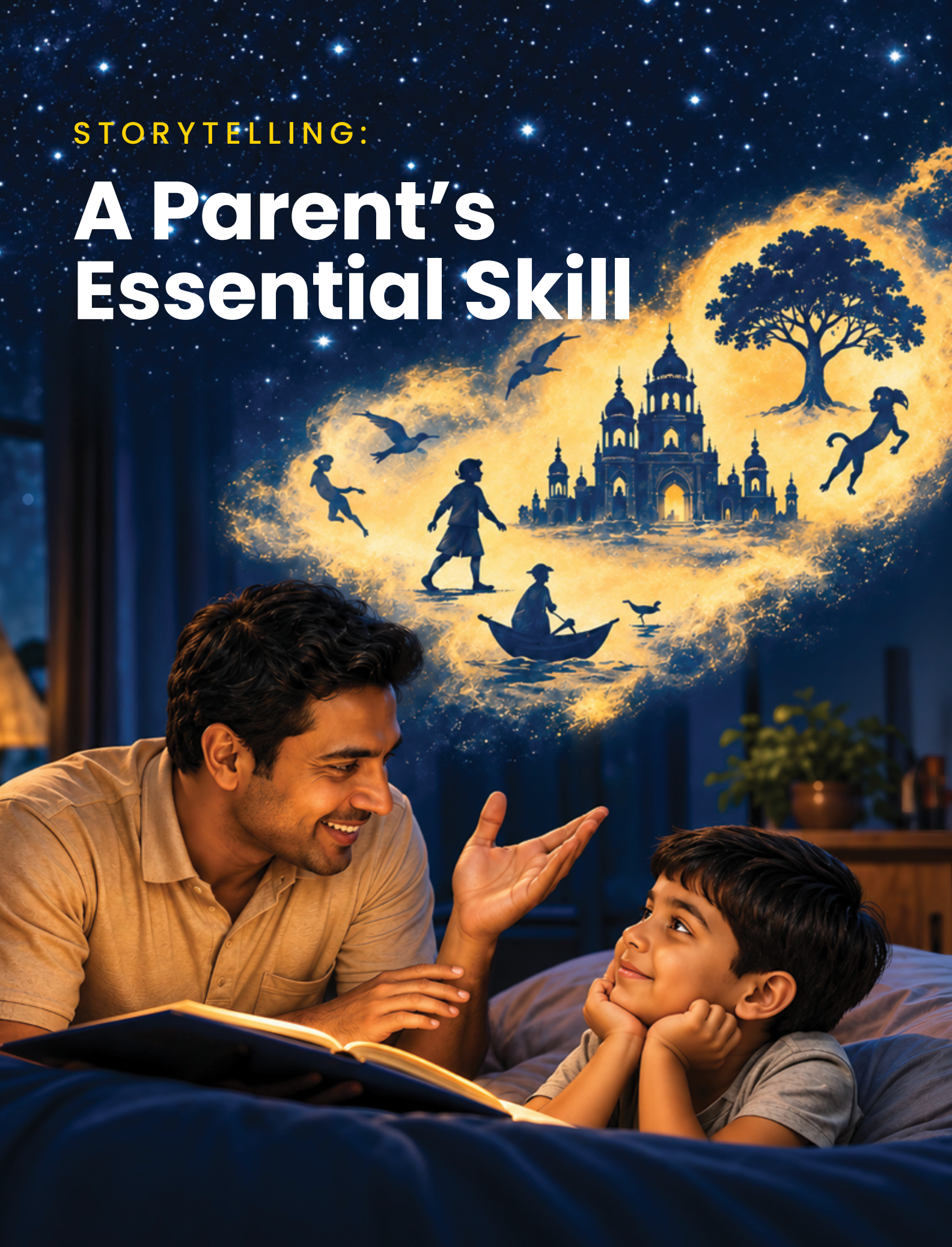
education

"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."

ARISTOTLE

STORYTELLING:

A Parent's Essential Skill



Originally published in *Hinduism Today* (July–September 2006). Reprinted with permission from the author.

From childhood memories to family traditions, storytelling offers a way to share wisdom, explore feelings, and nurture values across generations.

By **RAMA DEVAGUPTA**

My father was never trained as a professional storyteller; he is a retired engineer. And yet, some of my fondest childhood memories and valuable learning experiences can be traced to the innumerable stories my father narrated to me as a child and teenager. It did not matter what day of the week or what time of night it was. Besides the daily morning routine, where he would tell a story while getting ready for work, whenever there was a moral to be conveyed, a painful lesson to be learned, after my mother's questioning and reprimanding was over, my father would amazingly narrate a story whose characters, by some strange quirk of fate, also happened to be encountering questions, frustrations, and dilemmas similar to mine.

Often, by the end of the story, even as a child, I'd gain a new perspective on my feelings and emotions and leave with a deeper understanding of the next step to take. Modern psychologists might say that listening to parables, legends, and fables helped me come to terms with my own "case history," with renewed spontaneity, creative problem-solving, and wonder.

"Children learn best when they are unaware of the fact that they are being taught," explained Shri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari [Chariji], a former global guide for Heartfulness meditation practitioners. "That is why play, perhaps, is so intimately intertwined with the teaching process. Children learn practically all they are ever going to learn within the first six or seven years of their lives."

"Children learn best when they are unaware of the fact that they are being taught."
—Shri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari [Chariji]

It is no wonder, therefore, that storytelling has been a powerful tool throughout the centuries—used by parents, grandparents, teachers, educators, saints, and seers. In fact, storytelling has been part and parcel of humanity since the beginning of time—from the days of prehistoric cave art to the interactive stories, videos, and digital media available to children today.

"When did we first get exposed to the presence of a higher power in our life?" we might occasionally wonder. Walking down the obscure road of foggy, distant memories, we may eventually recognize that, in all likelihood, our first exposure to God, to religion, and to spirituality started from a tale narrated by a parent or grandparent at bedtime. For instance, the Hindu psyche has imbibed knowledge and insight from the deep treasure chest of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. Native Americans draw inspiration from their vast storehouse of oral folklore. Buddhist teachers reveal the timeless wisdom hidden in Zen stories and Jataka tales. Islam depends on its wealthy inheritance of stories from Sufi scholars and saints. Judaism draws its richness from Hasidic examples and biblical histories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Job, and others. In Christianity, the New Testament describes how Jesus taught the masses in parables and reserved the esoteric teaching for his disciples when they were away from the crowds.

Storytelling has been part and parcel of humanity since the beginning of time—from the days of prehistoric cave art to the interactive stories, videos, and digital media available to children today.





Augusta Baker and Ellin Greene, authors of *Storytelling: Art and Technique*, speak about the need for this craft in simple, everyday language. "Storytelling brings to the listeners heightened awareness," they say, "a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life."

Joseph Campbell, the world-renowned scholar of mythology, states pithily, "The folktale is the primer of the picture-language of the soul." In *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, Thomas Moore writes: "Storytelling is an excellent way of caring for the soul. It helps us see the themes that circle in our lives, the deep themes that tell the myths we live."

In *Stories to Nourish the Hearts of Our Children*, contemporary storyteller Laura Simms shares from her professional and personal experience: "Listening to a story is a dynamic process that delights children while allowing them to imagine themselves in a variety of situations. Stories are non-didactic teaching tools. A story heard is not an explanation, but an experience that is enduring and enriching. Each child personally integrates the story, embodying the characters and experiencing the events."

"Stories contain seeds of healing," she adds, "and telling them encourages growth and rejuvenation. Storytelling is an ancient method that has always served to bring people together and to stimulate creative imagination, wisdom, and compassion."

Unfortunately, the fabric of today's society is woven together by nuclear families consisting of exhausted parents, and its tapestry is strewn with the complexities of modern digital technology and devices. Consequently, stressed parents have little time or energy to spare and cannot live in the present or experience the joy of the oral tradition. Even the little ones lack the freedom to indulge in the make-believe world of dressing up, playacting, and fantasy games. To get a head start and be one step ahead in tomorrow's rat



race, more and more youngsters are being sent to preschool and kindergarten at a ridiculously young age—victims of "the hurried childhood syndrome." Additionally, indiscriminate exposure to streaming videos, social media, online entertainment, and video games is causing a major values crisis among young people in both developed and developing countries.

"Modern life has deprived the younger generation of access to the fairy tales of yesteryear," Shri Rajagopalachari lamented in *Down Memory Lane*. "They were entrancing beyond belief. But their greatest value lay not in their charm, but in their ability to give children, during their formative years, a permanent foundation of value systems which they absorbed without being aware of the fact that they were learning the most profound values of life. And since such values were implanted deep into the child's inner core of the developing human being, those values remained, to be called upon later in life in the form of hidden reserves of strength and fortitude, when the now-grown-up adult faced temptations or trying situations in actual life."

One can safely conclude that the loss of morals and ethics clearly reflects the diminishing importance we give to folktales, myths, and legends in our fast-food culture and high-speed life. One way or another, we have to simplify our lives, attend to our inner growth, and nurture our children's spiritual development.

Drawing on timeless wisdom from the collective human experience in myths and symbols, and stressing the importance of reading myths, Joseph Campbell explains how "they teach you that you can turn inward, and you begin to get the message of the symbols." He suggests that we ought to "read other people's myths, not those of your own religion, because you tend to interpret your own religion in terms of facts—but if you read the other ones, you begin to get the message. Myth

helps you to put your mind in touch with this experience of being alive."

As a child, I didn't realize how important storytelling would become in my life! Neither did I know that reading and telling stories would eventually become an integral part of my parenting philosophy and style. My son and daughter have been exposed to myths, fables, legends, folktales, and spiritual stories from birth. The first piece of music my son heard a few hours after coming into this world was the late Indian singer Mukesh's heartfelt devotional rendition of the Ramcharitmanas—thanks to the audiotapes I deliberately packed in the maternity bag for my hospital stay. Ever since, we've made it a daily ritual in our house to share stories from mythology and scripture at bedtime.

Over the last decade, I have watched my children respond to storytellers and readers with varied reactions, from interest and rapt attention to passivity and plain disinterest—at school, in the libraries, and in the comfort of our home. Watching their love for stories, I am nostalgically reminded of my father's gift for storytelling and the role mythology and folktales played in my self-development. As Joseph Campbell claims, these stories became the launching pad for my spiritual journey, as the writers and narrators had a clear, unmistakable goal in sight: to evoke inspiration and deeper thinking in the young listener's heart and mind.





Storytelling

A DOZEN PRACTICAL TIPS

In light of the wise words of scholars and spiritual teachers above, I hope parents will find it worthwhile to reflect on the significance of the art and craft of storytelling for the benefit of the younger generation. I hope parents will take up the torch of storytelling by following a few of the tips below. At one time or another, I have used them myself, and it has been an enjoyable experience for my children and me.

1. **Read the story for yourself** before you read it to the child. Absorb it, digest it, and try to capture not just its moral, but also its essence.

2. **Know the story well** so that if you are interrupted, you can jump back into it comfortably.

3. **Identify yourself** mentally with the child. Listen to the story with a child's ears and see how you might make it more appealing. Feel free to adapt and revise based on your child's age.

4. **Don't use a monotonous voice.** Polish up your tone and style with some drama.

5 **Allow yourself to get into the heart** of the characters to make the tale come alive. It is important for the child to identify with the emotions and feelings of the characters.

6 **Be natural.** Allow the story to flow through you. For younger children, facial expressions and hand movements used in a spontaneous, creative way evoke an enthusiastic response. Simple gestures, like a sparkle in the eyes, a happy smile, anger or sadness in the voice, can successfully recreate the story's original atmosphere.

7 **You are not giving a performance** for a critical adult audience. Don't be stiff-necked and self-conscious, worried about appearing silly. Your prime objective should be to narrate in a pleasurable manner.

8 **Some storybooks come with commentaries.** Do not read the commentaries to young children as they might sound like a lecture. Mention the moral in passing. Wait for them to ask questions, and when they do, guide them in their thinking.

9 **Allow time and space for a dialogue** with your children to instill the higher values of life. Reflection doesn't have to happen immediately after reading; it can be done in the ordinary moments of family life: while gardening, on an evening walk, or even at dinner.

10 **Sincerity is important in stories** that deal with ethics and spirituality. The slightest hint of adult skepticism, and children will see through it immediately. Remember the power of thought: Your demeanor will radiate whatever you feel—whether it be faith or cynicism.

11 **Learn to live in the moment.** Consider why we love reading the stories narrated by spiritual masters like Buddha and Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa with such enchantment. It is due to their simplicity, faith, and surrender to the Divine.

12 **Shri Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur** [Babuji], the founder-president of Shri Ram Chandra Mission, once said: "Spirituality is a science of wonder" and "Doubt is a poison for the will." So let us read and narrate these spiritual adventures with wonder and, along the way, teach our children the art and craft of living a well-integrated, balanced, happy life.

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The Biology and Inner Landscape of Compassion

Insights from neurophysiology and Heartfulness practice reveal how stress can interfere with compassion and how inner balance can help it flourish.

By **DR. KUNAL DESAI**



The Paradox

All our human interactions flourish when they are rooted in qualities such as empathy and compassion. Yet consistently expressing these qualities can become difficult when our inner world is burdened by stress, emotional exhaustion, and unrest.

Having practiced medicine for more than two decades, I have had a unique vantage point from which to observe this paradox. Healthcare professionals work in an environment where they repeatedly encounter illness, uncertainty, fear, and others' suffering. In these moments, empathy and compassion are not simply desirable qualities; they are integral to the very act of caregiving.

Yet caregivers themselves are particularly vulnerable to stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion. Repeated exposure to the suffering and trauma of others can also contribute to compassion fatigue, a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion.

Here lies a profound irony: those entrusted with caring for others may gradually deplete their own emotional resources. The caregiver may still intend to care yet struggle to access the inner space from which genuine compassion naturally flows.

This raises a deeper question—one that extends far beyond medicine:

Can true compassion flourish when our inner world is filled with turbulence, disturbance, and discontent?

If this is true for caregivers, isn't it equally relevant to every human relationship? Between parent and child, teacher and student, manager and colleague, husband and wife, or simply one human being and another, what we offer outwardly is inseparable from the inner climate we cultivate.



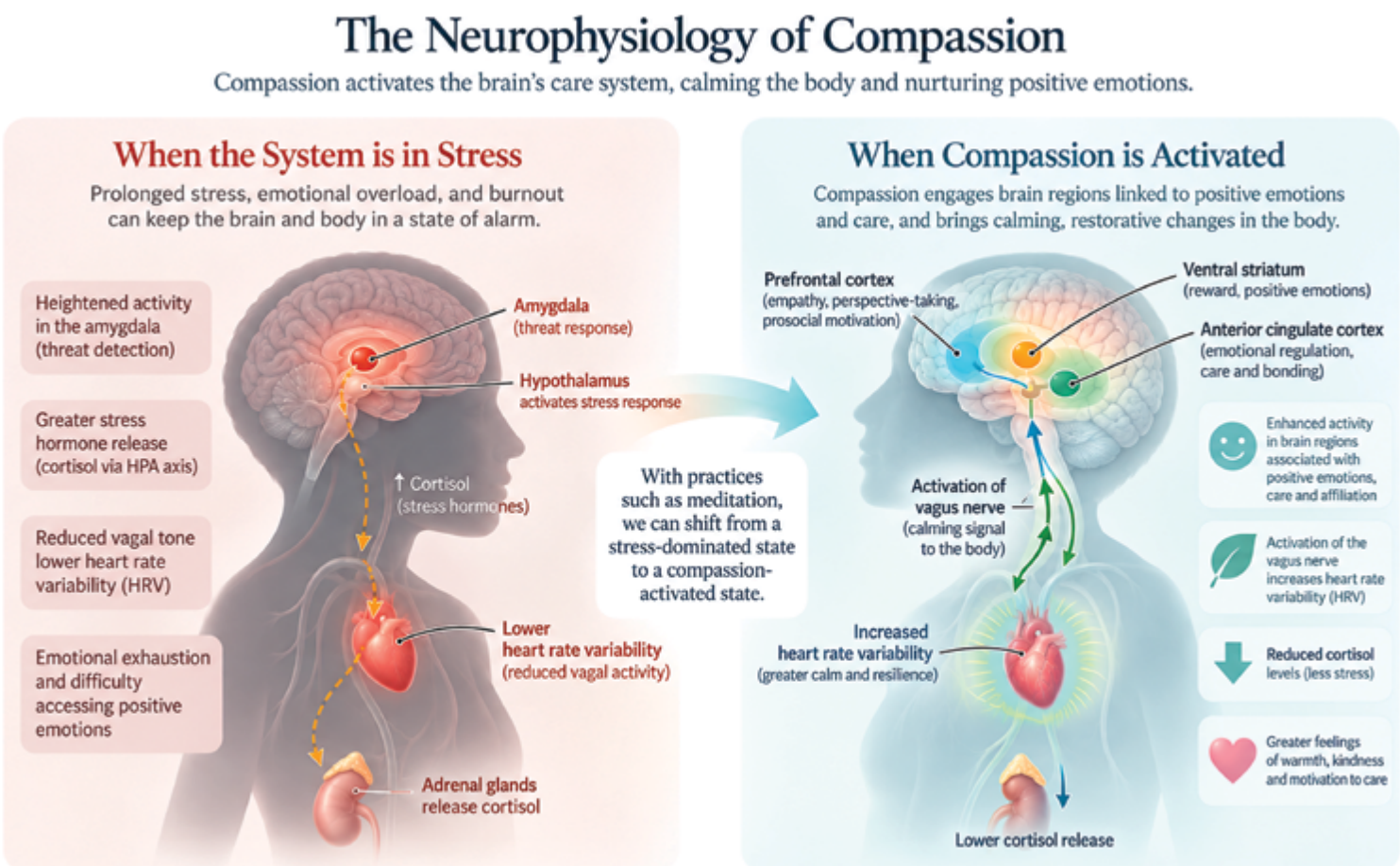
Neurophysiology of Compassion

Compassion has a biological foundation and is deeply rooted in our mammalian care system, which enables us to recognize distress, connect with those who are suffering, and respond with care.

It is associated with activation of the calming, parasympathetic nervous system through the vagus nerve, increased heart rate variability, and regulation of the stress response, including cortisol.

But this raises an intriguing dilemma. What happens when this same system is repeatedly exposed to stress, emotional overload, and the suffering of others? Compassion draws on systems associated with connection and positive emotion, while chronic stress and emotional exhaustion can deplete our inner resources.

The very idea of "cultivating compassion" presents an interesting paradox. If compassion is already inherent to our human nature, do we really need to create it—or simply remove what prevents us from expressing it?



An Experiment

We explored this question in a randomized study of healthcare professionals. Participants followed either a six-week trainer-supported Heartfulness program or a self-guided gratitude practice.

After six weeks, participants practicing Heartfulness showed significantly reduced burnout and secondary traumatic stress, along with a trend toward greater compassion satisfaction. Participants also described feeling calmer and less reactive to stress, with improved sleep and less fatigue.

Heartfulness offers an intentional inward pause through meditation, allowing the mind to settle and fostering calmness and inner connection while removing emotional imprints using its unique Cleaning practice. With repeated practice, this inner calm can gradually percolate into daily life, helping us meet difficult situations with greater poise and emotional balance. The resulting inner climate becomes more conducive to the natural expression of compassion.

Spiritual Science as a Bridge

When we think carefully, we appreciate that human emotions and feelings are energy the human system expresses in different forms, such as anger, compassion, empathy, and other qualities.

In *Spiritual Anatomy,* Daaji describes a subtle system of chakras, or energy centers, mapping the journey of human consciousness. Particularly relevant to our discussion are the five points of the Heart Region. They encompass a spectrum of human experience: contentment and discontentment, calmness and restlessness, compassion and displeasure, courage and fear, and clarity and confusion.



Heartfulness offers an intentional inward pause through meditation, allowing the mind to settle and fostering calmness and inner connection while removing emotional imprints using its unique Cleaning practice.

Seen through this lens, these qualities are not isolated emotions but part of an interconnected inner landscape. Consider someone who remains inwardly discontented and disturbed. Discontent may feed restlessness; restlessness may express itself as displeasure or anger, and fear may further disturb inner clarity. Most of us have experienced some version of this inner state.

Now imagine asking that same person to express compassion toward others continuously. Compassion may still be possible—but it can begin to feel like swimming against the current. Over time, the effort may become exhausting, making it increasingly difficult to express compassion naturally and consistently.

A simple prescription of Heartfulness practices addresses this core aspect, transforming our inner landscape, allowing these energy vortices to naturally flower and support the human qualities of empathy and compassion. When our inner climate is balanced and calm, we become a conduit of compassion in an authentic, effortless way, perhaps accompanied by corresponding changes in our physiology.

Being Present

As a caregiver, one of the most important lessons I have learned is the value of simply being present.

Our feelings are rooted in the present moment. I can remember holding my daughter in my arms for the first time and what I felt—but I cannot fully recreate that feeling now. It belonged to that moment.

Heartfulness practice gradually sensitizes us to this inner dimension, helping us stay connected to the heart and therefore more available to the present moment.

And perhaps being truly present is a prerequisite for compassion to find its true expression.

When our inner climate is balanced and calm, we become a conduit of compassion in an authentic, effortless way, perhaps accompanied by corresponding changes in our physiology.

Simple Practice

Before entering a difficult conversation, meeting a distressed patient or family member, responding to a child, or dealing with someone who has challenged you, pause for a moment and ask:

Do I feel balanced within?

Do I feel calm, or is there any inner turbulence?

Am I truly present?

All these questions can be addressed with a single act of connecting with our heart.



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reader voices

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BRENDA UELAND

Gratitude
A Quality of the Heart

Gratitude comes easily when life goes well. But can we remain grateful in difficult circumstances? Discover how greater awareness and spiritual practice can help us cultivate unconditional gratitude.

BY **VICTOR KANNAN**



Saying "thank you" is a good courtesy, and it is welcome. But gratitude isn't gratitude if it is based on a situation or condition. I believe gratitude runs deeper than thankfulness, though both have a mundane context and a deeper spiritual meaning.

We are all naturally grateful for the courtesies and recognitions we get. But what happens when someone treats me in a way I perceive as unkind? I may feel insulted and even vengeful.

A naturally grateful heart has now become a vengeful one. It is not only the ego behind the hurt and revenge that's gaining power, but the unawareness of it all. It is more a matter of unawareness than ego!

A lack of awareness of the principle of unity perpetuates our sense of separation and identification with the ego.

Compare a grateful person to a revengeful person. Who is suffering the most? Who is freer? This has nothing to do with who has been endowed with more.

I feel grateful for all that I have and all that I don't have. Having and not having is part of the same continuum. I wouldn't be who I am today if a single day had been any different in the past. I will go on trying to do my best and improve daily. And for that I am grateful.

Once, Chariji gave a talk saying he was grateful to be alive one more day, one extra day to work on himself and improve. He was already in his 80s when he gave this speech, just a few months before his death. This is a phenomenal attitude. It is also a fact. Only here and now, in this embodied existence, can we grow, however difficult the circumstances might be.

Lalaji says that when a soul enters the body, the mind begins to form. Without the body and soul, mind has no place to exist. In this Raja Yoga system of spiritual evolution, the mind is essential; life in the embodied state is extremely critical. This mind is that powerful invisible tool of cognition and evolution.

"Gratitude isn't gratitude if it is based on a situation or condition."

The moment the body, mind, or soul separates from this triad, we lose the opportunity to evolve and grow. Hence, it is important to live as long and as healthily as possible, and to practice a spiritual system with as much discipline as possible.

We started with the statement that gratitude is ungenuine if it is conditional. In fact, nothing spiritual can be conditional. Love, gratitude, faith, and other spiritual qualities must be unconditional and unchanging to be real. If all three, love, gratitude, and faith, become unconditional, without their negative sides of anger, revenge, and doubt, what happens?

It gives us a positive and purposeful orientation toward life.

Being oriented toward positivity does not mean being devoid of inquiry or careless about life's pitfalls. This orientation helps us get up and go toward the goal, undeterred.

I am grateful for opportunities that lift me and for suffering that shapes me into someone wiser, stronger, and more compassionate. I am grateful for growth that stretches me beyond my comfort, and for setbacks that reveal strengths I never knew I possessed. I am grateful for friends who walk beside me and for those whose indifference teaches me to seek fulfillment within myself.

Gratitude shuns blind acceptance. The mind remains the tool to discern what is essential to life's higher purpose. We use the mind to know and evaluate life's experiences. We cultivate a new "me," one that is more self-aware, self-regulating, and self-improving.



How do we cultivate gratitude that is unconditional, open-minded, and positively oriented?

First, we begin by recognizing the good things in life.

Not everyone suffers all the time. Even the most unfortunate has something to be grateful for. Find it, recognize it, and savor it.

It may have been a kindness from a neighbor or fellow traveler, or the simple gesture of someone holding a door open for you.

From there, begin to appreciate even the negative things that happen.

When something bad happens to you, don't ever ask, "Why me?" Be bold enough to say, "I am glad it is me. I can handle it."

Forget someone causing you trouble. How can we deal with our own bad behaviors?

Pausing. Pausing requires practice.

Pausing is strengthened by introspection, visualization, and reprogramming. This can be done every time you have a bad day. Eventually, bad days become fewer as you become better at pausing and processing in real time. Your interactions become more pleasant. This enhances gratitude. When we say smell the roses, this is what we mean. Pause, appreciate, and be grateful.

This pausing increases our awareness. While gratitude helps expand consciousness, pausing helps us change our patterns. When we are released from our patterns, we feel more grateful. This becomes a virtuous cycle.

Unconditional gratitude also opens the door to unconditional love. Think about it. Gratitude is the foundation for devotion, and true devotion is unconditional; it embraces universal love, devotion to the Master and love to fellow beings! Loving all whom he loves. This is the power of gratitude.

Thank you.

Gratitude is the foundation for devotion, and true devotion is unconditional; it embraces universal love, devotion to the Master and love to fellow beings! Loving all whom he loves. This is the power of gratitude.

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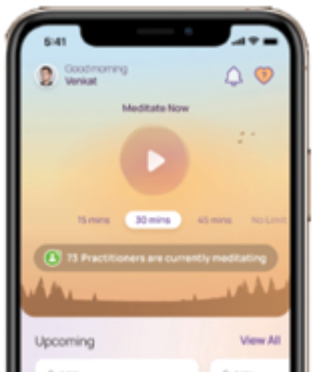




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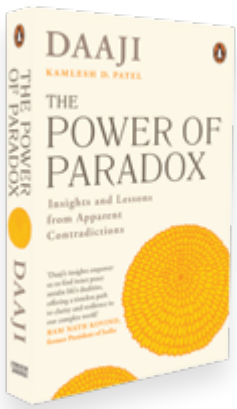
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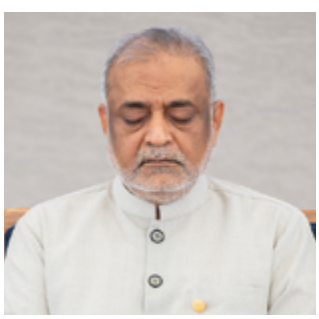




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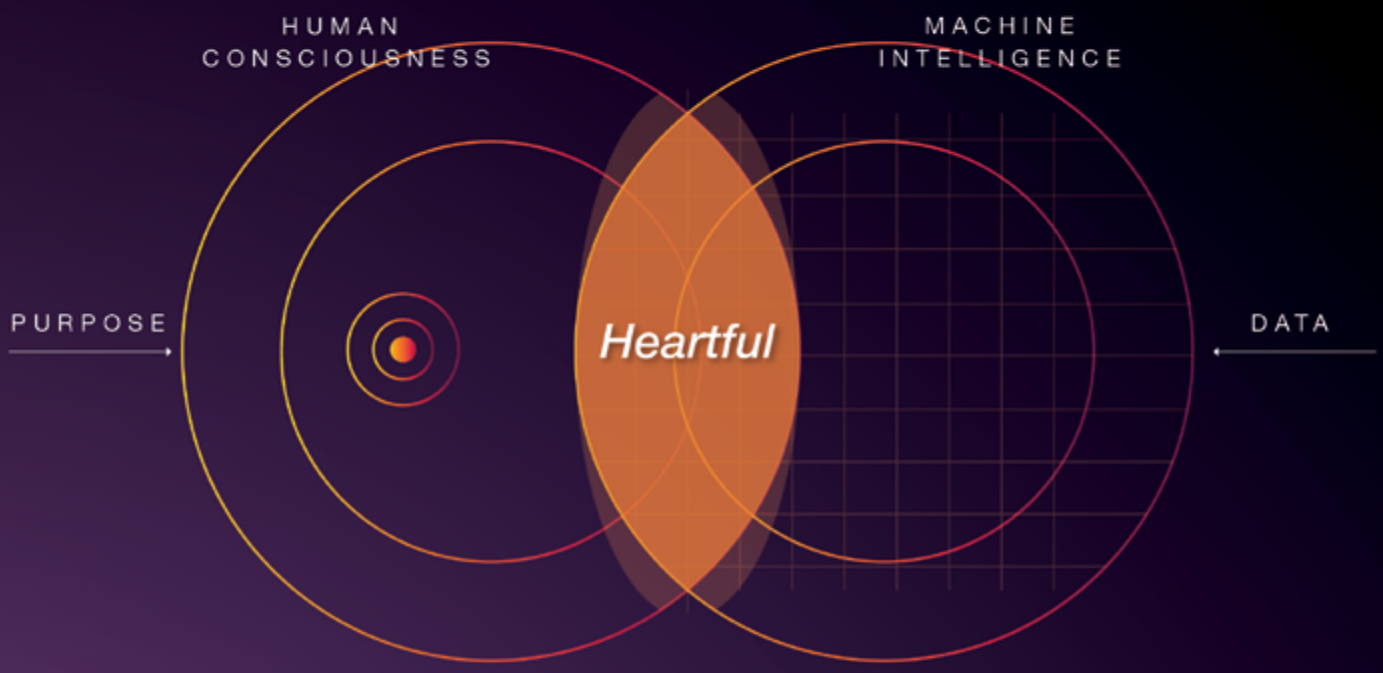
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