



PRACTISE

THE SPEAKING TREE
KOLKATA, APRIL 19, 2015

O God, You are peace, and from You comes peace,
and our return is to You, to peace
—Traditional Sufi prayer

LEARNING TREE

Who Am I?

A young woman went to her mother and explained how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and was on the verge of giving up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. Her mother took her to the kitchen and filled three pots with water and placed each on a high flame. Soon the pots came to a boil. In the first, she placed carrots, in the second, she placed eggs, and in the last, she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil, without saying a word. In about 20 minutes, she turned off the burners. She took off carrots, eggs and coffee



and placed them in bowls separately. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "What do you observe?" "Carrots, eggs, and coffee," the young woman replied. The mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. She then asked her to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard-boiled egg. Finally, she asked her to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, "What does it mean, mother?" Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity — boiling water — but each had reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak.

The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior. But, after sitting through the boiling water, its insides had become hard! The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After



they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water. The mother asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?" What am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong but, with pain and adversity, wilts and becomes soft and loses strength? Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit but, after a death, a breakup, or a financial hardship, does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and a hardened heart? Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavour. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around.

To be contemplative is to focus the heart on the Absolute Reality that gives meaning to life. To be a spiritual activist is to be engaged in the social world without losing perspective of the Absolute. To be an activist is also to be a realist and yet no sane human being is entirely without a sense of values. The contemplative faces that inner world of values and draws strength and wisdom from it, but no human being is devoid of those inner sacred values.

Urgent Need

The recognition of the 'sacred' is one of the most urgent needs of our time. The 'sacred' need not be based in a supernatural, or religious view of the world. We can acknowledge certain values as sacred: the innocence of childhood, the beauty of nature, the value of life, the courage of integrity. The recognition of the sacred is the recognition and relationship with real value, with something greater than the individual's selfish preoccupations.

Face Realities

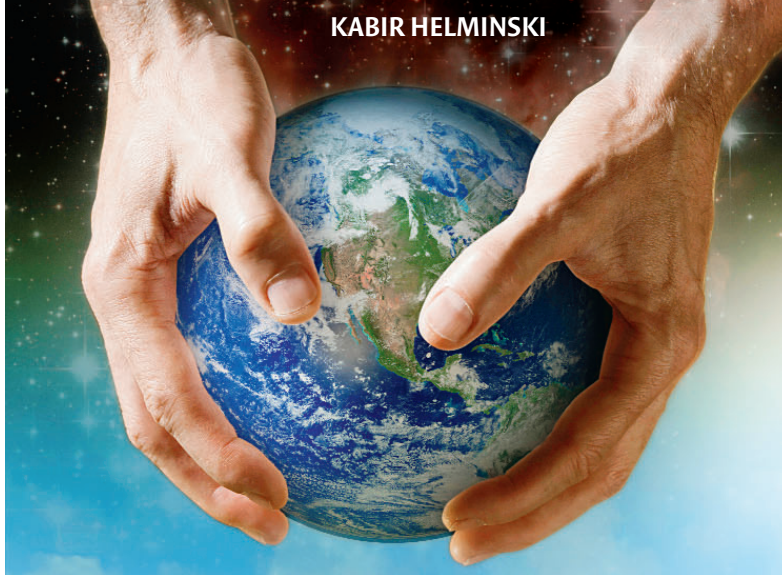
The self — liberated from selfishness — can bring about the new earth. But we must face the realities of political and economic systems that currently dominate our lives.

The corporate state, the oligarchy that rules us, is the result of the alienated self. The corporate state traps us in a system that we feel uneasy about but find it almost impossible to step outside of. The corporate oligarchy is the product of the false reality that is false because it is incomplete — just as profits from the exploitation of resources while escaping the incalculable costs of the destruction it leaves in its wake. Its methods seem logical while its goals are insane. It is an economic system without empathy and detached from reality. It is unsustainable because of its absolute dependence on increasing debt, on financial profits regardless of cost to the environment and human wellbeing. It fails to see and acknowledge its own demise.

What we need is the ability to stand aside, be quiet and reflect, to think critically about our situation, and to realise that the steps we are capable of may only be incremental. The change that is acquired is so fundamental, so much a reversal of the accepted way of doing things that it challenges the great common assumption of how life is supposed to be lived.

Sacred Earth, Sacred Self

Experience the Self in harmony with the magnetic field of Mother Earth, says Sufi Shaikh KABIR HELMINSKI



ically about our situation, and to realise that the steps we are capable of may only be incremental. The change that is acquired is so fundamental, so much a reversal of the accepted way of doing things that it challenges the great common assumption of how life is supposed to be lived.

Raise Your Vibrations

The experience of our wellbeing is an experience of the Self in harmony with the magnetic field of Mother Earth, which we experience as a state of transcendence, a foretaste of the Divine. Nature lives deep within us. The human self contains its own transcendence. We touch that immanent transcendence when we raise our vibrations. Raising our own vibration is one of the greatest acts of service but it is not enough. We also need practical knowledge to

build a more peaceful world.

Most approaches to peace are ineffective because they are naïve and lack understanding of the forces that contribute to violence. Social movements to change the masses, whether religious or political, will be successful when these social movements transform the self. It doesn't take a genius to build a better world.

In spirituality and religion, a new language is needed. The key to this spiritual sense, this perception of value, is described by the word 'sacred'. The experience of the sacred is an experience of joining ourselves with something of value greater

than ourselves and the ego's preoccupations as well.

Human suggestibility has been exploited to enslave us to systems that serve hidden elite. Consciousness is the best corrective for this suggestibility, and it is the responsibility of practical mystics, those who are more awake, to help people become conscious in their own lives and thus to be less manipulated and controlled by others. Human beings' suggestibility is easily exploited because the great majority of human beings are living without a spiritual centre capable of withstanding the weapons of mass destruction. The power of suggestion, when not balanced by conscious thought, can lead us to be programmed to believe almost anything.

Awakening Call

Outwardly, we seem to be in a third world war in slow motion, but despite appearances, the third world war is actually already over. On the spiritual level, peace is near. The challenge of this generation is to establish a culture of compassion. It is time to call forth an awakening in the whole human race. Bless everyone, call it forward in everyone; they're all part of God.

Those who reduce religion to a system of laws, outer behaviours, and a code of dogmatic beliefs are betraying the reality of spirit that is apprehended by the heart. Such concept of religion satisfies the ego but not the heart. It typically leads to authoritarianism and injustice. And we must forgive those who have projected their own violence upon us, because reacting with violence only proves them right and perpetuates further cycles of violence. Each of us must find the elements within our own tradition that can contribute to ending conflicts in our world. ■

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INBOX

Need To Focus On Quality Education

■ This is with reference to your cover story 'Back To School', April 12. A child is born to naturally admire and understand nature and her ways, but he is tutored in a controlled environment. Even when the first letter he utters is 'Ma', at school, his first step to speech starts with the letter 'A' and the number '1'.

Learning based on moral values is replaced by competitive capitalism in our education system. We can create good human beings only if we teach our children to be compassionate toward all beings.

Usha Vadi via speakingtree.in

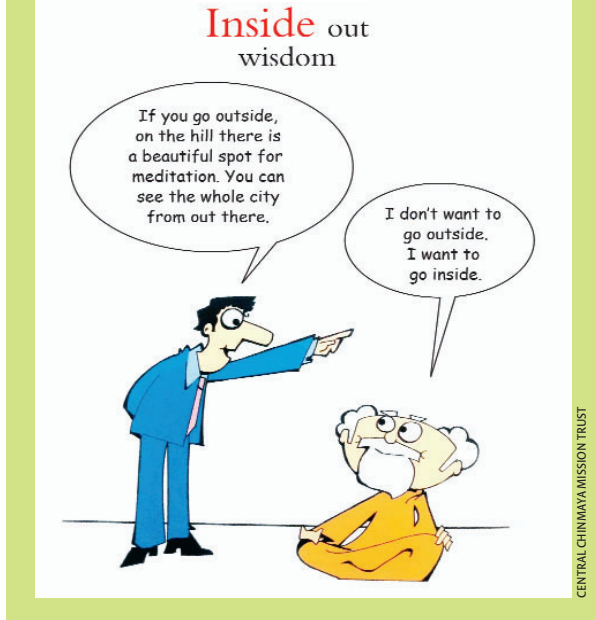
■ Earlier, when the *gurukul* system was prevalent, all students were not treated alike, irrespective of their family, status and gender. At that time, children belonging to so-called lower castes and girls were not given *gurukul* education. At least, today schools don't differentiate between students because of their castes.

However, education has become a business nowadays. We need to stop commercialisation of education and improve its quality.

Anil Tanwar, via email

Focus Your Mind On The Present

■ Apropos 'Look For Turning Points', April 12, it is more important to focus our mind on the



present moment than to quieten it. When our mind wanders, recalling the past or anticipating the future, we cannot concentrate on what is happening in the here and now. Our achievements today will provide satisfying memories and future success, if we base our goals on our needs rather than on our desires.

Ron Krumpos via speakingtree.in

Nirvana Can't Be Served On A Plate

■ Refer to 'Shortcut To Nirvana', April 12. There is no shortcut to nirvana. One has to traverse the path explained in the scripture or take the help of a guru. Nobody can serve it to you on a platter. One has to consistently practise meditation.

Raghavendrag Garde via speakingtree.in

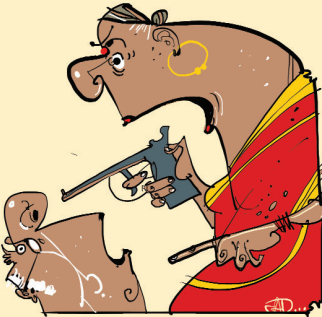
To Shiva, Via Rishikesh

■ Apropos 'Lord Of The Universe', April 12, whenever, I visit Haridwar and

LAUGHING TREE

Grandpa Tales

"So Grandpa," said Dave at his engagement party, "Your marriage to Grandma is legendary — everyone talks about how you two get along so well and never fight. What's the secret to your marital success?" "Well," said Grandpa Joe after taking a deep breath, "it all started on the way home from our wedding. We hadn't gone but a mile when the horse started giving us trouble. I gave the horse a little whip and that's when I heard your Grandma say in a



low voice, "that's strike one." A bit later, the horse stopped again. "That's strike two," she said. The third time it stopped, she grabbed my shotgun and almost shot the horse. I was in shock! "What in the world was that all about?" I had protested at the time. She said, "That's strike one!" "And that is what I owe our marital success to."

Gem Of A Gift

A husband gifted his wife a diamond necklace for their 25th anniversary and then she didn't speak to him for six months. When his family and friends heard this, they asked if it was because it was fake or cheap. He replied, "No... That was the deal!"

Brain Brightener

Yogacharya SURAKSHIT GOSWAMI's regular column on yoga focuses first on kapalbhati to cleanse body and mind

The process of exhaling with immense speed again and again is called *kapalbhati*. It is made up of two words — *kapal* and *bhati*. *Kapal* means 'head' and *bhati* means to 'brighten' or understand the head. Thus, *kapalbhati* helps to activate or rejuvenate energy centres in the head by cleansing the brain and increasing cognitive and perceptive vision.

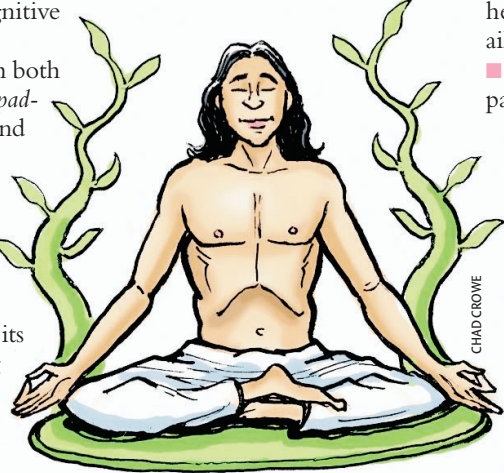
● **Procedure:** Sit down with both legs folded in *sukhasana* or *padmasana* and keep your back and neck in a straight line. Your chest should bulge out. Place your hands on your knees, as in *gyan mudra*, close your eyes and sit comfortably. Then concentrate on your breath and its rhythm, without keeping your stomach slack or loose. To perform *kapalbhati*, push your stomach inside, below the navel, with a jerk, and squeeze the muscles of the stomach. Simultaneously, exhale forcefully through the nose, making a hissing sound. After that, relax the stomach muscles — which you had squeezed — and inhale air without making any sound.

Refrain from exerting any pressure while inhaling and allow air to go inside your body naturally. Push your stomach inside again with a jerk and exhale the air noisily. This practice should be done continuously. Exhale quickly as many times as possible and when you feel exhausted, sit quietly till your breathing resumes its normal pace. Initially, breathe 20–30 times or as much as possible in one round.

As your practice increases, the speed and number of breaths will also increase.

● **Precautions:** While performing

kapalbhati, do not make any sound from your throat. This can dry up your mouth and cause irritation. Don't move any other part of your body except your stomach. Be calm and peaceful and keep your eyes closed. People suffering from cardiac diseases, high blood pressure and chronic asthma should not perform this exercise. But it can be



YOGA FOR FITNESS

practised at a slower pace if the disease is in control. This exercise is also prohibited for patients of hernia. In case of backache, *kapalbhati* may be practised in the *vajrasana* posture. If one is unable to sit on the ground, this exercise can be done while seated on a chair.

● **Resolution:** While practising *kapalbhati*, you should feel that with every breath you exhale, various ailments from your body are being expelled and you are becoming free of diseases.

● **Centre of Dhyana:** Manipura chakra

● **Advantages:** *Kapalbhati* is a cleansing process that plays an important role in removing toxins, foreign objects and polluted air from inside the body with the help

of your breath. With the purification of the body, the mind becomes relaxed. In *kapalbhati*, blood from your hands and legs starts flowing towards the stomach muscles and other parts, making the food pipe, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, gall bladder, pancreas, rectum, liver, kidney, testes and prostate, and the uterus and ovary healthier. It aids in curing various ailments related to these organs:

■ *Kapalbhati* keeps the thyroid and parathyroid glands, thymus gland, lungs and trachea well-toned.

■ An increase in the oxygen content of the blood results in the supply of this vital element to all cells and tissues.

■ *Kapalbhati* also makes the heart muscles strong and supple and prevents cardiac diseases.

■ This exercise cures disorders like constipation, gas, indigestion and obesity, controls diabetes, improves appetite.

■ By regulating the secretion of digestive juices, it improves digestive power.

■ It helps in disorders of the prostate gland and urinary tract.

■ *Kapalbhati* is also helpful in curing disorders like irregular menstruation, vaginal discharge and excessive bleeding.

■ It helps remove tumours and cures cough and cold.

■ *Kapalbhati* is really useful in treating skin diseases and preventing hair loss, hair breakage and premature greying.

■ *Kapalbhati* can keep you feeling fresh throughout the day, makes you healthy and improves your level of concentration.

Please Note: Consult a yoga instructor or health advisor for your exercise regimen. ■

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