

SECRETS OF OUTSTANDING PERSONS

BY
KUDO ERESIA-EKE, PH.D



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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife and children who give me so much joy.

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PREFACE

For those in leadership positions, this book is a must-read. For those aspiring to be leaders, reading this book is inevitable. For all, this book has something to offer.

Kudo has, once again, shown not only that he is a prolific writer but also that he cares for his readers' wellbeing. All through the pages of this book, Kudo shows a lot of respect for his readers. It takes much love, devotion and sincerity to make efforts to put down profound truth in everyday language for all to appreciate and understand.

Kudo has shown his love for life through sharing the insights in this book. That much love was put into writing this book is stating the obvious. The contents of this book are actually vital tools for the individual who wishes to excel in any endeavour.

Life is a school. Only the bold, adventurous and courageous seek to catch the secret of living so as to find the secret of happiness. Kudo has, in this book, highlighted some keys that could open the door to success for that individual who sincerely seeks to find it.

This is a record of the selfless effort of a rare gem! A humble man who embarked on a journey to seek the secret of happiness, not only for himself but for all who wish to make the sacrifice.... *And he found the secret of happiness.* What sacrifice is required of you? Just create time to study this book!

What is this secret? Scattered within the pages of this book are the records of his search and the secrets he found. Read, so that you too may know some of these secrets and put them to practice.

Seeking to give happiness to others, Kudo has chosen to share these secrets with his readers. Be ready for a journey; a journey that will take you to the heart of existence itself ... the joy that all seek ... the contentment that all wish for ... the beauty that all aspire to behold!

This book is a must-read for all adults and upcoming youths who aspire to be responsible adults, all persons who wish to be successful in life; all those who decide on being happy in spite of circumstances that threaten such mood, everyone who chooses deep within his heart to learn the secret of success and continuous happiness! This book is a must read for you and me.

The interview approach makes the reading smooth and assimilation easy. You can pick any chapter of interest and read. No chapter is a pre-requisite to another. The same with the sections.

Kudo deserves kudos for putting together this masterpiece that is bound to influence generations, timelessly.

Happy reading!

Enajite Orode.

PROLOGUE

When the water flows through the tap, for our benefit, it cannot claim to be the source of the water.

The microphone may magnify and relay messages, but it cannot claim to be the source of the sound.

The newspaper may bear the news of the day, but it cannot claim to own the imprint that sells it.

So it is with purveyors of the inner wisdom which bestow happiness, influence and excellence as we may find in the pages of this book.

To whom then does the credit for this book belong? It is difficult to say, except to confess that chapters have been written in conversational form in order to reflect the inner discussion from where this book is born.

Clearly, conversations imply exchange of ideas between more than one source; in this case between the author, who for the most part acts simply as a conveyor belt, and the voices within.

But to whom do these inner voices belong? Tough question. Let us just say they are voices of benevolent ones dedicated to the betterment and ultimate improvement of all; benevolent ones whose whole lives and existence are dedicated to our good as individuals and collectives.

You may notice from the tones and nuances of the conversations in these pages that there are numerous different “voices” which feature here. But varied as they may be, united, however they are by the common goal of helping us, to greater happiness, love, success, influence and excellence.

They wish to support us, as they have all outstanding ones before. Welcome to the movies of your own imagination as you enjoy the deep discussions that follow.

Enjoy the journey.

SECTION ONE: How To Find Happiness

Chapter One

HABIT

I have watched you for months and can't help admiring you. You seem to generate much personal magnetism. Is it what they call charm? It is so unwavering, almost not subject to the mood of the environment.

Quite frankly, I feel flattered by your comments. I would never have thought that I had such a happy effect on people.

Your laughter rings with profound unmistakable joy. You are always jubilant, like a happy child. How do you do it in this world of turbulence?

Attitude!

What do you mean?

My father taught me a long time ago that attitude or behaviour is a product of habit.

I thought it was the other way round; that attitude is actually what makes habits.

Quite frankly I do not know what the books say; but what I have found to be true for myself is that habit is actually a mechanical process. Habits recur like the grooves on a record. It does not matter how many times you place your pin on the record, it just traces the grooves as etched on the record and what is produced is exactly the same sound as you heard before.

I do not get it.

What I mean is that your mind works like the grooves of a record. The grooves on it are the paths through which the mind must run when triggered by a particular stimulus. Over time the mind develops stereotypical methods of responding to specific stimuli.

That reminds me of Sigmund Freud's experiments.

I think you are right. There is a clear association there. The point Freud was making was that, if a specific stimulus elicits a specific response continually, over time the response automatically follows the stimuli.

Now if I were to translate that into my own expression, what it basically means is that repetition helps to etch reactions deeper in the membrane of the brain; causing a strong link or association between stimulus and reaction. So that once the stimulus is introduced, the reaction is as good as predictable.

Sounds interesting.

Yes, I also think it is interesting. It works in probably the same way the recall mechanism works. We find it so much easier, for instance, to recall the names of persons we meet regularly than the names of those we seldom meet.

The repetitive recall etches them more deeply in the brain and therefore makes remembrance easy. On the contrary, the names of those we hardly meet only form faint impressions on our brains; hence recall is a bit more difficult.

What you are driving at here is that the mind is a phenomenon of habit?

Sure. It is a habitual entity that can be trained, to enable us behave in a certain way in certain circumstances. We can, for instance, train our minds to react angrily, no matter what someone whom we consider an enemy does. We can consciously form this habit in ourselves and in other people whose minds are vulnerable, and susceptible to our bidding.

So even where the so-called enemy acts positively and in our interest our programmed reaction remains negative?

Precisely! The programmed mind is no longer an open mind capable of objective or dispassionate evaluation of ideas or actions from that particular individual or group seen as enemy. It has been trained and indoctrinated to behave in a certain negative way to the perceived enemy over a prolonged period. So, of course, the stimuli almost instinctively elicits a negative reaction, no matter how good his intention.

Now, how do all these shed light on my original quest for the secret of your happiness?

Simple. The same way we can train a mind to react in a hateful manner, through repetition, to a particular subject or subjects, we can train it to react in a loving or happy manner. The logic is the same. Through repetition and indoctrination, the mind could be made to react in a friendly manner to a particular kind of stimulus; so that once the stimulus is introduced the milk of love and kindness is gingered to flow.

This is probably the kind of situation we have with most mothers and their children. Anything about the children, following years of experience and indoctrination, automatically elicits a love reaction.

Can the same apply to happy reactions if desired?

Yes. But I must say that this is usually a tall order and requires constant, minute-to-minute practice. The reason it can be so difficult is that for years, people would have made deep negative grooves of anger, jealousy, envy and the like automatic reactions to fellow beings.

The raw, animalistic part of the human appears to happily make the negative grooves almost with natural ease. Undoing the deep dirty grooves and possibly replacing them with fine happy lines is therefore difficult. But not impossible! It just takes a bit of determination and hard work. The tricks to be used are exactly the same as for the cultivation of the contrary - imagination, education, information, experience, and, above all, repetition.

Please level with me. How do you do this, practically speaking?

As I said earlier, it is a tall order, but it can be done. For as many hours as possible in the day, fill yourself with the feeling of joy and happiness. Look out for opportunities for laughter and joy. Smile from the depths of your heart. Try to feel your presence with happy images - images that call up gladness and sweet memories.

But above all, reaffirm your determination daily to be happy, no matter what. Develop all manner of reminders to keep you happy. It will not be easy, I must say. But it is possible to turn your mind into one with a ready happy frame.

Please continue.

In conclusion...

I didn't say you should conclude. I say you should continue. I am enjoying your discourse.

Perhaps I should say that once you make up your mind to make happiness a habit, even your outer circumstances would become friendlier and happier. Whether indeed there is a link between happy thoughts, happy feelings and happy experiences in life would be for you to prove in time. But my hunch is that, indeed, there is. Stay happy. Life is good.

Chapter Two

AVOID HATE

Good morning, sir.

Good morning, beloved.

I see you are beaming with happiness. What fills you with this jubilation?

Very many things, my dear.

But how can you be so happy this morning when only last night we heard the news of your betrayal by your friends castigating you unfairly before the world?

What does it matter? I have life. Life itself is happiness. The dent of wickedness and backstabbing of men is only a fading illusion. They fade as dew in the morning sun, if you are calm and happy. Let each wrong doer carry his own burden of guilt. Do not share the burden. Keep your good cheer. The burden does not belong to you, neither does the guilt.

You speak as if it were the easiest thing in the world to do. Personally, I have been sad lately because I was badly cheated by people who I thought were deserving of trust. I have been sad because I could not understand how some people could be so unkind to others.

Do not think like that my friend. Do not let sadness get to you. Fend it off the best you can. Keep cheerful. Keep doing your best even to those who do not like you. Let no evil into your heart. At first it will be difficult; I know, but do not succumb. If you fail, your adversaries would have succeeded in dragging you down their pit.

What do you mean, sir?

Happiness is the jewel that we all seek, whether we know it or not. Happiness is the prize we all yearn for. The victor in every situation is the one who retains happiness. The reward for retention of happiness is beyond quantifying.

Can you just give me an idea?

Retaining happiness in your heart shuts out hatred and enlarges the joy in your life. Refusal to allow hate into your heart is also a refusal to allow sickness and disease into your body, for happiness increases your level of immunity.

Is that really true?

Maybe you can do some research on that. But there is a relationship between happiness and health. Or better still; observe your own body against your moods. But these are even minor effects of retaining happiness in your heart in spite of hatred against you.

What more other benefits can there be?

The more subtle gains are far more important. Once you confront hatred with love you immediately feel an inner rise in consciousness. You gain a special morale and spiritual strength.

I do not understand.

How can I explain this to you? You see, the natural way to react against hate is to hate. That is the way the world works. So when you react against hate with love, you totally confuse and unnerve the world. You become mysterious, inexplicable, and enigmatic. The world can no longer understand you. This disarms haters, and forces an inferiority complex on them. That is why their gaze must falter, even if they dared to look at you.

Okay, I am beginning to get it.

As their gaze is laden with guilt, so are their hearts, so are their heads, so are their bodies. They suffer an all-round degeneration, and hurl a spiritual burden, which they may carry for a long, long time.

Please tell me more of what I can gain, as the one who refuses to let hate into my heart. That interests me more.

Naturally. Listen, beloved, our state of the mind generally governs the circumstances around us. To keep it simple, an unhappy state of mind tends to attract unhappy circumstances to one's life.

How does this apply in this particular love-hate situation?

I am sure you can deduce it for yourself, especially as it applies to you. If one succeeds in hurting you so much that hatred takes over, and ugliness fills or preoccupies your heart, he would have succeeded in the long run in sentencing you to an ugly life. The ugliness in your consciousness will ensure the replication of ugly circumstances in your life.

With a heart full of anger and unhappiness you are bound to attract unhappiness, and that is the ultimate victory of the adversary. And that is precisely what you do not want. What you rather desire is to produce the opposite effect of happy events and circumstances in your life. To achieve that you need the happy state of mind.

So while your effort and spiritual understanding help you to happier circumstances through a happy state of the mind, the reverse is the case for the guilty, the hate minded?

Yes. Of course they usually do not know it; for if they were aware they would not fill their hearts with hatred. But that is the way of the world. Be mindful of your own state of mind. Stay happy.

Chapter Three

GIVE JOY

I find your all-time happy disposition amazing. In spite of everything, you remain so cheerful, so bubbly, and so full of joy every time I see you.

What do you mean by “in spite of everything”?

I mean in spite of the rather humble life you live in the midst of all the needy people. Ordinarily it is not the happiest of conditions.

That is probably where the error is introduced. Happiness is a state of mind, not a physical condition.

Please explain.

Let me rather illustrate. I grew up in a royal environment with all the trappings of wealth and power. But I was not happy. There was hollowness in our family, generally. Nothing mattered except the material. It was somber existence. The few times we came close to being really merry were when we had someone to show off to. But even then the feeling was still hollow.

You mean the wealth could not confer happiness?

Precisely! Our egos bottled up any possibility of happiness. We were only concerned about ourselves how much more money to be made; how much better off we were; the pleasure of the latest car models. You know, stuff like these.

You did not enjoy them?

Well, as comfort to the body, yes. But unfortunately the body is not the source of happiness. It can never be. Happiness must be tapped from a much deeper and subtle spring within.

Please explain.

I will. But I must confess that it was when I decided to quit the palace to this humble home in this vastly poor country that I began to know true happiness.

Poverty conferred happiness?

No. It was not the poverty that made the difference. What I have learnt from my many years away from the palace is that joy, the elusive joy, fills me so easily with every effort to give joy to another, especially to the needy.

What manner of the needy are we speaking of here?

Good question. By “needy” I mean those in need of happiness. My new job as a missionary or organiser of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) is to try to do whatever I can to spread the happiness I crave for, to others. And there are many routes people take to offer happiness. For some, the way is to help with access to better health. For others, it is meeting the need for clothing. Some other persons take the path of just lending a listening ear. What you do depends on what the particular need is.

How do you cope with the vast variegation of needs?

My purpose is simple and singular - to help people find happiness. The avenue may differ from person to person, but the destination remains the same. So all I do is focus on the destination.

How do you manage, given the heavy demand that must be made on you?

I had long decided to put all my resources at the service of the goal of happiness for others. These include my mental, spiritual, material and other creative resources. I deploy all in pursuit of these goals for others.

And you have never found the need to reverse your decision at some point?

Never. The more people that have a taste of happiness through our modest effort, the more of a happy high I get. Sometimes I am truly ecstatic with joy.

Can you describe the pleasure?

I am sorry I can only feel it. It is sweet. It is heavenly. It is spiritual, rich and fulfilling. It is the kind of happiness that nothing can take away from you.

Is this how you plan to spend the rest of your life?

Luckily I know that life will never end. But even if mine were to end, I am more than grateful for the privilege of finding the great secret of the ages.

What secret?

The secret we have been talking about all this time the secret of joy, the secret of heaven; the secret of happiness.

I am sorry, but what is this secret? I know you have illustrated, giving examples from your life experience, but please tell me in a simple, explicit manner that all my readers can grasp.

I must say that I am not alone in the camp of those who have found this secret, through various other experiences, which may be totally different from mine. My experience is only illustrative. Those who are looking for happiness, like I was, would find it. For some sooner, for others later; and many through different routes than the one I travel; but get there, I believe, they all will.

I understand that, but please share the secret more clearly as I requested. How does the layman find happiness?

Let me put it bluntly to find it, please give it, not to yourself, but to others.

That sounds like a paradox.

Tell me, what is life, if not a paradox?

Chapter Four

LOVE YOUR JOB

What can I do to maintain a happy emotion?

Many things.

Like what?

Like loving your job or primary duty.

How?

Notice that you spend an awful lot of time at work. It does not matter what the vocation or profession is - medicine, journalism, law, broadcasting, teaching - it really does not matter.

That is correct. I would say that I spend more than one third of my time at work.

Much more than that my friend; for beyond the time that you actually sit behind your desk, you are very much at work. A lot of the times when your thoughts and conversations are about your work, you are at work.

But talking or thinking about work and office is not being at work. Or is it?

Thinking or talking about work, I would argue, is being at work. For as long as your consciousness is in someplace, there you are also.

I do not understand?

Listen, if you are usually sad at work because you do not like your job, the hate or envy of your colleagues; once you think about the office, what emotion do you feel?

Sadness.

That is exactly what I mean. For as many times as you visit what you consider a “sad” place or event, even in thought, you relive or reactivate the sadness.

I don't get it.

What I mean is that the emotion you feel at work is stretched beyond the time you spend there, if your thoughts and consciousness are glued to the office. And this happens naturally because the work place you often see as the source of your daily bread.

Secondly, your work is usually something that people identify you by and also by which you identify yourself. Imagine you were a doctor, for instance, you continue to be a doctor long after you may have closed from your clinic. Indeed many will acknowledge with pride, that they are doctors for life. That means doctors all the time. Doctors 24/7. For every moment of their lives, they are doctors.

I am beginning to get it.

I am glad.

Please go ahead.

Now imagine a situation where the person in question hates his work. For such a case would it be a surprise if he ends up a really sad person, almost all his life?

Now I see why you always emphasise making the right choice of vocation.

I am happy you see that now. Your profession or vocation is a primary factor in helping you to a happier life. Picking the right vocation is as fundamental as picking a life partner.

Let us take a positive illustration. Imagine a man who loves to teach; one so in love with his teaching, that he loses a sense of time when practising; one who is happy to teach at any time; one who comes alive when talking about his job, because he is deeply in love with it.

Now tell me, since work tends to dominate consciousness as we explained, would such a teacher likely be a happy person or not?

He will likely be a happy person.

Now you get it. This is why I say it is unwise for parents to, for whatever reason; force their children into vocations the children explicitly dislike. In a sense, by doing so, they sentence their own children to lives of unhappiness. Some of such children actually live and die unhappy men and women, thanks to overbearing parents.

You really mean what you said about the choice of a vocation being as important as the choice of a spouse?

I would even stretch it to say it is much more important, because for all intents and purposes, your profession, or vocation is your primary spouse. The evidence of this is in how much time the job claims; in how much attention the job gets. In some cases the job can even determine who you marry or whether the marriage succeeds or fails.

You mean it?

Well, chew it over carefully and you may reach the same conclusion.

Would you then advise those who find themselves in unhappy, wrong vocations to change?

Of course! And to add, it is a fallacy that some vocations fetch good money and others do not, which often is the reason for wrong choices. For any man who loves his vocation will eventually become so good at it that he will attract higher and higher incomes. The love of the vocation guarantees his spending more and more time to perfect his trade, which in turn fetches higher returns.

But the best part of it all is that the one with the right choice of a profession or vocation earns money for having fun, for enjoying life, and for doing what makes him happy. Could it be better?

Chapter Five

FORGIVENESS

Thanks for granting me audience.

It is good to have you here.

My mission is still on the quest for happiness. We would like you to share a tip that can lead one to a happier life.

I am glad you say “a tip”, because there are many tips. Happy people place emphasis on any combination of them.

Which would you readily want to share with us?

Have you ever considered forgiveness as a tool for a happier life?

No.

I would definitely recommend it. Most of the time when we are sad, angry or generally unhappy we could actually trace it to some clash or misbehaviour, at least in our own perception, of somebody else. Often we believe that person has somehow maltreated, cheated or dishonoured us. So we get angry. This is so rampant in life, isn't it?

Yes, but why is it so rampant?

Trampling on one another's space, dishonouring, cheating, or maltreating other people is almost a natural result of the basic nature of man, which is greedy and selfish.

Imagine you lived in a very small community of persons, each selfish and greedy. The social behaviour would easily reflect an uncaring attitude towards the next person. There would be a general lack of respect of individual freedom, spitefulness, and encroachment on others' property, intrigues, conspiracy, and all manners of deviousness. Not so? The logic of greed and selfishness necessarily drives us to that conclusion.

I agree, but does it have to be so?

Oh, sure! So it has to be, because each person in that community sees the world only from his own myopic viewpoint. This is the quintessential worldview of the classically greedy and selfish. The only real goodness he recognises is himself. Others do not really matter.

Everybody else is an expendable tool useful only in helping him achieve his selfish end.

Can you illustrate for my better understanding?

The examples are all over us. Take a selfish woman, for example, who hankers after another woman's husband. In her obsession, which is how selfishness behaves, she has no hesitation in hatching all manner of evil plans to smear, maim or even kill the wife, while luring the husband with every means at her disposal, including wicked and fetish means. That is one example.

Take another example. A man is ambitious and wants to govern a people by all means; he violates the election process by force of banditry, hurts, maims, and even kills. Nothing matters but the actualisation of his selfish ambition.

Sometimes, the issue could be plain greed for money. In such a case all the rules of fairness can burn. It matters little whether the comfort, privacy, property or lives of others perish in the process. The only thing that counts would be money, the object of his greed.

So the world is full of people just hurting themselves?

Unfortunately, that is generally correct. We hurt ourselves with the blade of the sword, the nib of the pen, the tone of the tongue, and whatever else we find instrumental. The world is like one where all in society wear skins like porcupines, so that almost every meeting is hurtful.

How does all this relate to happiness?

Easy. In a world as described, only a fool would expect not to be hurt often. Only a fool would rest assured that people would not attempt to violate his space or property. That fool would be akin to one living in a den of thieves, but does not bother to lock his doors.

Given the circumstance, there surely would be attempts to rob him because of the overwhelming number and nature of the worms of greed swarming in the social space of the robbers' den.

Let me add that some people in such a society of the selfish may not come at you directly as a robber would. They may resort to other

means like psychic, including some methods of prayers, to try to deprive you of what is rightly yours.

Not clear.

Look around you. Open your eyes, my friend. And while you are still doing that, let me return to the relationship with happiness.

Living then in this world of compulsive hurters, getting hurt is common. Now, in a place where people are so vulnerable to hurt so often, imagine a man that is bereft of forgiving spirit.

It is beginning to make sense.

At every turn, he would be engaged in mental, emotional or physical combat. His head would be filled with a never-ending list for revenge. His mind would be occupied by anger. His suspicion would be beyond paranoia. We are here describing a man who is verging on insanity. That is the lot of one in such a culture of selfishness and greed in this world. Without forgiveness, how would he find a place in his heart for happiness?

But a man inclined to forgive would continuously cleanse and free his heart. With each hurt and the wounds of anger it necessarily inflicts, the forgiver washes away the stains and continuously heals his heart.

Now I can understand why forgiving appears to lift off heavy emotional and spiritual burdens.

Without forgiveness, hurt and anger weigh down our hearts; incapacitating our ability to be happy, for only from the heart that is pure can true happiness come. The heart is the home of happiness. Where the heart is constrained, so also is happiness. We could actually declare that we are only as happy as we forgive, for continuous hurt is inevitable in this world, given the character of greed and selfishness of its inhabitants.

Chapter Six

EXERCISE

Hi! Coach, how are you doing?

Hi! My dear lady, how is the going?

Pretty good, I'd say. What about you?

Always good. I feel great.

I wish I felt as great.

Sure, why not?

C'mon you don't feel that great when you have to carry a body weight as heavy as mine around.

Why not?

Well you know, you are always somewhat awkward, with a size like mine. Even getting into a vehicle can be a project. And my husband does not make it any easier. He always nags me about having to shed weight, having to exercise.

You don't agree with him?

Am not so sure I don't. His nagging is even spikier because I know that what he says is true. But I just cannot muster the strength or the willpower to do what he says.

Ah, I think there is something wrong there.

Where?

In what you just said.

What? What did I say wrong?

You give the impression that doing the things he says would be to satisfy him. I think that his satisfaction may just be incidental. The true and primary satisfaction and indeed happiness would be yours.

Why do you say that?

Now don't get me wrong. I believe people should choose their body sizes. If it makes you happy to be slender, please be slender. If it makes you happy to be fat or even obese, why not, it is your body. The only thing I would like to put attention on is the connection between physical exercise and happiness.

Interesting. Tell me.

I am not a medical doctor or anything like that. I am just a coach. But I can say from years of experience that there is a happy high that is released to your physical system as a result of exercise. Your mood improves, your outlook brightens, and you feel lighter and happier. I speak from personal experience, and many others say the same.

And that is?

Whenever you exercise, you give yourself a chance to be happier. To be honest, I do not know how it works. I do not know what particular chemical reactions or actions bring that feeling about. But what I know is that it is real. It is real that exercise tends to increase happiness.

Some psychologist friends of mine attribute it to the sense of achievement that accompanies a successful exercise session. I do not know if they are right or wrong. But my suspicion is that there is far more to it than that explanation.

Are you suggesting that exercise can change my rampant moodiness?

You try and see. For me, it is one of the prime tonics against moodiness. If an issue weighs me down or something hurts me bad, and I need a lift badly; one of the things I have learnt, no matter how pressing the problem, is to exercise. It helps me immediately with happiness-high, and appears to help me reach a solution faster. I am convinced that exercise helps my brain work better and faster.

Are you sure?

Now again, do not ask me to explain for I do not know why that happens. I just know that that is my experience, and those of many others.

So exercising is not just for losing weight and keeping healthy?

It is for far more, I can assure you.

I see.

But back to the discussion between your husband and you; I think he really loves you and wants the very best for you. He wants you to reap the benefits that he is reaping from exercise. I know him as a faithful jogger.

Oh, he is a disciplined jogger. And I must confess that he always comes back from each jogging trip, happier, more ebullient, and loving. If we had quarrelled before his exercise, you can almost be sure that after his routine the quarrel is over. None of our fights have lasted beyond any of his jogging sessions, except of course I insist. So your theory makes a lot of sense. It sheds a lot of light on his post jogging behaviour.

Well, I am glad you think so. But the point I really wanted to make is that what he is asking you to do is not really for him. He would certainly benefit from your exercising in several ways, but you remain the prime beneficiary, especially being a rather moody person. Exercise lifts your spirit almost instantaneously.

Would you recommend any particular kind?

No. You would have to choose which pleases you. There are many kinds of exercises. I love outdoor exercises, though. They get fresh air into your lungs. And I believe fresh air is itself rejuvenating.

Would jogging be best for me?

As I said, any exercise would do provided it is one you really enjoy doing. Jogging suits my nature that is why I chose it. You know, long distance running is generally a lonesome, individual affair. I like the loneliness because it allows me to talk with myself.

For you it may be different. You may prefer a team game that allows you to chat with friends. It all depends on what suits your nature, and, more importantly, your health condition. You might need

to have a doctor first check you and advise. But do get on some exercise or the other. Make it regular and win medals of happiness for yourself.

Chapter Seven

ACT AS IF...

Greetings, Wise One.

Greetings, my son. How are you?

I am fine, Wise One.

What brings you here?

It is an interview request I had made to speak with you.

Oh, I remember. What would you like me to speak on?

Happiness, Wise One. I run a weekly column and would like you to please share some of your insights on the subject with my readers and I.

That's a noble venture. Do your readers appreciate what you are doing?

I do not know, Wise One. I just do it for love.

I like your reason for action, son. Keep it up. Love is all there is. As for the reason why you are here, what do you want me to say about happiness?

To please share some tips that can help people live happier lives.

Oh that is simple. To be happy, look happy. Pretend to be happy and you will be happy.

Wise One, these appear to be simple words that you have spoken, but I have difficulty grasping their true meaning.

Try not to read beyond the simplicity of the words. The matter is as simple as I have stated it. To be happy, look happy. Do all those things you would ordinarily do, when you are truly happy.

Such as what, Wise One?

Are you sure you do not know what you would do when you are truly happy? Of course you do. On particularly happy occasions some wear pretty clothes, perfume their bodies and look truly happy with life.

You mean dressing up nice can aid my happiness?

Yes, it can. And indeed it does. It helps your self-satisfaction, self-esteem, and self-contentment - prerequisites for happiness. The idea is to begin to act as if you were truly happy, as if you were specially celebrating life for the abundant goodness and happiness that it offers you.

If I understand you correctly, Wise One, you are saying that to be happy, I should do those things that I would ordinarily do if I were really happy? Laugh? Be cheerful?

Exactly! Keep a sweet smile on your face. Smile deep from your heart. Hum a happy song, feel joy run through you. Warmly greet all around you. Be generous with gifts and with praise. You know it.

But how can I do these things when I am not happy? Just pretend?

Yes, pretend. Act as if you are happy and you will be happy.

But what you teach me now runs contrary to anything I have learnt. I was made to understand that it is the changes within that transform the looks outside. You seem to stand that on its head.

Not quite. My thoughts are just a bit more dialectical. My assumption is that, as the inner influences the outer, so too can the outer influence the inner. Let me ask you Have you ever experienced a greater sense of self-esteem, when wearing exquisitely fitting beautiful clothing?

Yes, I have.

Now that is a simple example of the outer influencing the inner. Again I ask you Have you ever felt a sense of elation when someone actually honestly and publicly commends you for a job well done?

Surely, often it is a great morale booster.

Again that is the outer influencing the inner. The key is in affecting your mind through a carefully chosen external stimulus.

So the external acts as ginger for the mind?

Correct. Visit a home that sparkles with cleanliness, and the immediate tendency is to try to be clean, too. Receive a warm happy smile, and the tendency is to smile.

But wouldn't one just be deceiving oneself, pretending that one is happy when one is not?

But who says one is not happy? To be happy or not to be happy is a matter of choice. Let the external stimuli you choose demonstrate that choice.

So to be happy, I choose stimuli that give the impression of happiness?

Correct. In fact I like the way you have put it. Experiment and see if it works for you. I know from personal experience that it should work. The sub-conscious finds it difficult to distinguish between what is reality and what is pretence. Both register on it as the same.

If the chosen external stimuli are those denoting sadness, the subconscious, childlike as it is, interprets it as such and proceeds to reproduce sadness within.

Conversely if what is desired is the happy state, what to do is to act out the traits of happiness, irrespective of the current state of the mind. Really act them out consciously like a professional actor on stage. Sooner than later the subconscious mind, more precisely, accepts the action as fact, and proceeds to reproduce happiness within.

When a goal is scored in a football match, the cheering that follows is only a reaction from so called supporters, passively enjoying the success of their team. If they were real supporters they ought to be active co-creators of goals with their teams. Active support is the anticipatory cheering that leads to the goal. Here the fans are active participants in creating the goal, rather than mere cheerers of a goal scored already, an easy role for anybody.

Meaning, Venerable One?

Enough. I think I have said enough. Those for whom this is intended will understand.

Chapter Eight

SERVE OTHERS

As I prepared to go out for another interview in the series, the doorbell rang. I wondered, glancing at my watch. It was too early for a visit, this Saturday morning. Members of my family were still sleeping.

I walked to the door and found my friend, Harold. It was not unusual for Harold to show up at any time of the day. I was glad to see him. We hugged.

I noticed he had come along with a friend, who was wearing a flowing white gown. He had such long hair that rested on his shoulders.

He smiled somewhat knowingly like a man of much accumulated wisdom; and he was strikingly handsome, almost beautiful, tall and slender. His face was smoothly shaven. I had to look twice to assure myself he was a man for he could have passed for a very beautiful lady.

Together we went into my study, my favourite room for cherished visitors. I hinted Harold that I was about going off to one of my Happiness Interviews, and of course invited him and his friend to come along. But he had ideas of his own.

He had brought me this incredibly calm person to save me the trouble of the outing. He introduced his friend, who for purposes of anonymity we would simply know as GD. Harold believed that GD was more than worth being interviewed for the column. I was delighted and straight away, the interview started.

The first thing I notice about you, sir, is the calmness in your eyes. They are incredibly calm. You must be a very calm person. How do you do it, in this city of turbulence?

Ha...haa...haa! You are interesting, yourself. To pick on that as a first question is telling.

So will you tell us the secret behind that satisfied, contented, and joyful look in your eyes, on your face? Is it always so with you?

Yes. And it can be same for you as well.

That is why I am interested for my readers and myself. Please share with us, how we can achieve such serene happiness; how we can have this light of joy that is always in your eyes.

I am glad at what you say. To see the light of joy in my eyes, you must have a glint of it yourself, either in reality or in potentiality.

Please teach us.

Permit me, but let me ask you. Are your readers really desirous of being contented, happy, and joyful?

Sure, I believe so. Maybe, not all. But there are many, I would say, who are eager for the wisdom to be happy; given the turbulence that is their lives. They seek succour. They seek peace. They seek comfort. Above all they seek happiness. Maybe they seek it everywhere, but in the right place, I don't know. Please assist.

Of course I will assist. I live to assist.

Really? You live to assist?

Yes. I live to assist. And, maybe, that is the summary of what I have to share with you as the secret of my calmness, the secret of my happiness and the light of joy in my eyes, as you put it.

I am listening, sir.

You are interesting; a good listener; good trait for an interviewer. One of the traits that people like me must have. As life assistants, we must listen and understand before we can help as needed. So keep it up. Who knows? One day, you too, may live only to assist life.

Sir, please go deeper into this issue of living to assist life. What does it mean? How can it confer happiness?

OK, maybe I should use you as an example to help illustrate what I mean. OK with you?

I am glad, if it helps me and my readers better understand how to find happiness.

You have a family, don't you?

Yes, I do.

Is your family your assistant or you the assistant of your family?

I am principally their assistant and steward.

How do you do this?

You are turning the table and acting the interviewer. I should be asking the questions.

I know, but we agreed; just to help with the illustration.

I understand. I serve my family. I look out for them. I anticipate their needs. I am concerned for them. Usually, I put them first in any decision I have to take. Sometimes it could be strenuous to do this, but their happiness means the world to me.

Good. You do pretty well. You are a classy assistant and steward of your family, from what I hear. You are their first class servant. Now tell me, do you find joy in giving them joy.

Incredible joy, I tell you. Serving them lights me up. It is the oxygen of my life.

There you are! Imagine all you had to do in life was serve your family alone. Imagine how happy you would be, if it were so.

Oh, yeah.

I bet you would be wondrously happy. You would beam with joy always at their joy because of the amount of love you have for them. It is the love in your heart that compels you to serve them without grumble. It is the love that watches out for them. Your heart throbs for them in a genuine and sincere way. That is the secret. That is my secret, if you want to call it that. That is the reason for the light of joy that you say you see in my eyes. It is the privilege of servants of love. It is the privilege of all that serve just because they truly love.

However, life is not all about serving the family alone. Often, if not most of the time, you have to attend to people who do not know you, people who do not like you, or even those who hate you. You have to meet others who have no cares about you or your feelings.

I agree with you. But notice how much happiness serving your family brings you. Imagine extending that same service, with genuine and sincere love to all of life. Then the harvest of happiness would come, not just from the family service, but indeed from all of life. The obstacles you enumerated about an uncaring world are basically the ladders, which you must climb to pluck the fruit of joy. They are the steep pyramids to lead you to heights of happiness.

Sir, it is very difficult to extend love to the world.

I know, but that is the challenge. That is the price.

Can one ever be able to serve and love others as one loves one's own family?

Maybe not exactly. The love for outsiders does not have to be as passionate, physical and warm as that of your family, but at least you can give goodwill. You can have no evil thought against anyone. You can sincerely wish everybody well and mean it. You can genuinely give a present of goodwill to everyone.

Let all who meet you be lifted in some way. Give without ceasing. Serve with sincerity. Do to others only things that would uplift them. Be ready always to assist with a heart of love; gladly, willingly, and cheerfully. Do these and the spark of joy will ever dwell in your eyes and in your heart?

So that is your secret?

You have called it so.

I am awfully grateful to you.

I am grateful to you too, for helping me to share; for you are indeed assisting me with my job as an assistant of life, whether you know it or not.

Haa...ha...ha! That sounds like being your apprentice.

With gladness, I would like to have you.

Chapter Nine

KNOW YOUR TRUE SELF

It rained heavily this morning. The roads were flooded, and traffic was bad. Slow, sluggish. It took longer to get to the interview venue than we anticipated. Cars swam through the lakes that were the roads. Some got unsolicited water baptism as vehicles splashed through the waters. At the bus stops many were drenched, shivering and waiting. It was cold and damp. The atmosphere was moody and sombre.

But this was in sharp contrast to the warmth that greeted us, as we stepped into the sitting-room of our interview subject today. He beamed as he saw us, eyes lit up like torchlight. He offered us warm water in tea cups.

It was a strange but welcome offer as far as I was concerned. I surveyed the smallish looking man, in his robes. He wore beards with streaks of grey. His eyes were small, and when he smiled, as he did often, they elongated in a single slit, like a shy cut on a skin. His laughter was full and rich, sounded like a choir.

Sir, thank you for granting us this interview.

Oh, it is my pleasure to have you here. Welcome. Welcome indeed. It must have been interesting arriving here so early in spite of the rain.

Yes, it was quite an experience but we are glad we made it here on time. The scenes on the road were quite depressing. Maybe it is the rain. Generally, when it rains people are not as happy or bright as they ordinarily are. Do you notice?

Sure I notice. It happens to a lot of the people. But not to all, I must say.

Does it happen to you?

What?

I mean do you get moody, generally, when it rains? Does it dampen you in some way?

No, why should it?

Why not? When everywhere is wet, damp, cold...

Yes, so what? No matter the weather, I am happy.

Precisely, how do you do it?

How? I don't get your question? You mean how do I remain happy in spite of the damp environment?

Yes, Sir.

Do you mean that figuratively or literally?

Well, first literally. How do you do it?

Simple. I am not the weather. I am. The weather is. We may be related. But we are not the same. I have freedom to be as I choose, in spite of the weather.

Doesn't the weather affect you? Like when it gets cold or wet, or damp?

Let me see if I understand what you mean. If I place my body under the rain, of course my physical body will get wet. But that is my physical body. Not me. Not Soul. Not even my mind. Not my emotion. It is just my physical body that gets wet. I, as Soul, I never get wet. I am always bright, sprightly, beautiful and happy.

Excuse me, you have said so many things, please let me try to follow. Are you saying you are not this person I am seeing? This physical being that I can touch?

You are funny. But seriously I am not this being you are looking at. What you are looking at is my physical shell. It is not me. Just like your clothes are not you. They are the covering of your physical body. So your clothes getting wet, does not mean you getting wet, or does it?

I am still confused.

No, do not be. The matter is very straightforward.

But it is not clear to me, sir.

Okay, let me put it this way. Do you know that you are created by God? Do you know that you were created from the Holy Spirit?

No, what I know is what we are taught; that God put his breath in man, and man became a living Soul.

Good. Even that is good enough. So you are made from the breath of God?

Yes.

Excellent! But notice that the Holy Spirit is the breath of God.

Yes.

So you are a living Soul as you say, made from the fabric of the Holy Spirit.

Yes.

Good. So now you know you are Soul, individualised Spirit. Ever happy.

Ever happy?

Yes, ever happy. Soul, by nature, is happy.

But sometimes I am sad.

By choice upon the use, or wrongful use, of the mind. Soul is like a prince, dressed in golden light but free to roam, as it wills. Sometimes it can roam to regions of dirt, as it likes. But it does not mean that because it is in the region of dirt, it is itself, dirty. But Soul can permit the mind to play that trick on it. So by being in a dirty or damp environment, Soul can decide to assume oneness with the environment, and thus feel dirty or damp. It is the choice of Soul. But that choice does not negate or nullify the happy nature of Soul.

So whether the environment is wet, damp or cold as the case may be, Soul reserves the right to remain its happy self?

Fantastic! You got it. Now I think what is generally missing is the lack of awareness that we are Soul, and not the body. And that the body is subject to us, as Soul. Not the other way round. There is also general ignorance that Soul is happy, by nature. The whole strive of

man to find happiness is a preoccupation to rediscover his timeless happy nature as Soul.

What I say here is by no means original. It has been repeated and regurgitated in many forms through history. One of the most popular means of expressing this idea is probably the Socratic command 'Man know thyself!'

So what you are saying here is that once I know my true self, I find happiness?

Of course! For we are happiness itself. Happiness is the very chemistry of our makeup as Soul. This knowledge and a continuous reminder of it are bound to induct our bodies with happiness. It even gets better when we begin to express ourselves as Soul. And eventually come to the full realisation that we are truly the captains of our own ships; where Soul is captain, and ship is our destiny in the ocean of life. For with the freedom Soul enjoys it can always create happy circumstances for its enjoyment, and thus reinforce the awareness that it is made of the fabric of happiness. That it is happiness by nature.

Unaffected by the weather or the changing moods of the world?

Thank you. Soul is like the sun or the moon, well beyond the vagaries of the earthly weather and more. Whether it rains or not, '*il ne fait rien*', as the French would say. The shining, the beaming, the happiness continues unadulterated as long as we remain conscious of who we are as Soul.

So to be happy?

Live as Soul.

But how?

I think I have said enough. But if I must add, please know that the chief characteristic of God, Spirit and Soul, is Love, Divine Love. Love without expectation of rewards. Practise this to the best of your ability and it will surely lead you to true and lasting happiness. *A bientot!*

Chapter Ten

FASTING

What was the use of attending, if you were not going to eat?

I came to honour your invitation.

But that presupposes that you also enjoy the food which we have prepared for the occasion.

Please do not get it wrong. I truly appreciate the invitation. And I deeply share in the joy and significance of today's occasion.

Then why don't you take some food?

Now I see you are really getting concerned. If you've got a few minutes let's take a short walk.

Sure, you are today my most important guest and I would really have loved to see you enjoy our food with us.

But who says I am not enjoying the food?

The one you have not tasted?

The fact that others are enjoying it, and I am part of the merry making is enough.

As you can see it is not enough for us, the hosts. We would have liked to have you taste something.

Would you have preferred that I did not honour your invitation on the grounds of a fast?

You mean you are fasting?

It has become necessary to tell, so I do not spoil your mood on your birthday.

Oh! I see. Now I understand. Forgive me, but is there any special reason for the fast? We, your friends, could join if need be.

You could join in for a fast, one day in every week of your life?

Why one day, every week of my life?

It is just a routine fast for no special reason, but to help put attention more on spiritual things and less on the material and physical.

Is it part of the injunction of your faith?

Yes and no. It is recommended in my religion, but not a command. People can choose to fast or not to fast. People could modify their fast, in fact. Some prefer the dry fast; that is fast without taking anything from dawn to dusk. Others take only water throughout, some others do the fruit fast, in which case they take only fruits throughout the period.

This must take a lot of discipline, for it to be done routinely a day every week.

For us, our choice day for fasting is Friday. You can join if you like and see if it is good for you. I am definite it is good practice. And I can say with certainty that even outside the spiritual benefits you would see clear benefits regarding your physical health as well.

Now you are joking.

No, seriously the fast is an excellent health tonic. It particularly provides a reprieve period when your body system rejuvenates and cleanses itself of impurities. It is an excellent discipline for health.

You mean it? Is it part of the secret of your good health?

I must say that it is. I enjoy my Friday fast, because of the spiritual and physical blessings that it bestows. Generally I put a lot of attention on my health. I think it is well worth it. Life without good health is inconvenient and painful and unhappy.

You know this is a lesson, which many people have not learnt. The pursuit of material achievement, and the rush to win the rat race, whatever that means, completely pushes questions of health to the back burner. So easily, stress and other distressing ailments build up in the body until it is too late and then you are forced to take up regular appointments with doctors and hospital beds.

What you are saying makes a lot of sense. In the course of daily hustling, we find no time to unwind or take care of our bodies. So, sooner or later illness forces us to make the time, at great inconvenience and even at most inauspicious times, not to speak of the pain.

You have never attended any of my counselling clinics. One of the things we deal with is this whole question of striving to live the balanced life. It is really ironical that people stress so much to provide the comfort of life for themselves. And they usually succeed in gaining the material but losing their health, which should help them enjoy the proceeds of their sweat, in the first place.

This is probably the message I really needed most to hear today. It is probably my best birthday present.

I am glad you see it as such. The pursuit of happiness can be such a mirage, such an elusive target, if we do not enjoy good physical health. Life appears to lose its salt, when the physical body is unwell. So I always advise my clients to invest on their health; exercise daily, even if for a few minutes, generously have fruits and vegetables and watch the kind of food they eat.

What do you mean by watch the kind of food they eat?

Food should be an extension of medication. That is what I think. Your food should assist in running the body, not in ruining it.

What kinds of food ruin the body?

I am sure your nutrition expert can guide you on that. But really do put some attention on good health, and see how much of a booster of happiness it is.

Chapter Eleven

LAUGHING AT ME

Eresia had two wives. Both wives were once my friends. We were all school mates in secondary school. I knew them both fairly well. Leka and Ulakun.

Leka was fair, almost half-cast, and slim, with a small but pointed nose. She carried herself with elegance and grace. When she walked it was with a spring on her feet. Her smile was sweet, revealing a set of sparkling rows of teeth. But she had a poor sense of humour. She was arrogant and touchy.

This was in sharp contrast to Ulakun who was fat, and looked older than her true age then. But she was very jovial and full of humour. She was dark in complexion, with a full chest, which her good height could not quite conceal. When she walked her legs bent out sideways making an inverted V while her knees struggled in friction against each other. Some said she had a 'K' leg. She was the butt of jokes in class.

But the strange thing about Ula, as we called her, was that she laughed loudest when you tried to make fun of her funny features. She would laugh until tears stood in her large lovely eyes. A newcomer would never know she was the person being ridiculed by the rest of us, her classmates. She was such a sweet jolly fellow, with what today I understand as a great sense of humour.

In character Ula and Leka were poles apart, almost opposites. Naturally, both did not get on well in class. They seemed to belong to two separate clusters of female friends. Although Leka was from a fairly humble background that struggled to pay her fees, she carried herself with stupendous arrogance. She was snobbish and rude. She was really a contrast to Ula, who was easy going, from a well to do family, generous with gifts, humble and warm.

How they ended up marrying the same man is a mystery, which I would rather allow to rest in the carrot-coloured store of memory.

Forgive, reader, I had to detour to Ula and Leka because my interview-subject today, an old woman, Kitiana, adulteration of Christiana, whose only means of communicating with me was our local dialect had referred to them.

Kitiana's face is lined with the grooves of age, but her eyes sparkle like two little balls of crystal in the sun. She is devoutly religious, and an unsung village counsellor, especially of young couples. Her wisdom attracts me to her. I thought we should, today,

talk about happiness. I thought she would have some uncanny insights, which I could share with you.

It was in trying to illustrate her points on happiness that she referred to Leka and Ula. They were now her daughters-in-law. She predicted that Leka was going to age faster than Ula although Ula was the first wife and slightly older.

Why, Mama?

Because Ula likes to laugh.

I agree.

What I like best about Ula is the way she laughs at herself. When we married her, my younger children did not support the marriage. They were not happy with her looks. But I loved Ula from the day I met her. She had beauty that the eyes could not see. And that was the kind of woman that I wished for my first son. My wish was realised in Ula.

Mama, I do not know where you are going to land with these illustrations, but I just mean to remind you that what we are talking about here are secrets of happiness.

Exactly, that is what I am sharing with you. I am sharing what God and experience have taught me. I referred to age and the process of aging because there is a relationship between habits of happiness and aging. Ula knows how to stay young for my son.

How, Mama?

Through her sense of humour. She laughs at herself. It is a great quality. Instead of getting bitter with a correction or even an abuse she turns it into a joke, and laughs at herself. That way her heart is hardly bitter. In spite of the fact that her husband defaulted in putting Leka in the family way and then being forced to marry her, Ula still enjoys a good relationship with her husband. And I believe it is because of her sense of humour. Her husband enjoys her company.

I see.

Let's face it. Who likes an ever frowning face and touchy heart that takes offence at every bit of misbehaviour?

Nobody.

Nobody. Of course, nobody. Cheerfulness is good for company. But above all it is good for happiness. And it is good for health, and from my experience, it is good for retaining youthfulness. A man who is always cheerful will never age early. And to remain cheerful, people should not take things too seriously. Occasionally yes, but for most of the time, find the humour in every event and enjoy it. From that point of view Ula is my heroine. They say her face is ugly and her legs even uglier, but for me she is the most beautiful girl on the face of this earth. If I had girl children, I would have ensured that they imitated Ula.

You love her that much?

Believe me, my son. It is a wonderful trait to have in men and in women. If you do not have it already, try to cultivate it. If your wife does not have it, encourage her to do the same. Tell her that I, Kitiana, the old, feeble woman in your village that walks on three legs, said so... ha, ha”

Mama, I cannot see the third leg.

What do you call this my support stick here? Leg, of course. Without it can I stand or walk?

Mama, you are so funny.

You better be funny too, and above all find humour in laughing at yourself. I recommend it. Tell anyone that a toothless old woman in your village, called Kitiana, said so. Listen, boy, if not for humour do you think I would have lived till now? I would probably have killed myself in sorrow. Do you know that I was childless in this village for a long time? I gave birth when everybody had given up hope, including my husband. Why do you think Ula’s husband’s name is Eresia? It means unthought-of, unexpected. Against the ridicule and pressure of the village, God gave me a sense of humour that helped me survive.

Thank you, Mama. Thank you, so much. I wish I could stay longer but I must go now. I will be back.

Thank you, too, my son. My warm regards to your wife. Tell her to take care of you, her husband, very well otherwise I would find my way there and become your second wife!”

And we both laughed!

Chapter Twelve

A TIME TO SOW

Sir, I wonder if you have ever come across my newspaper column.

Yes, I have. I recognise your face from your mini picture. I however notice that lately you have been volunteering descriptions and in cases initials of your resource persons.

Yes, sir. I do that at times.

I do not know about the others you have spoken to, but I would not like any descriptions of me.

I would respect that.

Now straight to the business you have come for. As you must know by now there are innumerable paths to happiness. Still there is only one path. But do not let the paradox throw you. Let's rather talk about something as common place as my hobby.

What is your hobby, sir?

Before I come to my particular hobby, the point I wish to begin with is that people who seek happiness should have hobbies. Something to do just for the love, for the joy, for the enjoyment, for the giving and sharing.”

Sir, what you have just said reminds me of a conversation I had yesterday with the Chief Executive Officer of a local bank. I had asked if he had any hobby to help him relax. He actually scoffed at the question. For him, at this time of his career, hobbies are a waste.

What a pity? He probably needs to know how much of a window of love these hobbies are. He needs to ventilate his heart and let in some freshness. It should help to greater vigour and interest in what he does for a living. Shut your love windows and you are actually a working corpse. For love is life. Life without love is hell unimaginable.

So what is your own hobby, sir, if we might get on to that question now?

My hobby is gardening. I love to plant seeds and watch the wonders of their first sprout, and opening. For me it is a miracle to behold the enigma of life, growth and beauty. The hobby opens the doors of my heart every time and fills me with joy beyond words. When I speak of this love of my gardening, I believe my eyes light up even more, for truly it gives me so much happiness. Any time a seed transforms into a tiny little plant, it recreates the marvel of creation. Sometimes I wonder at the joy that God must feel in watching things such as seeds nurtured over years, grow into full maturity.

I wonder too.

But you can find the same joy at your own level, in planting a seed and watching it grow. It is an exercise, which I often have children partake in. It helps their sense of wonder at the miracle of life. I recommend it to you and to your readers. It is cheap and easy but the harvest of joy and happiness is rich.

How often are you in your garden?

Everyday, as much as I can help it. You see, the seeds I plant are my responsibility. I feel responsible for helping to bring them to life. As I plant, I see myself as God's extension worker, helping to materialise His dream for greater life and abundance. I see myself as undertaking a deep spiritual and divine assignment in planting those seeds and watching them grow. The plants become like a part of my family, that I must care for, that I am responsible for.

Do you ever lose some plants, in spite of the care?

Hardly. But even if that happened for whatever reason, I would still be grateful for the opportunity to have shared some intimate moments with that slice of life, that slice of God that came in the guise of a little plant. Do you have a garden yourself?

No, but I do have some potted plants and flowers, because I love flowers. But I had never looked at them in the sense in which you speak of the plants today, as possibly members of the family, completely dependent on me for critical elements of survival.

You know the best of it all? Gardening is an avenue for me to practise Divine Love. Divine Love is giving or loving without any thought of a return gratitude or reward; just giving for the joy of giving.

How does that apply?

Loving plants simply for their sake. The plants are never able to say thank you for love. They will never be able to help win a contract, or find a job. They do not get involved in selfish human calculations. They just are. Love them or leave them.

But who practises Divine Love these days? In the hustle of everyday life, people are very manipulative. They do sweet things; say lovely things always with a motive of gain. Even a hearty good morning these days from a neighbour may mean that a request is coming.”

Is it then a surprise that so many people are not happy? People may flash phony smiles, just to deceive, but in their hearts, do they feel the love of God? Do they feel Divine Love? Do they feel the source of happiness? Do they touch the garment of God?

Happiness, my son, is hidden in the simple things of life. Things as simple and mundane as planting a seed, watering it and watching it grow.

Many would see this kind of hobby as childish.

No, my son. The word you are looking for is child-like. Is it a wonder that children find happiness easily, while their parents grope in endless, fruitless search? The gifts of heaven are for the children. Those who think they know may never know. The babes, who know nothing and wonder at everything, know everything. The paradox again. But don't let it throw you.

So, sir, if I were to take a simple sentence message today from you as recipe for happiness, what would it be?

It would be as simple as Join me, let's together marvel at the wonder of creation, in planting seeds, watering them, and watching them grow. This will open your heart, in ways you never thought possible.

I am grateful sir.

So am I! You have made my day. May the blessings be!

Chapter Thirteen

A HEART OF GRATITUDE

Sir, I have done many interviews in the course of this series, but for once I am tempted to deviate from my primary concern of the paths to happiness.

Why?

Because too many good sections of life shoot out from you so poignantly that I am tempted to focus on them.

Things like what?

Frankly, I do not know which to start with. Should I for instance concern myself with your secrets to such great wealth and riches, which you possess? Or should I try to extract from you the secret of what seems like eternal youth which you possess? Or should I try to find out why your health seems to be in such excellent condition? Or is it the ever-present sweet calmness on your face? Or the almost palpable joy around you all the time? There is so much to learn from you. I am confused.

You are so kind to credit me with all these goodness. I thank you. And I thank God who makes it all happen. If you really want to know, I hardly deserve any credit at all.

What do you mean?

I mean that all the credit belongs to God Almighty. And I do not mean that in the usual frivolous sense just to appear humble before you. That is absolutely unnecessary.

How do you mean it then?

I mean it in the simplicity in which I have said it. My experience is that it is God, and only God that truly makes it all happen.

But you must have strived. You must have paid your dues.

What dues? How much dues have I paid more than others? There are many more out there who are more handsome, more faithful to their religions, more hardworking, more intelligent, more armed with knowledge, but who may not be enjoying a minute fraction of what I daily take for granted.

You are so self-deprecating.

No, no, no, seriously that is not the issue. I am merely emphasising that I truly owe it all to God Almighty. I have not in any way deserved what I have got in life. At the beginning I used to arrogate to myself achievements which I thought were largely due to my work. But all that, I know today, is fallacious. There are many out there better than I, in so many ways, but who are not half as lucky.

What made the difference then?

What else? The grace of God, of course.

Don't the others also enjoy that grace of God?

Of course we all do. It is a blanket grace. It is an unquestioning grace. It is a non-judgemental grace. It is a non-value grace. It is an unconditional grace. But it is live-grace, only upon acceptance. And in many cases, the depth of acceptance translates to the depth of grace that we enjoy.

So the critical difference is in the acceptance of the grace?

Yes, my brother. I cannot find another reason for the difference but total acceptance and active submission to the will and guidance of the Invisible Guide, which is however visible to some. And, of course, a heart and attitude of gratitude.

Please correct me if I am wrong. You are saying that there are three elements responsible for your happiness in every sphere of your life?

Yes.

You say they are One, Total Acceptance of the Grace of God. Two, Active Submission to the Will and Guidance of the Invisible Guide, who is however visible to some. Three, A Heart and Attitude of Gratitude.

Correct. That is my recipe for happiness any day, any time. In fact to keep it simpler, I would say that my fast track, digital link if you like, to

happiness is a heart and attitude of gratitude. That third element encapsulates the other two.

How can one internalise this attitude?

You said it. It is an attitude. To imbibe a new attitude, is to practise, practise, and practise.

So one should practise gratitude?

Yes. By all means, if you desire to be happy. My experience is that gratitude is the shortest cut to God. And it is also the shortest to happiness.

Really? So gratitude is the secret of happiness?

That is my experience. That is what I have found for myself. No matter the situation, once I can tune my mind to what I call the channel of gratitude, that which was seemingly grave begins to find its grave, and I can then find my wings to dizzying heights of happiness.

Do you mean gratitude to God or to your family or the social life around you or what?

I mean gratitude to everything that has life. But above all, I mean gratitude to God Almighty.

Gratitude for what really?

Gratitude for everything. Gratitude for life. Gratitude for health. Gratitude for family. Gratitude for business. Gratitude for food on the table. Gratitude for protection. Gratitude for affection. Gratitude for joy. Gratitude for laughter. Gratitude for oneness. Gratitude for peace. Gratitude for yesterday. Gratitude for today. Gratitude for tomorrow. Where shall we begin? Where shall we end? Everything begins and ends in the womb of God, whether we know it or not.

Tuning in to this channel of gratitude suddenly brightens your mood?

That is an understatement. Tuning in to the channel of gratitude catapults me to moods of heaven. It enlarges my heart until it completely envelops me in its balm of sweetness. And where I am deeply, sincerely grateful, I feel the electric vibrations of joy run through my entire being. And I am not ashamed to admit that sometimes the joy overflows down my cheeks and I cry like a baby.

Chapter Fourteen

LET THE MUSIC PLAY

Still on your quest for happiness?

You guessed right. That is why I am here.

Now what can I tell you?

You know what to tell me.

What?

How to find happiness. That's what my column is about.

Yes, yes, yes, I read the column myself.

You like it?

Oh yes, I do.

Glad. Today it is your turn to contribute.

I know, and I will. I was only trying to figure out how to convince you that I am serious when I tell you what I have to contribute.

What, sir? I am glad to hear it. We can go straight to the point.

Exactly what I intend doing.

So what is the secret of happiness?

Listening.

Oh my God. How?

Just listening. Opening your ears and paying attention.

Attention to what?

Attention to yourself. Attention to your inner being. Attention to your make-up. Attention to you as Soul. Attention to God within. Attention to the music of the ethers. Attention to happiness as sound.

Now I am totally lost. Sir, please be patient with me. Please explain to me, so I can understand. I do not seem to follow.

Relax, what I say is nothing complicated at all. You have merely complicated my simple words with your sophisticated scholarly mind. I do not at all mean to be scholarly. I mean to be simple and clear. So take the words I have spoken simply.

Simply?

Yes, simply.

You mean that listening is a path to happiness?

Yes, especially listening to the music within.

What music?

Inside you. Inside me. Inside all of us, there is an ever-playing music. It is the music of God. It is happiness as sound.

How do I do this?

Again it is simple. Put your attention within. Another way of saying it is, open your spiritual ears.

Oh my God. I have heard about spiritual eye. The third eye. The tisra til. The door of Soul. But never of spiritual ears.

That you have never heard of them does not deprive you of their ownership. It is just that you have them but do not use them. If you have money bequeathed to you by a relative, and you are not aware of it; it does not take away the fact that it is yours legitimately. The day you know, you claim it.

So there are spiritual ears?

Very much so.

There are eyes for seeing and ears for hearing. The twin manifestation of God is often as light and sound. The spiritual eyes see the light. The spiritual ears hear the sound. Usually in the sound is

the light, and in the light is the sound, although some people may perceive them as two different manifestations. But that is probably taking you too far afield. Let us return to your basic quest for happiness.

So how do you get the spiritual ear to hear?

Let me confess that this is both a simple and a complex question. It is simple for some who have had certain kinds of spiritual privilege and training. All they do is simply shift their attention to the inner side of their being and they can hear the music of God. And that is what I referred to earlier as happiness, as sound. It is a most uplifting and enlightening sound. But for most of the people, it is advised that they still try to shift their attention inside and listen to the silence. This silence can be heard because it is itself a sound, but one of fine vibration. And it is part of the music of God. The music of happiness.

This presupposes that one must find a quiet place to do this listening?

Generally yes. Even though I must add that there are many spiritual students who can hear the quiet even in the midst of a rowdy meeting. But it is advisable to find a quiet place and period, when you can hardly hear any external sound. Find a comfortable place to sit, shut your eyes to avoid distractions, relax, and simply listen to the silence.

This is part of the music of happiness?

You can also call it the food of love for in listening with an open heart you are actually refuelling your being with Divine Love and Happiness.

Because of the necessary quiet would it be best to do this exercise in the morning?

Any time actually. The important thing is to find the right quiet conditions, although I agree that for many practical reasons it is easier to locate such times in the early mornings.

So the listening helps to boost happiness?

Yes. It helps to fill one with contentment and joy. It fills one with God-like characteristics of joy, freedom, wisdom etc. And this generally tends to fortify one against the temptation of the world. It provides us with better happiness stamina, to withstand the taunts and

tantrums of this world. It fills our tanks of happiness so we can journey into the day with good shock absorbers to sail easy over the possible potholes, gullies and gutters of the day.

How often would you recommend me doing this exercise?

At least once a day.

For how long a day?

It all depends on you. Maybe 10 minutes, may be 15, may be 20. Over time, no one would need to remind you to practice your quiet time, because you will know the difference by experience.

How can I thank you?

It is I who owe you gratitude. Thanks very much for coming. God is always with you.

Chapter Fifteen

APPRECIATE THE MOMENT

Sir, in the midst of all the confusion in the world, how can we find happiness?

You are looking for happiness?

Yes sir, that is why my microphone has been roving from place to place for the past 6 months now, trying to get clues from the likes of you.

But you must have found it by now. I have been following your column myself and have found it particularly enriching. It has covered so much and given so many clues to achieving the elusive state of happiness. I doubt that there is much I can add.

Sir, I believe there is much you can add.

Why do you think so?

Sir, you know better than I do that the wisdom of God is boundless. The quest for true happiness surely is the quest for the Highest. So it is the Highest that may be informing the rest of us through channels like you.

I am glad you put it that way. I hope that God uses me as a channel even as I discuss with you today, and if there is something to be added to what others have contributed, I am glad to be the voice for saying it.

I am glad you now see it as such. So what is the secret of true happiness?

What shall I say? Maybe I should put it somewhat differently and ask what is the secret of God?

It is your question still.

I know. The secret of God, the secret of realising God in one's being, in one's presence, in one's situation, is immediate, moment to moment recognition of ITS presence.

IT?

Yes, IT. For God is beyond gender.

I see. Sorry for the interruption. You were driving towards a point, about the moment to moment recognition.

Yes, the reality of God in our lives requires a moment to moment recognition, or better still, a moment to moment appreciation of the Divine presence. But the Divine presence, by definition, confers true happiness.

So?

So finding true happiness is a moment to moment realisation. That is why I guess it is a slippery state of consciousness. One moment you seem to have it, another moment it is all gone.

Please go ahead, sir. I am listening.

The point I am making is that happiness has to be won, on a moment-to-moment basis, just like the realisation of God in our lives, through perpetual appreciation.

Perpetual appreciation of happiness?

No, rather perpetual appreciation of the grace and gifts of the moment. That is what confers the tingling excitement of happiness. We should practice uninterrupted appreciation of life every moment, no matter the place, the event, the time, and the circumstances.

So your recommendation is that we appreciate every moment?

Yes, recognise the Divinity, the life, the opportunity, the gift, the grace and the holiness of every second given to you as from the heart of God.

So one should continuously be grateful for the gift of life in order to find true happiness?

Be continuously grateful for the moment and for all with you in that moment, for all of them are gifts from God.

You mean if I find myself in a bus now, for instance, I should be grateful for being there. You mean I should be grateful for the bus, for the people in the bus, for the comedies of the moment, for the comfort or discomfort?

Yes, my son. I mean all of that and more. I mean also that you deeply show appreciation for every soul or person that you meet. For everyone that you serve or that serves you are Divine gifts coming to you in very subtle ways. All are harbingers of true happiness. Happiness is everything and everything is happiness.

Those were almost the words of my 5-year old child.

Your child said so?

Yes, sir. I was dazed. I could have been concerned, if I had not been taught that Higher Wisdom often finds children fine vessels for passing on Its message to the waiting world.

Surely, it is amazing having such wisdom coming from a child. But it is true that children are worthy channels of the Divine Wisdom; if only we would pay them attention and listen more to them.

Sir, let us return to the advice you were giving. Are you saying that we should appreciate all that we meet?

Yes. It should always be a privilege to meet another soul. The meeting of souls is always an opportunity for more learning, and for more wisdom, and for more happiness. Appreciate the gift of having others in your life at every turn, no matter how fleeting. Be appreciative of your boss, be appreciative of your father, be appreciative of your sister, be appreciative of your opponent, be appreciative of your competitor, be appreciative of your friends, or your colleagues. These are all God's gift to you.

How?

I am afraid I will not be drawn into a mental discussion. My suggestion to you and your readers is that you practice and learn by your own experience whether this approach wins you more happiness or not.

So the secret is in appreciation?

Yes, the secret is in appreciation. Once you are spiritually tuned to this vibration of appreciation, you have automatically done several things at once. You have declared and acknowledged the presence of the Divine One in that moment. You have also acknowledged that all things come to you from that Divine pool as gifts of grace. You have also set up a direct line of communication with the Gift Giver, who now knows that you recognize ITS presence, and thus is encouraged to give you more.

Could this explain the common wisdom that the appreciative ones increase?

Sure. Indeed, why not? For appreciation means increase. When something appreciates it is known to have increased. With appreciation increase is a given. Appreciate more and see how much increase of happiness and general goodness you bring to your life.

Sir, how can I thank you. From the bottom of my heart I really appreciate your time and wisdom. I feel exalted. I feel excited.

Chapter Sixteen

BE GENEROUS, FREELY GIVE

Mister *How to Find Happiness!* What brings you here this morning?

To talk.

You should be enjoying your forced holiday from the nationwide strike.

It is rather an opportunity for me to catch up on my interviews, ma.

How did you get here? No molestations on the road by protesters?

No, surprisingly the roads were empty and free.

It is very generous of you to deploy your time this way for a non-paying venture like running a column these days in the dailies.

I appreciate your kind words, ma. But I think you are rather generous on me. What I am doing is no big deal.

I insist that it is.

You are so generous and so kind. But let me turn the focus to you; to the reason why I am here, to interview you as you must have guessed about your secrets of happiness; secrets I could share with my readers.

I know that is why you are here, but I wonder if I have any secrets to share with you. (Pause) Maybe there are.

What could they be, madam?

Generosity is one virtue I know that will always deliver abundance of happiness to your heart. There is never a generous man without a heart full of gladness. That is what I believe, and evidence, which you also can investigate, would bear this out.

I know generosity. It is a common word we use to mean dashing people things. I do not want to take my common sense understanding

of the meaning of the word without hearing your own definition. So when you say generosity what exactly do you mean?

I think I mean what you know. Generosity is giving, but more importantly, it is giving freely. Between those two there is a major difference.

Please explain, ma.

Giving with intent to receive any form of reward, cash, position, recognition, and etcetera is different from giving without any thought of gain. The generosity I refer to is the latter. A truly generous person is no scheming giver. He is no calculating giver anticipating dividends from the gift given. A gift from a generous heart is one totally without strings, without expectations of reward.

Forgive me, ma, but more clarity is required please. If I give a gift to a charity home for instance and I have the media cover the event for public kudos or image purposes, you would not regard that as generosity?

Strictly no. At least not for me; but which is not to say that those who do so are wrong. No, they must have their reasons. It is just that it does not fit into my particular definition.

I understand, ma. What if I make a huge public contribution to my church, and spontaneously have the congregation give me a rousing ovation. It would not fit into your definition?

No, not quite.

What if I pay an indigent girl's school fees, so I could befriend or marry her?

No, I am sorry it would not fit. The generosity for me that counts and yields load of happiness is the one done in secret, almost anonymously, and without thought of gain. To be sure, the secret giving could also take place in public. The critical thing is that there must be no **motive** of gain. If a gain happens to come through the inexplicable workings of life, fine. But it should not be the reason for the generosity. It is not like a politician handing out fortunes so he could win elections, for instance. That would not fit.

So the motive is really what makes the distinction?

Yes. In the motive is everything, in this case. Hence the emphasis on giving freely. Without strings. Without thoughts of repayments or rewards. Without conditions. In a sense, to give like God.

That is tough.

No, no it is not. It is a matter of love, and of discipline.

Is the generosity you refer to limited to material giving?

No, not all. Sorry if I gave that impression. Material giving is only one small aspect or way of giving. There are more and probably more important means of giving freely.

Like what?

Like forgiveness without conditions. That is giving greatly and freely. Like kindness in the way we treat people, the way we talk to them, the way we approach them with love. Those are also great ways to give freely, without expectation of reward. Especially if we give the kindness to all, irrespective of what they think, or how they act towards us. That is generosity.

Interesting.

Yes, it is. And so is holding beautiful thoughts of all, irrespective of how they think of us. To sincerely wish everybody well and mean it from the bottom of the heart is great generosity, for no one sees your heart. Only you know what thoughts you harbour for the next person. It is really in the utmost secrecy of the heart that generosity finds its quintessence. For indeed generosity is a matter of the heart. I can imagine that nothing gladdens the heart of God more than the giving from a generous and cheerful heart.

So giving in secret but with a grumble is not generosity?

I have doubts. The key word is **freely**, meaning happily, sweetly, cheerfully, willingly, voluntarily, eagerly, lovingly.

I see.

I am glad you see. Be generous my son, it is the secret of happiness that you have been looking for. Be generous with compliments to people, especially sincere compliments. Actively look out for the

good in others and compliment them. Do it with relish. Do it with love. But do it with sincerity.

Please continue, ma.

I have given you what you are looking for. Give freely. Give generously. Never miss to commend the goodness in others. See all as precious creatures of God, respect and appreciate their unique gifts and presence. That is generosity. In your thought, be generous. Think kindly of people. Think kindly of places. Quietly bless without ceasing, seeking neither recognition nor money. That is true generosity. Do these and watch your heart blossom with gladness. Do this and experience God massage your heart with sweetness, and closeness you never thought possible.

Really?

May your experiences answer your question.

Chapter Seventeen

ENJOY THE PRICE

Nicholas! Long, long time. Where have you been?

In Nigeria.

Are you in business or working some place?

I work in a regular but large firm.

Great! You must be doing well.

I am glad to say that I am.

I am not surprised. You have always been much focussed. Very optimistic. And always ready to pay the price of success.

You were not much different either.

But you are outstanding.

I must say that I have learnt over the years that the concept of paying the price of success that we had in the university was not quite right.

Really?

Maybe that is putting it too strongly. We were probably right in believing that we pay, but I have found that we should not actually be paying for success.

What should we be doing, if not paying? How do we achieve it?

What I have found is that rather than pay the price for success, we should be enjoying the price for success.

What is the difference?

Paying for success presupposes a certain level of pain or suffering leading to our object. But enjoying the price connotes happiness in course of the journey to success.

Now that sounds radical. But it appeals to me. So please expatiate.

What I mean is that the road, or better, the structured, designed road to success should be something that excites happiness with every step.

Exciting thought.

Let me illustrate. I am married to the most beautiful and wonderful woman in the world.

Nicholas! If you describe yours in such superlatives, how would you describe mine?

Relax, let me make my point. You see, before I got her to marry me, it was quite a struggle. And you know I am ugly. But I knew in my heart that she was my wife. I was convinced beyond all doubt. So I tried and tried and tried again.

Mister Die Hard!

Each time she rebuffed me, rather than feel sad, I was filled with gladness and excitement because I knew in my heart that every attempt was getting me closer to my goal, even then it was not evident. My friends wondered at the contradiction.

My man!

What they did not understand was that I knew that good things take time sometimes. And that the rough road to success should engender happiness, not sadness. To cut a long story short, in the end she agreed and today we are married.

With beautiful children?

I would say with fantastic children. For me, the journey to success is happiness, not suffering. Often when I want to drink from the pot of happiness, I set high goals for myself and begin the hard work. With each step along the way happiness fills my heart, in anticipation of success.

Your idea is fascinating.

Let me give you another example. You see in this country, the popular refrain on the lips of most graduates is 'No Job'. After school, I

refused to accept that song. As an accounts graduate, I asked myself what it was that companies look for in an accountant? I took my time to find out, and then set about acquiring them first of all. Within a short time, I had enough to begin the search for a suitable job, armed with due qualifications and professional affiliations.

Interesting.

I combed the newspaper that used to publish vacancies every week, along with other sources for vacancies. I set myself a goal of applying to at least eight jobs weekly.

Wait a minute. You mean you sent out 8 applications every week?

Say it loud. That was what I did. Within 10 months, I had sent out about 400 to 500 applications. And I enjoyed every bit of postage because I knew in my heart that the results would come.

Did you get replies?

At first none; indeed for nearly a year, the replies were not coming. But I kept on enjoying my price. My brother, when the replies now decided to start coming, they came in droves. Various interview calls from various parts of the country. I started choosing which ones to attend, and which ones to leave. And so also were the job offers.

You do not mean it?

I swear. As at the time I accepted to work in my current company, I had three other offers, equally juicy. My wife and I had to pray to make the right choice.

This is inspirational.

That is my experience. The road to success is strewn with happiness.

Really?

My brother that is the story of my life. Structured, designed road to success is my recommendation for happiness. As I am now, I am already looking ahead, enjoying the price of tomorrow's successes.

Nicholas, you have just written my next week's column.

You can't be serious.

Chapter Eighteen

CHOOSE JOY

It is a funny, interesting and beautiful world.

Why do you say so, Father?

I was just enjoying ruminating over the many contrasts there are in life.

I guess that is what makes life so colourful.

Yes, that is what makes life so colourful, and so full of choices, so full of alternatives. It is this abundance of options that makes choice so imperative.

The way you put it, it is almost as if choices are the prime defining factors of living.

You got it; for what is life without choices. It is the choices, which we make that enliven and effectuate the freedom that the Almighty extended to all of us. Choices activate our liberty and give meaning to our freedom. Choices are testimonials to the inexplicable generosity of God. It is in the boundless choices that are available to us, that one can begin to appreciate the unfathomable depth of the goodness of life.

But most people complain about the constraints of life. Some would rather live their lives differently. They would rather be happy, but they are sad, owing, as they say, to difficult conditions. They would rather be rich, but are poor. They would rather be free, but are slaves.

Good insight, son. But those constraints are all part of the choices they have freely made.

I beg your pardon?

You heard right. Those constraints that people complain about are direct choices that they themselves have made. Some of them may not have consciously made the choices, but ignorance is no excuse. If you throw a seed on a soil that meets all the conditions for it to sprout, it

would of course germinate. That you threw the seed consciously or not makes no difference.

Really?

You tell me. Does it make a difference? Does it make a difference that it is a child or a man who dips his hands in boiling water, knowingly or unknowingly? It does not matter. In either case the person would be hurt. So ignorance is no excuse. It is always in the place of Soul to know.

Can't some understanding be shown where it is for instance a child involved?

In the universe, Soul is equal to Soul. There is no adult, male or female Soul. The body in which a Soul chooses to manifest is again a matter of choice. It may be conscious or unconscious choice, but it is still a choice.

Life must be lived by choice. Whether in the physical or inner planes, it does not matter. To act is a choice, not to act is a choice, to be indifferent is a choice, to be kind is a choice, to be angry is a choice, to be stupid is a choice, to stand is a choice, to sit is a choice. Life is full of choices, no one can escape it. Whatever you do or think or say, is a choice. To be happy is a choice. To be sad is a choice.

This is tough to accept, I must confess.

Again acceptance or rejection of truth is a choice. So you are acting well within your freedom to choose to accept what I am telling you or not to accept. It is all your choice.

So you mean I can choose to be happy or be sad?

Surely, you can choose to be happy or to be sad. Happiness or sadness is like the clothes we wear. You can choose clothes for celebration or clothes for mourning. It is all a matter of choice.

I am interested in the happiness. Let us talk a little more about that.

That again is choice. You are still exercising your inalienable right of choice as Soul.

What can I do, Father, to choose happiness?

Just choose it. It is as simple as that. Keep your mind tuned to happy channels and of course you will remain happy.

Please explain, Father. This is getting very interesting.

This morning as we drove to work, I recall you were toying intermittently with the radio dial, looking for good happy music. Anywhere you found what you were looking for you left the dial there, until the channel programmed something else that did not interest you, then you searched for another channel with happy music.

Yes, I was doing that, looking for cool, love music.

Good. What you were doing with your radio dial is what you are expected to do with your mind. The world is full of incredible variations, permutations, and combinations. Each person or entity, like a radio station, transmits its own unique vibration into the atmosphere. So you have countless mini radio stations all around you broadcasting different frequencies of signals. Using your mind as the radio dial, you decide which ones to tune to. You follow?

Yes, I follow.

Since you want the happy channels, you make sure your dial always rests on the frequencies with happy vibrations. Let your mind feel steadily for joy. Let it continuously listen to joyful channels. Let it always sheer and participate, even if mentally, in the joy of others, known or unknown. Genuinely empathise with the happy ones and be genuinely grateful for the joyous events.

I guess it goes without saying that such a seeker of happiness like me should also avoid stations that transmit anger, hatred, jealousy, gossip and the like.

You got it! Let the seeker of happiness look continuously for happiness. Let him continuously give happiness to others.

I see.

But to give it, he must be continuously filled with it. As you know, no man can give what he does not have. To give happiness you must have it. That is why your mind must unceasingly feed on happy events, happy situations, happy dreams, happy words, happy people, happy thoughts, happy friends, and happy feelings.

So having been filled with happiness, you can give it with ease?

Not only do you give it with ease, it shines through you. You become, in a sense, a happy star, which radiates happiness. This is because you have exposed yourself so continuously to happiness that you have taken its nature. You know people unconsciously inherit the traits or characteristics of the people or events or situations that they are continuously exposed to.

So if you are continuously attached or exposed to happiness, you gradually become a personification of happiness?

Correct. Knowingly or not, you become a prophet of happiness.

Must you become a prophet of happiness to stay happy, Father?

Without doubt, because happiness remains dormant in you as a potential until you give it. It is the continuous sharing that sparks the fire.

So the rules are, if I may summarise in trying to see that I have grasped the lesson:

- a. *Keep my mind dial continuous on happy stations.*
- b. *Share the resulting joy with others by giving them happiness in whatever way I can.*
- c. *This sharing is what ignites and sustains the happiness in me.*

Excellent! The only thing I would like to add is that in sharing happiness try to understand that you must respect the space of others. Do not assume that other people would like to be like you. Some may even prefer sadness, knowingly or not. You must respect others' choice.

Father, even where I mean well?

No matter how good your course or, better, how good you think your course is, never cross the boundaries of freedom of the next person. Present what you have, but do not push, do not force. Enjoy your channels of happiness. Subtly spread your good news, but grant others their right to have their choices, even if of sadness.

Chapter Nineteen

DON'T EXPECT GRATITUDE

Can you imagine that she could so bitterly bite the finger that fed her? I cannot believe that I could be so generous to her and receive ingratitude in return? Can you believe I bought her a brand new gold watch and she did not as much as say a word of thank you? These must be familiar questions.

Yes, I recognise them. I must have asked them sometime or the other too, in the past. They are common questions. There must be very few of your readers who have not asked such questions ever.

But must it be so? Must people turn so ungrateful for acts of kindness?

I do not know whether it must be so. But I know that it is so.

Why is it so?

I repeat; I do not know. Maybe it is because there are many ungrateful people in the world. But why bother with these questions?

Well, the reason I ask is because such negative reception of good deeds makes otherwise generous people sad and in some cases deter them from giving.

It shouldn't.

But it does. Everyone likes to be appreciated. If you do something nice to another, the least you expect is a form of gratitude.

But why do we have to expect gratitude?

I would rather say why not? It is natural. If you have done a kind deed to another, you deserve a thank you, at least.

So what if the beneficiary doesn't say thank you?

If he does not thank you, he discourages you, or in cases even annoys you.

But why should you be annoyed because someone did not thank you for a good deed?

Why shouldn't I be offended? I did something good to someone and he is ungrateful; it is just not right.

Why is it not right? Doesn't the person reserve the right to be grateful or not to be? Is there a law in any sphere, physical, psychic or spiritual, which says that people must be grateful for a good deed?

Well, none that I know.

Now that is the thing. So why are we usually so fussy about gratitude? I admit that ingratitude has its own natural consequences at all levels. But the consequences are the individual's choice and they come in perfect obedience of the order of the universe.

Are you encouraging people to be ungrateful?

No. Do not get me wrong. All I have said is that people can choose whether to be grateful or not and freely reap the consequences of their choice. The giver should not be concerned with what choice the receiver makes, whether to be grateful or not. I also believe that no receiver or potential receiver should stand in judgement over the giver or potential giver, regarding the choice to give or not to give.

I still do not get your point.

The point I am making is that none should stand in judgement over another for being ungrateful or otherwise. The universe has its immutable compensatory mechanisms. It meticulously hands the deserved consequences of our thoughts and actions to all with unflinching precision.

Therefore, if I do a good thing to someone I should not bother whether he says thank you or not?

Precisely! Mind your own business. And your business as a giver is to decide whether or not to give. And the business of the receiver is to decide whether or not to be grateful. Whether they know it or not they reap the due consequences of their actions, one way or the other.

I see.

What is generally missed is that when we complain of someone's ingratitude, we are actually judging that person. The advice of all the great teachers of character has always been that we should minimise judgement of others. They advise that we should avoid condemnation of any sort. Their preference is always that we give the benefit of doubt or even completely overlook what may appear as another's weakness. And I say appear because we may not have all the information to adequately grade an action a weakness or not. Often we do not. Or more frankly, cannot!

I see.

Maybe it helps to reorient our whole attitude towards giving, by asking ourselves Why do we give? Do we give for the thanks that we expect? Do we give for the kudos? Do we give as an investment? Do we give for love and love only?

If the giving is in the vein of generosity, surely the answer is that we give for love, and love only.

Excellent! Now if we give for love and for love alone, it means we give without expectation of reward. Correct?

Yes, that is my understanding.

Expectation of reward may include expression of gratitude, pay back, commitment, loyalty, and the like.

I see.

Secondly, my understanding is that giving for love is really another way of saying giving for God.

Yeah. I share same view.

I am glad you understand it. Now, the implication of doing something on behalf of God is that the credit should not belong to us. But to the One on whose behalf the deed is done. If the receiver wants to be grateful to God and show it in being grateful to you, the instrument by which God has reached him that is entirely his business. Not yours.

I am following.

Lastly, the expectation of reward causes so much disappointment in life, because too many people are simply ungrateful. So that as long as we carry the consciousness that expects gratitude for every kind gesture we get hurt and unhappy. Rather than enjoy the joy that comes from generosity, we reap sadness from disappointments. Now that is really sad.

Now I see.

I am glad you understand. Do not lose the joy that giving confers by expecting rewards for your generosity. Rather, act purely as a detached giver; more like a messenger. Give without seeking reward or gratitude in any form.

If gratitude comes, fine, be grateful. If it does not, fine, be grateful still. That way your joy from giving keeps multiplying, irrespective of the attitude of the beneficiary.

Chapter Twenty

ENJOY THE CHILD

Your countenance has suddenly changed. The aggressive face I saw this morning has suddenly transformed into a sweet smiler. What changed?

I went to a clinic.

I did not realize clinics have that transforming effect on people.

It depends on what you go for.

What did you go for that transformed your countenance?

I went to visit a friend's wife, who had just had a baby.

Yes...?

Yes, that's it.

Was the effect from the clinic staff or the friend's wife or the baby?

The baby, of course. Harmless and charming as he lay, he wiped away all my anger. His touch was a master tonic. His looks a wonderful energiser. His eyes were simply heaven. Babies always have a fantastic effect on people. How sad can you be that a baby will not make you happy?

Shall I read you to mean that people should keep making babies to be happy?

Surely there is nothing wrong with making babies. I encourage it. It is a divine service in many respects, especially if it is done in sincere love for the mate and for the child. But this is not, strictly speaking, what I mean here.

What do you mean then?

I mean that any baby would have that uplifting effect on you, if you sincerely open your heart in love and acceptance of the child; no

matter whose child it is, for babies are bundles of love literally. I recommend this to you. If you ever feel low, find a baby to love, even if for the moment. Hold the baby and look into its eyes, behold the deep innocence and trust in them. Marvel at their delicate body. Feel their soft slim fingers. Wonder at their colour at birth. Watch the abandonment with which they yawn. See the countenance when the mother holds it to breastfeed. The feeling you get is simply magical.

I can relate to that easily.

I am sure you can. I wonder who cannot, for we all have savoured this enchantment of babies at sometime or the other.

I agree with you. No grown person could have been denied that magic at one time or the other.

Sometimes when we ourselves are yet babies, parents bring home more babies as siblings. And even as children it is always a rare and simply wonderful experience.

So you are seriously recommending baby care as a tonic for happiness.

Yes, if you would choose to call it that. In fact, I think that is a very good way of putting it. For whatever you do genuinely and lovingly for a new born - carrying the baby, rocking the baby, washing the baby's clothes or giving the baby a bath - surely leaves you with the feeling of love and happiness.

The key is to do it with love?

Yes, that is the key. To genuinely love the child. Not to pretend by putting up an appearance for the purpose of pleasing a boss, a colleague or a neighbour. Do it not because society expects you to, but because you genuinely love to, then you can truly feel and know the transforming effect of babies.

Those who do not have babies around them obviously cannot benefit from this happiness therapy.

To some extent not having a baby physically can be a constraint in employing this therapy; but only to some extent.

What do you mean?

You do not have to have the baby with you to have the benefit. What do you do with your imagination? Use it. In depressing moments, take a soul journey to a baby you know.

Soul journey?

Forgive the jargon, what I mean is imagine a baby you know and love. In your imagination get close to the baby. Carry the baby gingerly. Give the baby a big warm smile - the kind of smile that emanates from the deepest of your heart. You can even whisper *I love you*, and watch the baby react, possibly with a smile in return. And you know how baby smiles are. For me, they give the most charismatic and magnetic smiles you ever knew. Do this and see how you feel.

You want me to do it now?

Not necessarily, you can practise it any time you need a lift. Or in fact any time you are high on gladness and need to be even gladder.

Can I imagine another person's baby?

Of course it would have been better to imagine your own, if you had one. But if not, you can imagine any other baby of your choice that you love. Now, that is the key element Love. You must approach the child with a heart of love.

Why?

I am surprised at your question. You should know by now having interviewed so many people on this subject of happiness. Love is always the channel of true happiness. Love is what fetches you the reward of happiness that you seek. Not power, not hate, not money or any material possession or wicked intention.

If there are no longer such young ones in the family, can I imagine my younger siblings when they were new-borns?

Why not? This is the beauty of imagination. It can take you as far or as near as you want. It can take you into the future, and it can lead you way into history. It all depends on what you want and imagination is at your service.

I wonder why I never thought of this.

Maybe you did at one time or the other. You probably just did not dwell on it long enough to savour further goodness from the thought.

Thanks so very much.

One more thing before you go. My suggestion is that you can reap so much happiness not only enjoying the goodness of babies in reality or imagination but also in helping the helpless young ones. There are so many of them littered all over in need of someone to care for them.

How?

There are many children in the world without parents or even people they could call their own kindred. They need the likes of you to help. Any help to them is bound to reap for you, more happiness than you ever imagined.

You mean help with material support?

Yes, I mean that Food, clothing, medicine, etc. But they also need the warmth of love. They need your hug. They need your embrace. It does not have to be money-based. Love is love and it can come in any form.

Are you campaigning for Motherless Babies Homes?

I am not interested in your politics or social categories. I am interested in love, especially to young ones, for those of you who love to be happy.

Chapter Twenty-One

MUSICAL KEYS

Sir, thanks for granting me audience. I really appreciate it, considering how much your time means.

Thanks for coming, too. I usually like to share my philosophy. I guess that is how it can be useful to others.

I am glad.

Get on with your interview; I need to get back to the studio soon.

Thanks, sir. My question is simple How do you find happiness?

In many different ways, but especially in the studio. I love to be there.

The studio gives you happiness?

It lifts my spirit every time.

Just by being in the studio, your spirit is lifted?

Well, yes. But what I really mean is that the music of the studio lifts my spirit.

How?

In the studio, I listen to my most beloved sounds, and I experiment with all manner of instrumentation, mixing and merging as I choose. The experience is always, for me, exhilarating.

So from your experience what would you be recommending to my audience as recipe for happiness?

That is a rather difficult question. I cannot really give a recipe for happiness as such, but what I would whole-heartedly recommend is that people should take music seriously. Just like people have perfume hang over them throughout their activities, I would recommend exactly the same with music. Let music always keep you company.

You are saying that people should always listen to music?

Yes. People should take the benefit of music. They should seek and listen to music that steers their hearts, that fills them with joy, music that their inner atoms respond to. They should earnestly seek it, listen to it and enjoy it, wherever they may be.

Even at work?

Why not! I said, wherever. Go with your walk-man. Plug it into your ears and chatter away on your keyboard.

Why are you so certain this works?

I do not see why it should not work for you, because it works for me and all who love music. Music is my best recommendation for anyone who wants a happy high, any time. It is bound to take you high because it comes from the higher regions. And the higher you go, the happier it gets.

Really?

Certainly. Music is vibration. When you hear sweet sensational vibration, it bombards you painlessly and so profoundly that your heart begins to vibrate in sympathy with the sound. If it happens to be happy, harmonious music, you begin to feel the same Happy and harmonious.

So music is that powerful?

It is. I need not place any emphasis. Indeed adepts would tell you that the inner planes of God could be distinguished by the nature of sound, or more appropriately music, that you hear as you ascend. Music is like a ladder up to greater and greater joy. It is a stream of happiness upon which you can float away to feasts of joy.

All kinds of music?

Not quite. But then it is difficult to dictate for others what music takes them to the heights of happiness. Each person must find his or hers. And it may well be that the gravity of the mood might dictate which music factor would best lighten the heart of the listener. This is quite intricate. The listener has to feel out for himself what kind of music excites him out of his moodiness.

What you are saying is that there can never be one music solution for all?

That's right. Generically, music lifts. But how quickly or what kind of music lifts what individual depends on the mood and bent of the individual in question. But what is certain is that music is a joy maker. This is why music generally accompanies any merry making. Music is an effect of joy or happiness, but it is also a cause of happiness and joy. Interesting dialectics, but the result is joy ever more abundant.

Could this explain why musicians appear to be so happy especially on stage?

Now you are beginning to understand why the studio is home to me. It is a place where I get high on music. The more I enjoy the music the higher I get. Sometimes the joy that music brings can fill your heart with so much love that some of it overflows like tears down your cheeks. You must know what I am talking about, being yourself a music lover.

I must confess that I feel the truth in what you say. Your explanation helps me better appreciate what happens to me when I listen to music that I truly love.

I would add that nothing penetrates the heart centre as deeply and as effortlessly as music. No wonder it is described as the food of love. Music is what love eats in order to get finer and better.

So music and love have a close knit relationship?

Yes! That is how I would put it and then add a third relative Happiness. Music, Love and Happiness appear to me to be siblings, children of the same parents, look-alikes, members of one team, elements of a blood group. Find one and the others are only a heartbeat away.

Which would be the easier to start with if I wanted all three for myself?

Music I would say. It is something within your objective control. You can turn it on or turn it off, as you will. You can choose what sounds you like and those to emphasise. Music is more within your objective environment. Ever wondered why music is such a common factor in almost all religions?

It is beginning to make sense.

You may not approve of all the kinds of music that religions employ, but you cannot deny the efficacy of music in bringing good cheer to the congregation, and opening the heart to the Word. You cannot deny the effect of music in preparing the altar for the flowers that follow. You cannot deny the effectiveness of music as a knock on the temple within.

I see.

I am glad you see. Religions understand the power of music. But so should you as an individual. Use it to open your heart centre to joy.

Chapter Twenty-Two

SAY “I LOVE YOU”

You look a shy person.

Why do you say that?

Just your looks. It may be deceptive. But that is my perception.

You may be right or wrong, who am I to say?

So that puts it squarely back in my court. I should not have judged in the first place.

But I do not mind at all. I personally find it difficult to categorise myself either as an extrovert or an introvert. It all depends on what the situation calls for.

Interesting. Tell me more.

Now you want to turn the table. I am here to interview you. So you should do the talking and I the listening.

Not quite right. It is for both of us to talk even in that case. What you could say is that you could do more asking while I do more explaining. But talk we both should.

Agreed, sir. If I may begin, I have come to ask you to please share with us some tips for happiness. What in particular has been your own happiness trigger?

That should be private.

Perhaps, sir. But what we seek is so others can benefit from your wisdom.

You put it in a way that I cannot resist. First you flatter me that I am wise. And then you tell me it is for others, giving the intention a noble and altruistic aura.

Thank you for your kindness, sir....

“Thank you” when you have not even heard what I have to offer? But more seriously, I have been reading your column and I know what it is all about, and I am glad to contribute.

Thank you, sir.

My contribution is to urge people to be more open in speaking about love, or more precisely in confessing their love to their loved ones. If you really love someone, tell him or her. Tell them, openly, warmly.

Sir, in our society it is not very common. It is not something we are used to. Some may consider it even “sissy.”

Listen. To improve, we must change. Anything or anyone that puts himself forward for improvements has automatically embraced change. What you seek is information that would improve us - make people to live happier lives, bring more joy into their hearts. That means change for the better. Now if we are ossified in our ways, why bother with improvement.

No, I do not mean it that way.

I do not know how else you would have meant it. What you are saying simply is that certain habits, traditional or not, inhibit people from using this easy facility for joy. Now, that is a challenge requiring change.

I see. But I still find it difficult, given the tradition we have grown up in. It is a tradition in which love is felt as a bond between persons. Or just assumed, but not spoken.

But what is wrong with speaking it? What is wrong with confessing it?

I do not know, it is just not our way. Maybe it makes one look weak to say such a thing?

I see the problem is deep.

I am glad you see it, sir. But you are also one of us. How do you do it? Why do you do it?

Do what?

Say, say... I mean, say... I mean say "I love you."

How else would I do it but just say it. I must confess that I had inhibitions once I started out with this habit. But the freedom in my heart that came with it, the rush of sweet that filled my heart as I said it, even the sense of care that the confession gave was so much that the habit stuck. And more; the effect it had on my loved ones, the encouragement it gave them, the goodness it conferred on them, the confidence that it grew in them sealed it for me.

Really?

These days, I miss something when I leave home too early in the morning before my children wake up. I miss my hug around them and the feel of their little hands on my back. I miss the look of comfort, security and joy on their faces when I tell them that I love them, one by one. That single act is packed with so much joy, enough to see me beaming throughout the day. And I believe enough to see them through the day as well.

Let me confess that experiences I have read and heard have helped me to hold on to this habit. Once I read of a girl, a teenager, who was scorned by her peers, because she was poor, and was raised only by her mother. She was miserable, and often wished that she could meet her father. Mum told her nothing at all about him.

One day, in another emotional nadir, she made up her mind to end her own life. And just as she walked out of school determined not to return the next day, a teacher called her back. She had a telephone call from a stranger, who explained how her mum had done everything including death threats to keep him away from her.

The stranger said he was her father, and that he had decided to make this call in desperation because he was terminally ill, and it may be a matter of days before he died. He said he had this burden that he must discharge, the burden of love he felt for her, his offspring. He said he had nothing really to offer her, but to let her know that he loved her. The phone cut, and that was the first and last she heard from her father.

But you know what. His three words, "I love you", saved her life. Today she works as an influential parliamentarian in her country.

As a linguist, I have searched for and used words in many languages. But nowhere have I found three words more powerful than "I love you!" Those words inspire the love and happiness in both the speaker and listener. I know you may have your pride as priority. I do not judge you. But I would recommend strongly to you, that you drop some of the tough act, and confess your vulnerability to love. You

may discover that you emerge stronger in spirit, emotion and body than you have ever been.

Above all, you would certainly be a happier man. Try it out on your wife, your sisters, your brothers, your children, your mother, father or any one you love. If you are too shy at first, write it for them to read. You may suddenly find that you live in a new, more rarefied, lovelier and joyous world.

Chapter Twenty-Three

TAKE SPIRITUAL RETREATS

I tried to reach you all of last weekend, without success. It appeared that your mobile phone was switched off. I had been persistent because I thought the weekend would have been a good time to hold this interview so I don't interrupt your work today.

You are right. I would really have preferred having the interview at the weekend but I was away. I travelled to Accra.

Business?

No, not business. I went for a spiritual seminar of my religion. It rotates annually amongst countries. This time it was in Ghana.

Oh, I see. I did not realise you were that religious?

Why do you say that?

Well, you know religious people appear a certain way usually. They dress a certain way. If women, they tie their hair a certain way. They do not mix freely as you do. They usually confront people with efforts to convert them. They carry their Holy Books around conspicuously. I mean they make you know that they are religious, sometimes through what they wear around their necks, their rings and so on. But you just appear to me to be a happy, ordinary guy.

I like that.

Sincerely, I did not imagine that you were the type that would travel internationally just to attend a purely religious or spiritual retreat.

Interesting. So what would you recommend? Should I change and behave in a more religious manner as you have described.

Not at all. I like you better as you are. Your universal disposition and acceptance of people of all faith is part of what I like about you. Your friends are of different ethnic groups. Even your dressing does not quite tell me where you are from because you appear quite comfortable and happy in all manner of attires from different parts of

the country. Your charm, and the happiness, in particular, which you exude all the time I have met you is really the reason for this interview. That is why I am attracted.

You are so kind.

I mean it.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your comments. I believe you must have more of these good qualities that you ascribe to me; otherwise you would not even notice them in me.

I do not agree. I come to you to learn, and hopefully have my readers benefit from you as well. As I had told you before, the reason for this interview is to extract clues to happiness from happy people like you. Happy people have the secret that the whole world is looking for. My job is to try to extract as many of the keys as possible. How many interviews have you done on this subject?

Over twenty.

In that case, whatever you get from me would only be a repetition, I think.

I do not think so, because from experience I have always discovered from each subject a new way or nuance, which makes a difference and adds to the repertoire of ways to happiness.

So you believe I have something new to add?

Very much so, sir.

Well I guess fresh from a spiritual retreat, that is what I would recommend to you and your readers as a means to refreshing your heart and maintaining the happy habit.

Why do you recommend spiritual retreats?

For many reasons and I speak from my personal experience.

Just perfect, that is what we usually wish to hear. Your practical tools for happiness are what we seek.

You see, in my religion there are usually many seminars in the year. We have continental seminars, like the type I just attended which was for all of Africa. We have worldwide seminars. We also have country seminars, often referred to as regional seminars. We have area seminars of contiguous states and even zonal seminars, which are more local. They all do not happen at the same time. Spaced all through the year, there is enough to attend.

But why take the trouble to attend? That is my question. What does one benefit? And how does that impinge on happiness?

As I said, many reasons. But let me take a few.

Yes, sir.

The preparation for a seminar is itself, a spiritual exercise. It is an opening of the heart to undertake a journey or a mission, which is not for material gains. To that extent it is a bit purgative, and disciplinary. As you may have experienced, anything that takes your consciousness away from the selfish and material, and places it on the spiritual and selfless tends to bring more joy to the heart.

As in fasting?

You get the idea. Another benefit of attending seminars is that they help to remind you of sacred spiritual truths and practices, which recharge your heart for more love. So again your heart opens with greater capacity to give and receive love. You must know by now that love is the gateway to happiness. You could almost say that the more love you have, the happier you become. The seminar opens your heart to more love.

How does it do this?

Throughout the seminar, the talks, workshops, roundtable discussions, music and other creative arts focus your attention on the spiritual. And the heart of any true spiritual teaching is love. So for the whole weekend your heart and mind are tuned to love.

I see.

This is why you often experience so much love from friends and co-attendees at a truly spiritual seminar. There is just so much love flowing amongst the people in a true spiritual retreat. You see so many smiling faces, beaming and shining. You feel so many hugs.

You have so many warm and friendly handshakes because there is more and more love flowing from the hearts of the people.

I'm listening.

It is usually not a surprise that at meetings like this, people receive miraculous healing just quietly on their own. An explanation is that the seminar has helped to open their hearts to a greater level of surrender to the Holy Spirit, which penetrates to make the healing possible. And healing can take place at all levels from the spiritual, mental or psychic, down to pure physical healing.

Please carry on.

Perhaps I should add that spiritual seminars help people to develop closer ties and more personal relationships with God, because at the seminar the talks and the teachings provide more and more insights into situations which were earlier not understood. The seminar also supplies rich experiences from other people, which help you to find your own way to deal with similar issues. The shared experiences reinforce people's conviction in the efficacy of their faith. And so everyone who attends literally leaves a richer and better person.

Everyone who attends benefits?

Sure. And this includes newcomers and visitors to the seminar. Indeed, people who attend a truly spiritual seminar never go back the same. There is always an added value to their spiritual life. There is usually a glow of happiness around them, which stays with them for quite sometime even after returning home. One feels a sense of joy and higher enlightenment.

Really, the benefits are far more than I can describe. You just have to experience it yourself. Open your heart and go for a truly spiritual retreat for no other reason than that you love God and see for yourself how rich the harvest of happiness can be.

Chapter Twenty-Four

FREE YOUR HEART

What cut you?

A knife.

How did it happen?

It was in my attempt to cut some oranges after dinner, the knife slipped and cut me.

Sorry. But that sounds quite unusual for one as careful as you.

Accidents happen.

Yes, I know. Sorry.

Thanks but the cut is quite minor. I just decided to use a plaster to avoid rubbing it against anything and cursing more bleeding.

I hope it is not an inconvenience at work.

Not at all.

Glad to know. On a lighter note, what caused the accident? After all, you always preach that accidents are caused and do not just happen.

Even in this case it was caused.

How? Don't tell me the knife caused it.

No, no. It was as usual a human error that was the root cause. I was the cause of the accident.

How? By allowing the knife to slip off your fingers?

Yes, but the real reason why the knife slipped was because I was not concentrating on what I was doing - cutting the orange.

Why?

I was not concentrating because I was angry.

You angry? What could have made you angry?

Occasionally I do get angry like everybody else. Although often it is just a mock up, just to give the impression of anger in order to knock a certain lesson or the other home to someone.

What do you mean by mock up?

By mocking up anger I mean pretending to be angry. Like an actor. But not letting the anger into your heart.

Why do you have to do that?

As I said, to teach a certain lesson or give a certain necessary impression without having to carry the burden of anger itself, which is a major impediment to spiritual communication.

What do you mean?

Anger blinds and deafens us for as long as it lasts. For as long as we are angry, it is difficult to communicate with our inner-selves or with God. It is for this reason that we are often advised to make up with those we are angry with before approaching the alter of God for worship of any kind.

I really do not know where you tap all these wisdom. But truth is simple enough for any sincere person to admit and accept.

I am happy you see it that way.

But let us return to the story of you and the orange, and your cut.

Yes, where did we deviate?

At the point of tracing the injury to anger.

Oh, yes. Anger it was. I was angry with some of our little ones for not listening to their elder. Many times I have tried to teach them in very subtle ways how important it is to listen and obey elders like teachers, parents, or very close relatives for these usually mean well for them.

In this particular case, an uncle had instructed them not to climb a stool lest they fall. They refused to heed the warning and one of them

fell, injuring herself. She then ran to me for sympathy, which instinctively I gave; but I proceeded to castigate her for refusing to listen. I recounted several earlier experiences, which would have caused injury just for same reason. It was in trying to knock the lesson into her that I unwittingly crossed from mocked up anger into anger itself.

Hmmm...

It was in that angry state that I went to cut my orange and instead cut myself. I knew intuitively that the accident was simply a lesson for me stop loosing your temper.

Did you accept the correction?

Yes, with due humility. Thus I did not blame anyone for the cut. I realised within me that it was my fault, and hopefully have learnt the lesson. In addition to silently admitting my fault, early this morning I made it a point of duty to reconcile with the little ones.

I reached out and hugged them, professing my love to them, but reiterating albeit more kindly the sense in listening to their elders. I explained why I lost my temper last night, and apologised. In no time we were friends again. I regained my full happiness and set out for work, whistling happy tunes.

There is a lot I have to learn from you.

There is a lot we all have to learn from one another.

I don't know how many people would have calmly accepted their wrong-doing as you did; corrected themselves, and proceeded to make peace with little ones over whom they have a seemingly unquestionable control? There is really a lot I have to learn from you.

I repeat, there is a lot we all have to learn from one another. There is a lot we have to learn from the little ones, too. And, conversely, there is also a lot that they have to learn from adults as well.

Is this why you always seem so happy with life?

It is part of it, I must confess. I take seriously the injunction from the Holy Scriptures of keeping the heart free of anger and animosity. I try not to allow hatred or anger stay with me. I usually find a way to wash my heart clean with love as quickly as possible

To be sure, it is not an easy habit. But for me it has paid off richly. That habit ensures the heartiness of my laughter. You know I love to laugh. That habit ensures and insures my gladness everyday of my life.

Truly blessed are the pure in heart...

For they are happy people.

Chapter Twenty-Five

BE LIKE A CHILD

It was a minute past one p.m. when I arrived at the restaurant for a lunch meeting. Traffic had caused me to be a minute late, but I was almost sure that I was nevertheless going to be the first at the venue. Traffic can be quite a ready excuse for lateness at meetings.

As it turned out, I was right. I was the first so I had to wait for the others. But in the meantime what do I do? I thought. Stare at the unfamiliar game on the television, or order a soft drink while allowing my thoughts roam?

I chose the latter. But it was not long before my ears and mind rested on a conversation taking place at the table next to mine. They were a couple, probably new acquaintances; from the kind of questions they asked each other.

The man was dressed in an all white *jumper* and *sokoto*, while the lady was clad in a dark grey western-style suit. She could have been a banker. She had a serious, business-like mien, while the man seemed relaxed, albeit very focussed on the lady. He did most of the questioning. This is an approximation of what transpired; at least the much I picked up:

“Did you read the article on happiness in today’s newspaper?”

Yes, I did.

What did you think of it?

I thought it was good. But I wonder why anyone would want to tackle such an issue so elusive in life.

But that is the more reason why he should. It is a good challenge.

What I mean is that the topic is too broad.

I do not understand.

Different things make different people happy. So it would be virtually impossible to know what makes people happy in a generic sense.

I see what you mean. But I disagree.

Are you saying that one person can capture what makes all people happy?

I do not think the author depends on one source for his articles. He must be talking to a lot of people and therefore getting to know the various ways people employ to be happy and stay so. But the point I am really getting at is that although there are many ways to be happy, there is really only one gate to happiness. At least, that is my own understanding.

What gate are you talking about?

I am talking about the gate of love. I think love and happiness are a married couple. Love is the masculine one who goes after the feminine happiness. It is impossible to have happiness, except you go for it by using love as the bait. Happiness will only go to love, and nothing else. Indeed, I can put it to you that without love there can never be true happiness.

I think you people just waste your time talking about these things. Who is ever really happy in this world of ours with so much evil around?

That many people are not happy does not mean that some are not.

I think you are just being idealistic.

C'mon, have you always been like this? Pessimistic?

I am not pessimistic. I am just being an adult. As an adult you just have to be realistic.

What does it mean to be realistic?

In this particular case, just what I have said; that you grow up to know that some things are just not possible - like being truly happy.

I cannot believe this. But were you happy as a child?

Yes, but that was as a child. As you grow up you begin to realise that life is not a bed of roses.

But roses have thorns too interspersed in the stalk sometimes. Does that make them any less beautiful? Without the challenges of life,

wouldn't it be such a humdrum boring existence? Without the opportunity to serve, tolerate others and grow, I doubt that anyone can experience happiness.

What are you implying?

What I am saying is that in spite of all the difficulties, it is still a very beautiful world.

Well that is your opinion.

I agree it is my opinion. But beyond my opinion it is my perspective, for love is a matter of perception and action. First, you have to see with the eyes of love before you can act with love. I tell you a very short experience with my friend, a man and his little son, Imoh. Let us call the man Akpan.

Calabar people?

Whatever. I had visited them, and we had gone for a ride. As we came back to their home, unknown to us, their dog had been unleashed, and the servant had been chasing it around to put back the leash. We drove in, oblivious, bounced out of the car, only to see an excited wet dog dashing to us.

It jumped on Akpan with its dirty limbs and wet body, soiling his white shirt. Akpan was livid. He took it out on the servant and the dog. I supported my friend. Little Imoh watched in silence.

Much later when we had all forgotten about the incident, settled in front of the television to watch a football match, the 4-year-old approached his father. He said, "Daddy why were you mad at Bingo, for coming to welcome us?"

Akpan and I turned to look at the child. I felt a sense of shame, and I wondered if my friend felt the same way. At that instant our eyes met. Why didn't we see the incident from the viewpoint of this little lad? There would have been no need for all the anger and venom. Why did we see the same event so differently?

The more I thought about that incident the more I realized that love was the difference. The child saw the world with an eye of love, and interpreted the actions as such. We saw the world with the eyes of aggressors, and interpreted the world in those terms. It is not a wonder that beauty is always in the eyes of the beholder.

And all so often children see beauty everywhere because of the love in their hearts. They see beauty even in the faces of beggars on the roadside.

I see the point you are making, but it is just impossible for adults to be children again.

May be you are right. But even then it is a matter of choice. There is none who has ever achieved anything truly great, who did not look upon the world with the eyes of a child. Where the adult eyes see impossibilities, eyes of love see possibilities.

Where the adult eye sees limitations, the child sees boundlessness. The child lives in all of us. It is a matter of a simple twist of the heart. While some may see happiness as impossibility, those amongst us who, irrespective of physical age, retain the wonder and magical love like children will always find happiness.

Is that what you believe?

It is what I know”.

Chapter Twenty-Six

WARRI'S WORRIES

Professor Moi?

Yes. Who are you?

I am sorry. I just assumed that you would recognize me.

I am sorry, no.

I am a patient of yours. Or should I say a former patient.

I see.

I saw you for a couple of hours, four years ago at the psychiatric hospital, where I had come for counselling.

Quite honestly I do not remember, because there were quite a lot of such patients then. And today they are more than I could have ever imagined. Anyway, it's good to see you. You are travelling out of the country?

Yes.

Business?

No, still medical. Or more precisely still some psychiatric problems. I just can't seem to get over my worries. Now they are eating my life away. I have now developed all manners of complicated ailments. Please do not let me dampen your spirit with my woes.

I am so sorry. Just to help my recollection, what is your name again, please?

Mister Warri.

Pardon me.

Warri, I said. Mister Warri.

Spell please.

W-A-R-R-I. Mister Warri.

I see. Forgive me, is that why you worry so much, because your name is Warri?

They are not spelt the same way.

Of course! Only joking.

My problem is however not a joking matter. I was considering reverting to your hospital again. You are obviously travelling, meeting you here at the International Airport.

Yes, I am. I am off for some few weeks' vacation.

When will you get back?

In a few weeks, maybe three weeks.

I will make an appointment.

That suits me. But, Mister Warri, are you sure there is no easier way to handle your problems.

Well, that is why I have proposed coming to see you. Maybe you are the one to really help me. I must confess to you, I have tried everything. Sometimes I believe I am even haunted. I am ashamed to say it but I have stood naked in front of numerous shrines to find a solution. In cases, I appear to have some psychological relief, but not for long. Even with all my wealth, I am a thoroughly unhappy man.

Not many of your countrymen would believe you.

Well, let them come and wear my shoes, and they would believe.

Mister Warri, it would of course pay me professionally and financially to encourage you to come to my clinic, and indeed do come still if you find it necessary, but I was going to introduce you to a better psychiatrist and psychologist.

Who, please?

ITS name is Love. Some people call IT God.

Prof, I am a serious believer.

Just relax and listen a bit.

This Love that I introduce you to is your maker. It is the source of your energy. It is your life. I know you would have read and memorized lots of Holy Scriptures. But forget those for now. Just think about Love.

How?

Think about the Love that made all the earth, all the seas and oceans, all the vegetation, all the animals, birds and fishes, all the people, in their billions. Think about the Love that made them and sustains them all. Think of the Love that knows their every cell, every DNA, every history, every future, every circumstance, every situation.

Think about the Love that made all the stars innumerable as they are. Think of the Love that made and controls the Milky Way in all its boundlessness, yet it all works with a precision better than that of the seconds watch. Think of the almightiness of this Love.

Then recognize that it is the same Love that made you, and is with you and is in you. It loves you personally and dearly. Think of this Love as Spirit - Holy Spirit.

The name you call it does not really matter much. Just recognise its nature as Love; boundless Love. And then accept IT as your leader, teacher, psychiatrist and psychologist. Imagine this Love in the form that best suits you - as a mighty man, as a mighty ocean, as pure light or whatever else.

A lot of very experienced spiritual beings know this Love as pure light and wondrous music. In true humility, sincerity and solitude try to find this Love in your imagination. And then surrender all your worries to IT, totally. Be glad to accept whatever IT chooses to do with the worries. But just let them go. Let them all dissolve in the sound and light of Love.

Regularly refill your being with this fluid of Love and spread IT willingly and happily, the best way you know how. Devote your life to loving and all will be well.

I am dumbfounded.

Sorry Mister Warri, that's my flight being announced. I must go now. Enjoy your trip.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

WEAR THEIR GLASSES

You are wearing new glasses. It is pretty.

It is not new. Just new frames but old glasses.

I see, but it really looks good on you.

Thank you.

Is anything wrong with Nkem, your sister?

What do you mean?

I mean is she ill or something of the sort?

No. Why do you ask?

I was with her at lunch on Monday.

That sounds perfectly normal to me. I guess the whole idea of having staffs go to lunch at break is partly to have people mix. Or is there something else?

Not really. It is just that the way she behaved that day was a bit unusual. I was surprised at the brashness.

Again what do you mean?

We all know Nkem to be a very soft spoken, quiet and considerate person. But on Monday at lunch she surprised me. We got talking and she just seemed impatient to leave, cutting me short in many ways. She eventually left me at the table. I would say almost rudely.

That is surprising. It does not sound like Nkem at all. I wonder what could have happened.

I was embarrassed. I wondered how many people noticed.

I see. That is really unusual. Oh now, I think I know what happened.

You know what happened?

Yes, I know what happened on Monday.

What?

You know Nkem is very shy.

Yes, I know.

She is shy to a fault.

Yes, I know.

What happened was this she was having a stomach trouble, what people call running stomach. Throughout that day, and even into the night, she kept purging. Now I remember, she told me about the incident with you.

Oh, was that it?

Yes, that was it. She was too shy to tell you that she had to run to the toilet. Instead she was being ladylike, hoping you would finish your meal quickly so she could make the dash. But, unaware, you went on leisurely with your story until she could no longer contain herself and had to leave abruptly.

Did she tell you this?

Yes, she did. She told me that she was not sure how you viewed her behaviour that day, and that she does not even know how to apologize.

Oh, I am so sorry I complained at all. Now I understand.

No, it is okay. I mean it happens. It is just a question of misunderstanding. Or, maybe, a question of communication.

You know people could actually begrudge others based on such misunderstanding?

Sure. Most quarrels or even enmity result like this.

You are right.

That is why I often insist that people should never rush into judgments over anything. It always pays to give the benefit of doubt. More importantly, try to see things from the others' perspective. When you imagine wearing another's shoes, it is easier to feel the pain that he feels.

You are right. Now putting myself in her shoes, I can fully understand why she behaved the way she did.

That is precisely what I mean. Rather than destroy our joy through bitterness, and anger, it is better always to try to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, and see what it might feel like. My favorite way of putting it is by asking people to try to wear others' glasses, for we all see differently - depending on our situations, circumstances, history, experience or even geography. These conditions shape and color our glasses and therefore our worldview.

I think what you have just touched upon is the issue of perspectives.

Yes, as a communication officer, I know you would understand it. Perspective is usually the basis for agreements or otherwise in relationships amongst people.

Is that why love is said to be a matter of perspective, as well?

Precisely. Love sees it from the others' point of view, and so finds it easy to be more tolerant, more forgiving, and more giving. The ability to see from the other person's point of view is an ability of love.

I see you are an advocate of all-round perspective?

Certainly, that is love in action. It spares groups unnecessary fights, quarrels and disagreements and maintains harmony and happiness amongst them. So don't just be content to wear your own glasses. At least, before you pass judgments see how the other person views the world with his own unique glasses. That will help you to love more and live a happy life.

You are so wise.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

HAPPY MESSENGER

What was the argument about?

Did you hear us?

Of course, I heard you people arguing away over lunch. I could not tell what it was about but you sure were having a very animated discussion.

Don't mind Kunle, he always wants to bamboozle and intimidate people with his religion. He has a tendency to look down and belittle every other religion. Instead of just sharing ideas of what his faith is and what works for him, he always wants to lord it over others.

But did you have to argue with him?

Of course, I had to call him to order. He has to understand that religion is a private affair, and the best we should do for each other is respect one another's faith.

Did he understand and appreciate your point?

How would he? I say he is too swollen headed about his beliefs. *So was there a profit in the end in arguing with him?*

Looking back now, really, the answer is no. It was not worth it.

Do you know that at a time in our village, many years ago, if you ever told anyone that there were beings like us in other parts of the world who were white, no one would believe?

Sure.

That is the right word, but why so?

Simple. It is because as far as they knew at that time, no such person existed within their scope of awareness, knowledge or consciousness.

Well said. How does what you have said now apply to Kunle's case?

Come to think of it, they are actually analogous. In the end the limit is awareness, consciousness.

Correct. If you tell people truth beyond what they know or consider possible, you meet a brick wall of ignorance. And believe me there is nothing as impervious as ignorance. It is very difficult to enlighten ignorance, especially one that is worn like a crown.

You throw me, what do you mean wear ignorance like a crown?

C'mon, I am sure you know what I mean. You know there was a time when people thought the world was flat? That was then the final truth. The indisputable. Any who told people otherwise was then courting trouble. And if I recall right, at least one person was executed because he said the world was round. Simply the arrogance of the ignorant of the time was so queenly that it sentenced truth to death. Now, that is how much of a crown ignorance can be.

I get it.

You see, when I confront people like Kunle, I watch myself. At such times I always recall something a man taught me years ago. It is a quotation, which I have by my bedside. It simply states "A spiritual path ought to transform you into a spiritual being who is filled with love. That should be the test of your religion."

So when one like Kunle bombarded me with his gospel, I should rather have looked for love.

And looked for it silently. Love is the measure of a spiritual path or, more precisely, the measure of that individual on his religious or spiritual path.

That makes a lot of sense.

I am glad you see it that way. But before we got on with this discourse, I was about telling you of a very happy and beautiful lady I saw today.

Where?

In the bus. In the midst of all the banter and noise, her eyes were glued to her handset. And she held this most enchanting smile throughout. You could see that the smile was only a reflection of the

happiness that shone within her. I stole as many glances as I discreetly could in search of her eyes, but her head remained bowed, focused on her handset. Her fingers were nimble and I knew she was busy with text messages.

Did you get introduced? Get to the meat of the matter.

The way your mind runs. But I did ask her how she managed to exude such happiness. And you know, she was genuinely unaware of the effect she had on people around. But she did share what she was doing that made her so happy.

What was it?

She was sending sweet messages of love and joy to her friends and siblings. She knew the messages would brighten the day of each one of the recipients. And as it often happens to those who uplift others, effortlessly they themselves are uplifted. By sending happy messages to people, she herself glowed inside and her face shone with beauty that only happiness bestows.

I think I'll try it.

Sure bet. Me, too!

Chapter Twenty-Nine

PROTECT YOUR HAPPINESS

I can't believe this? What changed your mood just now? Were you not the one I saw moments ago, so chirpy and happy? What happened? Someone annoyed you?

It is nothing really. It is just my wife, Theresa.

What happened?

For no reason she has been carrying a long face since yesterday.

Did you approach her to find out what was wrong?

I did, but she claims there is nothing wrong.

What do you think could have gone wrong?

I think lately the strain of work has come down on her. She closes late from the office and still has to attend to the children, and to the house. And I am not so sure the maids are doing as well as she expects.

What about you? Have you done anything wrong to her?

Nothing. The relationship has been super.

So what could have happened?

I don't know. The only thing I can think of is that there seems to be a pattern. Anytime her sister visits, Theresa tends to go into these inexplicable moods. Suddenly, you find her yelling at everybody at the slightest provocation.

Why?

I don't know. I believe her sister has obviously made choices in her life, which makes her full of woeful stories.

About what?

I don't know. But my perception is that her husband is one of those in our country who do anything for money except an honest job. Of course, that kind of lifestyle generates its own culture and contradictions. Generally, I do not like to hear of her or her woes. Her choices were deliberately made. I therefore never see why we should be bothered with it. But my wife...

Oh yes, of course it is difficult for her to disengage emotionally. She is her sister.

But we cannot carry on like this. We have a happy home of our own, why should we allow someone else to continuously badge in and ruin the harmony.

I sympathize very much with you. Surely, this appears like a tough nut to crack.

I know you counsel people on how to gain happiness and live joyful lives. I have never sorted your assistance. But I should consciously do that now, because I am getting fed-up with this routine. It dampens the spirit of my home.

I know how you feel. Let me confess that I have not quite thought about this kind of scenario. And none of the people I have counselled have put the problem this way.

Well, it is your field. I will appreciate any assistance.

I don't believe anyone is an expert here, but perhaps together we may come up with something. First, let's agree on something - that happiness is a priced possession like health.

Sure, that is a good comparison besides the fact that they are related.

Now, whose responsibility is your health?

It is my personal responsibility.

Why?

As an adult nobody can take care of me but me. I determine what I eat or don't eat to stay healthy. I decide whether to exercise or not to stay healthy. I decide how to behave to stay healthy.

Fantastic answer. I have little to add. But let me ask you one more question if your wife or wife's sister had a serious contagious disease, which you all knew very well about, what would you do, expose yourself to it, or protect yourself from it?

Obviously, I would be sympathetic and do whatever I can to help, but I would of course protect myself so I can be of better help, by staying healthy.

No more questions. Sadness is contagious, just like happiness. There are people who are habitually sad. And there are people who make obvious choices that lead to sadness. And there are people who are generally oblivious of the goodness around them to be grateful and happy. That is just the way it is. There is little you can do to change them. All you can do is to take responsibility for yourself.

How?

Protect your happiness. Realize it is a personal responsibility to be happy or not to be happy. It is a conscious choice. No one owes it to you. Not even your mother. You owe it to yourself absolutely. And so does everybody else. Living in a society, you of course, have to mix; but never forget that happiness is a personal choice. Even if everybody around you is sad you can choose to be happy. You can choose to genuinely open your heart in gratitude to love and happiness.

True?

True. It is tough to do; because you must then subjugate and control your thoughts to continuously impart the happy feeling. It takes the practice of emotional detachment. You can show sympathy and still maintain your inner sense of gratitude and happiness. Know this, and perhaps let your wife know this as well.

Chapter Thirty

AN ACT A DAY

Darling, what is this on your to-do list today?

What?

I read something here about a visit?

What visit? You have been reading my private book again.

No, I was not peering; my eyes just happened to have caught something unusual.

Where?

Ok, I admit I was peering into your book. But it was not deliberate. I saw it because the book was open.

Yes, it was open. But if I had seen your diary open would I have read it?

No, you wouldn't. But you know we are different.

Sure, we are different.

And that is why we are an excellent couple. We complement each other. You do not poke your nose in other people's affairs, I do. You do not peer into other people's private notebooks, I do. You do not like to eavesdrop on other people's conversation, I do. To that extent we are different.

But we had agreed that you would stop the habits.

Yes, I recall that and I think I have done well. Lately, I have been minding my business very much, and not engaging in gossips or peering at other people's things.

So, what were you doing then looking into my diary?

It is different with you, don't you understand? You are my husband. We are one. I should know everything you do.

So being married means to be stripped completely of privacy of even thought?

Please don't wax philosophical with me now. I simply wanted to know about the visit slated for execution in your today's to-do list.

Visit to where? Spell it out. You have already read it, so be clear.

Visit to the Motherless Babies Home. What are you going to do there? I never heard you discuss anything of the sort before. That was really why I bothered to ask.

Well, I am glad you asked because it just reaffirms that you are still very much in the habit.

C'mon darling. You know I don't mean any harm.

I know, but please respect the private space of others, even that of your spouse. Isn't that what love entails?

I do not know. Are you going to tell me about the visit or not?

Well, there is more than that to tell, actually.

I am glad to hear.

Since last month, I decided to start implementing something our spiritual leader has always taught.

Yeah?

Yeah. He had always taught that we should try performing one true and conscious act of kindness everyday.

Yeah, I remember that. But I confess I have never really dwelt on it.

Well, I have. And I have been trying to practise since last month.

I see. Any effect?

Sure. In a very practical way, it is a very edifying experience. But beyond that it fills me with joy, and lightens my own personal burdens. I guess an explanation could be that the act puts my attention on somebody else, and thus reduces my personal anxieties. But what I cannot explain is the amount of joy these simple acts of kindness bring to my heart.

Oh, is that it. This must explain your newfound zest for life. Lately, you have been almost as enthusiastic as you were when we first met 17 years ago.

So you noticed. It is funny but it just fills you with gladness – a simple act of kindness.

Is that why you had that visit slated?

Sure. That is the one conscious act of kindness I want to perform today. Everyday I try to figure out one thing I could do purely for love; not expecting any rewards whatsoever. Not even for public relations purposes. Just for love.

What do you actually intend doing there?

Just to visit anonymously. See the children, play with some, if the opportunity exists, brighten their day and give a gift or two.

How sweet.

The intention is not to get any commendation from even you. It is an act that I do purely for love. Purely for God.

I see. That is truly noble. I am sorry if I spoilt anything.

It is okay. At least now you understand why some things should be private even amongst couples.

I understand. But I am also glad that I probed, because now I, too, will try to follow your footsteps and see if my experience would be the same.

Trust me, you will enjoy it. Just make up your mind to do it. Do one truly kind act everyday and the harvest of joy will surprise you.

Chapter Thirty-One

LET TIME HEAL

Who was that on the line?

Why do you ask?

It was an unusually long phone call. It is very uncommon of you to interrupt a meeting for an unusually long phone call.

Well, because it was an unusual phone call.

Where from?

From Ngozi.

Which Ngozi?

The one who just lost her husband.

It must have hit her really badly. Poor woman.

Yes indeed, poor sweet lady. She is one of my sweetest cousins. Unfortunately, I could not be there by her side in her most depressed moment.

Yeah, I know how much in high esteem she holds you. I know she likes you and trusts you a lot. She must have felt really bad that you did not attend the burial of her husband.

She felt bad. She felt hurt. She felt almost betrayed.

You must be right. But why didn't you attend?

Sadly, I heard about the demise of her husband after I had committed myself fully to an assignment outside the country. It was a major dilemma for me, I must confess. But all considered, I just had to travel.

So why didn't you explain to her before leaving?

I couldn't. When I attempted to speak with her, she broke down while we spoke, crying. She was in deep emotional pain, not a time for me to begin to give her excuses for not attending the burial. And as if she knew, in-between her sobs she implored me to attend. It was no time for me to be contrary. All I could do was implore her in return to take heart.

When you returned from your trip why didn't you make contact, to explain why she did not see you at the burial? I can tell you that she must have consciously looked for you in the midst of the crowd. She must have been sorely disappointed that you did not show.

I knew that and that was why I thought calling her on phone would not do. I rather went to see her physically. But I met her children, not her. She had been so depressed that some relatives abroad took her along, to recover.

So you did not get to see her?

Yes. So for months she has been sore, utterly disappointed in me. Then how come she is still the one that called you?

That is precisely the point. She had allowed the weeks in-between to tamper her disappointment and cool her temper. She did not call me when she was hot and hurt. She allowed the steam some time to evaporate until her coolness was restored.

What wisdom!

Wisdom indeed. Even in sorrow she has taught me yet another very useful lesson; a lesson to help me keep my cool and maintain a state of happiness.

What do you mean?

I am applying her lesson and it is yielding results. Only this morning I received some annoying texts from two of my siblings abroad. My initial impulse was to immediately react, but then I remembered Ngozi's lesson and allowed the steam to evaporate for sometime while maintaining my calm and happiness.

Did you totally ignore the texts?

I did for a while. This allowed me time to slowly chew the import of their message and to find a kind way of responding without hurting them and accepting the annoyance that lurked in their message.

Were you successful?

I am glad to say yes. I gave some hours, and then returned to the text messages and replied sweetly. Believe it or not, they quickly responded with a correspondingly sweet message; and my happiness, rather than diminish, multiplied.

So would you share this in your next column?

You bet! Allowing time to pass in-between what could otherwise be provocative circumstances or messages can help people maintain their equanimity, their peace and happiness.

Chapter Thirty-Two

SAY “NO” SOMETIMES

I was thinking...

What are you thinking again, Mister Thinker?

Nothing much, mum; just something about good people.

What about good people? You mean our church people?

Oh, mum, there you go again. There are many good people out there in the world who are not our church people.

But our church people are generally good, and I would say they are the real good people.

Look, mum, I am sorry but I do not want any arguments about our church people now. I just want to tell you about something else altogether.

It is my job, as your mother, to make sure that you recognize our church people as the good people of the world.

Mum, honestly I have doubts about that, but let it be, for now. What I know is that there are good people everywhere, from every religion. There are always the stars and the dregs of every religion. The stars are the shining examples, the shining lights, and the models of Divine Love. They do not have to even appear religious but from the actions of their heart you know them.

Where are you driving?

You are looking at me suspiciously. Just please listen.

I am listening.

Ok. I see a friend in class, Morenike, as one such shining lights of her religion. She is full of love. She is always there to help, and she is full of compassion. She has a nice word for everyone. And she never

mocks or jeers or gossips about anyone. She seems to wish everyone well and does not complain about anything.

I see. She must be a really sweet girl. Has she always been in your class?

Oh, yes, she joined when we were in JS 3. At least three years now.

Interesting.

You know, mum, lately she got into real trouble and had to be suspended from school indefinitely.

How?

Now that is why I brought up this issue of good people.

What happened?

Some classmates, who had prior knowledge that a search party was coming to the class to look for some stolen items, had pleaded with Morenike to help them keep an envelope. Morenike was naturally wary, because the lads were not going anywhere. They were in class with her but just wanted her to take custody of their treasure.

Why didn't she just say "No"?

Mum, that is the main point. I find that good people have great difficulty in saying "No". This is not the first time I have seen good people suffer so much because of their desire to help.

But what happened in the case of Morenike? Did they find something on her?

Of course, mum!

Money? Stolen money?

No, it happened that the parcel was not of the stolen money that they were looking for?

Really? What was it then?

The envelope was only a means of concealing wrapped weeds.

Weeds?

Yes, weeds. Some called it cigar. Some called it tobacco; I don't really know.

Oh, my God!

They found it on her, and all her attempts to convince the authorities that the packet was not hers and that the owners gave it to her that afternoon for safe keeping did not save her.

Why?

Because the boys denied her. They strongly denied her. They agreed that they gave her an envelope, but one containing money!

God!

So Morenike found herself in double trouble. She had weeds in her possession. And then there was the case of money, which the boys swore they must recover.

Are you sure Morenike did not...

Never, mum. The word is never! Morenike is very innocent. She is a good person, a very good person. Today she is at home paying painfully for something she knew nothing about; just because she could not say "No". She has lost her happiness, just because she could not say "No". Those who go to visit her say she just sobs all day.

Such a pity!

Indeed, mum, such a pity. But it has taught me a great lesson. I will try to do all the good things you and dad teach us. I will try to do all the good things that we learn from the church and the scriptures. I will try to always be a shining light for my religion, just like all good people. But mum, I have promised myself that I will never suffer like Morenike. All my life, I will say "NO", when I have to. Nobody will hide under my good nature to steal my happiness away.

Chapter Thirty-Three

TO ALL, BE FAIR

Theresa, can you believe that this was my classmate at St. Bora? You look so good, so young. Timeless, I would say. How do you do it?

Good afternoon, Madam, do not mind your husband. From when we were in school he had always been prone to hyperboles, to exaggerations.

No, Tony, I am not kidding you. You look fantastic. You could pass for my youngest brother.

Well, thank you. It is the grace of God.

Listen, I know it is the grace of God, but you must be doing something additional. Seriously, I will like you to share some of your youth secrets with me. Or should I pay you for it? I know money has never been a prime issue for you so I'd be surprised if you are selling your arcane knowledge.

Money? No, Timi. I have not changed in that sense. Money remains where it belongs in my life - as a servant, never a master. If there were indeed any secrets I would of course be glad to share them with you.

But you are not sharing the details now. I am asking you clearly to share the tips.

You are serious?

Yes, I am serious. You do not know how you look, simply incredible.

Oh my God! You are just amazing.

No, tell me.

Okay, let's sit. You know, the truth is that there is really no secret to share except that I follow the precepts of my religion.

Oooh, you have not changed. You now want to attribute everything to God? Tony, so you have not changed?

I believe I have changed. I am deeper in God now than I was in school.

Alright. I understand your stuff about God, giving you peace of mind as result, which in turn affects your state of mind, and body. Right?

Correct!

As I said, I agree; but aren't there some real practical tips?

You are incredible. I do not want to say incorrigible. So what do you want me to say?

How you have managed to retain such glowing youthfulness and, I must say, happiness. You seem to have retained your incredible zest for life. Age and time appear not to have dampened you at all.

Thanks for the compliments. You do not look bad yourself, as Madam here will testify.

Tony, stop parrying the question. Address the matter!

Well, what I do to keep my health, which probably reflects as youthfulness, is what everybody else does - pray, eat well, sleep well, exercise well, and treat others well. Simple.

Typical Tony. Listen, I can understand the role of prayer, food, sleep, exercise, but what's this stuff about treating others well. What is it got to do with it?

A lot.

How?

Listen, I would say that it is a prime factor on the state of your health, and happiness. When you treat others wrong, with disdain, lack of respect, and especially unfairly, it has its own direct effect on your state of mind and body. Also, it has indirect effects on whether you sleep well or not. It has effect on your general outlook on life. One who treats others fairly always tends to be happier in life. He tends to be fearless. He tends to harbour fewer misgivings. These in turn have good effects on his body and mind.

Give me scientific proof.

Interesting. You have not changed. If you like, keep waiting for science before you do what is right for you. I would rather go for experience than science. If it works, why not try it. Besides, if you ask medical doctors, they could come up with explanations of the effect of wrong treatment of others on the body that may astound you.

You mean that?

I can almost say for certain that there is a direct causative relationship between your health and how you treat others.

I will investigate it.

I suggest you do. Fairness is a great medicine. It is a greater booster of love in any place, body or environment. And love is probably the greatest and best tonic for the mind and for the body. When you treat others right, especially fairly, you go to bed with your two eyes closed, in a manner of speaking, and sleep like a baby. And if that happens continuously I would not be surprised if you begin to look more and more like a baby.

Now I am totally confused.

No need to be, my friend. Being fair to others is being fair to yourself, to your mind, to your body. This is true, at least by my experience. And I imagine the converse is also true.

**SECTION TWO: SECRETS OF
OUTSTANDING PEOPLE - The Star Student**

Chapter One

LIKE YOUR TEACHER

Student: This year I made a resolution that I intend to keep. I am determined that nothing is going to come between my goal and I.

Teacher: What is this goal?

Student: To be a star student.

Teacher: I must commend you. It is a worthy and great ambition. Your goal is very much in line with what we have always tried to inculcate in you students, namely that you should not just be content to be one in the crowd in all you do. You should always aim at standing out of the crowd. You must detest the “I also ran” syndrome.

Student: What is that, sir?

Teacher: Never mind. It is just a way of describing people who participate in something without any conviction or mark; so that no one really remembers that they ever participated because they were just statistics in the crowd.

Student: I see.

Teacher: The saying is meant to discourage people who participate in things without merit and quality, ending up merely making up the numbers.

Student: I understand, sir. I am determined not to be an “I also ran”. But to achieve my aim of becoming a star, I need guidance.

Teacher: We do give you guidance.

Student: Yes, sir. I know you give us guidance as students in general. But what I am now asking for, sir, is in-depth, personalized guidance. I would like you to share with me some of the secrets that made you a star in your days as a student. We hear legendary stories of your unbeatable records in schools you attended. Please sir, share some of your personal tips and secrets with me.

Teacher: Hmm...

Student: Please, sir.

Teacher: I hesitate, not because I am in anyway reluctant to do as you have said, but because I am deeply touched by your thoughtfulness and determination to achieve your new goal.

I must confess that I am thoroughly impressed with you. Luckily, since we are on vacation from today I will be glad to discuss at length with you anytime, even if daily; for what is the use of the tips that helped me if I cannot pass them to serious students like you.

Student: I am grateful, sir.

Teacher: It is nothing. I am glad to do it.

Student: Thank you so much, sir. Let me confess that I was not so sure that you would accept. But I had to come to you because I like you very much, sir, as a person.

Teacher: It is nice to hear that. Indeed, the first lesson I probably have to teach you in our series of discussions that may follow is that it pays to like your teacher.

Student: Really, sir.

Teacher: I mean it. It pays to like your teacher for your own good. Let me tell you a short story. Once upon a time there was a very bright boy who, right from nursery school, was outstanding.

He kept up the record well beyond primary 4, I believe. Everybody in the school knew him for his brilliance. He was simply fantastic. His parents were very proud of him. So were his teachers. Everyone loved Obuoma, for that was his name.

He stood out a shining star, a shining example for all in the school. But things changed when his father was transferred to another country. I believe it was to Ghana, on the West African Coast. Obuoma easily gained admission, of course. But there soon ensued an unusual problem.

Student: What was it, sir?

Teacher: Obuoma did not like the accent of the Ghanaian teachers, and he made a big fuss of it. The intonation of the Ghanaians was

markedly different from what he was used to. So he did not find the foreign accent acceptable at all. Because of this problem, Obuoma ended up not liking the teachers except for one who was from his native country and therefore spoke as he was used to.

Student: Did it matter that he did not like the accent or intonation of his teachers?

Teacher: Ordinarily it would not have mattered. The reason it became an issue was that Obuoma allowed his dislike for the accent to rub off on his love or liking for his teachers. He ended up disliking the teachers.

Student: But why would it matter, sir?

Teacher: It mattered because his dislike for his teachers in turn created a dislike for the subjects that those teachers taught. Because he did not like the teachers, he also disliked what they taught. This led to his doing very badly in their subjects.

Student: Oh, I see. But does it follow, sir?

Teacher: My dear Kudo let me assure you that it does most of the time. I do not know whether there is any scientific explanation for this but I can tell you from experience that most students do not do well in subjects taken by teachers who they do not like. You can check this out.

Student: I think you are right, sir. At least I can tell from my own experience.

Teacher: There you are. Lesson 1 Whatever you do make a deliberate effort to like your teacher, otherwise you jeopardize your chances of doing well in his subject. It is probably an unwritten law that students must first buy into their teachers, before they buy what their teachers have to say. Again, love makes the difference.

Chapter Two

POWER OF ATTENTION

Teacher: Today, I would like to look at what we can do to keep our goals in focus, because attention makes all the difference in our every endeavor.

Student: Yes, attention makes all the difference.

Teacher: If not all the difference, at least a critical difference between our achieving a goal or not.

Student: How?

Teacher: I would just allow you to experience this yourself in the course of your life and, hopefully, establish the truth for yourself.

Student: Please explain a little, sir.

Teacher: Anything you put your attention on is what you tend to attract.

Student: How is that?

Teacher: Even if I knew, as I said earlier, I would not like to go into the theory of it. My preference would be to let you come to that conclusion by yourself.

Student: How, sir?

Teacher: By your own experience. Choose any two possible but similar goals, for instance. Make sure you are continuously reminded of one only. And see which of them you are likely to progress more on.

A friend of mine illustrated this to me in a funny way. He showed me a composite picture of 5 persons and then asked me to focus on any particular person for a considerable length of time, and then tell him what I observe.

Student: What did you find?

Teacher: I found that the one on which I put my focus tended to become clearer, while my vision of the rest became blurred. I also noticed that the one on which I had my attention seemed to grow larger and nearer to me than the rest. It brought home to me, the power of attention.

Another friend of mine illustrated this fact to me with a story of a warrior who was killed in a war against a neighboring country or community. As he lay dying he instructed his two wives, for he had two, to always remind their children of how he died; especially what caused his death, the enemy. The two women heard him alright but only one actually implemented the instruction.

Student: What did she do?

Teacher: She had only one child who happened to be a male. Before every meal, breakfast, lunch or dinner, she would remind the child of the enemy who killed his father. She would repeat the same as she put the child to sleep and first thing when he woke up.

Student: Incredible.

Teacher: According to the story, she did this continuously until he became a young man who then got married and moved out to his own home. Even then, the mother did not let up of her husband's instructions. She hired a servant, who continued the job of reminding her son, at every meal, before bed, and first thing in the morning about the enemy. Continuously the boy had this on his mind.

Student: What did he make of it?

Teacher: Not surprisingly, he too became a warrior and rose to the rank of a General. All the time, he had only one thought To eventually crush the enemies that killed his father. In the end he accomplished that. And he ruled over one of the largest empires in the world. Asked in his last days what the secret of his conquering success was, he surprised everyone with his typical taciturn answer ATTENTION. Upon this he paid wonderful tribute to his mother and attributed all his achievements to her.

I repeat this story to you, not because I am persuaded that the emperor did the best thing or chose the right vocation. I repeat this to underline the importance of attention in any endeavor including your school career. You could employ the power of attention to wonderful results in academics, too.

Student: How sir?

Teacher: Devise a means that would remind you of all you would like to achieve, say by the end of the term, or in your external examination, for instance. Your goal could be, just as an example **To be the most outstanding student this term**. It could be detailed in terms of the scores you actually would like to see in each subject as your grade. For instance you could have Mathematics A, Biology A, English A, Chemistry A, Physics A, History A, etc.

Having decided on the goal, the next thing is to ensure that you are always reminded of them, as many times a day as possible, before you sleep and as you wake up. My suggestion is that you create a small poster for yourself with your goals, and then put it up where you can see it regular, but privately.

Student: I do not understand that. Please explain “regularly but privately”.

Teacher: Well I assume you know why you should see your small poster regularly.

Student: Yes, sir. It is really the privately part that I do not understand.

Teacher: If people saw your goals what do you think most of them were going to do? Encourage/support, discourage/mock, be jealous/obstructive.

Student: In all sincerity I think most would be negative.

Teacher: You have answered your own question.

Chapter Three

TOO DIGNIFIED TO CHEAT

Teacher: Something that runs common among outstanding students is their penchant for fairness in exams or, better, their disdain and disgust for exam malpractices like cheating.

Student: Are you saying that outstanding students do not cheat?

Teacher: In all my schooling up to the doctoral level I have never seen a truly outstanding student who cheats.

Student: Really, sir?

Teacher: Positive. Do you have contrary information?

Student: No, sir. I cannot think of any myself. It's just that it had never hit me as such. But it seems true.

Teacher: I know it is true. And in my opinion there are several reasons why outstanding students are not drawn to cheating.

Student: What are these reasons, sir?

Teacher: Let me tell you a story of how a fine teacher in one of the highly regarded private secondary schools in my city was fired in disgrace. He was well respected by his peer teachers throughout the state, but this incident caused him so much shame and pain that he had to return to his home country; for he was a foreigner.

For years he had served as an excellent chemistry teacher in this school until this day, when a chemistry competition was set up between his school and two other top schools. There was a special scholarship award at stake. Dogo, as he was fondly called, badly wanted his students to win all the five slots at stake.

He wanted to win for the good of the students, but also to prove that he was indeed the best chemistry teacher in the state. That would be in consonance with his already acquired reputation. I believe he also wanted to enhance the rating reputation of the institution that he worked for. As with most serious external examinations, none of the concerned teachers and students in the schools had any prior knowledge of the exam questions until the time for the paper.

An external examiner was posted to each of the competing schools to ensure that nobody cheated. It turned out that the examiner posted to Dogo's school was particularly active, booking any nonsense or interference by anybody.

As the examination started, Dogo now had the privilege of seeing the exam paper. He quickly noticed that one compulsory question was on a topic that he had overlooked and not taught his students. He was troubled. He felt guilty and had an irresistible urge to make amends in order to improve his students' chances of winning. He contemplated several options including confessing to the examiner so he could be aloud to say a word to help the students; but the demeanor of the examiner plus the consequent risk of dismissal if it all went wrong, discouraged him.

He eventually came up with an idea, quickly dashed off to the nearby stores and soon returned with a nice cold bottle of soft drink, which he offered the examiner. He said it was a mere solidarity to a fellow teacher and also a mark of respect and hospitality. The examiner was touched by his kindness and gladly accepted the drink.

Dogo offered to serve him and reached for the key holder in his pocket to open the drink, while the examiner still focused on the candidates to ensure none was cheating. About five minutes after taking the soft drink the examiner suddenly fell asleep on his desk.

Dogo's plan was working. He quickly emerged in front of the students to draw attention to the problematic compulsory question, solving it in the full glare of the students and commanding them to copy. All the students obeyed, grateful to their teacher, and scribbled away, except two – Chilaka and Shanti. These two would have nothing to do with the blackboard and whatever Dogo had written on it for them to copy. They simply refused to look up.

These were precisely the best two chemistry students with the best chance of getting the scholarship of all the calls. Dogo particularly looked out for them, to make sure that they were copying. But they obviously were not. He was livid and matched off to the duo that happened to be sitting close to each other.

"Why are you so stupid? Can't you see what I have done on the board for you to copy? Are you mad?"

"I am not interested", Shanti coldly responded.

"Me too," added Chilaka.

This incensed Dogo the more and he went berserk raising his voice to cajole the students to comply, knowing that the examiner was deep in slumber.

The commotion must have lasted for quite sometime. But it all came to an abrupt end when the proprietor of the school, a no-nonsense disciplinarian, walked in sneakily, as was his tradition, and caught Dogo red-handed trying to force Shanti and Chilaka to cheat.

Both held on to the fact that it was forbidden by their faith and by all their parents taught them about fairness in competitive circumstances like exam.

They said they would rather fail than cheat. In no time the proprietor had unraveled everything that transpired. He was left with little choice but to sack Dogo, in order to remedy the good name of the school. For their principled resistance, the sponsoring organisation for the scholarship singled out Shanti and Chilaka for an elongated scholarship program that would lead beyond the intended university bachelor's degree education to PhD level.

This was more in recognition of their character than their score in the exam. I personally take the view that outstanding students are generally too dignified to stoop to cheat. This sense of dignity forces them to do the necessary hard work that would ensure their excellent grades. In sum, outstanding people are generally too proud to cheat or beg.

I believe outstanding students also cherish the distinction which cheating tends to obliterate, lumping the dull and bright together in one dumpsite of guilt. Because they would rather fail a test on their own steam, than cheat. The outstanding students always end up correcting themselves, and painstakingly learning the examiner's trick before major examinations. They know that they have only themselves to rely on; while the cheats seek the lazy way out, hoping to cheat the outstanding ones dig in deep.

The outstanding ones easily come to learn the lessons and reap the gains of self-reliance much faster than most of their peers. It is therefore not a wonder that they do so well for they rely on something they know would not fail them – themselves. As their self-confidence grows, so also their ability.

Chapter Four

MISTAKES ARE FRIENDS

Teacher: Kudo let me ask you. How do you feel when you make a mistake in class?

Student: I feel bad especially if the mistake is made before an audience like the whole class. You know how it is, people laugh at you.

Teacher: And you do not like that?

Student: Who does?

Teacher: I do.

Student: What do you mean, sir? You like to be mocked? You like to make mistakes and have your peers laugh at you?

Teacher: It is not as if I like to be mocked, but I have found that one of the secrets of great and outstanding students who rise to make their mark in the world is the quality of never being intimidated by the possibility of making mistakes. In fact, many, if not all, of them are grateful for the opportunity to make a mistake while trying to do something worthwhile.

Student: I do not understand sir.

Teacher: Let me tell you the story of Kukuye. He was not a bright student. So my story has nothing to do with any form of academic brilliance. In fact, I am not sure if he ever made it to the university. But he rose to be a national star, as a soccer player. He is the one that you all call KK. We knew him as Kukuye.

Student: Really?

Teacher: Yes. Kukuye and I were in the same class. We both enjoyed playing soccer. He was a skilled player from the onset and he set his eyes on spot kicks. He enjoyed taking free kicks. As far as I was concerned, I thought he did that purely because he was not a very

enterprising player. So the free kicks gave him a chance to at least play some notable roles in the game.

Student: Did this include corner kicks and throw-ins?

Teacher: All spot kicks including penalty kicks. Most often, Kukuye would force himself to play it. He would argue and insist. Sometimes while somebody else was getting ready to play after having been chosen, Kukuye would quickly take the spot kick. He fluffed most of the time, to everybody's annoyance.

Student: What do you people then do?

Teacher: Of course, we would rain all manner of abuses on him because as he missed the target most of the time he wasted chances. But Kukuye never stopped insisting. I will never forget when we got to the finals of the state's secondary schools soccer competition and Kukuye caused a most painful loss.

Student: What happened?

Teacher: Within minutes to the end of the match we had a golden chance of direct free kick, as it was then known, just outside the 18-yard box. It was goalless at the time, and the stadium was on its feet. We consulted quickly amongst ourselves on the field and agreed that our skipper was going to take the shot. But Kukuye seized the ball and refused to release it because we did not agree that he should take the kick.

Student: Incredible!

Teacher: Yes, incredible. First there was a tussle between him and Yebo, our captain. Then a fight ensued between them. Tempers were high and so the referee had little choice but to send out both players. Another player who was completely unprepared for spot kicks finally took the kick. He ballooned the ball miles over the bar. So we lost the chance.

Student: What a shame.

Teacher: Shame indeed and worse, playing now 11 against 9 it was easy for the opponents to overrun us. That was how we lost 1-0. Till date, many of us believe that it was all the fault of Kukuye.

Student: Of course, it was.

Teacher: But our numerous losses from Kukuye's free kicks have turned into necessary gains for our national pride and position in world soccer. Thanks to Kukuye's persistence and lack of shame in making mistakes. He learnt from all his many errors as a rookie, transforming into national hero and expert in spot kicks for our national team.

Student: Oh, now I see where you were headed. His learning from his many mistakes, in spite of the numerous disappointments he caused you his schoolmates, is what today has translated into experience, leading him to world-class standards as a spot wizard.

Teacher: You get it. Ever heard the saying, experience is the best teacher?

Student: Yes, Sir.

Teacher: This is what is meant. It is in doing and making mistakes that we really learn. Everything else is mere shallow intellectualism and book knowledge, which does not make any sense in practice. But practice is what counts. For, nothing is ever truly known until it is practiced. True knowledge must come from personal experience. And since experts in any field or area cannot be born or made overnight, it therefore takes practice.

Practice entails making mistakes. It is in making those mistakes that true knowledge and expertise come. So those who do not have the courage to ignore the possible embarrassment that comes from making mistakes cannot end up outstanding in anything; certainly not in academics. This is why I say that mistakes are friends. They help us grow. They help us achieve mastery. They help us achieve our goals. Every great mathematician must not be ashamed to try practicing as many problems as possible; while making mistakes and learning in the process.

Those classmates who laugh at you because you attempted a problem of any sought and failed in class can remain in their ignorance, if they like. No expert has ever emerged in any discipline without the gladness to accept corrections that come from making mistakes. Mistakes are builders, not destroyers.

Mistakes are part of life's protein for development and growth. Love to hug them and learn from them. They are part of the essence of your experience. And experience is always the best teacher.

Chapter Five

BE BOLD AND ADVENTURESOME

Teacher: An old priest once told me that only the bold and adventuresome would find heaven.

Student: Why?

Teacher: Because heaven is often hidden behind fear.

Student: Did he mean that literally or metaphorically?

Teacher: I am not so sure which. But what I have found for myself is that to achieve anything great or good requires courage, among others. Moving from the known to the unknown is like moving from a familiar to an unfamiliar territory. At times it might even appear like moving from light to darkness. So courage is necessary.

Student: I don't get it.

Teacher: Ok, let me take your mind back to your first days in primary school if you may recall. For most children this is usually a frightening experience. They cry and cry and cry because of having to leave the familiar to the strange. Some children take a long while to conquer this fear of school.

Student: I never thought about it in those terms.

Teacher: An old woman once told me that it was for the similar reasons that children cry when they are born. Leaving their familiar and loving home in heaven to live in mortal flesh in a new abode of fear, darkness and uncertainty called earth causes so much fear that all wail on arrival. She made me wonder about conquering fear, for to achieve anything worthwhile requires this victory over fear.

Student: But can one actually conquer fear?

Teacher: I see what you mean. For me conquering fear means acting in spite of fear. The fear would be there, but one must subdue it by acting boldly nevertheless. I recall my experience when learning how to swim. It was one of the most frightening experiences of my life. There is a big river in my village where I grew up. It is ordinarily a

very beautiful and velvety river. Fetching water or bathing in its sandy banks, shallow and clear, was always fun.

Student: I can imagine.

Teacher: Being thrown into the deep dark end was extremely frightening. I would scream from fright so much that I would convulse. The deep end was dark green velvet, grim and fearsome probably concealing the imaginable. Not able to swim as a child then, I faced the prospect of drowning as I was being taught how to swim. It was so frightening that I swore never to swim. But they would not let go. My uncles would take me by force and simply throw me at the deep end to scramble for life. I would splash violently, gasping breathless for air until a strong arm saves me but not before having gulped some pints of the water, eyes red, nose running.

Student: It must have been a real nightmare.

Teacher: It was. But today I thank God I am a good swimmer; many thanks to those 'wicked' uncles. Today, I am a fearless swimmer having eventually overcome my fear of the dark deep ends of the river as I learnt to float and then to swim.

Student: Now I am scared.

Teacher: Why?

Student: Because I was thinking of learning how to swim this vacation.

Teacher: Oh, why not. I am sure you would even be learning in a more controlled environment like a pool, probably with a swimming instructor beside you.

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: So what is there to fear?

Student: I am afraid of drowning.

Teacher: But your instructor would be there.

Student: But can I fully entrust my life in his hands?

Teacher: Well, that is a question that only you may have to answer for yourself. In my case, I was forced to trust my uncles. But to learn how to swim, you must take that risk sometime. As I said earlier, anytime you must learn something worthwhile you need courage.

Student: I believe this applies no matter what - physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, philosophy, history, music, geography or even goalkeeping. At the point you confront an unknown with no skills, the tendency is to turn away from it. Because you are so clueless about the subject at hand you appear small before the problem, an effect of fear. Only courage helps you to accept the challenge in spite of the fear.

Teacher: If you are lucky to have a great teacher, he would shed and try to dissipate the darkness of ignorance that shrouds the subject and scares you. But he can never completely drive away the fear for you. Only you can do that for yourself. Nothing can truly dissolve fear except your own personal experience. It is in learning, trying, working, failing and trying again until you master the subject that the fear can be conquered. Only knowledge by personal experience fully conquers fear.

There are three keys to that all-important personal experience namely Practice, practice and more practice. I recall when Mike (not his real name), a friend of mine who eventually became a national goalkeeper, first ventured into goalkeeping. We had an excellent soccer coach. What this coach told him I would never forget.

He said “Mike, you have no skills. But I don’t care for I find in you what I am looking for in a potentially great goalkeeper Courage. With that jewel in your heart you would one day be this country’s number 1.

It came to pass.

Chapter Six

DO IT YOURSELF

Teacher: How do you do your homework, or what some of you call take home assignments?

Student: When I was much younger, I used to have my parents do them for me. Or rather, my mother was always there to help out. She would normally do the assignments for me and then I would copy them into my schoolbook. But now, I do them with my circle of friends in class. We gather after school to jointly do the homework.

Teacher: Has this worked for you?

Student: Yes, of course. It generally has because I earn good scores from the assignments.

Teacher: But if I confronted you alone with those assignments would you cope?

Student: I would try. But I do not think I would do that well; at least not as well as I usually do with help from my parents or my friends.

Teacher: Well that is honest.

Student: Let me confess however that I am today the worst fine artist in my class because through primary school my mum drew all my homework. The teacher was usually quite impressed with my home assignments thinking that I drew them myself. In a way I regret it because today I cannot draw well at all.

Teacher: I believe you have summarized today's lesson. When people do things for you they reinforce your inability and deepen your ineptitude. Of course, this ordinarily does not appear so in everyday practice because we often distinguish between academic and everyday skills.

Student: I don't understand.

Teacher: For instance, one easily sees the import of learning to drive by doing it himself. He must get on the driver's seat to learn. His

instructor may demonstrate the skill but he must also take the steering before he can learn.

Student: True. I can tell from personal experience.

Teacher: I am glad you can relate to that easily.

Student: Yes, I can, sir. I am currently hoping to earn my driver's license before next year.

Teacher: Very good. I am particularly impressed that you used the word "earn", which means to get something on merit, by personal qualification. But when it comes to academics the case is often different. Homework becomes a ritual not necessarily requiring merit or personal sacrifice. At best it becomes a means of posting scores to the report card, and not necessarily a deliberate act leading to the acquisition of a specific everyday skill like driving.

Student: But our subjects are not meant to teach skills that we use, are they?

Teacher: They are.

Student: Sir, how? How can I compare the direct usefulness of driving, for instance, to a subject like history or chemistry?

Teacher: This is precisely the point. Because you do not see the relationship between your subject and an everyday skill, the subject is truly mere academics, an abstract knowledge, not really relevant to daily existence.

Student: I am sorry to say that you have actually described how most of us see schoolwork. It is something we have to do so that we can pass to the next class. It is something we have to do so that our teachers would not punish us. It is something that we have to do so that our parents would not be ashamed of us.

Teacher: I know. I understand. I was once like you so I really do know where you are coming from and let me confess that sadly for me, it was not until my days at the university that I began to see the practical relevance of some of the subjects we were taught in school.

Student: Really, sir.

Teacher: You can quote me. I was a very good student but my motivation to work hard was not the relevance or the application of

the subject to our everyday life but the kudos that I received from my parents, my teachers, and my peers. I loved to bask in the glory of academic excellence. That was the prime motivation, not necessarily any clear and palpable way.

Student: What a relief! Your confession, sir, has washed away all the guilt that was building up in me in course of this conversation.

Teacher: No need to feel guilty at all. But if you must I believe we the teachers should share from it because it is in our place to point out the immediate and remote relevance of whatever we teach.

Student: Thank you, sir.

Teacher: Why are you thanking me? I am telling you all this to reassure you that whatever you learn has everyday application. If for any reason the teacher fails to make the link or rather assumes that you should know, never hesitate to ask. Always try to find out why you have to study anything, that way you have an additional incentive. You would be amazed at how much inspirational and motivational impetus it would add to your study.

Student: Sir, what if the teacher does not explain it in a way that I fully understand.

Teacher: Then seek elsewhere. Check books, check the Internet; ask your friends, your uncles and aunts, your parents, or any adult whom you believe should know. Always try to see how the subject affects you personally – how it affects your life and the lives of those around you. It makes a world of difference in your study when you know why and how it applies to you.

When I was first introduced to phonetic symbols in Oral English, for instance, I made so much jest of the ‘nonsense’ until someone pointed out that the symbols were useful in helping me dramatically improve my spoken English. He told me that I could become a presenter on television, which was an experience I wanted!

His words truly and dramatically changed my view of phonetics. I delved deep into it, even deeper than the teacher taught because I now had a personal interest in the matter. So I tell you, do what you can do to locate a personal interest in what you learn and you would be amazed how much it would motivate you to do your homework yourself.

To be sure, there is nothing wrong with help from your teacher, parent or friend if it is homework; but always make sure you learn the subject yourself privately, so you can make the learning personally.

Chapter Seven

POLISH YOUR SCRIPT

Teacher: I would like to talk to you about double-checking your work.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: It is what is expected but....

Student: But what, sir?

Teacher: It is what is expected, but more. You must compare your answers to tests, assignments or exams to the work of an artist.

Student: How sir?

Teacher: Every artist finishes his work in phases. Some would even argue that a true work of art never really finishes, in the final sense of the word. They argue that no matter how good a work of art is, there is always room for its improvement. So, generally, left with no pressure of time, finance and the like, a true artist may keep working on an art work forever.

Student: Really?

Teacher: Yes, but of course it does not happen so in real life, for a time comes when the artist must let go his finished work, whether or not he sees room for continuous improvement. Anyway, do not lose sight of the point I am making, namely, that you should see your answers as a work of art. Whether the subject being tested is mathematics, physics, or literature, you should maintain the view that the answer is akin to a work of art.

Student: In what sense, sir?

Teacher: In the sense that you must never rest to say that an assignment has been finished, in a final sense, except constrained by time or other pressures.

Student: I do not understand, sir.

Teacher: Imagine for instance that you were given a test to write a composition on *My Future Career*; and allotted a time of 90 minutes within which to submit your essay. Where you know what and how to present your facts you may end up finishing your first draft within 60 minutes, leaving you with 30 minutes extra. Let me put another way. Suppose you were actually the one involved in this case what would you do, having finished 30 minutes before the allotted time?

Student: I would submit my paper and go out to play or do something else. It is usually a thing of pride or competition, in fact, to see who would finish any test or exam first. We see the early finishers as the brilliant ones.

Teacher: And you regard all those who finish much later as dull?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: I may be harsh to say that what you do is silly. I quite honestly believe that to think as you do is either childish or plain stupid.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: The outstanding student knows that the test is like a work of art, which must be continuously honed for improvement. Having therefore finished such a test with extra time in his hands he would deploy every remaining minute to ensuring his work is as good as it can be given the time limit.

Student: How, sir?

Teacher: Having written the essay, he would consider it a draft, and then begin to actively and painstakingly look for errors – in spelling, syntax, fact, presentation, etc. Meticulously, he would check and correct. If the problem were a scientific or mathematical one, he would check every step to ensure that no mistake was introduced. Calmly he would scrutinize his script, pick up the errors and correct them.

A friend once called this painstaking error finding duty ‘polishing the script’. Where he finds certain pages dirty as a result of cancellations or erasures he may even choose to copy onto fresh sheets, organizing his answer in a better, more presentable way. The whole idea is to use the extra time to move the script from good to better, and from better to best.

Let me confess, for I was one of them, such students are often thirsty for marks. They are students that always want the full marks or as close as possible for every test. For them, every mark counts. Indeed from my experience every mark does count; even fractions make all the difference sometime. There were classmates in my time that lost scholarships or repeated classes, or missed prizes because of fractions of a mark.

Outstanding students are very aware of this, so they strain to make sure that no silly avoidable error leads to loss of marks. Their opportunity to ensure this comes with those extra minutes left after they have finished the first draft of answers. This is their chance to polish the script.

Conversely, for the foolish the extra time is misused. Often he jumps off the exam hall to give the impression of having had a simple test, which he did not require all the time allotted to deal with. This for him is evidence of his brilliance, so he wants to show off, like all stupid people.

Sometimes it is not just plain stupidity, I should admit. It could also be mere impatience. The extra time that could have been used to improve his work and increase his marks may appear an eternity because of impatience. Of course, the eventual result shows the failure following from mistakes that could easily have been avoided, if only he had the patience to polish his script at extra time.

Chapter Eight

STRIKE IT HOT

Student: Sir, I have a complaint.

Teacher: What, son? What is the matter?

Student: I am sorry to bother you with this, but I need to talk to someone I trust.

Teacher: Please, go ahead.

Student: Sir, it's my parents. They are fond of punishing me even when I am not guilty.

Teacher: Take it easy. Cool down and tell me the story.

Student: I have a younger sister, Beli. She is very troublesome, and is forever taunting me and misusing my things without my permission. Each time I react and lash out at her, my parents would punish me.

Teacher: Why?

Student: They either accuse me of unmanly behaviour of hitting a lady or of not behaving like her elder brother. I am just fed up of it. Why do I have to be blamed all the time when I do not start any trouble? I have tried to talk to my parents about this but they just keep blaming me unnecessarily.

Teacher: I am sorry you are so upset. Calm down. After all Beli is your own sister.

Student: But she must stop being such a fish bone in my throat.

Teacher: I understand. I understand how you feel. I also grew up with very troublesome sisters who, I must confess, held their own and presented me with both intellectual and spiritual challenges. By their virtues they challenged and shattered the so-called male superiority myth, which I know now as a fallacy. Maybe that is part of what you are wrestling with. Who knows, some of her challenges may have

been more acceptable or tolerable to you if they were coming from a younger, but fellow male.

Student: I think so, sir.

Teacher: Perhaps you are right. But I am more interested in what your parents tell you when you react to her “trouble”.

Student: That is really the annoying part. They tell me that being older I should exercise restraint, and not react immediately. They say I should always take time to chew over my reactions, even overnight, before I react if I must. But I find that unfair and almost impossible.

Teacher: I know how you feel. But I can also appreciate the training your parents are trying to give you. They really mean well. In time you will understand. If you really imbibe this training you will save yourself and very many others a lot of trouble and hurt. Trust me. But let me seize this opportunity to point out at least one area where your tendency for immediate reaction can serve a very useful purpose.

Student: Where, sir?

Teacher: In your studies. Never allow any topic taught by your teacher an overnight rest before you revisit it. Revise and exercise with problems related to the topic. People have used this ‘strike it when it is hot’ strategy to amazing effects in school. I speak from personal experience.

Student: Really sir? How did you do it?

Teacher: It was generally easy for me because, I guess, out of habit classmates always approached me for my experience of lessons taught. I never failed to latch on the opportunity. Once the teacher is out of the class I begin to almost verbatim regurgitate what the teacher had said. I pretend to be the teacher and begin to teach exactly what had been taught; the way it was taught.

Where I did not have a chance to do this during school hours I do it after school. I always had the opportunity of acting teacher to my friends. You would not believe this, sometimes alone I would pretend to be teaching what the teacher had taught that day in class. I would revise it and tackle the problems. For the lesson still fresh on my mind makes them easy to deal with.

I must say the teacher-mimic practice left me with some by-products of being a good actor; for I would mimic the teachers’ every

gesture even as I repeated the lesson to my friends. Now I believe it was the acting part that drew my classmates to my fake classes.

I can swear to you that the practice served me better than I can ever relate. I learnt by it that you remember things taught more easily if you repeat them or discuss them shortly after they have been taught, when it is fresh on your mind. With the repetition the fresh teaching sinks deeper into your brain, making it difficult to forget.

A friend of mine put it this way. He said when you first learn something it is like writing faintly on sand on a busy street. Generally, before morning you have difficulty reading it at all. He said an early revision preferably that same day, is what etches it into the brain.

My friend added that each revision is like etching further and deeper into the soil with larger and more effective instruments like diggers and shovels, so that it would require an extra special effort, maybe the employment of caterpillars and the like, to ever fill and obliterate the learning. He however emphasized that the most important repetition was the first one after the lecture, when the writing is still very faint on the ever-busy brain. The fresher it is on the brain, the better for the first revision. That way the details are retained, to a large extent, intact. Subsequent revisions now reinforce those details.

Chapter Nine

HOLIDAY HARVESTS

Teacher: So you are now on holiday?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: Holidays are always the best times for students. I know how much I looked forward to them myself.

Student: I am happy you say that, sir. Otherwise I would have felt guilty because I really love holidays, when I have to drop all my academic cares and enjoy with my folks and friends.

Teacher: I know what you mean.

Student: Holidays are really my best periods.

Teacher: I imagine it is so for you because you make good results normally.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: Parents are often not too glad to allow their children or wards that failed exams or did not perform well, to fully enjoy the holiday time as they ordinarily would have.

Student: That's right, sir. It is very much that way in my family. Anyone who does not do well in the term preceding the holiday is generally the butt of jokes for that period. He is mocked and as often as possible reminded of his poor performance.

Teacher: So rather than be happy such students end up being melancholy and miserable.

Student: Let me confess, sir, that I have myself suffered this way. This was some years ago. After that experience, I vowed that it would never reoccur. I am glad that by God's grace, it has not reoccurred.

Teacher: I am very happy to hear that. May it never happen to you, again.

Student: Amen.

Teacher: I did not mean it that way but if that's the way you take it, fine. However, always remember that you are the master of your destiny, the architect of your fate.

Student: Sir, we hear this kind of quotation very often, but is it really true?

Teacher: Yes, it is true.

Student: How?

Teacher: Ah, that will take us far a field. Maybe, another time. But for now know that you shape your life, your destiny, your future, by what you think, what you feel, what you do and what you say. A lot depends on you, some would say; and I believe that too, that everything in your world depends on you.

Student: I am confused, sir.

Teacher: Now you understand why I said we could leave this for another time? For now let us just return to our interesting discussion on holidays.

Student: Alright, sir.

Teacher: I particularly like your interpretation of holiday.

Student: You mean as a time to enjoy?

Teacher: Well, yes. But that is not all that I understand from your interpretation. What I hear from what you have said is that holiday is a reward for good performance. Am I correct?

Student: You have put it better for me, sir.

Teacher: That is a very beautiful way to review holidays, as something that you earn, something that you deserve, but only after you have done a good job. In this case, only after you have delivered good results that you and your folks are happy with.

Student: Very correct, sir.

Teacher: But I view holidays slightly differently.

Student: How, sir?

Teacher: For me holidays are like breaks between sessions. I liken holidays to the break at half-time during a football match. It is a time to reevaluate what happened in the first half, and then re-strategize and re-energize physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

The holiday for me is like one of the stops made by racing cars, to refill, recheck and correct weak links before speeding up again. Holidays are periods for filling knowledge gaps and stretching expertise, so you can improve on even your best previous performance.

You do all this a bit more leisurely, in-between rest and enjoyment, but never grinding your studies to a halt, for the same reason that a long distance runner never quite halts until he finishes. He may slow down or even jog on the spot because he knows that it takes greater energy to get back into the running rhythm if he were to stop completely.

Less effort is always required to keep a moving object going than to start the same object from rest. So, enjoy your holiday but never stop studying.

Chapter Ten

WRITE, SPEAK CLEARLY

Teacher: There is something special I would like us to dwell on today.

Student: Which topic, sir?

Teacher: Communication.

Student: Communication skills, sir?

Teacher: Yes, but not in broad sense of the word. I would like us to dwell on communication as it strictly pertains to your performance in school.

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: Let me ask you how would you rate your oral communication skill? Or better still, how does your Oral English teacher rate your speaking ability?

Student: She rates me very well on phonetics, especially transcription where we have to write everyday English words in phonetic symbols.

Teacher: That is very good. It shows you have technical knowledge of the subject.

Student: My rating when it comes to speaking is however not very good. She insists I have to work on my speech.

Teacher: I think she is right. I do not know how you did but you certainly picked a very nasal accent, which makes it sometimes difficult to understand some things you say.

Student: Sir, I was born abroad, and actually did my primary school up to a certain level before my parents relocated here. So I imagine the vestiges of that still remain.

Teacher: Please get me correct. I pass no judgment on your accent. My interest is in the clarity of what you say. If for instance you were

facing an oral exam, which would happen anyway in course of your years as a student - that is if it is not already happening now, and your teacher or professor has to strain or continuously ask you to repeat before getting what you are saying; then you are likely to pay the price through mark reduction, one way or the other. If ordinarily you were an A student, you might then find yourself dropping to a B for reasons that may not be clear to you.

Student: So what do I do, sir?

Teacher: This is precisely why I thought we should discuss this. You need to make deliberate attempts to speak clearly. How I would put it is this - try to give respect or due recognition to every syllable in a word. Do not swallow syllables or letters in a word except those that are conventionally meant to be silent.

Student: Sir, can I have an example please?

Teacher: You can have as many as you want. Take the word, “**want**”, for instance. Many people, even so-called well-educated and exposed people, would pronounce the word as “**won**”. Such that you generally pick up the meaning of what is said by the context in which it is said, not necessarily by the full identification of the word through the speaker’s pronunciation.

As you can then guess, where the context can admit both “**want**” and “**won**” and still make sense within the frame of the conversation, the audience or listener immediately has problem; for he is then left wondering whether what was meant was “**want**” or “**won**”. Once you begin to give your examiner that kind of headache, you are running the risk of losing marks, and detracting from your possible “A” grade.

Student: I see. So what do I do, sir?

Teacher: That is the second time that you are asking precisely the same question. The simple answer is *Speak Clearly*. Do not swallow letters in any word, except it is meant silent, like “H” for example, in the word “**Honorable**”. Make the effort.

Also observe good speakers. If you cannot identify one ask your parents and teachers. In particular listen to excellent broadcasters. Many who broadcast to international audiences are generally very good in whatever language they are communicating, especially newscasters. Their job is to lift the word from the paper, to the ears of the listener.

Student: Would you want to recommend any radio or television stations?

Teacher: No. I would suggest you ask your Oral English teacher, she can tell. But there is something possibly even more important in communicating in school, which you must give all the attention you can muster.

Student: What is it, sir?

Teacher: Writing clearly. I am referring here to writing well, or writing good English, or writing in a manner, which grips the reader. That is a different skill for another time. What I refer to here is writing CLEARLY. Do not try to imitate adults who jumble the letters in their words. Perhaps they can afford to do that. After all they have left school and probably would not need to be graded again.

That is not the case for you. Your results depend on the grade that the examiner gives you. That grade is often dependent on what he reads from your script or answer. If your writing is so clumsy, cluttered and untidy that he has difficulty discerning between your “L” and “T”, between your “S” and “Z” and so on, then you are in trouble.

Chapter Eleven

PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY

Teacher: There is a particular attribute of yours, as a student, that I admire and enjoy.

Student: Sir?

Teacher: I said there is something you do in class which I would like you to keep up and indeed commend to your friends and classmates.

Student: What, sir?

Teacher: It is your enthusiasm in class. I like how you participate actively in class.

Student: Sir, I am very happy to hear that. I did not know you liked it that much.

Teacher: Of course you would not because you were not doing it to impress me. You were simply being yourself, enjoying learning. I find the attitude highly commendable. I believe this is an attitude every teacher wants to see in his class.

Student: I never realized it was important to teachers that we participate actively in class.

Teacher: Very much. That is why the teacher is forever asking for feedback or contribution from students. That way he can tell whether the students like what he is teaching, whether they are following; and above all whether they are actually learning.

Student: So teachers care that much?

Teacher: Yes, of course. At least good teachers do. A good teacher is very much like a good parent, who wants the very best for his child. A good parent, like a good teacher, always desires the child to do better than he did in every way. He always desires the plus element in his children. So he wants to see the signs of that potential displayed as he teaches in class daily.

Student: But I could be following a teacher and not participate actively in class.

Teacher: Generally, teachers do not like lukewarm students. Teachers are first and foremost, communicators. They desire not just to pass information but to engage the students. They are therefore happy when students show signs of not only following but hooked onto what is being taught. That is the kind of feedback a teacher craves for.

Student: It almost sounds as if you believe that active participation in class by students is for the benefit of the teacher.

Teacher: To some extent it is, because the teacher gets the satisfaction of having delivered his goods. He actually gets the satisfaction of a salesman who succeeded in selling his wares to his customers. It gives him a sense of achievement. He goes home happy to have done his job well. Why do you think a good teacher is often sad when his students perform badly in a test?

Student: Why?

Teacher: Because he shares the sense of failure with the students. He also feels that he, too, had failed. It is exactly the way a coach feels when his players flop in a match they were expected to win. It is usually not a very pleasant position to be in. You need to experience it to feel the pain.

That is the kind of pain a teacher feels. He has a sense of emptiness; a sense of having wasted his time and energy; in some cases even a sense of self-doubt, as to whether he actually is a good teacher. That is how much a good feedback or result means to a teacher; especially a good teacher.

Student: I see.

Teacher: But the point to bear in mind is that the ultimate beneficiary in all these is the student. Yes, the participation is good for the teacher's sense of well-being, relevance and accomplishment, but it is the student that is being improved. The teacher is imparting what he already truly knows. It is the student that does not know it. It is the student that needs to learn it to be better than he is.

My point would probably be better appreciated against the background of students who do not enjoy class participation. Maybe you can help me here. What kind of response would you expect from such students? Try to see from the Teacher's view.

Student: It is difficult to see from the teacher's view but let me try.

Teacher: Go on.

Student: I think such students would not respond to questions in class. They would not participate in class projects. They would not even listen with full attention to what the teacher is saying.

Teacher: Well said. So who would be the loser in such a case? Teacher or student?

Student: Student, of course.

Teacher: Why?

Student: Because in not showing enthusiastic interest in what is being taught, he cannot fully follow in detail the logic of the teacher. He would easily forget what is taught because he is not repeating according to the teacher. But we know that by repeating we retain things better in our minds. Also, by not participating actively in class projects he loses the chance of putting into practice what is taught which would have enabled him better understand the topic and its application to the world.

Teacher: You have said enough for yourself and for your friends. Thank you.

Chapter Twelve

DON'T BE INTIMIDATED

Student: Sir, there is an issue I would like you to address because it is something of great concern to me and, I believe, to quite a lot of students.

Teacher: I am all ears.

Student: Sir, let me preface what I have to say with the fact that most teachers are good and kind-hearted.

Teacher: You mean it?

Student: Yes, sir. I mean it. Most have been kind to me as an individual. I can speak from my own personal experience.

Teacher: Good.

Student: But what I would like you to kindly address affects us badly. Let me speak for myself. The particular behavior of some teachers which I am alluding to affects me badly. Terribly, in fact.

Teacher: That bad?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: What can this be?

Student: Sir, it is the tendency of some teachers to intimidate students. I have suffered from this behaviour tremendously, especially as a much younger student. Even in primary school!

Teacher: Really?

Student: Yes, sir. I recall a particular year when I was so intimidated by my teacher that I lost confidence in myself. Of course it immediately affected my result. I dropped from being the outstanding best in class to second or third place. On one particular occasion, while reciting a poem on stage I was so engrossed watching for acceptance in the face of that teacher that I forgot my lines; and even

forgot the cue for my group to leave the stage. That is how adverse teacher-intimidation can be.

Teacher: This is strange.

Student: It is strange, sir. But it happens. It is happening!

Teacher: Why would a teacher resort to intimidating students?

Student: I do not know, sir. But I imagine it would be for his personal reasons. I recall that the experience I narrated about my intimidation in primary school was associated with an approach my mother made to the teacher. I come from a background of parents who are particular about our studies as children. So they scrutinize report cards to understand everything written on them, along with their implications

On this occasion my mother noticed that in one particular subject I was supposed to have been first but was graded fourth because there was a mistake in summing up the scores. She showed it to my father who insisted that she must return to the teacher so the corrections could be made. My mother complied.

I took no part in the discussion. But my mother returned cheerful because the changes were made, apologies rendered and more importantly I retained my expected first position. But that event became a watershed for me in that class.

From that point on I noticed that the teacher changed his attitude towards me drastically. He threatened me at will, picked on me for every negative trait, freely reported me to the supervisor, easily made me scapegoat for every offence and I was the butt of his jokes and abuses. He kept me really miserable. He even encouraged friends and classmates to distance themselves from me.

Teacher: Really?

Student: Yes, sir. Believe me, sir; it is happening to students at various levels even now, including our school. Students endure enormous suffering quietly and fail to report to anyone for fear of even worse repercussions, including malicious fabrications against the student that could lead to expulsion.

Teacher: No, you cannot be serious.

Student: Sir, I am very serious. It has happened to a girl I know.

Teacher: Why did the teacher do that?

Student: Sir, I do not know. All I learnt was that the teacher wanted a favour from her and she refused, so he concocted a very negative story which implicated the girl and she was sent packing by the school authorities. Worse, her sponsors, for her parents were poor, illiterate and lived in the village, did not believe her plea of innocence. Today, I do not know what has become of her. So, sir, it is a very serious problem amongst students; and, I would add, at all levels.

Teacher: This is sad; very sad. Listen, fight is not often good; but once in a while it becomes inevitable for you to stand and fight. If there is anything worth your fight, son, it is your freedom. It is your freedom to be yourself. Let no one, let no teacher intimidate you into surrendering that. Respectfully raise your voice and report to all who can listen including your parents, before you are trapped by intimidation and related machinations.

Your early warning through complaints to relevant authorities would likely push back the impending threat and you would be treated cautiously by that teacher. Have no apologies for protecting your freedom. You have a God-given right to be who you are. Report any sign of intimidation. Don't harbor it and do not be afraid to fight it when it becomes absolutely necessary. Wisely resist any attempt to enslave you through intimidation of all sorts. Report! Raise your voice. And raise it early. Someone will hear and force amends. Otherwise down goes your self-esteem, your academic performance and above all your God-given freedom. Never let it slip. Never!

Chapter Thirteen

RESPECT INSTRUCTIONS

Teacher: I was really shocked to find that you barely passed the test I gave you students last week.

Student: Me too, sir.

Teacher: It was very much unlike you!

Student: I am ashamed of my performance. I am really sorry.

Teacher: What happened? You answered the questions like one in frenzy and therefore made all kinds of stupid errors.

Student: That is correct, sir. I was too much in a hurry because I thought there was no time to do justice to the questions, so I tried to hurry through them.

Teacher: But that was not the case. There was time.

Student: I know, sir.

Teacher: I would not set questions and not allow enough time for them to be answered.

Student: I should have known that. But somehow I did not carefully read the instructions. That was my bane.

Teacher: I am glad you are learning this lesson early enough in life. There are many before you who have failed major exams in school and in life generally just because they did not carefully read the instructions. In cases, the instructions were read but probably misunderstood or not understood at all.

Student: I can imagine, sir.

Teacher: Many brilliant ones have floundered in various ways because of this. Being very sharp, they know the answers to the questions and are thus eager to demonstrate their knowledge by rushing to answer, only to end up failing.

Student: Now I know that from personal experience.

Teacher: In fact one of the best students in my time had to repeat his final exams a year later because he failed a compulsory subject leading to his chosen field of study. He failed, not because he did not know the answers to the questions but purely because he misread the instructions.

To illustrate, I believe the compulsory question in the biology paper which he failed had to do with mammals. If I recall well enough the question was about characteristics, illustrations, diagrams or the like of non-mammals. The question had read something like Describe 3 of the species that are not of the mammal family. But somehow, in reading the instructions and in his eagerness to demonstrate his knowledge of the mammal family he did not see the word “not”, and therefore ended up writing a most impressive treatise of the very opposite of what was required. Being a compulsory and very important question carrying nearly 50 percent of the marks, it was no surprise that he failed.

The result came to all of us as a rude shock, that Salem, for that was his name, had failed biology. I particularly thought there must have been an error because he was an excellent student of the subject. The rest of us who were not as good as he was scored ‘A’s. It was therefore difficult to believe that Salem would score anything less. But not only did he score less, he failed the subject.

At first it sounded absolutely incredible. That was how much faith we all had in the ability of Salem. The Biology teacher was even more incensed, knowing how good the young man was. But after investigations we were to learn what the matter was. Salem had carelessly misread the instructions and had ended doing the very opposite of what was required. So he failed.

Student: I am glad that I am learning this lesson at this level, when I can still make amends without a major set back.

Teacher: That is the spirit. Learn the lesson and try not to repeat the mistake. Never be in such a hurry to exhibit your expertise or knowledge that you rush over instructions governing a body of questions or procedures. To do otherwise can in some cases be suicidal.

Student: That bad, sir.

Teacher: Yes, that bad. Notice that exams are only a minute aspect of life, but it generally elicits the core habits of candidates. The case of Salem brought this point home to me in an unforgettable way. As I said, Salem was very brilliant, but in our daily lives as students he was very careless and pretty much absent-minded at times.

Because he was so sharp we actually used to call him the absent minded professor. That was his popular name. For instance, Salem would come to class with several pencils, but would hardly find one at the end of the day because of the rather careless manner he would keep them; making it easy for other students to pilfer them, or borrow them with an intention to return them but hardly do. Then Salem would be close to tears. His parents would replenish. But almost exactly the same would reoccur. He was that careless. But because he was so brilliant he often got away with the flaws.

Even before a teacher would finish asking a question to test understanding in class, his hand would be up, eager to respond. If the teacher stopped the question half-way to give Salem a chance to speak Salem would often get the answer right. This impressed the teachers tremendously. But see what price he had to pay in the end owing to his absent-mindedness.

Still I would consider him lucky if he really learnt the lesson. Imagine that he did not and at one time fell ill, and he needed to see a doctor. Just imagine. He gets drugs but is impatient to fully read and digest the accompanying instructions. Hurriedly scanning the drugs, he comes to the conclusion that the whitish one must be a pain reliever and so takes a couple to relieve this discomfort, only to drown to death because what he took were concentrated sleeping drugs.

Chapter Fourteen

EXPECT MORE

Teacher: How many academic prizes did you have last year.

Student: Only two.

Teacher: In which subjects?

Student: In English and Chemistry.

Teacher: That's good.

Student: But I was not satisfied. In fact, I was not happy that I received only those two prizes.

Teacher: How many were you expecting?

Student: Five subject prizes, at least.

Teacher: I love the use of "at least" in that sentence.

Student: Why?

Teacher: It smacks of greater expectation!

Student: Greater expectation?

Teacher: Yes. It's like being greedy for the positive things of life. Why not? Be greedy for marks. Be greedy for prizes. Be greedy for excellence. Be greedy for good behaviour.

Student: That sounds nice.

Teacher: I really mean it. I can use a personal experience to illustrate this. Years ago in primary school, my father threatened to take my school to court for not awarding me my well deserved prizes. In fact, he had one of his lawyer friends threaten the school, set to go to court.

Student: What happened, sir?

Teacher: It was in the promotional exams to primary two. I had scored 100% in at least half of the twelve or thirteen subjects taught. Let me confess that my father was a connoisseur of his children's academic prizes. Almost everything was premised on whether prizes were brought home or not. For instance, he once cancelled a pre-arranged overseas holiday trip because not all of us brought prizes home at the end of that session.

Student: That must have been very painful.

Teacher: Oh yes, it was! I just never understood why he was that strict. But he would dance and make merry in public once we brought home prizes. If he was abroad or elsewhere when the result was announced, he would go out of his way to buy all the presents you never even expected. To really please him was to bring prizes home. Then you were his friend. But if you didn't you were not and it showed.

Student: But certainly that was not the case, in this event that you are narrating.

Teacher: No, it wasn't. The exam answer scripts returned to us already gave him an idea of how many prizes he was expecting from me that session. He figured that as I had scored 100% in 6 subjects, he ought to be expecting at least 6 prizes.

Student: Did you get the 6 prizes?

Teacher: No. That was the crux of the matter. I was only given two prizes by my teacher. One for mathematics or arithmetic, as it was then called. The other was for being the overall best student in class. I came back home and reported to my father. He was not happy. He was sorely disappointed and figured there must have been an error. So he asked my mum to accompany me to see the teacher the next day. The teacher had what he considered genuine explanations.

Student: I wonder what they might have been, considering you recorded 100% in 6 of the subjects.

Teacher: The explanation of the teacher was that he gave me only two prizes, so as to give others a chance of winning prizes as a way of encouraging them to do better, rather than have only one student out of 30 in the class cart away 7 of the prizes, leaving only 5 for the rest of the 29 students. From the teacher's point of view it was somewhat unfair to allow me take all those prizes.

Student: Unfair?

Teacher: Exactly my dad's reaction when we relayed the explanation to him. He was mad. He said it was the teacher that was being grossly unfair in denying me of prizes that I roundly deserved only to pass them on to others who never won them.

Predictably, the next day he left off going to work early and stormed the school. He was polite but left the school head in no doubt as to the action he would take if remedies were not made. He later backed up his threat with a letter from his friend's law firm, threatening to sue. I believe when the lawyer's letter got to the principal the latter realized just how serious my dad was and immediately arranged for all the prizes that I had won to be delivered to our home, as we had vacated.

My dad seized the opportunity to hammer into our heads, his children, that if there was anything we should be greedy for, it was the prize for any subject we were being taught. He urged us to claim all the prizes. He said in doing so we would always come home with some prizes, no matter what. I must say his advice had always worked for me. For not once, throughout my primary, secondary and tertiary education did I not come home without prizes. I commend the same advice to you.

Chapter Fifteen

DON'T BE A COCKROACH

Student: Sir, you seem a bit tired today.

Teacher: Why do you say that?

Student: Your eyes. They are not as bright. I would say they are even somewhat red-shot.

Teacher: Oh, is it so noticeable?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: I did not realize. I thought I was putting up a good enough face.

Student: You are, sir. But I have known you enough to notice minor changes.

Teacher: I see.

Student: What happened, sir?

Teacher: Nothing really. It is just that for some awkward reason I did not sleep early last night. At least, not at my usual time.

Student: I would like to share the reason, if you may.

Teacher: Why are you so inquisitive? Are you going to end up a journalist like your uncle? Anyway I will tell. It's no big deal. It had to do with cockroaches.

Student: Cockroaches?

Teacher: Yes, cockroaches.

Student: Cockroaches kept you awake at night?

Teacher: You could say that. But what actually happened was that my wife had continuously complained that she sees them in the kitchen. I

did not quite realize how serious the problem was until last night. Perhaps even my wife did not realize the matter was that serious.

Student: What happened, sir?

Teacher: Quite unusually I felt like nibbling at something before finally retiring for the night. I had worked late in my study and felt like topping up my energy level before sleep. So languidly I sauntered into the kitchen. All the lights downstairs were off, including that in the kitchen, as is the practice before retiring to our private living rooms upstairs.

So I had made my way to the kitchen with the help of the lit bulb on the staircase. But the light was not enough to lead me into the kitchen which was pitch-dark. So I felt for the switch on the wall and put the light on. What I saw dazed me. Cockroaches! There were at least a dozen of them latched unto the wall. Perhaps because of the light, they appeared frozen in their tracks. I was miffed. I swore to war.

Student: What?

Teacher: War, I said. I dashed upstairs and reached for the carton of insecticide spray. I pulled out my armory and headed straight for the kitchen, freely unleashing the bullets with venom. I was mad at those cockroaches.

I finished with the kitchen, having emptied a full can there, and progressed to the store and other rooms including my own. Whether I physically saw cockroaches or not was immaterial. Having satisfied myself that I had done enough battle, I stopped and found that I was now reeking of insecticides. So I needed a bath. But my room was already so poisoned with the insecticide that I could not enter it for a long while. I then realized that in my rage I had punished not just the cockroaches but myself.

It was quite a while before I could re-enter my room, have the bath and sleep. The result, of course, is what you have noticed Tiredness.

Student: So sorry, sir.

Teacher: Nothing to worry about. After all it is holiday time. I can always go back to bed later, to make up for lost hours.

Student: But if school was in session and you had to teach you may have....

Teacher: Surely, I would then be teaching with reduced capacity. That is why keeping late night is not good at all for anyone, especially students. I recall that in my school days there were certainly fellow students that we referred to as COCKROACHES.

Student: Why, sir?

Teacher: Precisely because they behaved like cockroaches. It was at the time that normal people would have turned off their lights to sleep that they resumed activity. That was when they preferred to do their homework, for example. That was when they preferred to read. So having worked through the night when normal people were resting you can imagine how tired they usually were during classes.

The result was that they were always in class with grossly reduced capacities to absorb what was being taught and to participate actively because their brains were tired and so were their bodies. They often ended up always playing “catch up” with their studies. For, not being fully alert in class, they would need to do extra work in the night to try to fully understand what was taught in class. Many times they never quite succeeded, at least not as much as the students who always slept early and woke up early - happy, healthy and ready for the day’s work.

Student: Were you ever a cockroach?

Teacher: Never. I always tried to work within the normal study time of the day; so I could rest and be 100% ready for the new day’s work. I urge you to do the same. NEVER BE A COCKROACH. It saps your energy, reduces your absorption in class, and turns you into a mental and physical dullard.

Chapter Sixteen

MIND YOUR HEALTH

Teacher: There is a factor in academic excellence which never plays up in consideration for students.

Student: What factor, sir?

Teacher: Health. Health is a prime contributor to success in any human endeavor of worth. Health is particularly critical for any pursuit of excellence. Academia is no exception to this rule.

Student: I never considered health so primary, I must confess.

Teacher: You are not alone in that omission. We all are like that. Health is something we all take for granted no matter what we do or plan to do. A housewife preoccupied with the good of her children forgets her health. She is too focused on her subjects of attention that she could have her health slide to points of danger, becoming even incapable of helping herself.

Student: That example is real to me because I recall it happened to my mother years ago. My mother doted on us her children so much that she hardly paid any attention to her health. In one instance when we were at a hospital to visit a relative, a doctor fortuitously asked her to check her blood pressure. It was incredibly high, we were made to understand.

The doctor thought it was serious enough to admit her immediately. But she pleaded that it would be impossible for her to submit herself to admission abandoning her children. The doctors scoffed at her excuses and insisted; but she would not yield. She however succeeded in tricking them, under the guise that she would return that evening.

Of course, she did not return. We, her children, would not hear of our mother going anywhere and abandoning us to mercurial house helps. But the truth was that for over a month she had been complaining of serious headaches, aches, pains all over her body. I believe her complete devotion to us, her children, kept her going somehow.

In spite of the doctor's alarmist warnings, she was ready to carry on. But something, which today I understand as pure grace of God,

intervened. She came down with chicken pox and was forced to be quarantined in her room, to avoid affecting any of us, her beloved children. For over a week my mother had nothing to do with us. She would only occasionally speak to us through her window. She was strict on not making any contact with us for fear of spreading the disease.

We never thought we could do without our mother for even one day! And she never thought we could be alright without her support for half a day! But guess what, we survived. And we survived well. Even my little brother who was then only 18 months did very well. Our father stepped in to take on most of her duties in addition to his. The house helps were also understanding and kind. After nearly 10 days ordeal she was fit again to rejoin the family, and we had all been fine. For me, it was a major first lesson in the ability of the human being to adapt.

The conditions had put a strain on our father but the fact that we could do without our mum for so long go to school, do our homework, play and partake in all activities as at when due really amazed us. They especially amazed my mum. But my greatest take from that experience was that the chicken pox saved her from possible disastrous health consequences. Chicken pox forced her to take a holiday and rest; something the doctors had said she badly needed.

Teacher: Kudo, you have made my point well beyond my intended illustration. Now imagine your mother was preparing for exam; and had to fall ill the week preceding her exams. Imagine the illness was so serious that she was unable to write the papers. Imagine for instance that it was the final year external exam. Imagine that she eventually survived and returned to school a month later. What would then be her status with regard to her school work?

Student: Clearly she would have lost a year. Her classmates including those far less academically endowed would have gained a year advantage over her. She would be in the same class as those who had failed previously and had to repeat.

Teacher: And all that would be because she was lucky and survived the illness. For it could have been worse, but for the grace of God.

Student: I see the point.

Teacher: Hardly do we all see the point, because the pursuit of whatever ambition we have set our minds on is usually so overwhelming, and so blinding that we never spot health as a major factor in the equation. As it is for teachers, so for students, so for

businessmen, so for politicians, so for even doctors and indeed for anyone who pursues any endeavor with passion.

Let me add that indeed no life endeavor, including studentship, is worth anybody's while except pursued with passion. That fact should stand out loftily, proudly, unimpeachably. But the point I make is that the passion to excel must include the passion to be healthy. For without health, the very vehicle that is required to carry us to success would prove incapable of making the journey.

We would be like the wise celebrity safari car racer who did all to put himself in a spiritual, mental, and physical top shape to win any race; except ensure that the vehicle in which he was to race was in good shape. The car engine malfunctioned half way and that ended his ambition. All his preparations and investment to prepare himself for the great event went to waste.

Student: He must have been the most stupid of all stupid men.

Teacher: I am glad you say that yourself; for that statement may well hold true for many, if not most of us.

Chapter Seventeen

OPERATION WALL GECKO

Student: Sir, why are you staring at the wall?

Teacher: Come and see.

Student: Sir, but it is just a plain white wall.

Teacher: No, look again. Be quiet. No noise.

Student: I see nothing, sir, but a plain blank wall.

Teacher: Do you see a small reptile.

Student: Yes, sir. I see a wall gecko.

Teacher: What else?

Student: In front of the wall gecko, there is something that looks like an ant.

Teacher: Is there a relationship?

Student: One looks like an imminent prey and the other a predator.

Teacher: Excellent. Now watch.

Student: Watch what, sir?

Teacher: Watch the predator in action.

Student: Ok, sir.

Teacher: Can you guess how long I have been here, watching?

Student: I have been watching you for at least 5 minutes.

Teacher: That is certainly more time than I have been watching this wall gecko.

Student: What is so fascinating, sir?

Teacher: Just keep watching.

Student: Oh! What speed! Sir, did you see that? The wall gecko that appeared to be barely breathing suddenly sprang to life!

Teacher: Did it succeed?

Student: Clearly, sir. The prey is right now inside its mouth. It is incredible, the speed. Sir, is that what you were looking forward to seeing?

Teacher: You have never seen the gecko in action before, apparently.

Student: Never, sir. Not like this. I have never noticed that the gecko could be such an incredibly sharp predator.

Teacher: Well, there you saw it. I always enjoy watching the gecko about to pounce on a prey. Learn to observe nature around you. There is a lot that the simple things around you can teach. I know for sure that I have learnt a lot watching the gecko.

Student: What could you have learnt, sir?

Teacher: You know, watching the gecko and its potential prey reminds me of golfers. A good golfer gets all his concentration to bear on the single little ball in front of him, completely oblivious of everything else. He rests his entire attention on the round object, aims slowly, and then sweeps suddenly; just like the wall gecko.

Student: Exactly, sir.

Teacher: I am glad you see the similarity. But why do you think the golfer and the gecko, for that matter, invest all their attention on the single object in front of them.

Student: I believe so that they do not miss. They want to take precise shots that hit the ball or object exactly where it is best.

Teacher: Correct.

Student: Sir, you say there is a lesson in that?

Teacher: Isn't it obvious?

Student: It is not to me, sir.

Teacher: Is there any successful project in life that did not require a successful step at a time?

Student: Ok, now I get it. It is like giving all my concentration to every teacher as he comes to teach, giving my every concentration to every period of every subject. It is like not letting my attention drift to the past or the future, but giving it to the present all the time. It is like making the most or getting the most of the present, always.

Teacher: I could not have said it better. Can you imagine what you could achieve if you could give your very best everyday? Can you imagine what you could achieve if you gave all your attention to every class?

Can you imagine what you could achieve if you gave all your attention, at a time, to every exam or test? That is probably the secret of making 'A' grades in all subjects. Something some think impossible. But now you have the key.

Focus on the present. Give it your all. Never be distracted by either the past or the future. Learn from the gecko and your greatness is guaranteed.

Chapter Eighteen

WATCH YOUR FOOD

Teacher: I have a story for you today.

Student: Is it something you just remember? You sound thrilled.

Teacher: It is a story which I would really like all my students to hear.

Student: I am all ears, sir.

Teacher: It is a story of Yogoyogo.

Student: What, sir?

Teacher: I said, Yogoyogo.

Student: What's yogoyogo, sir?

Teacher: Oh, I am sorry - a name so strange, ought to be introduced.

Student: So it is a name?

Teacher: Yes. Yogoyogo is the name of the subject of my story today. It was not his real name, but that was the name by which he was popularly known.

Student: I understand, sir.

Teacher: Now to the story. Returning from a mid-term break, Yogoyogo arrived with a band of native doctors from his village. The rest of us arrived to the spectacle of four bizarre looking characters, dancing round a boiling pot in front of our hostel. It was a free show which no one could miss.

We all gathered in a very wide semi-circle round the performance. Sitting next to the pot was young Yogoyogo, whose youth stood in poignant contrast to the elderly dancers. It took the concerted effort of the school authorities, police from town and pleas from Yogoyogo's tribesmen who lived in the town to move the native doctors from the

school. They left but I believe not before they had satisfied themselves that they had fully accomplished their mission.

Student: What mission were they on? To disrupt the school or scare the students?

Teacher: Perhaps those were subsidiary missions, for they also achieved those goals. But what we gathered was that their primary mission was to exorcise from Yogoyogo, who had had to repeat class one three times, the spirit of exam failure.

The story was that Yogoyogo was being held back intellectually by some black magicians and enemy spirits in the boarding house who did not want their son to progress from class one. After a careful analysis of the problem by Yogoyogo and his folks, this was the ingenious decision that was taken, to have juju men come to the school to drive away the evil spirits from interfering with Yogoyogo's progress.

We learnt that the spirits against the young man were responsible for his penchant for falling asleep each time he was in the library or the reading room to study. I can bear witness that Yogoyogo, who was once my classmate was never able to keep awake in the library or in class during prep periods either in the afternoon or at night.

The argument was that because these evil spirits hounded him to sleep every time, he could not study to pass exams. To the gullible many this sounded credible. But what most like me did not understand was why the solution was thought to lie with three smelly, dirty, old folks who certainly had tremendous challenge in conducting their lives out of crass ignorance.

But who were we to question the wisdom of Yogoyogo and his folks. Let me confess however that from then on I kept my respectable distance from him and avoided even the faintest contact with him, including shaking hands or even sharing the same pathway at once. If I saw him coming I would generally find an excuse to stop and divert to someplace else.

Needless to add, he eventually did not graduate; neither could he progress beyond class one even after 4 years of repeating the class. The principal eventually did an analysis following some investigations which he shared with the rest of the school in the assembly. This was after Yogoyogo had left.

The principal's findings were basically that his main undoing was his love for food, especially heavy foods like pounded yam and the like which he often ate with utmost relish. Yogoyogo was famous for his ability to mow down any food mountain, no matter how high. He loved and enjoyed to eat heavily.

According to our principal's analysis, having overloaded himself Yogoyogo was too heavy to do anything else but sleep like an overfed python. Unfortunately, it was not a once-off occurrence but a habit. His inability to curb his appetite caused him to sleep; perhaps, as a way of escaping work. No one could tell.

There is yet another reason to watch your food beyond the Yogoyogo syndrome. It is that as food makes you well, it can also make you sick. Countless are cases when food eaten has been the cause of the failure of many a candidate either at work or in school.

For instance, one of my best friends in school, Abba, had to miss a very important scholarship test because he had eaten something that upset his stomach so much that he excreted and vomited the whole day of the exam.

He lost that chance and the chance to continue in our school because subsequent events rendered his parents incapable of paying his school fees, a weight that could easily have been borne through scholarship which I am sure Abba would have got, being an exceedingly brilliant student.

Student: But the brilliance could not serve him in avoiding food poisoning.

Teacher: Sadly.

Chapter Nineteen

THE KILLER INSTINCT

Teacher: How do you spend your time now that you are on vacation?

Student: Studying, playing soccer and watching movies.

Teacher: What kind of movies do you watch?

Student: All kinds, sir; but it depends on what is available. Since I cannot yet afford to buy them as I like, I am grateful to watch whichever one is available. The one I watched yesterday was very interesting.

Teacher: What was it about?

Student: Are you that interested in movies, sir?

Teacher: Yes and no. It depends on what is there to learn. I prefer uplifting movies.

Student: What does that mean, sir?

Teacher: Let's talk about your interesting movie. Another time, we can discuss my kind of movies.

Student: Alright, sir.

Teacher: Go on then. I am listening.

Student: The movie was about a hardened criminal who broke away from jail and resuscitated his old gang to begin another lease of fatal bank robberies. The law eventually caught up with him, as the police traced him to his hide-out. He fought back, badly injuring some of the officers.

This aroused the killer instinct in the squad leader who had earlier planned to catch the criminal alive for the law to take its course. His killer instinct led him to gun down the criminal who was attempting to escape. The first shot injured the criminal; but he would not stop shooting. He shot to kill and continued pumping the bullets

into the dead body as if to assure himself that the man was really dead.

Teacher: Did you enjoy the movie?

Student: Very much, sir; especially the action part where the leader of the police squad was provoked into resurrecting his killer instinct.

Teacher: The killer instinct. You have used that phrase twice in quick succession. Do you know what it means?

Student: Yes, sir. I believe it is the instinct to attack something until it is truly dead, far beyond any possibilities of redemption. I learnt the phrase from my uncle only last weekend. He used it in describing the team that won the football fixture we were watching. He said the team that won had the killer instinct.

Teacher: Why did he say that?

Student: Ten minutes to the end of the match it was clear who the winner was, leading 4-0 and superior in every department of the game. Yet they were unrelenting, raiding the goal post of their opponent voraciously, hungry for more. They ended up scoring additional 3 goals; bring the final score to 7-0. Yet, all they needed was just a win to qualify for the next round of the competition.

Teacher: I think your uncle is spot on with his phrase. Surely, that is a team with the killer instinct much like the leader of the police squad in your movie. I must confess I love people who show the killer instinct, not necessary for killing but in executing whatever assignment they have.

Just imagine a student having the killer instinct preparing for his exams. Can you imagine a brilliant student with the killer instinct in the exam hall doing justice to the exam questions? Can you?

Student: Sir, you want me to answer?

Teacher: Yes, answer.

Student: I can, sir.

Teacher: How would such a student be different?

Student: He would take no chances. He would ensure that every question is given its due and that nothing detracts from full marks. He would ensure that his spellings are correct. He would ensure that his preparation is orderly and clean. He would not leave the exam hall early. In fact, I think he would likely be the last to leave.

Teacher: Why?

Student: Because he would want to utilize every available minute to ensure that his work is, as much as possible, error-free enough to guarantee or almost guarantee 100%. For him 99% would not do.

Teacher: Are you that type of student?

Student: No, sir.

Teacher: Would you like to be one with the killer instinct.

Student: Sir, by all means.

Teacher: Good. You must, therefore, learn never to be completely easily satisfied with your performance in anything. Those with the killer instinct continuously push the frontiers of improvement, never resting, no matter what they achieve.

Student: I see.

Chapter Twenty

WORK IS FAITH

Teacher: I called your house yesterday, as promised, sometime around 3pm.

Student: I am sorry, sir. Then we were still at the worship service.

Teacher: You were there until 3pm?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: So when did you close?

Student: We finally closed at 4.30pm.

Teacher: 4.30pm?

Student: Yes, sir. Actually, we closed early. Usually we would dismiss at 5pm or 5.30pm.

Teacher: When do you start the worship?

Student: We usually start at about 10am.

Teacher: You mean you worship for 7 hours?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: And you are all comfortable with that?

Student: Well, to be honest; not really, sir. You know, it is quite a long time to go on empty stomach, praying, singing, and dancing. I usually end up ill after every worship session. I have headaches, my belly churns and I generally feel sick.

Teacher: That is a pity.

Student: These days, I have learnt not to exert myself that much. I try not to shout during prayers and I minimize my dancing. But all that

does not stop the biting hunger, the headache or resulting weakness. Nevertheless, it is not as bad as before.

Teacher: Amazing.

Student: You have some suggestions, sir?

Teacher: No. In religious matters there is nothing to be said to another, especially unsolicited.

Student: But I am soliciting for your views, sir.

Teacher: I do not think you should worry about my views on this one. Your relationship with God is your private affair. It could be enjoyable, it could be punishing, it is all a private matter. In fact, speaking of views on religious matters reminds me of two short stories which I would like to share with you.

Student: Thank you, sir. At least now I have some view coming from you.

Teacher: Stories mark you, not views; and they are true stories. Now, the first story. Years ago, I knew a couple that belonged to a religion which did not allow for any form of medication. At one time the wife took ill, some serious stomach problem. She moaned, groaned and cried all day for weeks. Neighbours begged her husband to please take the woman to a doctor. He refused. He would sit beside his beloved wife, moaning in sympathy and crying from the agony of not being able to do something to relieve the pain of his wife, whom he obviously loved very dearly.

Relative, after relative, visited to join the neighbours in begging him to take the poor woman to the hospital. He was adamant. Eventually he also took ill; perhaps from the anguish of watching his wife suffer what was to be a fatal pain, for the woman died. Weeks later he followed, leaving their toddler child, who had suffered so much neglect in the face of the sick parents that it, too, died.

The second story is about Chinwe, one of my initial best friends in school. At least, she was until she joined this religious group. Some would say religious cult, which gave prayers such prominence in the lives of its members that it nearly obscured all other activities, including attending classes and studying. Chinwe and her group believed that prayers with faith - whatever that meant - solved all problems.

Shortly after joining this group Chinwe no longer turned up for prep and shamelessly missed classes. Anytime there was a clash between tutorials and their prayers Chinwe, who now dressed herself in “extra-pious” clothes, was sure to be found in the prayer meeting. She became known in school as the “Prayer General.” Chinwe could pray in any language, comprehensible and incomprehensible. More often than not, the latter was the case; for that was more than enough proof that she ate from the same table with God almighty. That was what we were made to believe.

Some of us even envied her. I must confess that I contemplated joining her because she seemed to exude reverence; except that her breath was terrible. It oozed badly. To hold a conversation with her, you had to be extra polite not to shield your nostrils. That was not the news, though.

The news was that Chinwe failed so much and so badly in her exams that she was advised to withdraw. She ended up with no skill and little knowledge except the jumbo she knew as prayers. It was not long after we left school that we heard that she committed suicide, after a night raid at a dingy hotel revealed that she apparently practiced prostitution, part time, for a living.

It was from the Chinwe experience that I extracted a major guiding principle “Prayer is Good, But Prayer and Work Sharing Equal Enthusiasm Is Better.” Now I work or study as if my life depends on it; likewise, I pray as if my life depends on it.

Student: Very enlightening stories.

Chapter Twenty-One

KEEP IT WARM

Teacher: I enjoyed your birthday party yesterday. Thanks for inviting me.

Student: I was very glad that you could come.

Teacher: It was my pleasure to be there. I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed the food. It was warm and nice, although I arrived very late. Usually, when you are that late to a party like that what you get is cold food.

Student: I am happy you enjoyed the food. Which did you have?

Teacher: Rice, jollof rice.

Student: That was my choice too.

Teacher: How did you keep it warm?

Student: By warming.

Teacher: What kind of warming? Were you taking the food intermittently to the kitchen to warm?

Student: No, sir. We had the whole pot of rice sitting on a gentle warmer, which heat it gently but continuously.

Teacher: Can you please say that again?

Student: I said we had a warmer, which kept the rice pot heated gently, mildly and continuously.

Teacher: Interesting. But I did not see any fire under the pot.

Student: We were using a new electrical devise, which is just like a pan upon which the pot sits but it keeps the food warm perpetually.

Teacher: No wonder. It is amazing how life's lessons pop up from everywhere to help us on the way to stardom and success in any field.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: What you have said about the electrical devise is a major lesson that could be useful to you even in your academics.

Student: How sir?

Teacher: Let me illustrate with a story. I was once on a holiday with a friend of mine in a far away country. He was a professional sprinter. It was off season for both of us, so we decided to take a two-week holiday, away from our usual habitat. We had a wonderful line up of things to do places to visit and amusements to have.

Student: I can imagine.

Teacher: I must say we had quite a good time. But that is not why I recall this story.

Student: I have come to realize that in your every story there is a germane lesson.

Teacher: Nice to note that. Now, what was interesting for me in course of this holiday trip was that this athlete friend of mine kept on a routine of physical exercise morning and evening, with probably the same fidelity with which he said his prayers - Without fail.

Student: Really? Even on holidays?

Teacher: I learnt a lot from him that vacation. It did not matter how the day went - good, not so good, exciting, exhausting or otherwise. It did not matter whether we slept late or woke up early, he was faithful.

Student: Faithful?

Teacher: Yes, stridently faithful to his physical exercises, his prayers and his scriptural studies - over which he would spend quite sometime, meditating or contemplating. The unflinching discipline to keep up this routine, even on holidays, was what thrilled and amazed me.

Student: Why?

Teacher: I used to pride myself then as being disciplined but there was my friend far superior to me in that department; teaching how

discipline could be kept. I could not help but ask him why he was so unrelenting in the physical and spiritual exercises.

His explanation was similar to what you told me about keeping the food continuously warm. He said he could not afford to disconnect from his spiritual source even for a day, for that guarantees his all round well-being and flourish.

Student: What wisdom!

Teacher: What wisdom, indeed! I was to find that this wisdom is good no matter the field of endeavour, which for me then was school. From then on, I always kept my brain busy, even though at times, at low intensity but busy all the same. I strongly recommend same to you even as you enjoy this holiday. Stay with your books, keep your brain warm. Keep whatever area in which you wish to excel warm like the food at the party, and it will never fail to please and impress no matter the test.

Student: Thank you, sir.

Chapter Twenty-Two

YOU NEVER WALK ALONE

Teacher: I have a story for you.

Student: You make my day, sir. You know how much I love your stories.

Teacher: I know. I would like to tell you a story about a very close friend of mine.

Student: Is it anyone I know?

Teacher: Maybe.

Student: What does that mean, sir?

Teacher: It is the story of a friend; so close that I could never describe myself outside of him.

Student: Close in what sense, sir?

Teacher: Close in every sense.

Student: Close as a relative? A brother? A sister?

Teacher: Closer, much closer.

Student: Close like shadow?

Teacher: Closer, much closer

Student: This is getting very intriguing.

Teacher: Not a surprise. It is intriguing but as real as anything, anyone you really know. He is also a close confidant.

Student: You mean you could tell him anything?

Teacher: Yes. It is foolhardy not to tell everything.

Student: Why?

Teacher: Because he knows everything.

Student: He knows everything?

Teacher: Sure, he knows everything.

Student: Whao! Is he God?

Teacher: Yes. He duly represents God.

Student: Now I see what you mean.

Teacher: I am glad you do.

Student: But God is always with us all.

Teacher: Yes, in theory.

Student: What do you mean by that, sir?

Teacher: I mean in the sense of general knowledge. Just like I know that there is a fountain down the road, or a cinema at the street corner, or a restaurant behind your house.

Student: I do not understand.

Teacher: I am not surprised. That is why I want to tell you the story of this friend.

Student: The one we are speaking of?

Teacher: No. Not really, another one just to illustrate.

Student: Oh, I see.

Teacher: This is a story about my friend, Ozinga. Many years ago, his father received a message from a relative who lived in a very big city. He wanted Ozinga, a boy of 8 at the time, to come live with him so he could assist with the boy's education. If Ozinga had stayed in the village, he was certainly not going to have any good education because his parents were very poor.

The message was Ozinga's chance to a better life. His parents recognized the opportunity; but his mother was very reluctant to let

Ozinga go. She thought he was too young to leave, that he would be lonesome and grossly unprotected in the big city.

Ozinga's father thought differently. He knew he was going to miss his son but he wanted to do everything to encourage the boy to make the move. Ozinga complained that he was going to be lonely without his beloved parents. He really did not want to go. His father assured him that he would go with him but not physically. He said to Ozinga that he would always be in his presence and that Ozinga could prove that for himself, even though he was not physically within sight.

Student: How is that?

Teacher: That is the story. His father assured him that he was always with him and that what he needed to do was listen to the inner voice within him. He said anytime Ozinga needed anything, advice or direction, he should ask as if he, his father, was actually there and then listen to the voice within for answer. He said Ozinga would actually hear him, his father, speak.

Ozinga did not believe his father but he put it to test and it worked! It worked at play and it worked in school. It worked everywhere. Each time the voice he heard was that of his father and the reasoning of the voice within was clearly the pattern of his father. Then Ozinga started believing. From that point on he knew that he never walked alone. He knew he went everywhere with his father. So in the big city, he was never lonely. He survived and prospered assisted by the enduring presence of his unseen companion, his father.

You know, you chose your own companion. It could be your real father or your Heavenly Father or anyone else. The one you choose will offer help only to the extent that he can help himself. So the more competent your choice of the unseen guide, the better the quality of advice that you get at every turn especially if you ask and really listen.

Chapter Twenty-Three

PRIZE GIVING DAY

Teacher: It was a very colorful ceremony.

Student: Thanks for inviting me. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was very uplifting.

Teacher: I usually like to witness prize giving day ceremonies in schools, no matter where it is held.

Student: I did not realize that a primary school could make it so interesting.

Teacher: I have been to that school's award ceremony twice. It has always been very rewarding.

Student: I was particularly thrilled by the excitement on the faces of the very young ones as they were called upon to receive their prizes. Young as they were, they seemed to realize the importance of their achievements.

Teacher: Maybe not as much as the parents, many of whom may have failed to enjoy such privileges in their own time. They hoped to recoup the missed experience through their children.

Student: I can imagine, sir, that such parents are usually more demanding of those prizes from their children.

Teacher: Sometimes, it is really those parents who have actually known the thrill of receiving prizes as children that are harder on their children for prizes. Such award ceremonies are often for them very nostalgic. It is like the gush of emotions that fill a veteran champion when the young ones are being crowned. It is like the feeling of the older couples at the wedding of younger relatives. Through the new, the old is renewed, the love and nostalgia rekindled. The experiences relived.

Student: Sir, you speak like the occasion flooded you with images of your own days in school.

Teacher: That is correct. I will not deny it. It took me back to those competitive days when the prize giving day distinguished the excellent from the very good. I loved those days. As a small child in school, I used to long for the prize giving days.

Student: To show off?

Teacher: Yes, to show off. To show the bullies, where it really matters. To show all my vainglorious classmates, that their place was officially behind me.

Student: Sir, wasn't that a mean way to think?

Teacher: I did not think so then and I still do not think so now. For me the prize giving is what, in a manner of speaking, separated the men, from the boys. But there was a far more important reason why I loved the prize giving day.

Student: Why?

Teacher: It was my chance to give back a little bit to my parents who, through their humble jobs, were giving everything so I could be in school. The prize day was my chance to say "Thank You" to them. It was my chance to encourage them. It was my chance to assure them that their labor will not be in vain.

Student: How touching!

Teacher: Oh yes. For me, the prize giving day was more than Christmas. It was my chance to put a big broad smile on the faces of my parents. It was my chance to put pride in their eyes and a chip on their shoulders for once. It was my chance to put them on center stage, so they could feel like stars once in a whole year.

Student: Oh, so touching!

Teacher: Yes, very touching. The prize giving day meant the world to me. It was a day that I knew my parents would be in their best clothes to come to school. Often their best clothes were nowhere near the garments of the rich parents. But I knew that once we came to the high point of the event, my parents' clothes would no longer matter. The back position where they sat or stood would no longer matter.

The importance of other parents' jewelry and splendor would fade, when my name would be called and called repeatedly. For each

time my name was called, I never failed to look inside my father's eyes. It said everything, every time.

Student: What?

Teacher: It is difficult to tell without bringing tears into my eyes now. But let me just say that the look in my father's eyes, in those moments, once a year was and remain for me indescribable. The look was that of a deep inner healing, it was hope, it was pride, and it was a rare glint of glory. It was faith that the future was surely going to be better. His eyes were materialized fulfillment and unrestrained gratitude for blessings he thought undeserved.

Student: You bring me close to tears.

Teacher: I do not blame you. I have to fight back mine. But my heart is filled with the joy of those days.

Student: I can imagine.

Teacher: You needn't imagine much. Did you see the young man who stood out in the arena at the mention of his daughter's name? The man in the resplendent grey suit and orange bow tie.

Student: His pride was palpable. He was there for the prize even before his daughter got to the stage.

Teacher: That is how jubilant many parents feel about star performances of their children. Can you imagine if students all really knew that? Can you imagine the length they could go to make their parents proud on prize giving day?

Student: Frankly sir, I do not know what other students would do. But for me, from today I promise myself that all prize-giving days in school would be dedicated to making my parents proud. I promise to fill their eyes with so much joy that I, too, would have difficulty describing someday.

Chapter Twenty-Four

SSSH.....SILENCE PLEASE

Student: Sir, why is it that very bright and creative people generally appear to be at their best in quiet environments?

Teacher: I imagine that should be obvious.

Student: I know it is because the quiet enables them to concentrate.

Teacher: Good.

Student: Could that be the only reason?

Teacher: Do you think there is something else?

Student: I do not know. Just asking? Just a hunch.

Teacher: What do you mean by a hunch, here?

Student: I just have this intuition, maybe a deep feeling that there could be more to it than just the need for a quiet environment where concentration could be enhanced.

Teacher: I believe your hunch is right.

Student: Really?

Teacher: Yes.

Student: I'm glad to know that. This had been gnawing on my mind for quite a while now. I mean this question. Almost all the very intelligent and decent people that I admire appear to have great love for the quiet place; either to live, or just to stay, stare and think.

Teacher: People sometimes tend to regard such persons, quite erroneously, as anti-social loners.

Student: That is how even in school we often brand the very brightest amongst us.

Teacher: You remind me of one of my closest friends while I was in the university. Anytime you could not find him either in the room, library or the drama theatre he was almost certainly at a remote section of the sea front. Quiet. Just staring at the sea and listening to the silence.

Today he stands tall as easily one of the most profound of our spiritual philosophers and a truly happy and successful man - very wise and ageless.

Student: That is the kind of person I look forward to becoming sometime in the future. I guess it is because of my love for such people that I have pondered over this question of their attraction to quiet places for a long time. It occurs to me that what they get from the quiet must be more than the quiet. Now you confirm it.

Teacher: Well put, son. What they get is certainly more than the quiet which is their initial desire. They look always for a quiet environment where they could concentrate with the least possible distraction and focus their energies.

Have you ever done the experiment in Physics in which you focus the energy of sun rays through a special lens?

Student: Yes, sir. That experiment is fresh on my mind. We did it a few weeks before this vacation.

Teacher: What did you observe?

Student: We found that by converging sun rays through the convex lens, we could actually burn a paper placed underneath the lens.

Teacher: Exactly. That is evidence of the power of concentration. When people minimize distractions to the barest, through the help of quiet environments, they could focus their energies better to penetrate or absorb the substance of whatever they are studying. This explains the need for quiet anywhere people are involved in study - class, library or wherever. But as you said, there is more benefit than the mere quiet itself.

Student: I'm all ears, sir!

Teacher: You see, all great thoughts come from silence. Silence is the harbinger, the library, the custodian of all great solutions, ideas, inventions or what have you.

Erroneously people believe that they are the ones who come up with great ideas of any sort. The truth is that those ideas already exist in the universe and silence coupled with personal affinity for that idea, attracts it to our minds.

You must have experienced a situation where pondering a particular question, an active way of setting up affinity, the relevant idea just floats weightless like a feather into your mind. Then suddenly the problem is illuminated with the solution in a split second; and you are filled with joy.

Student: Surely sir. This has happened to me several times, especially in my attempts to solve mathematical problems that have for long proved difficult. Suddenly, while ruminating over the problem, the solution just appears to sneak into my awareness and makes the problem so simple to solve that I marvel.

Teacher: Fantastic. You have the experience. That is what silence or quiet, as you say, does for you. It provides you with an optimum environment for maximum concentration and feeds you with ideas and answers long elusive. It is as if the silence helps open your mind; or your inner eyes and inner ears and subtly directs them to see a solution that may have been lurking around unseen because of the noise in the environment. For, as I said, in silence is the solution to all problems. With good affinity set up through inner questioning, or what some call contemplation, you may be lucky to attract that which you seek.

Student: So silence must contain the world's greatest treasures then?

Teacher: Where do you think all the good things have come from? Where do you think you have manifested from? Where do you think all has come from?

Student: Silence?

Teacher: Silence of course. From silence they come. To silence they return.

Chapter Twenty-Five

PRACTICE Q & A

Teacher: There is one technique that worked very well for me. I keep forgetting to let you know.

Student: I am glad you remember it today.

Teacher: I am glad too. But something prompted the remembrance.

Student: What did?

Teacher: I ran into Paulo, an old schoolmate. He was such a bright student especially at the university. He was so bright that he wrote books even before he got to the final year.

Student: Oh yeah?

Teacher: Really. He was so bright that he was delegated by lecturers to take tutorial classes involving not only junior students but, in some cases, his own very classmates.

Student: What do you mean by tutorial, sir?

Teacher: Sorry, I just assumed you knew. Tutorials are simply study periods for instructions to smaller groups, so students have a chance to look at some more practical application of the issues from a lecture.

Student: I see.

Teacher: In our particular case, we had options of which tutorial class to attend. Many elected to attend that under Paulo, although he was a fellow student. I guess people were overly impressed by a student who had written a book which even some lecturers bought.

Let me add however that I was not one of those who attended his tutorial class.

Student: Why? Were you envious?

Teacher: No, far from that. He was a very bright student. But as far as I was concerned he was not a great tutorial instructor. I had other ideas of how a tutorial should be conducted to best benefit me.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: Paulo's tutorial class was more like a direct continuation of lectures; where you were taught theories, philosophies and the like. He was profuse with explanations. I must say this impressed many; but not me.

Student: That is my point of interest. Why not you, sir?

Teacher: He just did not conduct the class in a manner which I liked. Well, this is besides the fact that he carried such bushy forest as hair.

Student: How would you have wanted him to conduct the tutorial class?

Teacher: Largely in the manner in which both of us have our discussions. More like a dialogue. Especially more like a question and answer session; something I generally like to refer to as Q and A sessions.

Student: Wasn't his session Q and A?

Teacher: No. He rather gave additional lectures, additional information and all that.

Student: But that is impressive.

Teacher: Yes, I know. But I am sad to tell you that most of those who attended his class hardly made any grades beyond 'C' in our own set.

Student: Oh? Why?

Teacher: I think precisely because of what I thought was wrong with his tutorial style. I guess students liked him because he did not require them doing any work before attending his class. All he did was feed them with more and more facts. In many cases he overfed them with facts and figures well beyond what the real lecturers gave.

Student: Are you implying, sir, that his method made students lazy?

Teacher: No. What I am saying is that his method was good for lazy students who did not want to work on their own.

Student: I do not understand, sir.

Teacher: To attend a tutorial class based on the Q and A model required the active participation of the audience - the students. This is a model which requires you, the student, to have done your homework properly and then expects you to come with questions which aim to clarify areas that you may not have understood in course of your reading.

Students in a Q and A session are expected to then have their questions or comments based on the work they had already done on the topic. This is what they contribute for responses either from the teacher or from fellow students who might have a better understanding of the particular facet being discussed.

Student: I see. What you are saying is that to get the most out of a tutorial class one must do his homework by reading up the topic to be discussed.

Teacher: Yes. I would say do not just read it. Read it in painstaking detail; then frame questions around the areas where clarification is required for your better understanding. The questions or comments you come up with are then what you take to the class. If indeed all the students do that, you would have a most enriching and rewarding session. You would receive new information situated in the context of what you already know and that would aid far better and deeper understanding.

Student: I see.

Teacher: I would recommend this Q and A method not only for tutorial classes but for all sorts of classes. I would even recommend it for your regular school, religious or spiritual classes. In fact, classes of any kind! Be proactive.

Student: What do you mean by “Be Proactive”, sir?

Teacher: I mean take the initiative. Do not wait for the lecture. Get the lecture from other sources in one form or the other before it is actually delivered. Take your questions to the lecture based on the reading or research you have done around the topic and see what difference it makes.

Chapter Twenty-Six

CHARGE YOUR BATTERIES

Student: Sir, I tried to reach you yesterday through your mobile phone to confirm our meeting today.

Teacher: So sorry, my phone must have been off. I realized this late in the day.

Student: What happened?

Teacher: It was the battery. It had run down. I forgot to charge it overnight as usual.

Student: Oh I see. It happens.

Teacher: Oh yes, I know it happens. But it can be quite an upset when people cannot reach you, and you are not even conscious of the fact.

Student: I can understand. It happens to me too.

Teacher: Sometimes I wonder if it also happens when God is trying to reach us or warn us about something and our spiritual batteries are just dead.

Student: Does God try to reach us in similar ways?

Teacher: Maybe not in similar ways but in various ways. I think God is perpetually trying to reach us.

Student: I have never thought about that.

Teacher: Well, I think those who expect the guidance of God look out for it; they listen for it. Some do have a knack for finding it in the sights or hearing it in the sounds around. But that is of course if their spiritual batteries are charged enough to pick up the signals.

Student: You sound mysterious sometimes.

Teacher: I am sorry if I do.

Student: Please do not get me wrong, sir. I really appreciate your thoughts no matter the subject and I come away always far better off.

Teacher: The lessons of life are in everything, if you care to look for them. So as we converse we, of course, stumble on them.

Student: I understand.

Teacher: I know you do. But let me illustrate further. Imagine that by trying to call me yesterday you wanted to warn me of an impending danger. Imagine, for instance, that you were to warn me not to take a particular route to town the next morning because you happened to know that a big tree had fallen across that road.

Now because my batteries were not charged I would, of course, not have gotten the message and thus would have proceeded to suffer the inconveniences and losses that you were trying to save me from.

As it is with human communication, so it is with spiritual communication. Often we do not pick up the signals, the same way that a transistor radio with dead batteries would not be able to pick up radio signals.

Student: Sir, can you use an illustration that relates to school, something I can easily relate to?

Teacher: Ok. Imagine that you were to have an exam and a cunning teacher had directed you to specific reading materials for the paper, knowing he was going to set the test based on completely different topics.

Imagine that one of the students had his antenna up and received spiritual advice to read those particular topics, in addition to the ones specified and thus performed far better than his mates. Can you relate to that? Is that a practical enough illustration about how keeping your spiritual batteries charged can help you in school?

Student: Certainly, sir. In fact I think I have had this kind of good fortune before. While reading the topics which this teacher gave us to prepare, I had a strong urge to go beyond them to a particular topic which he did not mention. It happened that nearly half of the questions eventually came from that topic; and of course I shone.

I did far better than all my classmates who then moaned about how they were deceived; and gossiped about how I could have been favored by the teacher, whom everyone knew was very fond of me. I tried to explain but no one believed me.

Teacher: That is how it works. You were able to pick up the signals through “a strong urge,” as you put it. That is just one of the ways the signal comes. There are others.

Student: Which?

Teacher: Too many, more than the human mind can fathom. There are dreams and sudden inner sights or insights, for instance. It could come through the voice of others, or an inner voice. It could come through a scene in front of you. Anyway, anything can be used to pass a message to you.

Student: But how does one get a message meant for him?

Teacher: I am sure you do not really expect me to have the answer for all situations, for it is extremely difficult to predict how the message would come to people. What I believe requires attention is simply taking time to keep your spiritual batteries charged.

Student: How do I do that?

Teacher: There again, I cannot interfere. Each must find his own way, depending on what his religious or spiritual faith is. But this much I think is safe enough to say Do whatever keeps you in close touch with the Divine within you.

Practice keeping in touch with IT, in whatever way you prefer - prayer, meditation, contemplation, mantras, repeating the holy names of God, ever reminding yourself of the presence of the Most High, reading and chewing over the Holy Scriptures, quiet conversations with God, acts of love, a feeling of true gratitude, etc. It all depends on what the individual prefers or, better still, what really works for him or her.

Let me say this, none has ever achieved anything great without the support of this inner communication. It helps to keep the batteries charged, whatever your goal.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

BLAME NO TEACHER

Teacher: I had a good laugh yesterday in the company of two of my former school mates.

Student: You must have been talking about the good old days?

Teacher: Oh yes, the good old days. I wonder why everyone always thinks the old days were good. I guess the past always appears somewhat more romantic.

Student: What stories did you share?

Teacher: What we laughed about yesterday were not really stories as such, but reminiscences of what happened in school. In fact the discussion centered more on blame.

Student: Blame?

Teacher: Yes, blame. Each was trying to outdo the other in blaming different teachers for not offering one subject or other in the final class and external exam.

Student: How, sir?

Teacher: As you may know, students often complain that because of some behavior or teaching method of a teacher or the other, they took a dislike for a subject. Haven't you heard such complaints?

Student: Very much sir. It is common. We complain about teachers discouraging us, in one form or the other, from doing well in a subject or the other.

Teacher: Exactly. This was generally the thrust of our discussion. And the reasons ranged from the reasonable to the ridiculous.

Student: What were the reasons?

Teacher: One said he had to drop a particular subject because the teacher had a bad eye, so you never quite knew where he was looking at any time.

He said once when he thought the teacher was looking at the window, he was actually directly watching him joking with his friend in the far end of the class. He said this put him off and from then he hardly showed any interest in the subject.

Student: Really?

Teacher: Another said he lost interest in a subject because the teacher had body odor; and that since he sat in front, being one of the smallest or, more precisely, shortest in class, his seat was usually just before the teacher. He said his acute sense of smell forced him to drop the subject because he was tired of the bad smell. That was how he ended up not offering the subject in our final exams.

Student: Amazing.

Teacher: If you saw him complaining you would not help feeling that his reason was genuine. I could not help sympathizing with him. But the one that amused me was the reason that one gave for not offering geography.

He said one day, I believe in their penultimate year in secondary school, the geography teacher, perhaps in an attempt to get the students to be serious, announced that the study of various aspects of the syllabus would take them a year each. He also repeatedly told them that the study of Nigerian geography would take them a whole year and that the study of African geography would take them another whole year.

The teacher also told them that studying the geography of Asia would take them a whole year and those of North and South America would each take them a whole year. He went on and on about how various aspects would each claim a whole year. By the time he had finished this young man, lets call him Tade, had calculated altogether 6 years to cover the syllabus, yet they had less than two years to their final exams. He reached his conclusion and opted out of geography.

Student: But the teacher must have been joking.

Teacher: Tade swore the teacher was not joking; at least not by the looks on his face. He concluded that the teacher was indirectly announcing that passing the course in two years would be impossible, since by his program they could not possibly have covered the syllabus by then.

Student: But did some others take the subject?

Teacher: Sure some did and passed creditably. Some even made distinctions.

Student: So the geography teacher was not that bad after all.

Teacher: No he was not. His statement had simply been wrongly interpreted by Tade.

Student: What a pity!

Teacher: What a pity indeed because from what I gathered, Tade was one of the best geography students then. Even more lamentable was the story by Kele who always dreamed of being a lawyer. In his final class he dropped history, which was then a requisite for law candidates.

Student: Why did he do that?

Teacher: According to Kele, not his real name, the history teacher had a penchant for mixing up his tenses and *verbing* at will.

Student: What is *verbing*?

Teacher: *Verbing* was the slang for speaking wrong English in school then. Another word for it was *kpoi*. Those who mixed up tenses and the like were said to be *verbing* or *kpoing* and were generally ridiculed.

Kele, a very good English language student, was particularly good at picking out the *verbage* in anyone's expression of the language. Then he would laugh at them until tears stood on his eyes. This he did no matter who was involved. You can then guess what happened in the history class with a teacher "madly generous with *kpoi*?"

Student: But was the history teacher a good one?

Teacher: Kele said he was. The only trouble he had with him was what he described as the man's "odious cocktail of misplaced tenses".

Student: What a shame!

Teacher: What a shame indeed. I think Kele would have made an excellent lawyer but he just couldn't overlook the faults of the history teacher and take personal responsibility for his subjects and his future.

Student: Sad.

Teacher: Sad indeed.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

WATCH THAT TV

Teacher: You do not look happy this morning. What is the matter, my friend?

Student: Sir, I was actually coming to complain to you.

Teacher: What is the matter? You quarreled with a classmate?

Student: No, sir. It is about something that happened at home.

Teacher: Home?

Student: Yes, sir. It is actually between my father and I.

Teacher: This is getting interesting. So what makes you think I can help with that?

Student: Because I think you can approach my dad on this one, on my behalf.

Teacher: Anyway, let's hear the story. What did he do?

Student: He ordered that the television in my room be taken away to the store. Now my TV which I had enjoyed throughout the vacation has been removed. I do not feel good about it; but my dad insists it is for my own good.

Teacher: Did he explain why he believes so?

Student: He said he made a mistake to have bought me the television in the first place.

Teacher: But why did he do that?

Student: He promised.

Teacher: He promised to buy you a TV for your room?

Student: Yes, sir.

Teacher: Quite unlike your dad. What warranted the promise?

Student: I had accused him of being unfair, because he had a television in his room which he rarely watched. So I requested that it be transferred to my room.

Teacher: And he agreed?

Student: He paused a while and admitted that I had a point about him hardly using the television, but added that he still used it even if minimally. He then proceeded to use my desire as an incentive for me. He does that very often. I have grown to know that. He said if I desired a television in my room I would have it, provided I came first in class that term. That was last term.

Teacher: Very interesting.

Student: So I worked even harder for that reason and I came first.

Teacher: Then he fulfilled his promise?

Student: Characteristically.

Teacher: I like that very much. Your dad is truly a man of his word.

Student: That is precisely the problem now.

Teacher: What?

Student: He promised and delivered the television. Now, after only 6 or 7 weeks he has ordered its removal!

Teacher: What reasons did he give for the removal?

Student: The expected reasons of course. He said it would be a distraction as school resumes. He said it would waste my time. He said I would become a TV addict.

Teacher: Does he have a point?

Student: Well, maybe he has a point but I am surely not going to be a TV addict.

Teacher: Would you know when you transform from a regular viewer to an addict?

Student: I guess so, sir.

Teacher: How many people have you ever seen owning up as addicts? They have the craving, which they continuously satisfy. As long they can afford the addiction and it has not caused any visible physical or psychological damage, they do not see themselves as addicts. The transition from the regular consumer to the addict is so smooth as to happen unconsciously. Maybe your dad is trying to save you.

Student: But I do not watch TV for that long.

Teacher: Or maybe he is trying to motivate you to maintain your current performance.

Student: How, sir?

Teacher: By withdrawing the TV. That way you can focus on your studies. TV and study are competitors. Both demand time. It is difficult to satisfy both. One has to suffer. Your dad may have thought of this and made the decision for you.

Student: But he has TV in his own room.

Teacher: Do you have his level of discipline? Be honest. Can you discipline yourself to have your TV off as much as he does when you know there are interesting programs all the time; with so many choices in the digital channels?

Student: No sir.

Teacher: That is honest. Your dad knows that and that is why he risks your anger for your greater good. Television is an excellent thief of time. It requires you to do nothing except sit back and enjoy. Not many young people can resist that temptation. What your dad has done is to make it easier for you to resist.

If I may add, TV is not really good for the development of your young mind. Books are by far better because they engage and force you to use your mind, either by providing the requisite image to complement what you are reading or by forcing you to reason, to think. TV virtually does everything for you - it gives you the word and also supplies the image. The brain does virtually nothing but

enjoy. Now tell me honestly, is there anything to gain from doing virtually nothing?

Student: I daresay, virtually nothing.

Teacher: Again, that is honest. No grind no growth. Need I say more?

Chapter Twenty-Nine

SURVIVE INDEPENDENCE

Student: Happy Independence Anniversary.

Teacher: Thank you but which independence anniversary are you referring to?

Student: It is my country's independence anniversary or don't you share the joy with us?

Teacher: Of course I share the joy with you. It is just that independence anniversary means so many things or, rather, so many times to me. So when you say "Happy Independence Anniversary", I have to rummage through my mental library of dates to figure out which independence you are talking about.

Student: I do not get it, sir. Are there different independence anniversaries?

Teacher: For me, yes. There are numerous.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: I would rather tell you a story.

Student: Characteristic!

Teacher: I beg your pardon.

Student: Nothing, sir. I am waiting to enjoy the story.

Teacher: Ok, listen. This was a story I heard from my favorite teacher which I would modify slightly to convey my intended meaning.

Student: As usual, I cannot wait to hear the story, sir.

Teacher: I know you love stories, but I would keep this brief.

Student: Alright, sir.

Teacher: Once upon a time, there existed a great community with a very unusual custom of discarding kings that ruled over them. Every 15 years they would pick a new king. No matter how well the incumbent performed or how healthy or young he was, once he had clocked 15 years on the throne he must be replaced with another.

Student: Strange.

Teacher: The stranger part was what happened to the king after completing his tenure.

Student: What, sir?

Teacher: He was led into the wild forest of dangerous animals.

Student: To the wild forest of dangerous animals!?

Teachers: Yes. This forest had the fiercest animals. No king was known to have survived it.

Student: The animals killed him?

Teacher: Of course in a matter of days, in some cases, hours.

Student: What a custom!

Teacher: What a custom indeed. Same fate befell every king. At least this was the case until the reign of Nganga who was determined not to suffer the same fate as the many kings before him. Usually for the 15 years that a king reigned, all his every desire or need was met by the community. There was nothing that the king wanted that he did not have.

The king was dependent on the community for everything, from food to fashion. Nganga decided, to the community's chagrin, to forfeit this privilege as a strategy for surviving the post-kingship days in the wild forest.

Student: How?

Teacher: He decided he was not going to depend on the community but would rather fend for himself all the way, while still governing. He joined the rest of the community in farming, hunting, fishing, building, etc. Initially this behavior was abhorred by the community who insisted the king must sit on the throne and be catered for. But Nganga would not budge. Since he had a mandatory 15 years to

govern the community just allowed him, knowing his reign would come to an end and they could revert to feting their kings as usual.

As Nganga worked with them, he picked up skills for survival. He became very creative in solving problems, strong and rugged. The community grew to love their unusual king, who offered leadership in all spheres of their community life and led by example. But 15 years was soon over and he had to be led to the wild forest.

Nganga had prepared for the day and was glad to go. Months later news filtered back to the community that he was still alive and indeed lived in a wonderful house surrounded by a well cultivated and beautiful garden. His wives, children and servants could neither restrain nor withhold themselves. With the help of an elated community they went in his search, found him and founded another community where Nganga reigned for the rest of his life.

Student: What a story! What a happy ending!

Teacher: I am glad you like it. But notice that King Nganga's story is your story. You are just like him; today a student cared for by your teachers and parents who fend for your every need. They do this faithfully knowing that some day your own kingship would be up and you would have to be led into the wild jungle of society for your own independence. If by then you have not imbibed skills of survival which you are being taught today as character and learning, you would have nobody but yourself to blame. The choice is yours to be like King Nganga or those before him.

Chapter Thirty

DON'T TRY TOO HARD

Student: Sir, I am sorry I could not keep our last appointment.

Teacher: That is OK. Why didn't you come? You had another engagement?

Student: No, sir.

Teacher: So what happened?

Student: I was at home but deeply depressed.

Teacher: What? Deeply depressed? Why?

Student: I once again failed to qualify as a neophyte golfer (or to make my "handicap" as is technically referred to). I have been trying to earn my basic handicap for a long time now. I really thought I was ready this time.

But I was nervous. Having the handicap meant so much to me. I guess the nervousness, coupled with my fear of failing again caused me to panic and falter badly. I played worse than I had ever played in all my practice sessions.

Teacher: What do you think was responsible?

Student: I think I was just too anxious. I wanted the handicap too badly. That made me nervous. I guess I tried too hard.

Teacher: Why did you try too hard?

Student: Because I was afraid of failing again.

Teacher: I am glad we are talking about this. At least this way I can share my own experiences with you so you can see that there is nothing strange about you. Most people go through this phase, sometime or the other. It should not bother you that much.

Student: What experience are you referring to sir?

Teacher: Numerous but let me narrate one that occurred when I was a boy scout. 12 of us had been selected for simple tests that would determine who should lead. I wanted the leadership experience badly. One of the tests, the one that I failed, was crossing a river atop a fairly narrow plank, hanging several meters above the fast moving river.

The challenge was to stay balanced on the narrow plank until you crossed. I remember the test because of how badly I felt after failing it. As it got to my turn, my anxiety had grown beyond my control. I wanted to win too badly. I was ready to try too hard.

Student: Just like me.

Teacher: I tried. I tried too hard and ended up falling into the river and of course failed the test. This was a piece of plank that I could easily have walked on for miles without falling off, if it were lying on the hard ground. But just because this was a bridge over a river, the anxiety of not falling off caused me to concentrate too hard. I tried hard. And in the end I tried too hard.

This is generally the consequence with anything that we try too hard for. The resulting anxiety tends to inhibit our performance and enlarge our fears, driving us to manifest to a self-fulfilling prophecy - the fear of falling, causing us to actually fall.

Student: You say this applies in every endeavor?

Teacher: I would suggest so trying too hard generally yields the opposite result. Even with studies! I am sure you have many examples of fellow students who tried too hard not to fail, but ended up failing. Maybe not because they ordinarily should not have passed but because they read too much, and possibly, hardly slept the whole night preceding the exam.

Trying too hard is often a manifestation of loss of self-belief, trust and confidence. The resulting nervousness, fear and anxiety often beget failure or performance much below that of an otherwise confident candidate. It is for the same reason that most nervous penalty takers in soccer end up missing target. The loss of confidence is already itself an admission of failure. Little wonder it is failure that results.

I once witnessed the miracle of how a child of about 6 months was saved from falling from the top floor of a 5-storey building. By some negligence the child had crawled to the corridor railing with gaps big enough to take the baby. An additional movement forward and the baby would have come tumbling down to an almost certain death.

Just then the mother instinctively turned, saw her baby, and was thrown into a frenzy of panic. She yelled, but luckily her voice was muffled by the quick hands of her husband which cupped her mouth. He too had just noticed the deadly situation.

But he was a calmer person who realized the consequences of trying too hard at such times. Calmly he called out to the little baby, who in turn responded by stopping to listen to his voice. That was all the split second required for the man to swoop the child away from danger and certain death.

The dad was later to attribute his heroic effort to the cooperation of his wife who understood his action in that trying moment of stopping her from panicking. In her frenzy she would have tried too hard and the baby, almost certainly, would have plunged to death. Although he, himself, was also apprehensive and anxious but not panicky, his natural calmness helped him control his fear and prevented him from trying too hard and acting desperate with possible fatal missteps.

Student: Sir, what is the difference between trying hard and trying too hard.

Teacher: Difficult question. Perhaps the difference lies in anxiety, in acting out of fear as against acting out of love. Trying hard is working for success. Trying too hard is working against success.

Chapter Thirty-One

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER

Teacher: Once upon a time there lived a very hardworking prince in some distant land. He and the rest of his community were victims of war, displaced and sentenced to refugee status where they were being maltreated. Many accepted their new condition of misery and became beggars on the street.

The ravages of the war made no discrimination between the common man and royalty. All were equalized by misery so much that those who knew the background of the prince (let's call him Ude) mocked him about his past, calling him prince in jest. The more charitable ones called him pauper.

No dehumanizing abuse was spared to humiliate Prince Ude, for the land where they took refuge was incidentally that of his clan's bitter rivals who had earlier been subjects of their kingdom. The new turn of history was seen as their turn to rubbish the royalty that once ruled over them. Ude, the only surviving member of the family, was therefore the butt of their jokes; singled out for all manner of jeers.

They rained abuses about how he was no good, how he was being punished by the gods, how he was beneath them and not worthy of a place as a servant in their households. Ude's clansmen accepted their new status as beggars. Many even began to believe that they were never-do-wells.

But not Udeh. In spite of the circumstances the prince never, for once, forgot who he was. He reminded himself incessantly that he was prince and that it was forbidden for a true prince to beg. So he never succumbed to begging, no matter how difficult and rough it got. He would rather bear all possible humiliation and spare no ounce of energy in order to earn his own living.

He lent himself as a hand in the farms, in the markets and at homes. The fact that he was mocked as "Prince" did not matter. He was more content to ensure that whatever he got he earned, as is expected of a prince of his kingdom. Nothing could break his spirit or obscure his self-belief. He was convinced of who he was and nothing in the universe was going to take that away from him.

One day the kingdom of their refuge was itself attacked by another clan of adventurers to satisfy an expansionist desire. The erstwhile hosts then also became refugees like Ude and his people. In the course of interacting with their new rulers Ude was identified as

an extremely talented, imaginative and thoughtful person, poor as he was. Soon they found him a role in their administration.

Over time the new rulers discovered that he was actually a prince of one of their subject states. As he found favor in their eyes, they deployed him to rule on their behalf over his own clan. That was how Ude, through a strange turn of history, reclaimed the throne and dignity of his forebears.

All those who saw him as a refugee bore witness to his steadfastness. They testified to the fact that not even in the most difficult of circumstances did Ude for once renounce, by actions, conscious or unconscious, his prince-hood and the dignity of his clan as reposed in his royalty. For this, his people loved him and held him in the highest esteem. Ude ruled over them for many years until his death in old age.

Student: What a story!

Teacher: I hoped you liked it?

Student: I loved it!

Teacher: I am glad.

Student: He must have been a man of very strong character to have survived with his self-belief, all the bruises and damnation imposed by the circumstance of a refugee in a hostile environment.

Teacher: You are so brilliant. You get the import of the story right away. The strength of character. It is in difficult, tough and humiliating circumstances that it is truly tested. That is when you doubt yourself and your abilities. That is when you lose faith in yourself and your identity. That is when the environment begins to dictate who you must be. That is when you are made in the likeness of others so easily. Only strength of character can resist the onslaught that most people would succumb to.

Student: Sir, where can I find this strength of character? Is there something I can read to help me?

Teacher: Surely there are lots you can read to help you develop strength of character. But the greatest help you will need is inside you! That is where your true self resides, not on the outside. That is where you would find the greatness in you. Some would even say that is where you would find God.

You must be familiar with the story of Ezi, your schoolmate.

Student: The one who won the Governor's prize?

Teacher: Exactly.

Student: Ezi joined the school as a class 3 student from another school. We were then in Class 1. His parents had been transferred from the rural area where he had been one of their best students in years. He believed that he was the best until he came to our school. Here he found that standards were far higher than what he knew and that his best could only earn him a humble position in the new school. His pride was hurt. Ezi was mocked by his classmates as a village school champion who could not compete in the city school.

In spite of this, he never lost faith in himself. His strength of character came to the fore. Ezi refused to relinquish his self-conviction as the best. He was therefore ready to put in all the hard work necessary to reclaim this position, even in the new school. He set to work and buried himself in his books. His father believed in him, too, and provided for him a coach at home to help him catch up with the new standard.

Teacher: That is basically the story of Ezi. At first it was difficult. His mates mocked him as a village champion who could not compete in the city. His new grades seemed to buttress that fact. But he would accept none of them. Ezi would only accept himself as the best and nothing could persuade otherwise. No amount of hostility from his environment or even the facts of his grades would shake his faith in himself.

After the initial years of struggle Ezi caught up and manifested his faith in himself as indeed not only the best in his new school but in the entire region, winning therefore the Governor's Prize.

Student: That is strength of character.

Teacher: Now you know.

Chapter Thirty-Two

LOVING BY STUDYING

Student: Sir, I have been looking forward to this meeting today hoping there would be another story.

Teacher: I am glad you look forward to the stories. I enjoy them myself even as I tell them.

Student: So there is a story for me today?

Teacher: Yes, but a very short one.

Student: It does not matter sir. I am glad to hear it. The stories help me to have a better understanding of the truth you teach.

Teacher: Again I am glad to hear that. You make my day. Now the story which I have today is not fiction. It is true. You must know the Ukalas.

Student: The Ukalas! Yes sir, I know them. The twins! Yes I know them.

Teacher: The non-identical twins as some describe them today.

Student: Oh yes, sir. But are they really twins?

Teacher: They are twins. They used to be more identical when we were growing up. They also did almost everything alike.

Student: How come they seem so different today, in looks and I think in their views of life, even in religion!

Teacher: The difference started to show in the university.

Student: But they are both doctors today.

Teacher: Yes, in name. Only one of them is actually practicing. The other has long been decertified because of incompetence.

Student: Oh, I did not know that.

Teacher: He is not allowed to practice.

Student: How sir? How did he turn out incompetent?

Teacher: That is the story.

Student: I see.

Teacher: They are from a very religious background. Both of their parents were leaders of their sect. So both children were raised in line with the principles of their faith. They both embraced the teachings and became very devout and pious.

In the university, one of them, Kamu, took his religiosity to extremes and paid more attention to evangelism than his medical studies. The repercussions from this behavior split the family into two ideological camps. Kamu's twin, Ewe, on the other hand placed far higher priority on his studies, while still practicing his religion quietly. Ewe had the full support of his father, who was very unhappy with Kamu.

On the contrary their mother understood Kamu and gave him succor, support and even subtle encouragement; believing that the things of heaven should be given more priority over earthly issues including studies. The effort of their father to try to persuade Kamu and his wife otherwise did not yield fruits. Each held fast to his or her position. This disagreement ran so deep and bitter that it actually split the family.

The parents separated and so did the twins. Kamu lived with his mother, while Ewe lived with his father. The position of Ewe and his dad was that medicine, like other professions and occupations, was merely an instrument for loving God through practically caring for his creatures.

It was in line with the primary injunction of their religion to love God above all else. Father and son believed that a prime way of showing this love for God was to shower love on people whom God created by loving them in tangible, practical ways. One's profession, for them, was one of the major tangible and practical ways. They believed that love must be demonstrated through what one does; and by how well one does it.

For Ewe that translated into becoming the very best doctor that medical school could produce, so he could minister to his patients with masterly expertise, always doing the very best for them. He and his father believed that to do this, was to love God.

Student: Sir, I am a bit confused here.

Teacher: Why?

Student: Did they mean that one's profession is supposed to be a major means for loving God through practically helping other people?

Teacher: Yes and, I am afraid, I agree with them. To say that I am a teacher is simply to say that I have chosen teaching as a prime means of loving God through loving his creatures that I teach. To say that I am a mechanic is to say that I have chosen that vocation as a prime means of loving God through serving those in need of my services. To say I am a lawyer is to say I have chosen law as a prime means of loving God through serving those in need of my services. To serve them best is to serve God best.

Students who love God struggle to become the best in their chosen vocations or professions. They see this as a prime means of returning God's love through serving others.

Student: So to take my studies seriously is to love God?

Teacher: You could not have said better.

Chapter Thirty-Three

THE HEAVEN DWELLERS

Student: Last night I witnessed quite an unusual event while visiting my uncle. His eight-year old son had a project from school and needed white sand for it. He could not find any in the concrete environment of their house. From the balcony his father, who is also my uncle, watched.

Unsuccessful with his search around the house, the child gave up and was about retiring into the house when his father intervened. He urged the child not to give up and advised that he should step out of the compound and walk a few meters down the street where there was a building site.

The boy agreed but called out to his mother to go with him. Again the father intervened. "Go by yourself", he said. The little lad seemed shocked that his father could say that. He cast a furtive look upstairs just to be sure his father meant what he said. Indeed his father meant it for he repeated the order.

The child seemed perplexed. He thought for a while, and announced that he did not need the sand anymore. He explained that his teacher had given him the option of choosing any other material for his project. It didn't necessarily have to be sand. Again the father intervened "You must go and get the sand. Get the sand. If after you have gotten it you decide you do not want it anymore, you can discard it; but get it you must."

The child pleaded, "But I do not need the sand anymore, Daddy." His father retorted, "It does not matter. You must go and get the sand." The boy, now standing at the edge of the street, cast a look back at the gate, as if thinking of dashing quickly back inside. His father seemed to have read his thoughts and threatened "If you do not get the sand, you are going to be locked out and you would possibly have to sleep outside tonight."

It was getting dark. The boy was now visibly afraid. He started crying, shivering. But his father was adamant, unrelenting in his order. By the mound of sand was a shack where two guards watching over the site lived. The guards were in, for the father had sited them. He suggested to his son to go to them, seek their permission and get the cup of sand that he wanted.

The boy became even more petrified and now sobbed loudly, attracting the attention of their domestic servants inside the house two of who rushed out to help. Their emergence miffed the father who

immediately ordered them back into the house. The child must be left alone to face his challenge, he insisted.

Painfully realizing he had no options except to face his fear, the child began lifting one heavy leg after the other, timidly moving, sluggishly approaching the shack. You could tell what a monstrous burden this was for the little lad. From a safe distance, he tried to engage the guards, who obviously sensed his predicament and pitied him.

They were outside earshot but he seemed to have got their nod, because he proceeded to scoop what he could into his cup and walked back, all tears, probably wondering how unjust a dad could be! I was myself shocked at my uncle's hardness at his own son, whom I know he loves dearly.

Shortly afterwards, I announced that I was leaving but my uncle insisted that I should have dinner with them. It was unlike him to insist, so I decided to wait for dinner with the family and I am glad that I did. It was over food that my uncle unraveled the mystery behind his action.

He explained to his son that his insistence was to teach a simple lesson of courage. He recounted how the lad was first full of fear, eventually had no choice but to confront his fear and then successfully achieved his mission. He said this was the usual pattern in the achievement of any worthy objective.

My uncle emphasized that his son must learn to be courageous in all he does. I was to then understand that he did all this against the background of a complaint from the child's school that his son was often too shy to ask questions in class and too afraid to take up active roles in joint projects including drama, dance and the like.

He saw the evidence of this penchant for fear in his too-quick readiness to back down from the search for sand once he realized no one would accompany him. I took the lesson home, in every sense, and was particularly struck by the trouble my uncle had taken just to make the point of courage in our lives.

In fact I remember him paraphrasing what must be a favorite quote "It is true that the meek would inherit earth, but only the bold and courageous would inherit heaven." To inherit the heaven of anything, courage was extremely necessary. He however added that courage must be coupled with caution and common sense.

I went home wondering and pondering over this lesson, and I was full of gratitude for being there when it was enacted. One day, when I too have a family I would borrow from my uncle's ways. That is how much I was touched by his words and I thought I should share them with you, sir. I wonder what you think.

Teacher: I am short of words. Unlike me, you did not declare that you had a story to tell. You just told it - easily and sweetly - better than I could have ever done. You have with great insight underlined the major lessons to be distilled there from. I am grateful. Thank you for being my friend.

Student: Now you are making me shy.

Teacher: Seriously, I have enjoyed your story. Your uncle must be a very wise man. His son is very lucky. I hope he grows to fully understand and appreciate the lesson his father was trying to pass across.

If he learns it, there would be no stopping him from greatness in whichever sphere of endeavor he chooses to serve life. For truly, courage is a major factor that would separate the heaven dwellers from the earth bound even in scholarship which is currently your main preoccupation.

You must have courage to be best in anything you do. To believe that you can, and work to achieve, irrespective of obstacles, is to demonstrate courage. It is an indispensable element in any achievement. Have courage, my son.

Chapter Thirty-Four

DON'T BANK BITTERNESS

Teacher: You look worried, troubled in fact. You look far different from the handsome amiable friend I am used to. What is the matter?

Student: I am bitter.

Teacher: Bitter? Why bitter?

Student: A friend stabbed me in the back. A friend that I trusted so much betrayed me; and worse, lied against me to our new mathematics teacher. I feel very sad about it.

Teacher: It is probably better not to ask you about the details.

Student: I am glad you understand, sir. It is a very private matter.

Teacher: I am sorry about that. Your friend must have really hurt you badly. Sorry. I am so sorry to see you in such a bad mood.

Student: It is alright sir. I would get over it.

Teacher: That is the spirit. Try to get over it. I would add, as quickly as possible. The quicker, the better.

Student: I know you are trying to teach me something.

Teacher: You sure know me well enough by now. True, I am trying to get you to understand that bitterness is poison.

Student: Poison?

Teacher: Yes, poison. Perhaps even worse than the usual poison, which affects only the physical body.

Student: What do you mean, sir?

Teacher: Bitterness of the heart is like the poison of say a snake, or any such dangerous creature, to the human body. It needs to be flushed out of the body system as quickly as possible before it does

damage. But I would go one step further to add that the ravages of a mere physical poison, especially where not immediately lethal, could be less dangerous than a bitter heart.

Student: I still do not understand, sir.

Teacher: Bitterness of the heart actually literally introduces poisonous fluids into the human body. It would not be surprising to find a bitter person develop all manner of illnesses - nausea, ulcer, heart problems, high blood pressure, stroke, name it! The more the poison increases in the human system the more deadly it becomes.

Let me even bring the point nearer home and ask you how you feel now compared to your normal states of happiness or balance?

Student: I feel sick.

Teacher: For how long now?

Student: Since the incident this morning.

Teacher: Does it all make sense now?

Student: I am beginning to understand.

Teacher: So you see, the earlier you get out of your melancholy, the better your chances of fending off illness. Now, while the bitterness debilitates your physical body and depresses your immune system, it obviously also poisons your emotional body, which is why you are moody and sad. All the effervescence of life usually around you is dimmed like a bulb with a dying battery.

Many would describe you as not being yourself for you are diminished, less than who you are; and as an aside, let me add that you become less attractive in every way. Rather than being drawn to you as usual, people would be repelled from you. That is what brooding and moodiness cause. It strips you of charm, of charisma, of beauty in exchange for ugliness.

Student: Oh no, sir, it cannot be that bad!

Teacher: It is even worse. Notice how much the moodiness has affected your appetite for study. Work that you would ordinarily gladly undertake efficiently becomes a cumbersome drag. Your mind slides into slow motion and you find yourself not thinking or acting

clearly, negatively affecting your every endeavour. You become in every sense a sub of your usual self. Thanks to bitterness.

As it constraints your mental activity rate, so it affects your intuition and perception. All the attributes and talents that you are otherwise imbued with are completely minimized. That is what bitterness does.

Student: Sir, but it is so difficult not to be bitter when people are so unkind to you.

Teacher: I know. People may be unkind to you, causing you to be bitter. But must you multiply the effect of their act by inflicting further unkindness on yourself? If they actually set out to hurt you, must you become an added weapon against your own self?

Chapter Thirty-Five

RESPECT OTHER RELIGIONS

Teacher: Did you read about the bloody clash between two religious groups at the university?

Student: No, sir. What happened? I hope no one was killed?

Teacher: The papers only reported that about 9 students were being treated for serious injuries at the Teaching Hospital. Some of the students are said to be on the critical list.

Student: God, this is strange. I have never heard anything like it before; clashes between two religious groups in the university?

Teacher: Sure.

Student: That sounds really strange to me. The reports that I am more familiar with are reports about cult groups killing one another. That is terrible enough. It really scares me to know that one day I would be a university student myself.

Teacher: Do you fear you might join the cults, too?

Student: Never! No matter the lure or coercion. After all, majority of students graduate from the universities without joining any cult groups. I would safely belong to that majority, and nothing would happen to me.

Teacher: I am glad you have that understanding. So do not be afraid.

Student: But now that the clashes are beginning to involve religious groups and I am religious, how safe can I be?

Teacher: It depends.

Student: It depends on what, sir?

Teacher: It depends on whether your religious group is a cult or a gathering of lovers of God.

Student: I do not understand, sir. Please help me understand.

Teacher: Let's put it another way. What is the difference between a cult group and a religious group?

Student: Very many, sir. They are as distinctly different as night and day.

Teacher: That is how it appears.

Student: Sir, you mean it is not so?

Teacher: At least not as obvious as it appears. There is a very thin line separating both. With just a minor deviation a religious group easily transforms into a cult. A major distinction between both is that the cultist is often under oath to protect fellow members against anybody else.

A cult sees its members as one body, which must be upheld against others, no matter what. The cultist must take sides with his co-members, no matter how wrong his 'brother' may be.

On the other hand, by definition a religious group is united by a common love for God, the creator of all including those who do not belong to the group. The love for God helps the religious group apply universal principles without partiality to anyone including their own members.

This is easy to understand because God, which is every religion's rallying point, is the Father, the Creator, and the Maker of all forms of life. So, for true religions to love God is to love all life; to love all persons irrespective of which end of the universe they may come from. But not so for the cult, whose band and bond of loyalty is circumscribed within its membership to the detriment of all others.

This is why in the court of a fellow cultist as judge, any member is sure to win a case no matter how guilty. In the cult right or wrong, partiality or discrimination, reward or punishment, is dictated by membership or otherwise of the person involved.

So if a religion sees itself and its members as distinct to the extent as to be automatically favored against all other people irrespective of what the members deserve, that religious group is transformed into a cult. So that by a mere sign or recognition of a fellow member, partiality in his favor is guaranteed.

At that point we are practicing cultism; the point at which one is immediately adjudged better or more entitled to life than others just because of being a member of the group. Amongst cultists loyalty, not

love, not universal principles, not fairness or justice, dictate decisions no matter how lofty.

So when religious groups on campuses or anywhere else begin to condemn, mock and demonize other religions, putting themselves on pedestals of arrogance, and self-righteousness against other groups, that body is knowingly or not transforming into a cult. So a cult can be a religion.

It is therefore not surprising that religious groups clash typically like cults these days, because they have unwittingly become cults indeed. The test is in how you regard and treat other children of God who may not be members of your religious group.

Student: I see.

Teacher: I believe that as long as you recognize *getting to know God* as the basis of any religion, understanding that God is the source and maker of all beings whether or not they belong to your religion, you would keep away from transforming into a cultist and reaping its consequences.

SECTION THREE: The Ideal President

Chapter One

SPIRITUAL ASSIGNMENT

Kudo: Good morning, sir.

Sage: Ah, good morning, Kudo, how are you?

Kudo: I'm great.

Sage: Good to hear that. What brings you to me this morning?

Kudo: My usual newspaper column.

Sage: It is amazing how you find the time to keep up with this, in spite of your schedule.

Kudo: I do what I can, sir.

Sage: So what do you want me to speak about?

Kudo: One quality of an ideal president.

Sage: Whao! What do you mean by president? Is it President as a title, as one who superintends over events, places or people?

Kudo: I mean the word in the specific and general senses, as you have described. Same qualities should go for both, anyway, I think.

Sage: Yeah, I think you are right. But why one quality?

Kudo: I realize there may be numerous qualities, but perhaps it is better for my readers and I to chew one at a time.

Sage: You sound like an old teacher.

Kudo: I am trying to be like you.

Sage: Ha, ha, ha, you're funny. Ok, let's see. One quality of an Ideal President (Pause), I would say an understanding that public service is a spiritual assignment.

Kudo: Sir, please explain.

Sage: Before offering oneself for Presidency or any aspect of public service for that matter, it is best to realize that the office is a spiritual trust built on the consent and interest of those one wishes to serve. That office is an abstract phenomenon, which borrows its meaning and significance from the faith and trust that people have placed on it. It is thus a spiritual construction. And as many religions would buttress, all powers to superintend over anything in God's universe derive from God. So, roundly, governance is a spiritual assignment.

Kudo: How would this kind of understanding help?

Sage: It brings the realization that the office is a sacred one, and that the goings on there are of great interest *to interests* beyond human. It also comes with the realization that the office is not for material gains, but for selfless (spiritual) service. That understanding emphasizes that public office is not private property to be run for one's own personal aggrandizement. It, therefore, brings the realization that an office is not only a human but also a spiritual trust.

Knowing that governance is a spiritual assignment carries with it a sense of responsibility, when one knows that he can NEVER escape accountability. It conveys the realization that the incumbent may hoodwink man, but never SPIRIT that is watching over the affairs. Only a fool runs for public office or even takes public office without understanding the enormity of the responsibility. Apparently, fools are not scarce.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: Now with that level of understanding of his duty, he is more likely to carry it out in the awe and love of God, knowing that whatever he does, whatever he says, he is being watched beyond the intelligence of ordinary man.

This is particularly so because his powers can enhance or diminish the prospects in many directions of those he is supposed to cater for, who themselves are all children of God. Whether they realize it or not is a different matter. But ignorance does not change Truth, for surely the Father of all these children cares for them, and any cheat or tormentor in the guise of a President, will not escape the necessary lessons, and if need be, the wrath of the inner penitentiaries.

Kudo: Sir, is this really true what you have described?

Sage: My son, ignorance is no excuse. The spiritual law officers will do their job, without fear or favor. Bribe is meaningless to them. The position of governance is hot and sacred; and the greater the responsibility, of course, the greater the accountability. No one can fool God. Not even the President.

Kudo: So you mean damnation awaits those who misuse office? You sure? I am sorry sir; given how rampant this is in my country, forgive me if I sound deaf.

Sage: I know what you mean, son. Sometimes what should be obvious is not, because we are blinded by negative passions of greed and other beastly inclinations. But it does not change the spiritual laws. It does not change the sacredness of the office. It does not change the fact that the power you wield does not belong to you. It does not change the fact that each must account for his deeds in due time. But this should not scare you. It is just the way it is. People who feel they can serve well, should aspire to govern. It is a great test. And like all tests, it is a major challenge, but also a wonderful spiritual opportunity.

Can you place in perspective the rewards of a faithful servant who realizes the sacredness of his duty as President and performs it from that lofty height of spiritual awareness? I leave you to use your imagination. But the enduring love he engenders in the hearts of men even pale against the shine of heaven for a job well done.

Remember, not only will there be physical accountability; there must be spiritual accountability for we all are Souls, spiritual beings. It is sad that because of ignorance many mortgage the priceless and timeless for a mess of porridge, pans and metals useless beyond earth. This should be enough for now. We'll continue another time. Enjoy your day.

Chapter Two

HUMILITY

Sage: Another attribute of the President, which I would like to suggest, is humility.

Kudo: Humility?

Sage: Yes, humility. By this I mean the understanding that we all are equal as spiritual beings; we each possess as much power as the other, although the levels of acceptance of this may vary from person to person. This attribute of humility tends to tame the superiority or reversed inferiority complex that you often observe in a lot of people in positions of power.

Kudo: Please explain, sir.

Sage: First, let me say that the cause or even effect of superiority or inferiority complex is actually the same. They are two sides of the same coin. When a President believes, for instance, that he has monopoly of knowledge, and that everybody else is stupid, he is merely sitting on that high horse as a protective mechanism. He must lord it over all others by force because he feels inadequate or lacks the self-confidence to engage or confront superior arguments. So what does he do? He climbs a high horse and tries to intimidate or bully everybody into submission to avoid exposure.

Kudo: I do not understand, sir.

Sage: Let us take an illustration. Cast your mind back to your school days. Remember your teachers at school or even lecturers in the university. Recall that the very good ones, who knew their stuff, were often the humble and simplest ones in class. They were usually the ones that would tolerate challenges of their ideas in class.

Recall that they were the ones who were most sympathetic to even the most stupid questions. These humble but confident teachers would make sure that they broke down explanations to even first principles in order to carry everyone along. They would teach and be glad for the opportunity to answer as many questions as possible.

They would be grateful to have an active class, contributing and questioning. Often they refrained from bombastic words, so that

students would understand them. In a sense, they were willing and in cases even eager to reproduce their knowledge in their students. Sometimes you really thought, by the way they went about things, that their mission was to groom students to be better and greater than them, where possible. They rejoiced at even the possibility of that happening.

Kudo: You appear to be describing some of my best teachers whom I will never forget.

Sage: I believe to you and indeed most of your readers, the experience would be common. The worthy and truly qualified you would find humble, confident, happy and even generous. But not so for the impostor; he is the one you would find difficult, intolerant, irritable, brooking no challenge, ever desiring to be praised and worshipped.

Look around you, even well beyond your teachers, and you will find that the experience is common. Look, for instance, at your office, if you work in an office. Subordinates would not threaten a worthy boss, fully qualified to be one. Such boss would be open, not cagey. He would encourage debate and challenge and not stifle it. He would be accessible and calm, not arrogant and irritable.

Kudo: That makes a lot of sense to me.

Sage: The issue you might want to raise rather is, how does one know who would eventually display a complex if given a chance to govern? This is where a study of pedigree is important. Some inadequate candidates for office are often obvious, but most are usually not. In any case most pretend to be humble at least while seeking office, making it very difficult to tell the difference where you do not know them personally.

Kudo: That is correct, sir. We have numerous cases of people we thought were humble, who turned out the haughtiest, arrogant, and intolerant people ever when in power. I could give you clear examples.

Sage: No need to get personal, especially if this discussion is going public. The important thing to learn is how to make the right choices when given a chance. A few clues How much does the person love power? How much does he love notice and dominance? If the answer is "very much," then you are looking at a candidate with a high propensity to display a complex, once in power.

Kudo: Sir, please make this clearer. It is absolutely important.

Sage: Is it?

Kudo: I can tell you that we have suffered tremendously from picking and backing the wrong candidates, whom we thought were humble at first.

Sage: Let me tell you a short story. Once upon a time there lived a king who wanted to pick the best amongst his servants to marry his daughter, knowing that that servant would inherit his stool, since he had no son but only a daughter. He wanted to pick one who would be kind to his people, and improve their welfare. The king was sickly and aged, and knew that he had few days to live. The choice had to be made at once.

He sent for the wisest man in his kingdom. The man arrived and the king posed the question. Rather than respond directly, the wise man decided to question the king.

“How have they all served you?” he asked.

“Very well,” answered the king. “Almost equally well, so it is difficult for me to discriminate using that criterion. But there are two who I must say are exceptional servants,” added the king.

“Aha”, said the wise man, “I knew you would narrow down, for that is the natural order of things.”

“So of these two, which shall I choose?” asked the king.

“Can we interview them?” asked the wise man.

“Yes,” said the king.

“But first we must inform them of the reason for the interview,” said the wise man.

“But that would get it into their heads,” the king retorted.

“That is precisely the point,” said the wise man. “The one of the two who displays tendencies of desperation to be king, having known, would be the wrong candidate,” he concluded.

“How would I know which of them is desperate for the throne?” the king asked.

“Watch out for a willingness to do anything, just anything in order to ascend the throne. Look out for desperation. That’s the key. It leads to recourse to foul means. No true servant will soil or sell himself just to serve another man, a people or a group, selflessly. Selflessly. No true servant would beg, grovel, and mortgage himself or his conscience just to be of service, selflessly. Selflessly. If he so claims, he is merely a deceiver.”

Chapter Three

CONSCIOUSNESS

Kudo: Sir, I would like to return to the issue of humility as a prime element in picking the Ideal President.

Sage: I thought we had dwelt on that sufficiently.

Kudo: I am yet to fully understand it, sir.

Sage: What more would you like to know.

Kudo: Sir, please further clarify what you said about the perception of the equality of Souls as humility.

Sage: I just knew you would return to that matter. Ok, let us repeat in a different way. First, do you realize that you are Soul?

Kudo: What I am taught is that I have a Soul.

Sage: Not quite so. You are Soul. I am Soul. Soul is a spark of God. A Soul is what is made in the image of God, as we all understand. Soul is Spirit. It is from the fabric of the Holy Spirit that Soul is made. Now, made from this quintessence of purity, Soul descended into earth and took on the physical body in order to function on this physical plane. Perhaps that is a bit too far afield for you. It may be sufficient to just note that the equality we refer to is not of the physical or material. It is of our fundamental essence as Souls, as sparks of God. It is as Souls that we are equals. Soul is equal to Soul.

Now, once you know yourself as Soul, as Socrates urged long time ago, it becomes easier to appreciate the next person as Soul, too, a spark and an essence or a child of God. That way you recognize and acknowledge the next person's inherent divinity. It is thus easier for you to accord that person respect. It is then easier for you to give that person the amount of space and freedom, which you desire for yourself.

Now imagine how a subordinate staff, or younger brother who has that level of awareness, will relate to you, as his senior in rank, class, or in the family.

Kudo: You want me to respond?

Sage: You can, of course.

Kudo: I think such a younger brother or subordinate staff would treat me with a lot of respect.

Sage: Good. But how would he relate to his own younger brothers or subordinate staff over whom he has some authority?

Kudo: I think with a lot of respect as well. Perhaps with as much respect as he would relate to his senior.

Sage: Why would he relate with both, senior and subordinate, with equal respect?

Kudo: Because he sees both as Souls, equal sparks of God, bearing the same level of divinity.

Sage: From that level of awareness would he make a distinction between a beggar and a prince?

Kudo: No. He would respect both equally.

Sage: Beautiful. Now if you had that level of awareness, how easy would it be to bootlick or literally worship another individual, group or thing?

Kudo: Never. I would see each for what he is, at best as one just like me, and therefore give him the respect that I would like for myself.

Sage: Perfect. You have answered your own questions. But just to follow the discussion to some conclusion. With this level of awareness, how would you see one who bootlicks, sells his conscience, and mortgages his personal dignity, reason and freedom just to please another for the worldly gains of office?

Kudo: I am sorry to say, sir; but that suddenly appears to me as an inferior state of being; an ignorant state of being.

Sage: Why do you say that?

Kudo: Because by his actions as a bootlicker, he abuses and demeans his own divinity. Born prince he chooses slavery, for temporary material gains.

Sage: Well said. The person acts from the consciousness of a slave. Now, bear that in mind when you determine who governs you. Would your choice be that of a slave consciousness or of a prince or princess who respects your own prince hood?

Kudo: Should I answer?

Sage: You do not have to. Let me rather follow up with another question. If the one with the slave mentality or consciousness were to find himself in power, how do you think he would see you people, who then depend on him to cater for your general welfare?

Kudo: Hmmm. That is a tough one. But what I think is that he would expect us to bow before him or worship him the way he used to worship those who were in power before him. In short, he would see himself as master and the rest of us as slaves.

Sage: Was that difficult to figure out?

Kudo: No.

Sage: So the matter should be clear enough by now. All those who worship those in power will themselves demand to be worshipped once in power. And those who merely treat those in power as first amongst equals, giving them ordinary respect and never worship are more likely to treat others as equals if in power.

Kudo: Sir, unfortunately in my country, those who only respect and who do not bootlick or lose their dignity and sense of worth before people in power are labeled disloyal, treated like enemies by the powerful, and subdued by all means possible including death.

Sage: I see. Maybe that is a testament to how far away you may be from the ideal president. But do not despair; consciousness is growing amongst the people. Tomorrow will be better.

Chapter Four

SERVICE?

Kudo: Sir, I quite appreciate the rather exhaustive manner you have dealt with the issue of humility as an element in governance.

Sage: Did you say exhaustive?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: Not quite. There are still many ramifications of humility that we have not scratched but which are critical to governance.

Kudo: Oh...

Sage: Let me dwell on one or two more.

Kudo: By all means, sir.

Sage: Recall the relationship between humility and confidence as we discussed?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: Only the self-confident one can have the grace to be humble without feeling belittled. As long as a person suffers from a complex, a deep sense of inadequacy requiring of crutches to prop himself up, he would have great difficulty in putting others first; he would have great difficulty in truly serving others.

Kudo: Sir, that is pretty loaded.

Sage: Ok, Kudo. Let us take the last point about putting others first, the point about serving others. There are many factors which propel one to put others first, but amongst them are the issues of self-confidence and humility. You follow?

Kudo: Yes, sir. But how?

Sage: If a team, led by one with a bloated ego, achieved anything; how would the leader report it?

Kudo: Simple, sir. He would report it with his ego in front. He would report it in such a way that helps his ego, appropriate great credit to himself.

Sage: Precisely, because he is incapable of putting others first in any form. And what effect do you think such an attitude would have on team members who actually did the work?

Kudo: A de-motivating effect.

Sage: Do you understand it now?

Kudo: Yes, sir. If he cannot even put his own team first, how would he treat the rest of us?

Sage: His “I”, as far as he is concerned, supersedes “US”, so how do you expect service from such a character. Without humility he cannot serve, rather he wants you to serve him. He acts as master in every way, the very antithesis of service.

His penchant for credit to pad his ego even leads to claims to things he did not actually achieve. As President, he is the classical propagandist and deceiver, paying media to paint him in romantic light, exaggerating minimal success, lying, and doing everything to keep the praise singing. Muscle, money, bribes, blackmail, and just anything is utilized.

Kudo: All this is beginning to fall in place.

Sage: You recognize somebody?

Kudo: Many.

Sage: So lack of self-confidence and humility naturally leads to the love of unmerited praise and flattery. The result is that only those who flatter and praise him, even most undeservedly, are in his good books. He naturally hates those who refuse to lavish flattery on him and would rather tell him home truths. He may even regard them as outright enemies.

Kudo: This is making a lot of sense to me.

Sage: To receive favor or even be treated fairly, you must see the world as made in his image. You must praise beyond reason, bow

with loyalty, echo his warped reasoning, words and wishes. It also helps to dress like him or even cough or fart like him. In a sense see him as a god, in whose image you were made; and you will be his beloved son, in whom he is well pleased.

Kudo: Oh, my God.

Sage: Those are easy manifestations of the lack of humility, the lack of self-confidence in a President or any so called leader for that matter. One of the obvious losses is that the robust contest of ideas, sharpening one another leading therefore to best options in more open governance are lost to servicing the bloated ego.

Kudo: So the people stagnate even in the pool of great ideas, which dare not be expressed for fear of hurting the President's ego. Just to survive many become yes men.

Sage: Correct. I am sure you can imagine what the fate of any opposition must be in such a milieu.

Kudo: Of course he brooks no opposition.

Sage: In extreme cases, not even life is too sacred to be sacrificed to water the ego of the unbalanced character. That is how critical this matter of ego is in governance.

Kudo: I never imagined that personality matters like humility and bloated egos weigh so critically on governance.

Sage: It is a mistake many make. And believe it or not, the bloated ego syndrome is behind the crises of leadership. The inadequacy of the President forces him to cling like a drowning man to the crutches of power; so in many cases it is power or death! How sick can people get?

Chapter Five

WATCH OUT FOR...

Sage: Our discussion so far shows humility is a most critical element in governance, for the various reasons we have discussed and more. A good president, for instance, must be a good listener. He must listen as if he were directly in the shoes of the complainant. He must have the capacity to empathize with those he leads. But how can he if he has a complex, which forces him to demonstrate the superiority syndrome?

Kudo: So what use is he if he cannot listen to those for whom he is President?

Sage: That is precisely the point. Where you find such presidents in corporate organizations, it is true woe for those under them, especially who have possible superior skills than their boss. Suppression would be the order. Nothing would be spared to malign and vilify the quality persons in his organization simply for fear that they may outshine him.

Kudo: But that is again precisely the antithesis of good leadership.

Sage: You certainly get the point. A leader is a booster, an energizer of his team, a facilitator and mentor. But for presidents who lack humility the case is different. Suppression is rather the tendency, for no one must be seen or given the potential to equal them in anyway. Only he must stand as a tree, all others must be pruned to shrubs.

Kudo: Is that why leaders with bloated ego often surround themselves with mediocres as lieutenants?

Sage: Bingo again. A leader who is self-confident and thus has the capacity for true humility looks out for those more skilled than himself in order to build a high performance team. He looks out for lieutenants who can lead him in their various areas of expertise, people he can look up to for sound guidance and advice, but not so Presidents with the complex. The end result is that in governance the only element really served is the ego of the so-called President, for you end up with an underperforming team of a one-eyed man and his blind lieutenants.

Kudo: This sheds a lot of light. Now I can understand why many governments in my country are populated by virtual yes-men as commissioners, law-makers and the lot. Listening to you now, it all begins to make sense. Usually, those who are knowledgeable and have a good sense of self-worth are not likely to survive under a President with bloated ego who must be bootlicked to know that he leads.

Sage: If you find any such competent, self-confident person at all, under such miserable leadership, rest assured that he is going through tremendous emotional pain. Do not be surprised if he tells you that he is ostracized from amongst his peers. Everything he says or does would be regarded with suspicion. He would be often accused of plotting to overthrow the leader. His competence would be grossly underutilized, if not laid to rest for the period he is serving under the bloated ego. In a way he could be serving an emotional prison sentence.

Kudo: Then he should resign.

Sage: Of course that is a way out. But sometimes situations are more complex than what the public sees. Sometimes resignation can itself be a suicide note when tendered before a President lacking in humility. He sees it as an affront, as in fact he sees any genuine idea above his head. If you look carefully at your local history you may find the pages dotted with cases of the woeful fate that befell those who dared to differ and to resign.

Kudo: So the choices are limited.

Sage: For sure. Under the leadership of a bloated ego, your choices are limited to joining the bandwagon of praise singers and bootlickers, enduring the indignities for as long as it may last or risk a life of gross hostility upon resignation. But luckily most of those who surround a leader lacking in humility are likely to be mere lackeys, with minimal sense of self-worth. That is usually the tradition, especially where the egoistic President has the opportunity to pick his team himself; and usually he does.

Kudo: From everything you have said so far, am I right in summarizing that lack of humility is a probable cause of dictatorial tendencies?

Sage: Sure. That is a straight forward consequence. There is no dictator who did not lack self-confidence, and who did not suffer from a complex. It is the complex that leads to dictatorship, no matter the setting - democratic or not. Rather than wait for a superior argument which may not be theirs to win, the inherent dictator lacking in self-worth cannot take that chance. He would rather force the issue one way or the other to ensure that he prevails by all means, foul or fair; although usually foul.

Kudo: I always knew intuitively that humility was critical in governance but never thought it stretched to these extents.

Sage: Unfortunately, it does go even further. A man having a low self-esteem is easily a dangerous man, or at best an unstable one. Sometimes it is difficult to predict what would annoy him. A casual banter, which you absent-mindedly had with him, can plant a seed of acrimony in his heart that would later erupt as an oak of vendetta. And that is yet another dimension of a bloated ego. What eats him up in bitterness is usually not the obvious.

Kudo: So anyone who dares to be his own man before such a person is an endangered species.

Sage: That is for sure because you are more likely to act out of sync from his particular culture and ego, which must not be threatened. This is why the experts in getting along with such incapacitated leaders are what I might refer to as the schooled sycophants. They have the uncanny ability of dancing to the yes music of their master's ego without fail.

Kudo: Those who do not understand that culture are then outcasts.

Sage: Maybe not literarily but certainly practically. They can never get into the core decision making team. They can never belong to what some generally refer to as the kitchen cabinet.

Kudo: So only the yes men take all the critical decisions?

Sage: Clearly. And the implications should be obvious for transparency in governance, for good governance, for the rule of law, for double standards in office, and even for corruption. But maybe these are elements we should touch upon later.

Kudo: I am extremely grateful, sir. Please do not be tired of me for I shall return next week.

Sage: I understand what help you are trying to render through your column, and I would do what I can to help. Thanks for coming.

Kudo: Have a good day, sir.

Sage: I will. You too!

Chapter Six

LISTENING

Sage: Do you realize that listening is a prime duty of every President?

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Think about it for a moment? A President is there to lead in solving either progressive or retroactive problems, essentially.

Kudo: Yes, I get that.

Sage: But how can he, a fortiori, lead in solving problems of the people if he does not understand them; if he does not understand where and how the shoe pinches them.

Kudo: I see. I understand it now. I could compare it to a patient and a doctor scenario. What you are saying is how can a doctor help a patient if he cannot even listen to his complaints. Chances are non-listening doctors would come with wrong prescriptions.

Sage: Now you get it. But notice that for him to listen properly, the doctor must be humble and accede to the patient the pride of place; knowing that it is the patient's body that is being discussed. It is the patient that feels the pain and knows the symptoms first hand. So a good leader, like a good doctor, must be a good listener. But how do you listen well without humility.

Kudo: So humility is what enables you to listen?

Sage: Surely, son, surely. To listen and understand properly you must bring yourself to the level, at least psychologically, of the complainant. You must mentally live in his cultural context, and try to see from his perspective. Then you can begin to truly understand him.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: I will explain further. Listening is a key aspect in communication. And communication is basically a two-way transfer

of ideas with fidelity from one end to the other and vice versa in feedback.

Kudo: Is that the definition of communication?

Sage: I do not know what definition you memorized from school but this is my understanding of the concept. Can we admit it?

Kudo: I am not disputing the definition, I am just marveling at it.

Sage: Ok, good to know. Let's return. Notice that language or signs or appearances are often the medium of communication. And these owe their meanings to culture and situational contexts. So if a man says for example "He is mad"; assuming the language is the same, the context would determine the truth of that sentence.

Communication straddles too many intricacies, including culture, language, context, and sound. An inflexion, for instance, can totally change meaning. "He is mad", for instance, in a tone laden with laughter can convey a totally different meaning. You follow?

Kudo: Yes, sir, please carry on.

Sage: What I am trying to reach is an understanding that to grasp the meaning of any comment or message, the listener must enter empathically into the total cultural context of the situation as if he were the one there. In a manner of speaking, he must wear the shoes of the complainant. This is done mentally.

Kudo: It must take effort.

Sage: Exactly. That is the effort all truly honest listeners make. To listen well is to wear the shoes of the narrator, even if mentally.

Kudo: I get the point. So if the listener is not humble, or suffers from a complex that lords it over the complainant, how can he claim to be listening at all?

Sage: Brilliant. That is it. If I were your President with a complex and therefore arrogant, how do I level with you? How do I truly listen to you?

Kudo: Serious.

Sage: Serious indeed. To govern presupposes an ability to listen well. For how can a mechanic fix a car that he is too arrogant to understand?

Kudo: So every good President must be a good listener.

Sage: Nothing can be more truthful, and humility is what makes it possible. Just to stretch it a little bit further, good listening requires patience. Again only humility can confer patience on anyone. Arrogance is usually snappy and haughty, impatient and rude.

Humility is patient, courteous and thoughtful. But these are precisely the elements that aid the good listener to mentally locate the complainant and enter into his context to hear, feel, and understand his situation and message. You understand?

Kudo: I do, sir. I get the point To govern, first is to listen. But how can arrogance listen? How can arrogance govern? Those are your questions? I understand it, sir, but I am just wondering how such basic truth can lose on governance in these parts.

Chapter Seven

TRUE HUMILITY

Kudo: Sir, I notice that in the past few sessions since this series began we have virtually dwelt on humility as prime in the character of the ideal president. Why did it take up so much?

Sage: Humility necessarily takes priority in any matter involving character. Character is a reflection of the spiritual status of any individual, not what he says or claims. The character would generally give you an idea of how he or she is situated in the spiritual hierarchy or order. And the higher you climb in your spiritual development the more tender your heart grows.

Kudo: Please relate the explanation to humility.

Sage: I thought I already had. Or maybe I hadn't? You see, when your heart grows tender your ability for empathy and compassion grows as well. And it is precisely this ability that helps you to see others as similar to yourself. It is precisely what helps you to love others as yourself. It is precisely the ability that helps you serve others as if you were serving yourself.

Kudo: If I understand you correctly, sir, what you are saying basically is that the tender heart levels easily with others. The tender heart sees others as equally important as himself. But is that humility?

Sage: That is true humility.

Kudo: But that is not the general concept of humility the way we understand it.

Sage: How do you understand it?

Kudo: A general perception is that humility means diminishing or minimizing yourself.

Sage: I see. I guess that is why the act of humility, as you understand it, is so given to pretence. It is a concept that encourages you not to be yourself. Rather than be yourself, your concept of humility is to

pretend that you are less than what you really are. That is the kind of understanding that, for instance, leads people to disastrously believe that they are unworthy of God's love, and worse, inhibits their acceptance of it.

Kudo: Actually, it is a concept that teaches us to grovel, cover ourselves in rags, act undignified, in cases, to show that we are humble.

Sage: That is not the kind of humility that I know. The one I know and which I strongly recommend is that which sees the next person as an equal. That is the kind of humility that will enable you serve your neighbor or your people without feeling either inferior or superior. Indeed, relating to people without feeling either inferior or superior is acting in humility.

Kudo: This is a completely new model for me and, I believe, for most of my readers.

Sage: I am sorry if I took it for granted that we were speaking the same language. But please note that anytime I had used the word humility, what I had meant was feeling neither superior nor inferior in service or in relation to others.

Kudo: So if I give a gift to a beggar, I should give it as if we were equals? How is that possible?

Sage: Of course you and the beggar are equals as Souls. Didn't you know that? As Soul, there is nothing you have that the beggar does not also have. There is no power available to you, which is not also available to him. To crown it all, the Creator loves you both equally. IT's gifts for you are no more than IT's gifts for the beggar.

Kudo: Did I hear you say IT, sir? "IT" for God?

Sage: You have a problem with that?

Kudo: Yes, sir; very much. We do not address God as IT. It is very denigrating and unacceptable. Most would in fact say, totally unacceptable.

Sage: Do not let words distract you. The use of human language to express anything Divine will remain a struggle, because it is a grossly incapable and incompetent tool. Even in translating words from one

human language to another, we struggle because the cultures and contexts are different. Try translating stories or books in your native Ogba language into English, for instance, and see the trouble it takes trying to be faithful to the original meanings.

Kudo: Yes, I appreciate that. It is a tough duty in any language.

Sage: I am glad you see that. Now if it is so difficult to translate human literature to other humans who speak a different language in a common physical universe, imagine how tough it must be to express spiritual essences using the vehicle of a human language. That is why I say do not allow language to distract you. Listen more with your heart, than with your head.

To return briefly to the issue of a pronoun for God, notice that God is neither male nor female. God is beyond biological categorizations. God is beyond gender. And as you grammarians would tell us, once an entity is neither masculine nor feminine, in the English language, we refer to that essence or phenomenon as it. In this case capital IT, for obvious reasons.

Kudo: This is shaking the foundation of what I thought I knew.

Sage: Congratulations! That is always the feeling when you are truly growing. I've got to go now. Let's talk next week.

Chapter Eight

SELFLESSNESS

Kudo: What is it that marks out a great leader?

Sage: Several qualities, not only one.

Kudo: Which would you readily like to discuss today?

Sage: Selflessness.

Kudo: What is the relationship between leadership and selflessness?

Sage: A very direct relationship, I must say; for leadership is by definition an act of selflessness.

Kudo: Please take no offence; given where I come from and the experience we have had as a people, your definition is almost ridiculous.

Sage: Why do you say that?

Kudo: As I said, I do not mean to offend you or question your definition, but placed against the background of the collective experience in my region of the world, leadership appears to be the very opposite of what you say.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: Generally, where I come from leadership is a means of self-aggrandizement. It is the fastest route to ill-gotten wealth. It is the means for the appropriation of what belongs to all for self. Leadership is the quickest, the safest, and the most lucrative means of robbery.

Sage: Interesting.

Kudo: Leadership in these parts is what you assume in order to privatize what belongs to those you are supposed to be leading. Leadership is an instrument of intimidation. It is what you use to cow other citizens into submission, serfdom or even slavery. Leadership is

the muscle you need to appropriate the collective wealth without fear of prosecution. Leadership comes with the power to cheat, to maim, and to kill without qualms.

Let me keep it simple Leadership in our part of the world means selfishness activated. If you were being introduced to a leader here, especially in the public sector, the first assumption should be that you are dealing with a selfish brute, whose primary reason for acquiring the leadership position is access to unmitigated and unmerited opulence through appropriating the public treasury.

Sage: Can this really be true?

Kudo: Generally, it is true. Give an average office-holder two years in office, and he could be catapulted from abject poverty to obtuse nauseating wealth. Of course there are exceptions but these are rare. I am sorry I have gotten emotional; I have spoken more than the interviewee.

Sage: Why not? Ours is not a monologue. My understanding is that it is a discussion between both of us.

Kudo: That is a very kind way of putting it, but I know I have surely overstepped by bounds as an interviewer. Sir, please let us return to your understanding of leadership.

Sage: I would have liked to learn more from you.

Kudo: No, sir. Please let me hear from you. I choose to be quiet more from a sense of shame.

Sage: There is nothing to be ashamed of. The weaknesses you describe of leaders in your place are only manifestations of untamed human frailty. If it is a consolation, know that this cadre of leaders would not last forever. These experiences are not new in history. There are hidden laws at work. These laws in time would take care of the culprits, and inject sanity into governance in your region. But do not ask me how this would happen for I cannot predict the way, out of a zillion plausible options, available to those in charge. Just know that it will all come to pass.

Kudo: Thanks for the consolation, sir. We look forward to the arrival of that time. But please let us return to our discussion.

Sage: Ok, I was saying that leadership has a direct relationship with selflessness. Indeed to be selfless is to lead, and to lead is to be selfless. In fact, until a service is selfless it is not really leadership in the true sense of the word.

Kudo: Please expatiate.

Sage: Can you tell me why a group needs leadership in the first place? What makes leadership necessary?

Kudo: It could be in order to work towards fulfilling the common interests of the group? It could be to take care of the whole?

Sage: A good way of putting it. But beyond serving the common interest, leadership is simply serving others, unselfishly. Leadership is putting others first, and self last. Leadership is what the captain of a ship displays when faced with disaster. He sees first to the safety and well-being of his passengers before considering himself.

The story is told of how an otherwise gallant soldier failed promotion to the enviable rank of a General. At home one day, unknown to him, a situation of crisis, pandemonium, fire and the like were simulated about midnight as part of the test. The General made his escape swiftly to safety before remembering his wife and children. Of course he was not found fit to be promoted a General. This is in areas where Generals are seen as guaranteed leaders, who must serve others first and self last. Kudo, are you listening? You seem a bit lost.

Kudo: I am sorry, sir; I was searching my mental landscape for true generals in leadership. Hmmm - Tough job.

Chapter Nine

BE STRONG

Kudo: Greetings, sir.

Sage: That must be your telephone ringing.

Kudo: I am reluctant to interrupt our discussion. I am sorry, I forgot to switch off before this session.

Sage: That's okay; you could answer your phone anytime.

Kudo: Thank you very much, sir. Hello, hello, good afternoon...I'm in a meeting now, actually conducting an interview...Oh! I understand. What? Did you say the eagle was looking for me? What for? Anyway, I will call you later. Thanks... Sorry. Sorry, sir, for the interruption.

Sage: It's alright.

Kudo: My friend in Government House was informing me that the President would like to see me.

Sage: Interesting. I could not help over-hearing your reference to someone as Eagle. Could that be a code for the President?

Kudo: Very much so, sir. My friend was avoiding calling him by name or position for some reason of convenience.

Sage: I see. I like the reference to a leader as an eagle, which is generally regarded as the king of birds.

Kudo: It is quite common in these parts to associate leaders with the eagle; in one form or the other.

Sage: Because of what the eagle represents in the bird kingdom?

Kudo: I believe so, sir.

Sage: That is really neat, truly apt. Indeed the leader should be like an eagle. Strong, Inspirational, Savvy, Tough, Royal, Elegant, and Courageous. All these, a leader should be.

Kudo: Sir, I have common sense knowledge of the adjectives you have used. Should I assume that we have a common understanding?

Sage: Kudo, I do not know which understanding you have. It may well be the same as mine.

Kudo: Just for learning purposes, could you kindly take them one after the other and elaborate?

Sage: Which would you like me to start with?

Kudo: Strength.

Sage: Ok, let's take strength.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. What do you mean by "strong"?

Sage: There are many ways in which you can be strong. But here I refer to few specific areas of strength. First and most is spiritual strength.

Kudo: What do you mean by spiritual strength?

Sage: By spiritual strength, I refer to the hugeness of the heart.

Kudo: I do not understand.

Sage: You will. A heart generally denotes love. A huge heart denotes an ability to love deeply. It denotes a great ability for forgiveness. It denotes a great ability to overcome emotional pain. It denotes an ability to keep an open heart, in spite of hurt and scathing criticism, in spite of abuse of good intents. It implies an incredible slowness to anger, recrimination or bitterness. It implies a lack of vindictiveness and an awful capacity for tolerance. That is spiritual strength.

Kudo: It is a tall order.

Sage: Yes, it is. True leaders are not *commonplace*. They are gems. They are rare finds and ought to be so cherished.

Kudo: I agree.

Sage: But please do not go away with the impression that the true leaders are only found in high and lofty places. They are not so scarce as not to be available. Look amongst your religious groups, you will find them, the shining stars, quiet, unassuming and humble. Look amongst your football players you would find them. Look amongst your students or colleagues at work you will find them. Look amongst your family members, you will find them. They are usually not those who fight to lead, but their talent is often obvious for those sincerely in search of true leaders.

Kudo: Is this what you mean by strength?

Sage: Yes. Kudo, my son, what did you think strength meant?

Kudo: I saw strength here as a synonym for power.

Sage: In a sense you are right. We are dealing with power all right, but the power of love; the power to be truly a father to all. That is spiritual strength.

Chapter Ten

BE INSPIRATIONAL

Kudo: Sir, last week we dealt with spiritual strength as prerequisite for leadership. Are there other ramifications of the strength that we should be considering as well?

Sage: Well, the others, though secondary, are fairly obvious. These are basic issues of fitness including mental and physical fitness. The reasons why these are necessary, I believe, are obvious.

Kudo: Yes, they are obvious. Perhaps we should turn to your second description of the eagle as inspirational.

Sage: Ok.

Kudo: Sir, how and why should a leader be inspirational?

Sage: I would like us to turn here to the basic definition as provided by a standard dictionary. Check the one on the bookshelf there, and tell me what it says about “inspiration” as it concerns a person.

Kudo: The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines a person of inspiration as “...a person that causes one’s mind, creative abilities, interests etcetera to be stimulated.”

Sage: Excellent. I simply say a leader should be inspirational. He should be a symbol to inspire the performance and creativity of those he leads to greater heights. In a sense he must represent a being of admiration, worthy of emulation. He must have an edifying presence and quality.

It pays for him or her to represent one that most of the people would like to be like. He should be a model of sorts, a symbol to energize the imagination and work of the people he leads. He should be sunshine in gloom, he should be hope in hopelessness, he should be faith in despair, and he should be solace in turbulence.

Kudo: So a leader should be an idol?

Sage: I would rather say that a leader should be a ginger, a source of strength and inspiration. And this he must be, in character and in

deed. To be one and not the other is to be handicapped as a leader. He must walk his talk, to motivate and inspire.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: It is in combining the twins of talk and walk that great leaders emerge, whatever the course, be it religious, political, professional, artistic, or otherwise. The talk and the walk must give the same message.

Kudo: Both talk and walk?

Sage: Yes. The walk and the talk are one. A football captain who only yells at his teammates with direction, but hardly demonstrates dexterity and purposefulness with the ball, will surely be a poor inspiration no matter how loud he yells.

Inspirational communication must be total, utilizing all verbal and non-verbal channels in order to achieve the lofty aim. To reach resonance, the leader must not only be committed to his mission; he must become its synonym. So that consciously, sub-consciously or unconsciously, he exudes the mission with unwavering fidelity, whichever channel of communication you examine. He must become the embodied consciousness of that which he pursues for his people.

Kudo: Sir, you need to break it down for me.

Sage: What do you want broken down?

Kudo: You said inspirational communication must be total and that it must be verbal and non-verbal. I do not fully understand that.

Sage: Ok, I would back up a bit. Notice that inspiration expresses itself in engagement. There is a stimulus and a consequent response. When the stimuli have excited the responses for higher performance, inspiration has taken place. But for the stimuli to excite the response there must be a message to and a resultant feedback from the respondent.

Kudo: So what you are saying is that the inspirational process is basically a communication process.

Sage: You got it. But I add that the communication must be total, by word, deed and appearance.

Kudo: Sir, before you go further, something just struck me from what you've said. Recall that inspiration is basically communication, according to you.

Sage: Yes, that's correct.

Kudo: You have also said that the leader must be an inspiration.

Sage: Yes, that is the basic subject we are dealing with.

Kudo: Now, what I get from all that is that the leader is essentially a communicator.

Sage: Excellent insight. That is what a leader is - a communicator; but more precisely an inspirational communicator. To effectively inspire, he needs to be a total communicator, using all channels of action, words, and appearance to make the maximum impact. He must speak, act and be seen in every way to be faithful to his mission.

Kudo: His words must match his actions and his appearance to be the true leader?

Sage: Correct. Where any is faulty, doubts creep in which harm his believability. And one who is not believed cannot inspire. People must believe in someone before he can inspire them. To inspire you must be admitted into the people's innermost chamber - their hearts.

Let me add that except you actually gain entrance into someone's heart you are not really his leader; you are only an impostor that must expire sooner than later.

Chapter Eleven

WISDOM

Sage: One common attribute which most leaders recognize as vital for their success, is wisdom. This is what I meant to allude to when I spoke of the eagle as being savvy.

Kudo: What is the meaning of that?

Sage: I am sure you have heard the word before. It basically means the possession of common sense.

Kudo: But common sense and wisdom are not the same.

Sage: Who says? My understanding is that deep common sense is what is referred to as wisdom. Note that wisdom and knowledge, especially book knowledge, are not the same.

Kudo: But book knowledge enhances wisdom.

Sage: Well, maybe in some instances - depending on which kind of books you are reading and how serious you take them. But that is a digression. What I mean to convey is that education in the Western sense of the word, may not necessarily confer common sense. You may find cases where a “total illiterate”, again in the orthodox Western sense, may have more common sense than a professor of book knowledge.

Kudo: But common sense is not common.

Sage: Yes, I agree with you, but it is available to all in common. I guess that is why it is called common sense.

Kudo: Is it really available to all in common?

Sage: Very much so. It is in the very source of common sense that we all have our being.

Kudo: If common sense is that common, how come some do not seem to have it?

Sage: I doubt that there is one who does not have it, but there are countless who seldom use it.

Kudo: Why would anyone have such a valuable resource and not use it?

Sage: Difficult question to answer; maybe awareness could be one of the inhibitions.

Kudo: Awareness that common sense is available?

Sage: Awareness that each one has access to the source of common sense.

Kudo: But what can prevent anyone from accessing it? I wish you could answer that directly, sir.

Sage: I thought I did. But let's return to it. My answer would be ignorance, and its offspring.

Kudo: What about unrighteousness, immorality and stuff like that; can't those prevent awareness of this common sense.

Sage: That is a reflection of very common but misleading thinking. It is generally the thinking of moralists and fundamentalists of the orthodox religions that the source of common sense, which is the Creative Spirit that manifests all that is created, cannot be accessed by what people describe as evil. Lie. How do you think that humanity manage to produce evil geniuses? Common sense is available to all. It is impersonal, and is available to be used for good or for evil.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Really, really. It works as impersonally as the laws of physics or chemistry. Once things are combined in their right doses under given conditions, certain results are predictable. It does not matter whether it is being used to produce bombs for the destruction of cities, or for the creation of cures for diseases.

Kudo: If common sense and its source are so amoral, why then are you including it as one of the prime characteristics of an Ideal President?

Sage: I knew that question would come. But before I answer it, let me preface with this Anyone who employs common sense for evil,

must reap unhappy consequences. That is the law. My supposition in alluding to common sense as a factor is that leaders would use them for the general good; not for evil ends.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: Let me add that this warning of evil and unhappy consequences is very often ignored or even ridiculed by people who employ a lot of common sense. In the myopic view of life, they do not see that the cosmos is a self-regulating existence; hence whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap; and possibly with interest.

Again it is ignorance that scoffs at this fundamental, which every leader should be guided by. Sometimes the results of evil machinations manifest openly for all to see; sometimes the results show beyond what the ordinary eyes can see. But manifest they must, as long as the dramatis personae are subject to the law of cause and effect; the law of the lower worlds.

Kudo: Which are the laws of the higher worlds?

Sage: My friend, you are truly curious. Do not worry about that for now. Maybe sometime in the future we could return to it. I would rather that we finish with common sense, the subject of today's discussion. A leader who does not apply common sense is only a programmed robot, better suited for physics laboratories and not for governing people.

Kudo: Anything we can do to know that a prospective leader has common sense?

Sage: Terribly tough question. There is no ready formula. But I am sure you can identify wisdom. It usually flows gracefully from one with easy access to the source of common sense. I am sure you can also identify good intuition - an ability to arrive at the truth of a situation without necessarily passing through mental calculations and the accumulation of objective evidence. This may be an indication of a leader with the grace of common sense.

Chapter Twelve

TOUGHNESS

Kudo: Can we move on to the other elements of the Eagle Leader?

Sage: So you are still recounting the characteristics of the eagle?

Kudo: Sir, I find them a good guide for this interview.

Sage: Not a surprise at all. As an academic, your mind moves in ordered categories. Everything must be methodically fitted into one box or the other.

Kudo: Doesn't your mind work in the same way, sir?

Sage: How would I know that? It is up to you academics to analyze me. I think I am just a simple minded lover of God.

Kudo: Sir, but I still feel we should return to those characteristics you described.

Sage: As you please, Kudo. But which are these characteristics that we have not dealt with?

Kudo: Toughness, for instance. You had mentioned toughness as one of the attributes the eagle must have.

Sage: But we had discussed strength. Toughness for me has a very similar definition to the one we understood strength to be. Do not think by toughness I meant roughness in any form. Far from it. By toughness I refer to the inner strengths of patience, endurance, long-suffering, persistence, steadfastness, steadiness and resilience.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: I hope you get it. The toughness is to help the leader maintain his equanimity in spite of pressures. The toughness is to help the leader remain calm in the midst of crises. Toughness for me means inner ruggedness. Let me illustrate. Last weekend I was at the beach, and witnessed what could have been a disastrous event for one family.

Kudo: What happened?

Sage: A young man and his little children aged probably between 3 and 6 were strolling by the side of the ocean just as most people do when at the beach. The ocean had been calm, occasionally reaching out to the feet of passers-by and receding. This must have been the observed pattern before the young man took the children for the walk. They chatted away oblivious of what was about to happen.

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: Suddenly the water surged to the shore swiftly, powerfully and unexpectedly, pushing down the man and his three children into the water, and then sweeping back in return wave with speed pulling along the little ones.

Kudo: Huh?

Sage: The reason why I recall this event now is in trying to explain the true toughness that a leader requires. Clearly what I witnessed was a major crisis situation that caught most on-lookers with too much surprise to help. But you know what happened?

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: This young man demonstrated an unusual calmness and an incredible awareness in the near calamity. It was more than I had witnessed in anybody in recent times. You know what he did as the wave attempted to sweep his children away?

Kudo: I'm all ears, sir.

Sage: As he lost his balance, he deliberately fell on the smallest child, the one likely to be swept away fastest. This sank the child into the sand under his weight. Simultaneously he reached out for the next smallest one like a goal-keeper while his weight still held down the youngest.

Having waded the two, still flat on the floor, he now tilted his stomach sideways to gain height in his outstretched position in order to act as a wedge for the third and oldest child sliding towards him. But because the oldest child was weightier, the current moved him more sluggishly until the sand friction halted his glide just before his father's body.

All this happened within a twinkle of an eye. The dangerous wave having receded, the young man got up, grabbed his children, again in

the order of the youngest first, and led them out to safety. By this time a sizeable crowd had gathered.

As if oblivious why they had gathered, he goaded his children to his beach hut. When next I looked, a few minutes later, he was washing the sand off his children, joking and laughing as he narrated to his wife who apparently was sitting breastfeeding a baby. My heart filled with gratitude to God and admiration for the young man as I watched from my distance.

When they were leaving the beach, I could not help walking up to him. I asked him how he managed to remain so cool under the situation, keeping his head and taking the right decisions all the way until they were all safe. Throughout the incident he had exhibited no sign of strain or tension. His face was calm and at ease. You know what he answered me?

Kudo: What?

Sage: He said he knew nothing would happen to him and his children. I asked, "You knew?" He answered, with a soft but knowing smile. He said, "Sir, I knew. I knew in my heart that God was with us, and that nothing would happen to us."

Goose-pimples ran down my spine, and I knew in my own heart that I was looking at a very special person.

Chapter Thirteen

ROYALTY

Kudo: I hope you would not get tired of my questioning.

Sage: Why should I? Do I drop some hint of tiredness?

Kudo: No. Not at all. I was just beginning to feel guilty and exploitative of your kindness.

Sage: No need, my son. You may not know it but both of us are partners.

Kudo: Partners?

Sage: Yes, partners.

Kudo: How?

Sage: In the service of life. Especially in the service of life without thought of reward.

Kudo: Sir, I do not understand.

Sage: In time you will, just keep doing what you are doing. I am with you all the way; for as long as you can cope.

Kudo: How so kind?

Sage: You are the kind one, my son. I should thank you. You may not understand but don't worry. Just keep firing the questions.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. I would like to pick on the quality of royalty, which you mentioned earlier as one of the necessary attributes of the ideal president. How should a leader be royally?

Sage: Once again I would like to refer you to the good old dictionary. Read for us the meaning of "royally".

Kudo: It simply puts it as "a splendid manner."

Sage: Which dictionary is this?

Kudo: It is the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

Sage: Good. Just to be sure. The words “splendid” and “manner” neatly capture what I meant by a leader’s royalty. Of course I did not mean it in any sense of having a royal blood or things like that; as if anyone could actually isolate a royal element in anyone’s blood. None of such stuff.

Kudo: I see. I had misconstrued it to mean that actually. I was really expecting you to confirm my understanding. Although that would have made me very sad, for it would have established discrimination against most of the people purely by accidents of birth.

Sage: There are no accidents in life, my son. Everything is in its proper place. People being born under certain circumstances or in certain homes, is not in any way accidental. They are choices made or predetermined by previous actions. Being born in one family and not another is a matter of consequence; not accident.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Maybe we can discuss that another time. But for now let’s return to our definition of “splendid manner” as quintessential royalty. It is the manners that separate the truly royal from the others, not birth, money or the like. The royal displays splendid manners while the commoner displays you-know-what. Is that clear enough?

Kudo: So it has nothing to do with parentage or lineage?

Sage: Without meaning to confuse you, it does.

Kudo: Now I am thoroughly confused. First you say it has nothing to do with what I called accident of birth; and in the same breath you say it has to do with parentage or lineage. Which should I take?

Sage: I knew I was bound to confuse you the way I went about answering the question. But let me explain. I used parentage or lineage a bit imprecisely; in groping for an appropriate word. You see, we all come from one parent. That parent is the Holy Spirit. We all are made from its fabric. Our every constitution as spiritual beings is precisely same as that of the Holy Spirit.

Kudo: But we all are different and indeed act as such.

Sage: No confusion. We all necessarily act differently because we all have different levels of realization of the fact that we all are extensions of the Holy Spirit. By realization I do not mean cognition or acknowledgement. Those may be stepping stones, but what I mean is the extent to which we manifest, consciously align and reflect the truth of being born of the Holy Spirit.

Kudo: You mean like being “born again”?

Sage: Yes and no. Yes because being “born again” actually means returning to our real nature as Soul, spiritual beings. And no, because that birth is not a novelty, but a birth to what we really are and had always been; but which we had forgotten under the foliage and layers of ignorance and the filthy lucre of material and mental power and passion.

Kudo: So being “born again” is not like being born anew?

Sage: No. It is rather like rediscovery of the true self; realizing who we are, as Soul, as spiritual beings, as part of the originator of the universes; as master, not slave of the ephemeral lower worlds including the physical; as compulsive creators and servants of life.

Kudo: Strange.

Sage: Not strange, my son. It is this rediscovery, rebirth, renaissance which draws one to align with the spiritual culture of life, get soaked in it, and thus reflect it in his manners. It is this that curbs the selfishness of the flesh and reveals the nobility and selflessness of Spirit. So when I say the ideal president must be royally; I mean that he must recognize and activate his imperishable heritage as Soul, offspring of the Holy Spirit, the eternal royalty. It is from this vantage position that he can ever be truly royal.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: And it is not difficult to identify who amongst us is truly royal; for “by their fruits we shall know them”.

Chapter Fourteen

TEAM SPIRIT

Sage: I notice you changed your usual interview time today. Anything special?

Kudo: I did not realize that you would notice.

Sage: I noticed and I thought that there might be a reason.

Kudo: There is.

Sage: Let's hear it. Or is it something private, in which case you do not have to bother. Time is immaterial.

Kudo: No, there is nothing private as such about the reason. It was purely for my own convenience that I moved the time of this session. I did not want to miss a football match involving my favorite player.

Sage: So you like football that much?

Kudo: Oh yes, sir. I love football.

Sage: Really, why?

Kudo: That's a good question. I have never really pondered why I love the game so much. But just thinking on my feet now, I think I love the game because it teaches me so much.

Sage: Like what?

Kudo: Football is exciting, to start with - a game of 11 players functioning as one single machine. That, in particular, trips me.

Sage: You mean the teamwork involved in football?

Kudo: Exactly, sir. Nothing teaches me teamwork more practically than football.

Sage: That is a great insight. I never thought about it like that before. But thinking about it now, I see you are right.

Kudo: You think I am correct?

Sage: Sure. A football team is one organism, from the goalkeeper, through the defenders and mid-fielders, to the strikers. It is made up of positions occupied by different persons or personalities united by a common objective of preventing the ball from getting into their net while doing all to get the ball into the opponents' net.

Kudo: That is just how I see it.

Sage: The team players may have their different ideas, idiosyncrasies, or orientations but on that field each one is only a part of a larger team, where no one of them means much outside of the context of the team.

Kudo: Exactly how I see it, sir.

Sage: Fantastic insight you have developed from the love of such a common game. I wonder how many more see it like that.

Kudo: I can bet that most coaches see the game as such.

Sage: Yes, of course. The coach as the manager of the team appreciates more than most, the genius of teamwork. Many will tell you from personal experience about games they lost not because they lacked quality players but because the team did not function as one organism - in sync.

Kudo: That is what many football analysts say of my national team; fantastic talents, but poor blending as a team.

Sage: In that case when they play there may be flashes of individual brilliance, but the team would often flop.

Kudo: Typical.

Sage: This underlines the importance of teamwork. If there is indeed a singular trait by which great leaders could be marked out, it may well be their ability to engender and foster teamwork. This is why the task of the team manager is first to build a team; the way you would build a house; where each component adds value in a co-coordinated and concerted manner to achieve desired results.

Kudo: I agree sir, that that is the primary function of the leader of the team - to forge a unity out of a group of different individuals, so that the team functions as one entity in search of only the collective glory.

Sage: Excellent. Each member donates his entire effort, creativity and talent to the whole without seeking personal glory.

Kudo: That seems to me to define leadership. Given the much you have taught me so far about leadership, it is probably the ability to create an organism whose parts seek the glory of the whole with all their might, without the distraction of personal egos.

Sage: Does your favorite player conform to this spirit of teamwork?

Kudo: Pretty much so. This shows in his most unselfish disposition on the field. He works his heart to feed others with the ball, the best way it helps them perform best. He seems to have studied each member of the team and discovered how each likes best to be served the ball for best results for the team.

Sage: I think in that description you have probably come out with a finer definition of the ideal leader, as one who strives to help team members help the team the best.

Kudo: Watching him, nothing stirs me more than the way he celebrates his goals surrendering the glory to the team all the time. Perhaps it is best to view him in contrast with most other players, who when they score celebrate in accentuating their personal ego through body language such as chest beating, pointing to their own jerseys or jersey numbers, or something individualistic like that.

Sage: But how does your friend do it?

Kudo: When he scores he beckons on all the teammates to come together in celebration and collective ownership of the glory.

Sage: How sweet. That is leadership; glorifying the team always; not the self.

Chapter Fifteen

MAGNETISM OF FAITH

Sage: After our discussion last week I have become a more avid follower of football.

Kudo: Really. I hope you do not find it boring, sir.

Sage: No. Indeed, many years ago I was more of a fan than you probably are today. Back then football meant so much to me, and I learnt so much from the game. I guess my interest faded when there was not much to learn anymore from the game than from other pastimes.

Kudo: It is really cool to hear that you were a football fan.

Sage: In fact a couple of nights back, I watched what some say was the most dramatic of continental championship finals in a decade. You must have seen the match.

Kudo: Yes, of course, sir. I watched it. It was a remarkable experience.

Sage: Yes, it was. But let me hear your points of view on the match. What or who did you find most noteworthy.

Kudo: My kudos...

Sage: You mean yourself in plural?

Kudo: Ha..ha..ha. No, sir.

Sage: Just kidding. Please carry on.

Kudo: My praise goes to the winners, who apparently, and from all calculations of bookmakers, were the gross underdogs who miraculously made it to the final, to face a well-reputed and established giant.

Sage: It must have seemed like a David and Goliath case.

Kudo: You could not have put it better, sir.

Sage: Sorry to interrupt. Please go on.

Kudo: Shortly after the game started the great opponents of the underdogs clearly manifested their skill superiority, as they dominated the game. It was not long before they scored. They went ahead to score again within a fairly short interval.

And before the end of the first half, they scored yet again the goal that most regarded as the final nail on the coffin of the underdogs' ambition. All hope was lost. At least, so it seemed. The match was as good as over. That was the general conclusion of most football followers, including the most ardent supporters of the underdog team. Disillusioned, some fans even stopped watching after the first half.

Characteristically, finals usually record very low scores. In this case, the clearly more superior and more skillful team was already 3 goals on top. This, by itself, was an overloaded score line for a serious cup final like a continental one. So it was no surprise that many, including myself, had concluded that the match was as good as wrapped up in favor of the relatively bigger, more experienced and more skillful team, parading stars that were household names in world football.

Sage: I noticed that even the commentator said that much. He gave no hint of a chance to the underdogs after the third goal.

Kudo: But we all were in for a great surprise. I do not know what the coach did or said to the players at half time, but surely something was added that seemed to give the underdogs a new dose of courage. This manifested clearly in the captain. His every body language, showed that he was on fire, ready to give the fight his very all.

Sage: You noticed that as well?

Kudo: Yes, sir, I did.

Sage: You must be a very keen observer of the game. Anyway, you have said that much already. Please proceed.

Kudo: As they say regarding fortune favoring the courageous, a loose ball soon bounced towards the captain, not far from the opponents' goalmouth. He put all his power behind it, and found the net for the underdog's first goal.

Sage: Apt description.

*Kudo: And you know, sir, what pleased me most was the way this captain, capitalizing on this goal roused all his players by his body language, waving them to rise to the occasion; and more, his sign language to their throng of fans who had journeyed all the way to a foreign land to give their team support. He moved and motivated players and fans **to believe again**.*

Sage: Critical point.

Kudo: Sir, why do you say that?

Sage: Critical point indeed. You see the captain gave his all because he believed; and because he believed that victory was possible against all odds, he raised the morale of the followers, players and fans alike, to believe again. This belief fired their will and desire to win, irrespective of the odds. So what I saw on the field was a contest between a team of skill and some will and an underdog of more will and less skill.

Kudo: In the end, more will, founded on unshakeable faith, won, above more skill with less faith. The catalytic rouser of the faith and energies was the leader.

Sage: And that is the great lesson of leadership I found in the match. A leader, a true leader, must have unshakeable faith in the success of the collective pursuit, and must thus throw in everything to achieve it. This charges him with a strong magnetic aura that infects those he leads, and raises them to performance levels beyond themselves. There lies the magic of leadership.

Kudo: Led by a different person with less faith, the results would surely have been different. Truly, he who wears the captain's band makes a world of difference to the people or the team he leads.

Chapter Sixteen

INTEGRITY FIRST

Sage: There is something I would like us to talk about.

Kudo: What is it, sir?

Sage: Good old **honesty**. Good old **integrity**. Meaning what you say, and saying what you mean.

Kudo: That sounds basic enough to me.

Sage: It is as basic as it is fundamental.

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: One of my favorite examples of a leader is that of one leading a blind man. Clearly the one leading is the leader of the movement, and the blind is the follower. Without the leader, be he a child or not, the blind man can get nowhere. We see many of these couples on the streets of many countries.

Kudo: Mine inclusive.

Sage: I see. So you really know.

Kudo: Yes, sir. Usually the blind just places his hand on the shoulder of a little lad, who leads him everywhere. Whenever the lad chooses to rest, the follower - the blind man - must also rest.

Sage: Apt. The relationship is that close. Together they are one organism, more or less. Inseparable, for all practical purposes, at least, for the blind man. To go, he must see. To do, he must see. So the lad serves as his way shower.

Kudo: His guide, his eyes.

Sage: That's correct. Now have you ever watched them cross a tricky place, like a slippery ground, or a gully or a gutter?

Kudo: Not quite. I have not really studied them doing that.

Sage: Next time you have the opportunity, check. What you are likely to witness is a situation of total trust. With experience, the blind has learned to trust the word of the lad totally and obeys every instruction to the letter. Step to the left. He obeys. Slowly. He obeys.

Now stretch your step to the fullest. He obeys. A little more stretch. He obeys. Through experience, the blind believes the word of his little leader totally.

This is the highest accolade a leader could have; that his followers would go with him, freely, even when blindfolded. Nothing begets this level of trust except reliability, dependability, truthfulness, total honesty; in short, integrity. This is what confers on the little lad the authority to have commanding influence over the blind man.

Kudo: I never saw it that way before.

Sage: But it is the true test of leadership. Will your followers freely follow you blind-folded? If the answer is no, there is still a lot of work to be done to earn their trust. And without trust, you are actually leading no one. For to lead, is to be trusted.

Kudo: So if your so-called followers do not trust you, you are really not leading them, but forcing yourself on them?

Sage: Sure. Let me give you a personal experience. Many years ago, I once had a trusted leader. I should rather say, just a leader, because trust should be inherent in leadership. Through experience I could trust this leader with my life.

If he blindfolded me, took me on a journey to a mountaintop, and asked me to jump off, I would if he personally assured me that I would be unharmed. That was how much I trusted him. Over the years I had come to know that his word was gold, true, reliable, and infallible. He was my leader in truth.

Kudo: How beautiful.

Sage: Truly beautiful. Now what I am about to say may shock you.

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: We lived in two distant cities. But we had reasons to meet quite regularly. One day he promised he was going to come to see me at the weekend, precisely 2pm on Saturday. True to type at 2pm he showed up. We discussed a variety of common issues and he departed.

Kudo: That sounds rather ordinary to me. I was waiting for the surprise.

Sage: The surprise was that I learnt a week later through his relatives that he was poisoned and died days before my appointment with him, which he kept.

Kudo: What? Sure?

Sage: Sure. I was so certain that his relatives were wrong. I immediately took a trip to their city to prove that I was right. I got there and became confused. I was led to the mortuary, where I confirmed that the body was deposited before my meeting with him.

Kudo: This is incredible.

Sage: Yes, incredible. But it was my experience. For weeks I had difficulty coming to terms with it. Then one night he appeared to me in a dream, to explain.

Kudo: What did he say?

Sage: He said that we were all potentially gods. And that those who realize their godness never play with their words. They regard them as sacred, knowing that whatever they say comes to pass. He said, surrounding all are special unseen beings whose duty it is to ensure that whatever we say happens. But unfortunately people toy with their words, wavering at whim, until the special guides don't take them seriously anymore. He finished, smiled and left. Then I woke up.

Kudo: Was it really a dream?

Sage: You ask correct questions, Kudo. Maybe it wasn't.

Chapter Seventeen

MR. KNOW ALL

Sage: Kudo, good to see you. How are you?

Kudo: Excellent, sir.

Sage: I love that very positive response. It's very heartwarming.

Kudo: And you, sir?

Sage: Let me repeat your word Excellent!

Kudo: I am glad to hear that, sir.

Sage: Why not, you are the author.

Kudo: Ah, not quite sir; I'm just learning. After all it is the likes of you that have taught us that as a man thinks so he is.

Sage: Fantastic scripture. Son, I like your familiarity with the word. That is where it actually begins. Keep it up.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. I am learning.

Sage: And, you know, I like that attitude.

Kudo: What attitude, sir?

Sage: The attitude or rather disposition of continuous learning. It is an attribute that we should talk about for leaders, ideal presidents, as you would put it.

Kudo: Glad, sir. I had another set of questions in mind for today but we can shelve those and discuss this, instead.

Sage: It is really nothing new; just basic stuff. A leader should be a good student, ever ready to learn; ever ready to study and understand situations as they evolve; ever ready to study and understand lieutenants and therefore how best to get the team to resonate. A good leader should also be a good student to learn from his colleagues and

therefore enrich governance. A good leader should be a good student of life because ultimately that is what he serves.

Kudo: Sir, please expatiate on these points. I need to fully understand them to enable me communicate them to my audience.

Sage: What points do you refer to? Maybe you can help me by using your notes. What have I said that are of particular interest to you?

Kudo: You said that a good leader should be ever ready to learn. Why?

Sage: A leader should never claim to know it all because he doesn't. In fact the more certain he feels about a course of action the more he should double check. He needs to proceed with extra caution and clarity because his decision affects many outside of his immediate fold of family or company. He must know that in human affairs there is never an absolute best way.

If he does not know that but rather believes that he knows best always, you may be dealing with a maniac of sorts. And like all maniacs, care and service would not be their strength. More importantly, perhaps progress would be limited, because you have a so-called leader who is frozen in time.

In such cases the followers may be ahead in thought and consciousness while the backward leadership does everything to hold them back. Leadership then becomes a yoke of a people, rather than a means of progress. The trouble of such societies may then just be the leadership.

Kudo: That sounds familiar.

Sage: What sounds familiar? What I am saying or what I am describing?

Kudo: What you are describing, sir. It is like the cart pulling the horse; or thugs ruling the princes. Tail wagging the body; or a 19th century coach handling today's world class players.

Sage: So rather than leadership playing its traditional role of liberation of energies and creativity, it becomes an inhibitor, an oppressor and annihilator of creativity and progress.

Kudo: Man is then meant for power; not power for man.

Sage: Exciting. That is a good encapsulation. This is because what then happens is that being backward, incapable of leading from the heart with ideas to touch and transform lives for the better, the backward leader concentrates on power and its retention as the primary aim of governance. Of course at that point your statement holds true. Their only claim to leadership of a people becomes the possession of the coercive instrument of state. No more. They confuse holding the reins of power with leading.

Kudo: But is that not leadership.

Sage: Not at all. Until a follower is willing to follow freely, you are not his leader; only his captor.

Kudo: Sir, you shed so much light through your explanations even unto situations that you are not privy to. It amazes me.

Chapter Eighteen

POWER OF PRAISE

Kudo: I am sorry to be a bit late today. I had planned to come 30 minutes earlier.

Sage: The deviation is not much. Even clocks run late sometimes.

Kudo: But that is when batteries are low.

Sage: Who says human batteries do not run low as well.

Kudo: I know they do, but in this case it was not that of batteries.

Sage: What was it then, traffic?

Kudo: That is a cliché in these parts, I know. It is the ready excuse for even the most chronic latecomer.

Sage: So what happened then?

Kudo: I ran into two of my funniest classmates back in the primary school. Guess what, they are still very funny. And you know something, sir; I have an incurable weakness for jokes. Good jokes. I love to laugh at jokes. Way back at school my classmates knew that I made a good humorist. They were always inspired to entertain me with their jokes. Sometimes I would laugh until I reeled on the floor and tears stood in my eyes.

Sage: They must have been great company.

Kudo: Oh, sir, fantastic company. I love those guys and their jokes. So I am sorry to be late, but that is one of my weaknesses. I make my confession, sir.

Sage: No need to apologize, son. I am not sure that I am much different.

Kudo: Thank you for your kind understanding.

Sage: Suddenly I wish I were that funny myself. I would have liked to entertain you.

Kudo: Me, too. But sir, there was something remarkable about these two guys I met today that I thought I should share with you. Both of them were the worst students in our class way back at school. They always competed for the bottom position of the class, in a manner of speaking. And you know what; they were not even ashamed of their reputation. Instead they turned their predicament into classic jokes.

Sage: They must have a very unique sense of humor.

Kudo: Oh yes, they do. And now their stations in life are vastly different, but you would not have guessed if you saw them joking away today.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: One of them is a professor today and the other a petrol station supervisor.

Sage: Really?

Kudo: Yes, sir. I marveled myself. But I was very happy to see two of them after such a long time. However what intrigued me most was the great disparity in their stations today.

Sage: Did you learn anything?

Kudo: I think I learnt something.

Sage: What?

Kudo: I learnt something about encouragement, about praise. I am trying to avoid the word kudos.

Sage: You can use it, I am not about to poke a joke at you now.

Kudo: Sir, I learnt about the miracle of kudos. In-between my banter with them I tried to figure out how one managed, in spite of series of poor results in the primary school, to today become a professor; while his fellow dullard in school could not even finish secondary school.

Sage: Intriguing.

Kudo: The garage supervisor did not tell me much but the professor did. At the end of our meeting, I realized that he had a most supportive father who led and encouraged him to higher grounds.

Sage: How? Was his father rich?

Kudo: No, nothing near that. In fact the father of the garage supervisor was richer at the time. The secret, from what I deciphered, was that the leadership provided by the professor's father was one that was generous with kudos. He generally did not do well at school, as I knew. But his father lavished him with praise on anything he did well at all. His father always made him believe that in spite of the look of his result he was potentially the best. His father never failed to point out how potentially brilliant he was; and how he could easily be the best if he chose to.

Sage: That must have been great tonic to the young man's ego.

Kudo: I believe so. He never lost faith in himself, because his father used the power of praise on him. That was my lesson.

Sage: The implications of what you have said loom large even for national leaders - a leader without a tongue of praise for his followers may have difficulties raising a winning team.

Chapter Nineteen

CUSTOMER IS KING

Sage: This morning I watched a most hilarious comedy on television.

Kudo: On what channel, sir?

Sage: I do not quite remember. It must have been one of the local channels. I found it quite entertaining; and there were tips on leadership in it, which I thought might be useful to you.

Kudo: Please tell me about them, sir.

Sage: Let's see. There were lessons from various scenes, actually. One of them was about a couple - parents - and their 6-year-old son. Let's just call him Ike. This couple had about 4 children, from what I saw.

The couple had gone shopping and bought some fancy shoes for the children's end of year activities at school. I believe they were billed for some kind of children's party. All the children had no problems with their shoes except this 6-year-old. His feet could not fit comfortably into the new shoes. He was so sad that he started to cry.

This saddened his father greatly and he took turns with his wife to try fitting the shoes comfortably on the little lad's feet, to no avail. The mum tried to arrange alternatives, old canvass shoes and the rest, but this saddened the young boy the more. His cry increased in tempo.

The father abandoned everything he was doing to attend to his son, consoling him and literally racking his brain for a solution. He tried promising to buy another pair of shoes in time, but that did not help matters for the children's show was imminent. The other children were all dressed up, ready to go.

The mother then tried a take-it-or-leave-it solution. She tried to make the child feel guilty by accusing him of making an unnecessary fuss when there were viable options provided. It did not work. The boy cried the more.

All this while the father, who was preparing for a trip, abandoned his preparations and dotted after his little boy in search of a solution. Suddenly, he seemed to have a brain wave and called the boy to come over and try his own shoes. It was a laughable option because he was a big man.

But ridiculous as the suggestion was, Ike played along. He walked into his father's room and into the waiting daddy's shoes. Of course it was ludicrously oversized. Father and son gave up on that solution. But father still would not rest. He wanted badly to make his son happy. And the son just would not stop crying.

Then the man seemed to have another idea. This time he called for the troublesome new shoes of the little lad.

"Please bring me Ike's shoes," he said aloud.

"What for again? Can you both get realistic? Ike, pick one of your old shoes and let me take you to the party!" his wife ordered.

Father and son seemed deaf to her command. Since she would not bring the shoes little Ike had to go fetch them himself. Quick, he was back with the shoes and presented them plaintively to his dad.

"You can go. Leave me alone with the shoes. I will call you when I am through," he told his son. Unquestioningly the boy walked away as if he knew his father would perform magic. When the boy left his father locked the door, so he could be alone. Then we saw the unexpected.

Kudo: What?

Sage: The man sat on the bed and tried to force his big feet into the small shoes. It was extremely funny. To some extent he succeeded. The front parts of his feet were squeezed into the cover of the shoes. But the look on his face was agony. The pain must have been very bad.

As if forcing his feet into the small shoes was not painful enough he started walking around the room, almost in tears as his feet hurt. But he did not give up. He kept pacing up and down the room in the pain. After a while, convinced that he had done enough work on the shoes to expand it for his little boy, he removed them. You needed to have seen the stupid look on his face. It was extremely funny.

Gingerly, he unlocked the door and invited his son to behold the miracle. The joy on the lad's face, in his voice and in his eyes was palpable. He pushed his feet into the new shoes, and surprise, surprise, they fitted! He jumped, and hugged his daddy.

You could see from the father's looks that the joy of the lad far compensated for his pain and foolery. It struck me - what a great leadership trait he had. In the face of his son's "little" problem, he collapsed the briefcase of his own concerns and focused completely at finding a solution to the little boy's problem.

Kudo: What a humorous story!

Sage: The comedy reminded me of the secret of a good businessman Total focus on customer satisfaction. For this Daddy-Leader, the customers were his family members. Even if only one of them was dissatisfied, he would bend over backwards until he returned the smile to that one's face.

I thought of a story published in one of the dailies of a dedicated wife who dotted on her busy husband. The husband was so busy with his professional pursuit that he had no time for anything else including his own welfare. This woman spoke about her unblinking focus on her husband, providing whatever was needed to make him comfortable and successful. Ironically, she spoke of him as her eternal leader.

But I knew in my heart that, of the two of them, she was in fact the leader in that relationship. For she it was who had committed totally to the welfare of her spouse, just like the funny father to his son.

Kudo: It is amazing, sir, how these lessons of leadership visit us in many guises. But sadly only few have the eyes to see them.

Chapter Twenty

CHASTISE WITH LOVE

Kudo: Sir, I particularly enjoyed our discussion recently on the power of praise. From my few days of practice I have found that it is an incredible elixir to all life. But I must confess it has not worked for me in all cases. For instance, I confronted a stubborn case this morning.

Sage: What did you experience?

Kudo: Yesterday, I spent about an hour of my evening discussing with an electrician over a maintenance job in my house. We negotiated and came to an agreement. This morning he came for his cheque. But I had a hunch that he would want to cheat. I had a strong feeling he was going to come up with some trick for more money. My hunch was right.

Sage: Sorry, Kudo, I do not mean to interrupt your story. But what do you mean by hunch? How often do you have it, and is it always right?

Kudo: Wise One, I do not know why you ask, because you must be the master of the subtleties of Spirit which assist us in our day to day life.

Sage: I have my own experiences and notions, but I would be glad to hear from you.

Kudo: It is quite difficult for me to describe a hunch, because for me it is usually very vivid. It is often almost as if I hear a voice, distinct and clear about things or issues not immediately obvious by logic.

Sage: Interesting. Please carry on.

Kudo: They are even more lucid when I do my spiritual exercises faithfully and with love.

Sage: This is getting more interesting. What do you mean by spiritual exercise?

Kudo: Oh my God! Sir, you know these things far better than I do.

Sage: You can assume that. No problem. But I want to hear from you.

Kudo: Ok, sir. I take it that you are testing me.

Sage: It does not matter how you take, but I would like to hear from you. So get on with it. Tell me about the spiritual exercise.

Kudo: Alright, sir. I know everyone is familiar with physical exercise, especially in these days when a lot of people are conscious of the fitness of their bodies.

Sage: Yeeessss.....

Kudo: Spiritual exercise is simply the spiritual counterpart of the physical exercise.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: Let me put it another way. We are HUMAN. HUMAN, I think, is a word made up of two parts HU and MAN. My translation of those two words is SPIRIT and FLESH. By Spirit I mean the God essence, which enters the body, and turns it into a living being. I mean the one that departs and we say the body is dead. Some might call it the Life Essence. Others might simply call it God.

Sage: Fantastic. So HU is Spirit.

Kudo: Yes, sir. HU is the Holy Spirit, which is individualized in each one of us as Soul.

Sage: Amazing! So we are Souls.

Kudo: Yes, sir. We are Souls, not the physical bodies. We, Souls, descend to occupy the lower structure, called man, to then become HUMAN. Let me hasten to add that we HUMANS are not the only Souls living in physical or other forms. Indeed, Animals Are Souls Too, although generally a little less conscious than us.

Sage: So you know we all come from one stream of life?

Kudo: Yes, sir. We all are one. No one differs from the other in Spirit, except in the levels of realization of who we are. But back to your question on spiritual exercise. We jog, for example, to exercise the MAN. But hardly do we exercise our true selves as HU, or specifically as Souls.

Sage: So spiritual exercise is exercising yourself as Soul?

Kudo: Yes, sir. Exercising spiritually is developing spiritual muscles and stamina. A simple exercise, for example, is singing HU, as a love song to God, for a few minutes in a quiet corner. It fills one with Divine Love.

Sage: Does that help with the hunches?

Kudo: Amongst many others. Singing HU gets one more in touch with his spiritual self, which happens to know so much more than the mind of logic can ever know.

Sage: So that is how you knew your electrician was set to cheat you.

Kudo: I do not really know the right answer to give you, sir; and I hope you understand.

Sage: I understand, son. Sorry I led you away from your story. You were about to land somewhere with a question on leadership, I'm sure.

Kudo: Very much so, sir. As the electrician tried to hassle me for some more money, pretending to have suddenly remembered a new wire that he has to buy, I knew he wanted to capitalize on my weak negotiating position in the morning. Being in haste to go to work, he knew I could easily make a concession. I rather chose to pretend to be annoyed with him. It worked, because for the time being, he backed off.

Sage: So...

Kudo: So I just wondered what leaders could do in such situations with difficult people.

Sage: It all depends on what the situation calls for. But whatever choice you make be conscious to make it with love and for the good of all concerned.

Chapter Twenty-One

SEE FAR

Sage: Kudo, how was your weekend?

Kudo: Excellent.

Sage: What did you do that must have been so good?

Kudo: I was at a spiritual seminar - Eckankar Spiritual Seminar.

Sage: You love it at spiritual seminars?

Kudo: It is simply fantastic. The feeling of love is deep beyond what words can express. It is like being continuously in the presence of Divine Love.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: I can hardly describe what I mean. But I know what I feel deep inside. I know what I hear deep inside. I know what I see deep inside.

Sage: You sound like you are in love.

Kudo: I hope I am not sounding wacky?

Sage: No. Not really. You are just sounding like someone in love, someone drunk; drunk with love.

Kudo: Ok, ok, I better shut up. I get the message. Now what about you?

Sage: I went to the zoo.

Kudo: Oh, very interesting.

Sage: I do not like it very much at the zoo; because I would rather have the animals roam free in their natural habitat, like the rest of us.

Kudo: Me, too.

Sage: Although these days there are attempts to make the zoos in the image of the natural environment of the animals in custody.

Kudo: Some approximation.

Sage: Oh, yes. Not quite the same as the original. But I guess they have reasons why there are zoos.

Kudo: At least people can see animals they would otherwise have hardly had a chance to see in their lifetime.

Sage: Well that is a reason - just that it is difficult to judge whether it is a good one or not.

Kudo: Anyway, what animals did you see?

Sage: I saw lion, elephant, hippopotamus, crocodile, alligator, python, fox, hyena, monkeys, tortoise, and different species of birds. But my star of the day was the eagle.

Kudo: The eagle?

Sage: Yes, the eagle. I just love that being. It appears so naturally, so innately aristocratic. It carries itself with gentility and grace, yet it is so strong and so masterful. And you know, I saw the strongest species of eagle in the world. Can you guess where it comes from?

Kudo: Where?

Sage: Your country.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Yes, the guide told us that much - that the strongest and probably the most royal of them come from your native land.

Kudo: I am very proud to note that.

Sage: Who wouldn't be? There was something else I learnt about the eagle, which was quite new to me.

Kudo: What?

Sage: We were told that the eagle has incredible vision. It sees much farther than most. That explained some things that I used to take for

granted, especially the fact that the eagle is often used as a symbol of leadership in many climes.

Kudo: I don't get it, sir?

Sage: It occurred to me that the leadership element exemplified by the eagle was less the physical stamina, and royal grace, but more the vision.

Kudo: Why?

Sage: Because vision is a critical, if not *the critical* defining element in leadership. You think of it. A leader is one who leads, right?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: How can you lead when you cannot see the future? Where would you be leading the people? One can only go as far as he sees. If all he sees is the past, surely that is where that so-called leader will take his people - to the past. If all he sees is the present, surely he has no control over the shape of things to come, and what you will have is chaos - an environment spun out of control.

Kudo: That may be an explanation for the leadership crises in these parts.

Sage: It just may be. For except a man can see far, where is he leading the others to? The first question a prospective leader must be asked is What is your vision?

Kudo: Sadly, here, that is hardly part of the agenda.

Sage: If that is not, then I wonder what is. It must appear ironic that the symbol of leadership is found in its best and most visionary form in your native land.

Chapter Twenty-Two

REWARD ONLY PERFORMANCE

Kudo: Sir, I need some advice.

Sage: Anything the matter?

Kudo: Nothing personal. It was a friend of mine who recently approached me to advise him on an issue in his company.

Sage: What kind of problem was it?

Kudo: It was some kind of staff problem. His staff disagreed with him over his new method of rewarding them at the end of the year.

Sage: What was the old method? And what is the new method?

Kudo: The old method was to ensure that each staff had an increment on his or her salary every new business year.

Sage: Uhu?

Kudo: He thought it was important to do this for staff, all staff, as encouragement.

Sage: Now what has changed?

Kudo: He no longer wants staff to enjoy automatic increments that was usually a flat percentage rate over their previous earnings. The new method bases all earnings on performance; so that increments and the like now have to vary from staff to staff based on their levels of performance the previous year.

Sage: What took him so long?

Kudo: So long to do what?

Sage: So long to realize that rewards should be based on performance?

Kudo: Are you saying he has got it right?

Sage: Sure.

Kudo: But many of his staff are opposed to the new method. That is why he wants my advice. He seems quite worried and unsure.

Sage: Why?

Kudo: Because he is not certain that he is doing the right thing.

Sage: I see. Listen, Kudo, many years ago when I was a student, one of my favorite science subjects was biology. And one of my favorite experiments involved proving plant's dependence on light. We had a controlled experiment where plants were put into two closets which let in no light.

Then one of the closets was perforated for sunlight, while the control remained completely sealed. Over a period we found that all the plants in the completely dark closet started losing color and withering, while plants in the lit closet all tilted towards the light.

This is how it works in leadership. People generally tend to do more of what the leadership rewards. Like plants they tilt towards the light of rewards.

So your friend is surely doing the right thing. There would of course be those that would need to drop off because of the wind of change, but that is not a problem. Shedding off leaves is often a good sign in plants because it precedes new shoots or signifies competence for longevity and survival.

I think your friend is on track, especially if his goal is better service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Kudo: That is most encouraging. I wish he were here to hear this himself. But I would certainly convey same to him.

Sage: You know, son, leadership can be a tricky business. Sometimes you could be so sentimentally attached to your followers or particular followers that you tend to pander to their requests even when such requests are detrimental to the overall good. The happiness of this usually small circle of reactionaries, if you know what I mean, could translate to hurt of the larger community.

Often the choice has to be made, between loyalty to the overarching ideals of the organization or to few supposedly close allies. Many leaders have failed because they would rather please immediate friends and cronies than the larger public who depend on

them to act right; and for whom they are supposed to be leaders, in the first place.

Kudo: We see this often. Laws perverted, policies subverted just for the sake of a few to the detriment of the people. A consequence is that the reputation of the leader begins to wane; and so his trustworthiness and reliability. If in a public organization, he begins to lose respect and in private, it begins to lose customers.

Sage: So in the end it is in everyone's interest for the leader to reward only performance. It is in the interest of the organization's reputation and growth. It is in the interest of the leader's reputation and trustworthiness. It is in the interest of the customers, for they then obtain better service.

And it is in the interest of staff, for better service translates into better profits from which they benefit. Of course it is also in the interest of shareholders. Whichever way you look your friend has got it right a win-win situation for everyone. I would suggest that he stays the course.

Chapter Twenty-Three

WARM AND CARING

Sage: I once served as lift operator.

Kudo: Really? You must be joking!

Sage: No, I am not joking. It was a job I did for one day, and I am proud of it.

Kudo: Surely you must be joking.

Sage: No, I am not. It is a long time ago, though. No kidding. I served as a lift operator for one day. My experience on that day is what I intend to discuss with you today.

Kudo: Oh, I did not realize that. Maybe I should first hear the story and later question the fact.

Sage: Good deal. Let me tell you the story.

Kudo: Alright, sir.

Sage: That day I wore my blue khaki outfit. It fitted nicely. And I made sure I arrived at my station very early before the first callers. I was informed the office was going to experience a good traffic of people that day, for some reason.

Kudo: What are you calling your station, sir? You mean the lift?

Sage: Sure. For that day, that was my workstation, my office.

Kudo: Ok. I accept that, sir.

Sage: As predicted the traffic was heavy. But I must say not many came at a time. They trickled in, in small batches of 2 or 3 at a time. And in most cases, there was only one in the lift with me at a time. It almost seemed as if the people were timed to arrive separately. So I more or less had the privilege of interacting with each person; in cases when we had time to chat as we ascended.

Kudo: It must have been an interesting day.

Sage: Yes, it was. I met various personality types. Indeed I had a note and a pen. Once I dropped one off, I quickly made some notes against the person's name. Luckily they each had their nametags, well displayed.

Kudo: Interesting.

Sage: To simplify things for myself, I tried to classify the people into two categories. Warm and Caring. Cold and Self-Centered.

Kudo: Wow!

Sage: It was a most fascinating experience.

Kudo: What was it like with the Cold and Self-Centered?

Sage: It has been a long time now; however I still recall certain traits that led me into categorizing them as such. When they first arrived in front of the lift, they were frowning, tight-lipped, face making, or admiring themselves for the whole period we were together, oblivious of me.

All their attention was on themselves. They did not bother with me or anything else. And often when they spoke to me, it was in a commanding tone, bereft of courtesy.

They treated me like the lowly worker that I was that day - grunting when I greeted, or not answering my greetings at all. And when they left the lift it was usually without a word. Hardly did they make eye contact, or smile at me. If they bothered to look at all, it was in condescension.

Kudo: Were they conscious of making these kinds of impressions on you.

Sage: Of course not, because I did not matter at all, in their reckoning. You could almost say that I did not exist as far as they were concerned. I was a total nobody. In a few cases I was badly berated for stopping on the wrong floor. I was too unimportant to be allowed the latitude of a simple mistake without a good tongue-lashing.

Kudo: Were there lots of them like that?

Sage: Sadly, yes. For most of them, I could just have been part of the machinery of the lift, programmed to do a routine. Coldly they would come in, coldly they would say what floor, and coldly they would depart. But luckily it was not so all through. There were the refreshing personalities in-between.

Kudo: I cannot wait to hear about them.

Sage: I feel good talking about them myself, because their memories warm my heart. I may not see those young lads again in this lifetime. They may in fact have completely forgotten me. But thinking about those exceptions warms my heart.

Kudo: How nice.

Sage: They seemed to carry sunshine with them. First, there is this warm and friendly smile. And then there is the hearty “hello”, or “how are you, sir”. Perhaps because I was manifestly older than them, a couple treated me with almost embarrassing respect.

While in the lift some would ask about the wound on my face for I had a plaster on it. And then we would talk and laugh, sharing hearty moments even for those brief periods. And when stepping out of the lift, they never forgot to say, “thank you”, so warmly, you had no doubt, they spoke from their hearts. And you know what?

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: Those few exceptional warm hearts succeeded, because I was in charge.

Kudo: Of what? I do not understand.

Sage: The visitors were actually applicants coming for interview for a raft of jobs. I was recruited as an undercover consultant to pick the warm and caring ones amongst them, disguised as a lift operator. It was a crucial leg of their interview series, but they did not know it.

Today I am glad to tell you that those few caring ones have decently climbed the social rungs and are now either running their successful businesses or leading one organization or the other. I saw it in them - the insignia of great leaders the warm and caring heart.

Chapter Twenty-Four

WHY SOUL EXISTS

Sage: For some strange reason I did not sleep early last night.

Kudo: Why? Insomnia?

Sage: Not quite. For most of the evening I was writing. The spiritual energy coming through was so strong, and I kept on and on until I thought it was necessary to force a break. In such conditions I generally find something unusual to do just to unwind. That is how I got into watching a movie.

Kudo: I never realized you were into movies.

Sage: That's what I was trying to explain to you. I am not. But I ended up watching for longer than I would ordinarily have and then went to bed late.

Kudo: What movie was it?

Sage: The Power Game; ever heard of it?

Kudo: No. I am not a movie person, too, although I occasionally find myself watching. Was there anything of interest?

Sage: Yes, there was. As the title of the movie indicated, it was a story of power struggle between rival groups in a university campus. Two professors were contending for the lucrative position of vice-chancellor.

Kudo: There must have been a lot of intellectual debate, given the setting.

Sage: Sure. There was a lot of argumentation as you would ordinarily expect from intellectuals, but that was not all. The surprising element, was that the less qualified, and less popular of the two, hatched a plan to silence his opponent by killing him.

Kudo: What?

Sage: Now you can see why I was arrested by the turn of the events in the movie. Days to the popular election, this lesser professor, for want of a better description, contracted a killer to finish off his opponent; and paid him with all his savings.

Kudo: Did he succeed?

Sage: Surprisingly, he did not. The contracted killer was a prophet in disguise, sent to live amongst the gang of killers for undisclosed reasons.

Kudo: So what happened?

Sage: On the eve of the election when the killer was supposed to waylay the subject on his way home, he rather broke into the home of the one that contracted him and held him at gunpoint. At first the professor thought that his opponent had hatched a similar plan as his and had sent an assassin as well to eliminate him.

Kudo: Then what happened?

Sage: After he successfully had his victim under his control, the so-called hired assassin gently removed his hood to reveal his handsome face. The professor was shocked!

Kudo: God, he must have been shocked beyond belief.

Sage: Shocked beyond description. With the gun still held to the professor's head he began to speak.

Kudo: About what?

Sage: He asked the professor whether he knew the meaning of life. Whether he knew where life came from? Whether he could create life? Whether he knew what the components were that constituted life?

Kudo: And what was the Prof's response?

Sage: Nothing, of course. He was utterly speechless.

Kudo: Of course, he should be.

Sage: The killer further asked the professor if he knew what Soul was; if he knew that Soul was a particle of God, a spark of God;

whether he built the bodies in which the Soul that he wanted to dispatch dwelt.

Kudo: The professor must have been totally perplexed at the words of his contracted killer.

Sage: He did not stop at asking questions. He eventually asked the professor to relax. He put away his gun and started to teach, the way a father would teach a son. He told the professor that Soul was the image of God in us, which enters the body to imbue it with life. When Soul leaves the body, the body dies.

To kill the body, is not to kill the Soul. Because no one can kill Soul, since no one can kill God. What he had contracted him to do was to forcefully eject Soul from its abode - an act that was tantamount to tampering with the Will of the Almighty. He asked the professor if he knew the implications of such an action; of depriving a fellow being of the life granted him by his maker - all just for a mess of porridge?

Kudo: Could the professor answer?

Sage: No. Shame covered him. The so-called assassin taught him further that freedom to live is granted to all by the Source of life, which views all with love and great compassion. He told the embarrassed professor that the Soul of his colleague that he wished to dispatch was loved dearly, the way God loves every Soul. He added that Soul exists because God loves it. No more, no less. He then asked rhetorically, "Who are you to tamper with the beloved of the Almighty who created you?"

Kudo: Did the Prof respond?

Sage: Of course not; only cold sweat and shame covered him. But the questioning continued. Imagine that I succeeded in killing your opponent for you to take power; will that power never end? Will you ever be able to account to yourself, your conscience, and the Creator? Would there be a hiding place for you in God's universe?

Even you have no right to take your own life. I wonder if you know that. If you dare you run foul of tampering with the Supreme, which you can neither understand nor fathom. You know not from where life came, and you know not how it goes; so how dare you tamper with it?

And what is even more ridiculous - all for a mess of porridge, which sooner or later belong in the suck-away pit of history? Is this

the reason you are ready to face the wrath of the unchangeable, unappeasable eternal laws that would hunt you whether you still be in the flesh or out of it?

As the professor fell face down, sobbing like a baby, utterly ashamed, the young man turned and walked away.

Chapter Twenty-Five

WHO'S MY LEADER?

Kudo: Sir, in a company of leaders who should lead?

Sage: You surprise me with this kind of question. Why do you ask?

Kudo: It is something I have been pondering over because of rampant cases of leadership tussles everywhere Within companies, governments and other organizations.

Sage: I see where you are coming from. You associate leadership with positions like President, Manager and Director - things like that - right?

Kudo: Right, sir.

Sage: I will try to address your question from your point of view but let me say that leadership has to be dissociated from positions of authority. I actually find it funny when people beat their chests to say I am the leader of such and such group just because they occupy a certain position.

Position or post is only a function station. That you are manning a railway station or even a motor park does not make you the leader of the passengers. What you have is an assignment to organize the station for the good of the commuters; period.

Kudo: Sir, please explain.

Sage: Of course I will explain. A position or a post is a place of work, the way you would for instance have a security post. The occupant may or may not have leadership qualities.

Kudo: So you could for example have a president, who is not a leader?

Sage: Correct. That he occupies the office of the president does not make him a leader.

Kudo: Sir, I am confused. Who then is a leader?

Sage: Kudo, I am surprised you are asking this because we have been on this your series for over 6 months now. I am sure you know the issues. Maybe you are just temporarily confused.

Kudo: I like the way you put it. But please forgive my naivety. Who is my leader if those in such positions of authority are not, as such?

Sage: I love your care with words. The use of *as such* there was most appropriate. You must have specialized in Theory.

Kudo: I appreciate your kind words, sir.

Sage: Simply put, a doctor is one who takes care of his patients. One to whom patients willingly and voluntarily submit their bodies knowing he can help them. Yes?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: A driver is one who can manipulate the vehicle with expertise, competent to move it around - one to whom you willingly and voluntarily submit to take you from one physical destination to another. Right?

Kudo: Right, sir.

Sage: In the same vein a leader is one whom you can trust to lead you. He is one to whom you voluntarily and freely submit to lead you. A chain of trust, freely given, is what links leader and follower. The key is willingness, volition, or freedom. Introduce any form of coercion to replace that voluntary link, and you are no longer talking leadership, but probably slavery or dictatorship.

Kudo: So as long as people or followers do not submit themselves of their own accord to be led by another - that person cannot in all honesty claim to be their leader? He could only claim to be their dictator having violated their freedom?

Sage: Excellent. This lies at the heart of the crisis of legitimacy of so-called leaders. It is the trust freely given that confers legitimacy on leadership otherwise it is fake, illegitimate, fraudulent and therefore not leadership. Your leader, in any sphere, is he whom you choose to follow freely. Sometimes the leader you follow may not even know that you follow him because your choice is a matter of the heart.

Kudo: So the choice of leaders lies in the deep recess of the heart?

Sage: Correct. Let me say also that you do not have to have one leader. Different phases of life can throw up different leaders. They are the ones whom, exercising your due freedom, you follow.

Kudo: I imagine that often these leaders chosen in the hearts of the people would be those who can be trusted to further the interest of the persons concerned.

Sage: That goes without saying. No one chooses a leader that would act antithetically to his interest, because the leader is principally an agent of the follower. A leader is engaged to serve the interest of those he leads. Otherwise he loses them and dissolves; for leadership is nothing without followership.

Kudo: So it must then be erroneous to describe leaders that act against the will of their followers as leaders?

Sage: Whoever accepts that kind of leadership but a slave? If your agent, like your lawyer, acts against your interest, wouldn't you fire him?

Kudo: Of course.

Sage: So those acting against your interest and calling themselves your leaders are impostors and probably need to be called to order by you. But beyond that you must be conscious of what you mean when you address someone as your leader. I have heard so many agonize about crude tyrants, whom they turn around to refer to as "our leaders".

Kudo: Sir, it could be because of ignorance.

Sage: I wonder if ignorance will ever be an acceptable excuse.

Chapter Twenty-Six

LEADERS PROVEN BY CRISES

Sage: Kudo, I cannot wait to share this with you.

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: A conversation I had with some little children on holidays around our block. They now have lots of time to play with grandfathers like me who are happy with their company.

Kudo: Children are great company any day.

Sage: You know what I enjoy most about them?

Kudo: No, sir.

Sage: The wisdom that passes so easily through them to the rest of us, if we are attentive.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Yes. Often it comes straight from the heart, without cosmetics. Just the way it is.

Kudo: Sure. Children are hardly concerned with manipulations, cold calculations or powdering of facts to please some person or the other.

Sage: If your clothes smell, they tell you straight. No diplomacy. And best of all, no hard feelings. Children are simply great.

Kudo: They are.

Sage: Let me return to the conversation I had with them this morning that I found so interesting.

Kudo: Please, sir.

Sage: I was asking about the physical world, trying to find out why things exist. They gave amazing answers. But the one that interested

me most was the answer that one of them gave as the reason why night exists.

Kudo: What did he say?

Sage: The little lad of probably 6 or 7 years said nights existed so that stars could shine. And he went further to explain that but for the night we may never have a chance to see the stars, because they do not show up during the day, when it is very bright.

Kudo: Amazing.

Sage: I tell you, Kudo. Children are truly amazing. The wisdom of that little lad filled my heart with gladness all morning and I kept thinking about children.

Kudo: I have always wondered why great prophets love them so much. Perhaps the reason is the wisdom they exude.

Sage: But beyond that, I think, is the love in their hearts. That love, so humble and so simple, as love often is, is what makes the wisdom possible. But my excitement in this case was with reference to the implications of what the lad said.

Kudo: Is there more to it than I can see.

Sage: I do not know, but his statement, for me, was profound, deep and capable of explaining so many things in life.

Kudo: Such as?

Sage: Periods of temptation; periods of problems; periods of ignorance; periods of crises - all represented by the moments of darkness, which in turn provides the grounds, the opportunity for stars to shine.

Kudo: Are you speaking with reference to our individual lives?

Sage: It applies every way, in industry, in academics, in private lives, in national life. The period of the night, metaphorically speaking, provides the chance, probably the true chance for true stars to shine.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: Take students for instance. All would claim stardom but for exams, the period of tests and strain. That is when to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Kudo: I get it now, sir. Going by this wisdom, if I were a spinster, I would know how best to pick a husband.

Sage: Oh my God, how did your mind fetch that! I do not know if I agree that crisis is what should have helped you pick a good husband, but it is worth mocking up a crisis sometimes just to know who loves you or not - man or woman. For it is true that a friend in need is a friend indeed.

Kudo: Sir, knowing you, you must have told me about your encounter this morning with the children, with an eye to helping me fill my column this week.

Sage: I thought you would get the message.

Kudo: I think I do. But please clarify it for my audience and me. I just want to be sure that I got it right.

Sage: I am sure you did. Let he that must choose a leader among many, look out for him in the periods of crises; surely they would throw up the loving, courageous and caring of the lot. That is when to distinguish the real leaders from the fake ones. If you remind me, next week I shall share a few examples or anecdotes with you.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

THE REAL LEADER

Sage: I promised I was going to tell you a story today.

Kudo: I am glad you remembered. I was going to prompt you, anyway.

Sage: Thanks, but I do remember.

Kudo: I am glad.

Sage: I hope you are not looking forward to some long winding fairy tale from the days of yore. What I have to tell you is an observation I made a few weeks ago while traveling between two relatively neighboring cities by air.

Kudo: It must have been a very short trip.

Sage: Yes, it was. The flight could not have lasted more than 30 minutes.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: While waiting at the airport my attention fell on a gorgeously dressed couple. They looked very important. I particularly liked the way the man carried himself. He reminded me of tough army commanders, full of energy and decisive. He seemed to speak only in commands to all around him including his aides and I believe his wife. I was in no doubt that he was a man in charge of many things and many people.

Kudo: Interesting.

Sage: In contrast, the wife seemed very humble. She spoke softly, and addressed the aides almost like equals. She spoke politely to all. You could have described her as friendly and meek. She was certainly far from anything you could call tough; not by speech or by looks for she was even smallish.

Kudo: She must have cut the picture of a submissive wife as well.

Sage: Very much so. She doted on her husband, at least from the much I could surmise. Again, in contrast, her macho husband hardly paid her attention. His hat, like that of an American cowboy, accentuated his strength and tough mien.

Kudo: There must have been a matching frown of importance on his face.

Sage: Excellent description. Simply apt. No wonder you are a writer.

Kudo: I am just filling in from the picture you are painting.

Sage: You are filling in precisely. His frown of importance, if I may borrow your phrase, seemed permanently plastered on his face. Not once did I see him smile throughout the one-hour delay that we experienced waiting at the sparse lounge.

However the frown is not the meat of my story. The meat occurred when we were air-borne and ran into a minor storm. Because the aircraft was small the effect was much, for the plane became very shaky, rising and descending sharply, gyrating. It was quite scary.

Kudo: I bet the names of God seized the cabin.

Sage: Oh, Kudo, I do not think I have ever heard as many names of God in all my life as I heard in that short interval; in different languages, tongues, and dialects. It was a mad cacophony.

Kudo: I can imagine.

Sage: Interestingly, in this noisy market of God's names, you could identity the tenors and altos of the various strands of religion prevalent in the region. Some were simply wailing the names, some commanding the names; while others were invoking the names and others still were screaming the names. I could not help thinking whether some thought that God was deaf. Or was asleep, and needed to be screamed at or commanded back to attention.

Kudo: It must have been quite an experience.

Sage: It was. I must confess that I joined in calling the name of God, the way that I know it.

Kudo: How?

Sage: The simple name for God that I know is HU.

Kudo: HU?

Sage: Yes, HU, as in Human. I sang it quietly within me, knowing that God was with us.

Kudo: Great faith.

Sage: It is beyond faith, Kudo. It is a deep and unshakeable knowing. It is reality more solid than anything you and I ever know. But don't let me take you away from the kernel of the story, which was that in the crisis, our macho man was one of those wailing like a baby; while his wife, the small diminutive fellow, calm and composed, hugged him tight, patting his back as if to reassure him that all would be well.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: My son, it was a sight to behold. A sight I would not forget that easily. I could not help asking myself who amongst these two is the leader? That event helped me prove to myself once again that crises are always excellent selectors of the real leaders in every group.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

LEADERS ARE UNIQUE

Sage: Years ago I was a friend of a very influential and rich but old man, with a wide business organization. Towards his twilight years, he had difficulty in choosing the successor and leader of his organization. He looked to his sons. He had four of them.

For long he had anticipated this period in his life, when he would have to bow out and usher in one of his sons to take leadership. He had given all four very good education in preparation. He also put them through all manner of disciplines, which he considered good training for leadership.

In the end, all four graduated with very good grades, exhibiting good culture and leadership traits. Clearly choosing a leader from amongst them was tough especially since he did not wish to rely on the traditional measure of age as a differentiator. This was when he consulted me, his friend, to help. I must confess that for me it was quite a challenge trying to choose the best leader from these four sons, properly well groomed.

Kudo: But did you solve the problem in the end?

Sage: I would not say that I solved the problem, but the problem was solved, somehow.

Kudo: How?

Sage: We gave them series of tests, some written, others practical - just to test their knowledge and innovative abilities. I must say they all came back with almost equally good performances. The problem persisted until I decided to look beyond the content of the tests and their performances to the styles adopted for each event. Here I found the difference.

Kudo: What did you find?

Sage: I found that although they all had similar grooming, one in particular always differed in the manner in which he approached the problems. The approaches of three were more or less the same, classic, almost textbook materials. But you could almost characterize that of my favorite as unorthodox.

Kudo: Did they often arrive at the same solution?

Sage: Yes, you could say, more or less, but the solutions of the different one, whom we could just call Dopal, always had a certain way, a certain non-conformist slant; no, no, I think the real word is “unique”. He always came out somewhat truly unique. Although you could not describe the others as second-rate, there was always something about Dopal which smacked of identity.

Kudo: You mean he had a unique DNA imprint on all his ways?

Sage: I think that may be a better way of putting it.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: What was even more unique was the consistency of his uniqueness in all that he said or did. Even in the way he carried himself, spoke or dressed.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Really. Dopal gave you the impression that the schools never tampered with his inner self. Almost everything he did bore his inner character. It truly fascinated me and it was only much later that I got to understand.

Kudo: Was it that he was creative?

Sage: I think it was beyond just creativity. I believe the consistency of Dopal was attributable to a dogged sincerity to himself. He strived always to be true to himself and hardly did anything because others thought or said so, or even because someone had certain expectations of him.

Kudo: He was a free Soul?

Sage: Perhaps you could put it that way. He never let the opinion of the environment or its people constrain him or define his speech or action. He always did it his way. If he conformed, it was because he would have conformed even if no one were watching him.

Kudo: Did this uniqueness show even in answers to the theory tests?

Sage: He answered always with deep sincerity to himself. Where for instance he agreed with a certain philosopher's ideas, he internalized it so much that he spoke of it as if it were originally his and thus almost always ventured to advance the frontiers. He did not just regurgitate things for the sake of kudos or applause.

Even where he knew his father might differ he was never afraid to state his case, though politely. The critical factor was that he acted always out of his own personal conviction. He would never do it just to please or to belong. He acted from deep sincerity to himself.

Kudo: So you chose Dopal?

Sage: Of course! How can one ever lead others sincerely if he cannot even be faithful to himself? Put another way, the more faithful a man is to himself, the more of a leader he is, for the first one to be led is himself.

Be not surprised that true leaders in any sphere can always be spotted in the crowd. Somehow they are always different, because they express their inner self; and every inner self sincerely expressed is unique - an ancient signature of Souls liberated from the prison of social consciousness. That is a hallmark of a true leader.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

SINCERE COMPLIMENTS

Kudo: Good morning, sir.

Sage: admire your politeness, in spite of our familiarity.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. I truly appreciate your compliments.

Sage: I hope you do not mean compliments in the commonplace way it is often given which verges on flattery.

Kudo: Not at all, sir; especially knowing you.

Sage: Thanks for your implied compliments too.

Kudo: I am glad.

Sage: The point I was really going to make is that compliments are probably some of the most pleasant ways of teaching or correcting followers of a leader. I once worked with a leader, who always told you what was wrong with your ways by lavishly but honestly praising a desired course of action or behavior.

Kudo: He looks out for your good behaviour, so he would praise you?

Sage: Yes, but not quite. What he craved, I believe, was just the chance to compliment. And he felt really good if it was the one he wished to correct, or even if the subject were merely within earshot while he complimented another. What seemed important to him was that you knew what was praiseworthy.

Kudo: I do not get it, sir.

Sage: Let me give you an example. For some of the period that he led me, I was in the habit of coming late to meetings. Rather than directly scold the likes of me for coming late to meetings, he would rather lavishly praise the early comers. He would set them up as idols, without making any negative reference to the rest of us.

Kudo: I see what you mean.

Sage: In time, no one asked me to change my ways. Every follower cherishes the commendations and compliments of his leader in any sphere. Be it in the family, at work, or at play. I commend it strongly to you. It works.

Kudo: I can imagine.

Sage: And the greater beauty of it is that it corrects people without antagonizing them. It provides a reference point of action or behavior. To be sure, it could take a while for the correction to dawn, depending on how sensitive or sensible, responsible or responsive the intended subject is.

Kudo: Again you lose me. Please explain.

Sage: I am sorry. I never mean to lose you. It must be my communication skills, which require improvement. What I intend to convey is that some people pick up the correction quicker than others, depending on several variables which may include self-respect, adaptability, and experience.

Kudo: Could trust or integrity also be added to that list?

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: I mean from the point of view of the subject to be corrected. Or let me rephrase the question.

Sage: Ok, go ahead.

Kudo: Would the person to be corrected more easily accept the correction if he had greater trust in the leader?

Sage: Yes, of course. Now I see what you mean. If the leader were not trusted by the subject owing to faults of falsehood or integrity; even his most benign or well-meant criticism or praise would require some salting to be accepted.

Kudo: Exactly, sir.

Sage: Agreed. But in this case I basically assumed that the leader is trust-worthy, and honorable. That way his compliment or praise is

credible, making his followers crave for it. Otherwise who wants the compliment of an untrustworthy one, one who lacks integrity?

Kudo: Thanks for seeing my point. I also fully see your own point about using compliments to correct. I wonder whether there are many other better techniques of teaching than that.

Sage: The taste of the pudding is in the eating. Try it on your children, friends and colleagues and see what great result it fetches.

Kudo: You assume that I have their respect and therefore whatever compliment I give would be credible.

Sage: Of course. Knowing you this much, I believe I can safely assume that.

Kudo: You are so kind and generous with your compliments.

Sage: Because you truly deserve it.

Kudo: Thank you very much, sir.

Chapter Thirty

DECIDE RIGHT ALWAYS

Sage: Tell me Kudo, have you ever wondered why some great leaders manage to always make the right decisions, while most others almost always get it wrong, even with all manner of experts at their disposal?

Kudo: No. I have always thought that right decisions of great leaders were based on good advice.

Sage: That's correct. But good advice from whom?

Kudo: From cabinet members, special advisers, consultants, analysts, kitchen cabinet cooks...you know the retinue.

Sage: And what is usually their basis for advice?

Kudo: I think, sir, that the advice of this long list of advisers who surround a powerful leader is usually borne out of selfish motives, even though they might colour it with semblances of altruism.

Sage: Would this be for almost all the cases?

Kudo: No. I believe there are also some that are based on sound scientific analysis.

Sage: Any other categories of advisers?

Kudo: There may also be those whose advice is borne purely out of altruism. But I must add that this third group is likely to be in the minority, usually ignored or blacklisted.

Sage: Now is it a surprise then that many so-called leaders of nations, organizations, families, armies, clubs, schools etc often end with disastrous decisions?

Kudo: Sadly not.

Sage: I believe however that most advisers, whether canvassing altruistic, selfish or scientific; trust that they are genuinely doing the right thing. Some could swear by their actions and advice, even

though their advice may end up achieving the most negative consequences and sometimes the very opposite of what they intended. Over and over, good intentions have proved insufficient as a basis for advice or action. Experience has at least shown that much. But, of course, people do not learn.

Kudo: So if good intentions are not good enough, what is?

Sage: Here we stumble on the age-old dichotomy between material knowledge and inner wisdom.

Kudo: What do you mean, sir? Please explain.

Sage: Material knowledge is knowledge as exemplified by science - an objective analysis, observation and/or experience of the external world ordered by logic. For example, I could think I need to appeal to the selfish, insecure sense of the leader to help him loot some money, from which I would benefit.

I would remind him that sooner or later he would leave office, so there is the need to secure his future. Perfect material logic it is, but one that forgets that the future is one that is dictated and controlled by pure spiritual essence and non-materialistic logic. I am sure you know of far too many cases of anticipated futures that never arrived, or arrived jaundiced by problems, which no material matter could solve. Still, the lesson is not learnt.

Kudo: But the material logic still works, at least sometimes.

Sage: Of course, it works.

Kudo: So....

Sage: So why shouldn't it be used?

Kudo: That is what I mean. It has to be used.

Sage: Correct, it is irresistible not to use it to advance material interests. But the catch is that life itself is beyond material. Hence it happens often that even the most brilliant schemes of men end up in the smelly dustbins of history. But, of course, it has not stopped men from scheming. The illusion is strong. The illusion of the material is so strong; it constitutes a blindfold in a situation otherwise as clear as daylight.

Kudo: So what can leaders do?

Sage: It is obvious from what we have discussed. Let me add that this applies not just to leaders but also to all men. By the mental and material make-up of man, right decision is near impossible, especially decision over life-events, because life itself is not just material. It is spiritual. Thus only Spirit can truly understand and interpret its own language.

Kudo: Be clear, sir.

Sage: To always make right decisions of certainty one must awake as a spiritual being. A spiritual being necessarily understands the spiritual language of life. A spiritual being sees what the material cannot see and hears what the material cannot hear. Only those leaders tuned to this high frequency to listen to the wisdom within get it right always, as long as they are tuned in and are listening.

Chapter Thirty-One

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE

Sage: Today I hope you do not mind if we talk a bit about defeat.

Kudo: Defeat?

Sage: Yes, defeat.

Kudo: Ah, ah, why defeat? Why not victory? Victory is what leaders always want.

Sage: Yes I know, but hear me out first.

Kudo: I am sorry. I should not be drifting into impatience. Please teach me.

Sage: There is nothing I have to teach you, as you know; but I would rather share a story with you.

Kudo: You know I love stories. Please tell me. I am all ears.

Sage: Decades ago in a far away clan, getting married was not an easy ordeal for young men, especially for the not-so-strong. By custom, the ladies ripe for marriage were only married to the strong and powerful - the good wrestlers.

Kudo: How?

Sage: Once a year the clan organized a wrestling competition amongst all its eligible bachelors. Every one attended, either as a participant or as a spectator. It was the clan's most prestigious event. Families backed their participating sons with all possible support, including cheer leaders, drums, dances and, in some cases, charms. The stakes were high.

Kudo: Why?

Sage: The strongest and victorious wrestlers earned the right to choose first from the ladies; before the next strongest and then the next, in that order. The weakest bachelors often ended up with no

lady, for the stronger men would usually have exhausted the choices before their turn.

Kudo: So what happens where they fail?

Sage: Fail to do what?

Kudo: Fail to win, or prove to be weakest in the ranking; thus losing out, not being able to find any lady to marry for the year; would they then have to wait for the next event?

Sage: Of course! As you can guess, some never made it because by each new wrestling season, new crop of young men would have grown up, who, in cases, were stronger still. That is how some aged without the benefit of a wife. Some of such weaklings usually ended up marrying the total rejects, whom no one wanted; often the ones with incurable ailments or severe handicaps.

Kudo: Now I can see why it meant so much to the families.

Sage: Very much so. They stopped at nothing to support their young men to victory.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: But the story I am about to tell you is a love story. Once, there was a very beautiful girl. She was the most beautiful girl in the clan. She was tall and slender, with an oval face so shapely, the clan referred to her as *Ekhwa*, literally meaning 'Egg'. What an appropriate name it was for she looked so tender, and so sweet. It was the dream of every young man in the entire clan to marry her.

Kudo: I can imagine.

Sage: Indeed, I can imagine what you imagine. Anyway, back to the story. The season eventually came when Ekwa was one of those due to be vied for by the young men. Excitement was wild. Everyone was there.

Kudo: Of course!

Sage: But unknown to the clan, under the veil of the velvety skin, and tender mien of the most beautiful girl lay a very independent mind. Ekwa had fallen in love with an equally handsome but very slender

young man, called Ekwela who was not likely to be a match to the well built, muscular competitors on the village playground that day.

Quiet as Ekhwa sat with the other damsels, her big brown eyes could hardly conceal her anxiety. Nervously she fidgeted with her wrapper, traditionally reaching from just above her bust to her feet. In her heart, she knew Ekwela, her choice, would not make it. She knew it, almost of certainty.

So as the excitement grew, while the wrestling matches and the raised dust hazed the atmosphere, Ekhwa sneaked away into the bush. By the time the matches were done and the young men were ready to choose, Ekhwa was gone.

According to the tradition the choices still had to be made from amongst the bevy present. Reluctantly the bachelors made their choices; in the usual order of strength. Notably Ekhwa's choice, Ekwela, lay on the wrestling ground thoroughly beaten, heart-broken and too ashamed to find his feet. He thought he had lost Ekhwa for good. And so there he lay covering his face while the crowd slowly dispersed, mocking him.

This was when Ekhwa re-emerged from hiding and rushed straight to him. She knelt beside his battered body, lifted up his bleeding face and kissed him, crying and promising "Ekwela, my heart belongs to you. I will always belong to you!"

Soon word spread that Ekhwa was back. The Chief immediately dispatched men to bundle her to him for due sanctions.

Kudo: What a shame!

Sage: What a shame indeed.

Kudo: Go on, sir. Finish the story. Did they ever end up marrying?

Sage: Perhaps another time we would continue. But the import of the story, which I tell, is Like Ekwa, the true leader never abandons his team, whether they win or whether they lose.

Chapter Thirty-Two

LEADING FOR LOVE

Kudo: I came across a phrase in a scripture last night, which I would like to share with you.

Sage: Interesting. Which phrase is this?

Kudo: Just a simple phrase. Something to the effect that whatever you do, you should do for Love.

Sage: That you should do everything for love?

Kudo: Yes. I wondered how that is possible. And specifically for my own special interest in leadership, I wonder how one could lead for love. I could not quite resolve the debate in my mind, and thought you might be able to help me.

Sage: I am surprised that you say you could not come to a resolution, because this is something I believe we have discussed somewhat before.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: I think so, because leading for love is simply leading selflessly.

Kudo: Could I translate that to mean leading without selfish motives of gains?

Sage: Correct. But perhaps more.

Kudo: Please explain.

Sage: Imagine that Love was actually an entity for whom you were working or, in this case, leading. Can you imagine that?

Kudo: I guess I can, if the Mr. Love we speak of here is one who has the qualities of Love.

Sage: Precisely. Imagine you are working for a being of consummate Love, quintessential Love, who is the highest manifestation of love.

Can you imagine that? If you can do that then imagine how you would set about your job. What would be your mode of operation?

Kudo: I guess I would operate strictly according to the laws of love. I would do nothing, which infringes on other person's personal space and freedom. Everything I do would be by mutual consent, having the explicit permission of the person concerned. My administration would be wholly impartial, because all my subjects or customers, as the case may be, would be loved equally.

Sage: There would then be no need for favoritism, nepotism, or partiality, right?

Kudo: Right. Everybody would be rewarded with a harvest of good or evil, exactly as merited for that is the way that Mr. Love would do it.

Sage: Aha, so leading for Mr. Love is leading as if you were Mr. Love.

Kudo: Yes, sir. At least, that is the way I understand it.

Sage: I agree with you. Since you know you are not Mr. Love, you would be conscious that you are representing Mr. Love. In other words, that you are a proxy, a messenger or a mouth piece for the bigger being who sent you.

Kudo: Exactly, sir. I become like an ambassador, making no commitment except I am so permitted by my principal.

Sage: Fantastic. You have got the idea. So there is no representing Mr. Love without a strong communication link with him, and fidelity to his policies and practices.

Kudo: Sir, what you said now reminds me of the predicament that befell a professional colleague a few months ago. He happens to be a General Manager in his company and was asked to represent his boss, the Managing Director/Chairman, at a fund raising event.

Sage: What happened?

Kudo: The Master of Ceremony was a great sweet talker.

Sage: He had to be, if he was given the task of talking the people out of their money.

Kudo: But his method was the usual, he praised and flattered the guests beyond proportion, boosting their egos to bursting limits before inviting them to make their donations. When it came to my friend's turn, he was so carried away with the flattery that he pledged a sum far beyond what had been agreed with the Managing Director.

Sage: He must have gone back to explain.

Kudo: But his explanations did not work. He had to pay with his Christmas bonus for the additional pledge beyond what the boss had approved. Today he is still sore and mad, convinced that he made the additional pledge for the sake of the company's image. Sadly, the MD disagrees.

Sage: Poor fellow, he should have known better and limited himself to the framework set by his principal for even the company whose image he was supposedly boosting belongs to and is run invariably by the principal.

If the principal were Mr. Love, then your friend would surely be a poor representative, a poor leader for love. Or, maybe, even worse. This is because from my understanding a leader of people is always a surrogate for God who created them, and who is their Ultimate Leader. So to lead is to represent God. Indeed to lead at all, at any level, is to lead for God with all the attendant responsibilities.

Kudo: Now this is huge. Do you think leaders understand this?

Sage: I don't know. But this I know "Ignorance is no excuse."

Chapter Thirty-Three

WHEN TO LET GO

Kudo: Dear sage, I have a very sorry story today that I would like to share with you.

Sage: I am listening. Please speak.

Kudo: It is the story, or shall I call it the plight, of a friend of sterling character - a true leader, if I might say so. This friend of mine, for the purpose of anonymity, I will call Bagha.

Sage: That's fine.

Kudo: Bagha simply loves people. He loves to teach, to mentor and to inspire others. Bagha is full of encouragement for almost everyone. He is a great motivator. I use "is" because I believe he still is, in spite of the stain on his name now as an ex-convict.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: Bagha was sent to jail for a day.

Sage: What happened?

Kudo: That is the story.

Sage: I see.

Kudo: Bagha had a very affectionate secretary but who was careless, inefficient and forgetful. Let us call the secretary Ujuma. For years he coped with her against the advice of colleagues. Bagha believed he could groom her. He counseled and advised as often as she defaulted, which was very frequent. He believed that in time she would improve.

Sage: Did she?

Kudo: Sadly she did not, although Bagha stubbornly retained her, hoping that she would change. I must add that as a result of Ujuma's inefficiency, countless number of times Bagha had had to endure embarrassment. Let me recount a favorite instance of mine.

I was there in his office sometime in early December visiting when Bagha, in his usual manner, was showering a staff with gratitude over a card which he received from the staff that morning - a Christmas card. It was an open office so everyone heard the praise. Bagha loves to applaud people in the open.

Sage: Excellent leadership trait.

Kudo: I am glad you say that, sir. But in this particular case, an embarrassing situation for my friend.

Sage: How?

Kudo: The young lady, Ama, that he was praising for the Christmas card openly denied having sent one. Bagha sweetly insisted, even recalling some of the kind words in the card. In return she politely but firmly reiterated her denial.

Now my friend, Bagha, was getting embarrassed. But he tried not to show it. He rather walked to his table to fetch his evidence the card! A second later, he handed it to Ama. Now not only were ears attentive, all eyes were focused on the drama.

Sage: Interesting.

Kudo: Guess what happened. When he showed the card to eager Ama, she took one studied look at it and announced gleefully, "Sir, but this was the card I sent you last year, through your secretary." Chuckle. Chuckle, chuckle, everywhere.

Bagha had to do some quick thinking to limit the damage, replying jokingly, "Thank God! At least it arrived after all." Everyone had a good laugh.

He believed Ujuma would change.

In numerous other instances, official and private, he continued to be embarrassed on the account of his secretary's fault. But he held on to her, consoling himself that after all she had a good heart. He did not want to see her lose her job.

Sage: Poor guy!

Kudo: Another instance I readily recall was of a letter, which he had sent out to his Managing Director following a petition. It was a very urgent and important matter, which Bagha had characteristically treated with dispatch, and passed on to his boss.

The MD called him three weeks later from a distant location, asking if Bagha knew of any such petition since he himself had no knowledge of it, not having received any such correspondence. Bagha was dumbfounded. Of course, he recalled having treated the letter weeks earlier, with instructions to Ujuma to make copies for all his bosses. He found to his utter chagrin that for two weeks that vital document lay dormant in her drawer.

Still he would not bear to let her go.

Sadly today he is an ex-convict, because he trusted Ujuma to parcel materials that he was traveling abroad with on business. They were usually materials accompanied with requisite official approvals from regulatory bodies. These had all been obtained and passed on to Ujuma, to do the simple and routine task of putting them in an envelope, bagged along with the other files he was traveling with.

Having been in meetings till late Bagha could not double check before traveling. On arrival he was nabbed for lack of requisite papers and sentenced. Before his company could rally to his rescue Bagha had become an ex-con. He was quickly released when the papers were produced but this was after the fact.

Sir, where do you think he went wrong?

Sage: You are a wise man. I am sure you know the answer already. But every doctor will tell that at any accident scene, you quickly check for life, and separate the dead from the living. The living can be helped. The dead must be left. Every soldier in combat knows this basic rule. Invest your efforts wisely. No amount of resuscitation can improve a corpse, no matter how pretty the body is.

Chapter Thirty-Four

ALIKA AND HIS MANY WIVES

Kudo: You have not told me a story for sometime now. You know I love your stories.

Sage: But I am not a storyteller.

Kudo: I know, but you tell stories anyway. I would appreciate any story today.

Sage: I do not need any persuasion, because I intended telling you the story of my cousin, Alika, and his many wives.

Kudo: Alika?

Sage: Yes, Alika. Sounds familiar? Anyway, the story is a pretty straightforward one. So, as all stories begin...

Once upon a time, I had a cousin named Alika. He was born a really ugly child. He was lazy. He was indolent. He was un-charismatic in every sense of the word.

Kudo: Forgive me, sir, for the interruption. It is still about this name 'Alika'. It sounds so familiar. It could have come from around my area. Was that really the name of your cousin?

Sage: Well, let me first say that the story is true, as are all the stories I tell you. I guess that is why I emphasize that I am not a storyteller the way you would understand a fiction writer. So, to answer your question, indeed Alika was the name of one of my cousins in a different lifetime.

You may know or not that Soul returns in different bodies through ages, depending on what experience is required for that Soul in that lifetime. I need to be brief on this because I do not want to distract you from the story. We all have been something or somebody else at different lifetimes before. But let me return to Alika.

Kudo: Alright, sir.

Sage: So, as I was saying, Alika was not a likeable person. He was ugly, lazy, short, you name it a lot of the attributes that people would generally not be drawn to. But Alika had something special.

He had the uncanny ability to seek and partner with people who towered above him, whichever goal he pursued. Alika fulfilled many goals in that lifetime. But what interests me here is what he made of his family life. Far more than the rest of us who were supposedly better looking, tall, and seemingly more endowed, Alika's family life was the most successful.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Yes!

Kudo: How did he do it? What did he do?

Sage: Alika applied what most of us regarded then as his magic wand. Quite frankly, towards the end of our lives in that lifetime, many of us, his cousins, became envious of this hitherto ugly character. Perhaps to console or excuse our own failings we all concluded that Alika was some sort of witchdoctor.

Kudo: What did he do to warrant such branding?

Sage: Alika married six fantastic wives!

Kudo: Six wives? He was polygamous? That polygamous?

Sage: At that time and in that culture, it was normal. You know elements of morality are tied to cultural ethos at any point in time. But that is a totally different matter.

Back to Alika, he seemed to have done a good self-analysis before marrying his wives. I can say that now with the benefit of hindsight. He must have arrived at the conclusion that indeed he was ugly, lazy, short etc. In fact he could easily have passed for a dwarf. But you know what Alika did?

Kudo: No, sir.

Sage: He married wives, in turns, according to his weaknesses. For every wife that he married, it seemed that there was an attempt to make up for his deficiencies. Alika did what we thought was impossible. He married the most beautiful girl of our time in that village. How he did it, I do not know, but he did.

Alika, also married a girl that we all spotted as the most hardworking and enterprising of our time within our community. Omereta was her name. Oh, Omereta was beautiful. And then, Alika also married the tallest girl in the community.

Kudo: Incredible! How did he do all these?

Sage: I wish I could ask Alika now. But with the benefit of hindsight, I believe Alika set out to be an outstanding success in spite of his many handicaps. I believe his every move was deliberate. He was fully aware of what he lacked. I believe he was good for the egos of the ladies. I believe he must have always made them feel superior and needed. He must have worshipped them for the value that they truly were and provided him.

Kudo: Would women fall for that?

Sage: My guess is that both women and men would fall for that. In fact beyond falling, they would yearn for it. And that includes you, Kudo, I dare say.

Kudo: Oh, my goodness. I guess I have to give this some thought.

Sage: Please do. But what I know is that all humans yearn to be needed. We yearn to be seen and acknowledged as important in the lives of others. Alika understood this, I think, intuitively. Now I can see that he was far more developed as a spiritual being than the rest of us at that time.

While we moaned with jealousy and bitterness, Alika was creating a wonderful life around himself. Again, I repeat, in spite of his handicaps! He had the gift of great leaders.

He had vision. He had humility. He had enough confidence to surround himself with superior people in various respects. The resulting escalation of superiority around him lifted Alika to success beyond our wildest dreams.

Chapter Thirty-Five

THE SUCCESSFUL LEADER

Kudo: Wise One, looking through the numerous notes you have given me, would I be right in summarizing all the messages as tips for achieving success as a leader?

Sage: Bingo!

Kudo: Sir?

Sage: I mean exactly correct.

Kudo: I see. So following the disciplines you have outlined one should invariably end up a successful leader.

Sage: I would suggest so. But I must however caution that a successful leader is not the same thing as a successful person.

Kudo: But, sir, most people become successful by exhibiting good leadership skills.

Sage: That may be correct. And I may add “many” not necessarily “most”.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Let me also add that it may be difficult to have a consensus of what determines a successful person. For the definition or conception of success may differ from person to person, success basically being the achievement of set goals.

A man, for example, who has set himself the target of obtaining a university degree in this lifetime, may consider himself a success, while another whose target was a Ph.D, but could only manage a Master’s Degree may grade himself unsuccessful.

One marathon runner who came in last, may regard the mere completion of the race as success for himself; while another who came in second may record himself as unsuccessful having failed to win the first position that was his target.

A businessman who sets out to build a company worth at least 10 million naira, but ends up with one worth 8 million naira, may

consider himself unsuccessful while another whose target was to build an enterprise worth no more than 100 thousand, and exceeds target making 110 thousand may consider himself highly successful.

So you see, measurement of personal successes depends really on what target people set for themselves. But for leadership it is different.

Kudo: How?

Sage: The concept or understanding of leadership appears to me to be largely universally the same. For leading, the way that I understand, means helping people or other beings from one level to a higher level without violating the personal space or freedom of the followers.

Kudo: Sir, are you saying that if you move people from a lower to a higher level by using some benevolent coercion, you are not leading.

Sage: Some may accept that as leadership but it is not really. Leadership must hold the individual and collective freedoms of the followership sacrosanct for it to qualify as leadership; otherwise any trigger-happy dictator or animal in human skin can force a change for the better from an unconvinced and unwilling people or entities and claim to be leading.

Such persons may qualify as dictators, totalitarians, prison warders, but certainly not leaders, otherwise you make nonsense of the rare skill of leadership which requires allowing people to express their freedom, and yet being able to influence them enough for them to willingly surrender to a cause of action leading to a higher or better level for all concerned parties. All those who violate the freedom of the people they are supposed to lead, through the use of force or by bending the rules, are mere impostors.

Kudo: My eyes are opening.

Sage: I am glad, but more because you may not have to make the same mistake as others. Followership, in a way, is like love. It has to be given freely all the time. Once con or coercion gets into the mix, it can neither be true love nor true leadership. Let me illustrate with a story.

Once upon a time there was a king and his three sons who were shepherds, each with a large herd of cattle. To gain the position of the supervisor from amongst the three, a test had to be passed. The three shepherds were taken along with their cattle to very distant places, and asked to find their way back home with their cattle. Shepherd

One arrived well ahead of the others, but with half of the cattle lost; because in a bid to win, he forced, lashed, and coerced his “troops” so much that many died on the way.

Shepherd Two employed all manner of trickery like taking the cattle through artificially created slopes which forced them to glide distances by force. Needless to add some perished in the process, but he arrived second with a fairly larger flock.

Shepherd Three arrived last, but with his entire “troop” complete, fat, robust, well fed and happy. He took time to attend to them with loving tenderness. He made sure they were well fed. He did not overlabor them just to win. When they moved they did happily as a group.

The choice was easy for the king. Neither the first nor the second was chosen. He saw greater leadership in the one that came in last but with a happier team of cattle. He, in the eyes of the king, demonstrated love, care, and respect for the individual and collective freedom of the “team” in his care. Persuasiveness is the tool of the leader, force that of the dictator, and trickery that of the impostor. It was thus easy for him to determine which of the three was the greater as a leader than the rest. I hope you understand?

Kudo: Sir, I do.

BIOGRAPHY



*A passionate student of human psychology and spirituality, **Kudo Eresia-Eke**, is a mass communication expert, teacher and writer with numerous published works spanning short stories, essays, poetry, and music. He holds a Ph. D in Political Theory and is currently Manager, External Relations of Nigeria LNG Limited. He was until recently Visiting Professor to the University Forte Hare, South Africa.*

He also taught at the University of Port Harcourt, and was later Programs Director of the Centre for Advanced Social Sciences in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Kudo has served in various key government positions including Commissioner of Information and Culture in his home state Rivers. He was also the State Director of the National Orientation Agency.

*He has received numerous awards for scholarship and public service including CODESRIA Award for Outstanding Doctoral Thesis, and the **Distinguished Service Award for Outstanding Performance in***

Public Service by the Institute of Corporate Administration in Nigeria.

*Before moving into Government, Kudo worked for various academic and media institutions including The Guardian and Sunray Daily Newspapers, Point and Banner Weekly Newsmagazines, National and State Radio and Television networks around Nigeria. He was variously editor, newscaster, and producer. Kudo is cited in The Nigeria Union of Journalists' book, **Violations of Freedom**, as one of the journalists who paid severely for upholding professional ethics, during the national crisis of 1993.*

He is also currently actively engaged in ex gratia work of retraining former Niger Delta militants for self-employment on behalf of the Oil and Gas Industry Foundation, doubling as Chief Administrative Officer and Communication Advisor.

Kudo is married to Joanna. They have four children - two boys and two girls.