

## Finding the other

Last year I was invited to a conference at the Initiatives of Change centre in the Swiss mountains at Caux. Afterwards, I was asked to offer my view of what had transpired. I suggested that in earlier times people used to go to the desert or climb mountains to find themselves, to address the question 'Who am I?' It seemed to me that the people who had climbed the mountain to get to Caux had done so to find the 'other'.

One evening when I was serving in the Royal Air Force, we were sitting around the table discussing life, as one does with friends. The conversation turned to immigration and to my amazement, my best friend Mike started condemning the 'Pakkies' (Pakistanis). I listened for a while and then, realizing that I was boiling up inside, I said, 'Hey, Mike! What about me? You are talking about me!' Without a second thought he replied, 'Ah! But you're different. We know you.'

That was my first inkling that I was not an Indian any more. Even though I was different from them, I was no longer 'the other' to Mike and the gang, I was one of them, because they knew me. Deep down we were the same, even though at one level I was not the same as Mike, nor was Mike the same as me.

So what makes it possible to have this union—being one with the other?

When we look around with our external eyes we cannot see ourselves, we can only see the other. If one disregards the other, one is missing out on life.

### Desire to belong

To be fulfilled, we all need our own space in society. This gives an objective reality to the other, enabling the soul to love. Allowing others to maintain their identity and yet remaining in solidarity with them is vital to the enjoyment of the human race and all creation.

At the individual level, perhaps because of a sense of insecurity, we have a desire to belong. We long to be cared for, to be recognized, to have some worth and to be loved, whether it is through belonging to one's own family or to the family of the community created by our ethnic or religious group, or the city or the nation state.

But belonging need not separate us from



By Jehangir Sarosh

the other. The other may not belong to our group, but there can still be solidarity.

For separation will lead to division and division will lead to conflict. Division is the best tool the devil has. It says in our Zoroastrian scriptures—and in many others—that God's creation is good and that the kingdom of heaven can be here on earth. It also says that creation is to be enjoyed by all

**But you're different.  
We know you.**

God's creatures. This is an indirect acceptance of the responsibility to the other. For the primary dictum in our tradition is to think, speak and do good, which is defined as only that 'which is good for anybody whatsoever'. 'Anybody' does not just refer to another person but to all of God's creation. Thus division or separation is attributed to the negative mentality (referred to as the devil in some traditions).

If I stopped being the other for Mike, simply because he knew me, it emphasizes to me the need to get to know each other for the sake of peace on earth. It has often been

said that peace among nations begins with the individual knowing her/himself. But the individual is often insecure, and needs the community. It is therefore vital that both individuals and communities get to know each other. And that nations get to know and respect each other too.

The religions have a major role to play in increasing understanding between cultures by getting to know other communities, cultures and peoples. Globalization offers an opportunity for this. Religions were the earliest multinationals, and religions and cultures are intertwined.

### Simple initiative

Religious institutions have an infrastructure through which they can educate their congregations. As Imam Shahid Raza of the Council of Imams and Mosques (UK) said to an interfaith gathering, 'If only each imam would speak positively of other religions for just three minutes during each Friday prayer meeting, we would change the world.'

This simple initiative, if taken on board by all religions, could bring to fruition the wisdom and willingness to share with and consider the other first. This opportunity to hear positive things about the other in one's own safe environment is how mindsets can be changed.

I leave you with a Zoroastrian thought:  
*Remember, remember, remember  
Evil is not in the body  
Evil is in the mind  
Therefore harm no body  
Just change the mind  
Just change the mind  
Just change the mind*

Jehangir Sarosh is a businessman living in Britain. He is President of the World Conference for Religion and Peace Europe and Vice-Chair of the Inter-Faith Network for the UK.

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**Feature:** FAC visits Belarus to find out what is being done to help those affected by the Chernobyl disaster.

# FOR A CHANGE

Volume 15 Number 2

April/May 2002

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- **Christian-Muslim dialogue**
- **Tackling corruption in paradise**
- **Free, frank and fearless in Kenya**



**Journey towards  
the other**

by Mary Lean, Panchgani, India



**Bagpipes at dawn**

Dawn on a mountain top in India's Western Ghats. We had climbed up in silence and now watched as the sun teetered behind the clouds, gathering itself to climb into the sky.

Many had brought symbolic burdens to throw off the cliff. As some sat in contemplation, and others performed the yoga Salutation to the Sun, bagpipes wheezed triumphantly into life.

The depth and the cultural contrasts were typical of the 'global Hoho' at the MRA/Initiatives of Change centre at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, last January. Over its three weeks some 200 people from 35 countries took part. Nearly half were under 40, and perhaps a third from the global South—come to 'share deeply, search creatively and commit together' to new initiatives to bring justice and healing to a fragmented world.

**Look, no hands!**

The peace of the setting was a relief after the chaos of Mumbai airport and the excitements of the eight-hour bus journey south to Panchgani. Driving was a two-man operation—one at the steering wheel and the other in charge of sounding the horn and watching the nearside of the bus. He came into his own when his colleague overtook on precipitous hairpin bends.

India's drivers can judge distance to a hair's breadth in the dodgem-car anarchy of streets teeming with cars, buses, bicycles, motorbikes and

rickshaws. Our driver on the return journey had an alarming tendency to take his hands off the steering wheel and clap. But we didn't see a single accident.

**Ribbons of hope**

Even in the peace of the mountains, there was no escaping the reality of the world. A young Pakistani American, who has spent the last five summers working in Afghan refugee camps, gave us heart-rending statistics. The life expectancy of Afghan women is 39, and one in four babies dies before the age of five.

A Baptist yoga-teacher from wartorn Nagaland, now living in Australia, wept as he told us that two of his nephews had died of AIDS, while a third had been murdered. A young Indian woman had lost 40 of her schoolmates in inter-communal riots in 1992. A Scandinavian spoke of the pain she carried every day because of the disappearance of her niece.

On arrival, each participant

tied a prayer ribbon onto the branches of a sapling which was later planted outside the conference centre. Each ribbon seemed frail and inadequate on its own, but, joined with the others, presented a powerful image of longing, aspiration and commitment.

**Bribe-free businesses**

The participants were living evidence of another reality: the power of individuals to make a difference.

A Mumbai businessman described how he employs two lawyers fulltime to deal with the lawsuits which result from his refusal to pay bribes, while Kenyans spoke of their campaign for clean elections and an end to corruption in their country. One was part of a network of 675 businessmen committed to keeping honest tax accounts. Later in the conference, Africans from seven countries pledged themselves to launch a continent-wide Clean Africa Campaign to

tackle poverty, corruption and HIV/AIDS.

**God's messengers**

With tensions between India and Pakistan, and with the events of 11 September and the Afghan war vivid in people's minds, interfaith issues were high on the agenda.

Two distinguished Muslims from Delhi visited the Hoho to share their concerns and insights. 'I do not accept "the clash of civilizations", said one. 'Civilized people do not clash.'

They quoted the Qur'an in support of religious tolerance and humanity: 'There is no competition in religion'; 'To you your religion, to me mine'; 'He is not a Muslim if anyone in his neighbourhood sleeps hungry that night.'

Hindus, too, took the chance to share the riches of their faith with participants from other religions. 'What I find beautiful in Hinduism is its inclusiveness,' said one, quoting a text which reads, 'The truth is one—it can be expressed in different languages'. India is thought to be the only country in the world which has never persecuted the Jews.

Out of these exchanges came the idea of calling on people around the world to open their hearts and homes on 1 June 2002 to a person, family or group from a community with whom they would not normally interact. Linked to this, perhaps, was the thought that refugees in the West could be drawn on as 'God's messengers' to awaken the 'rich' world to global realities.

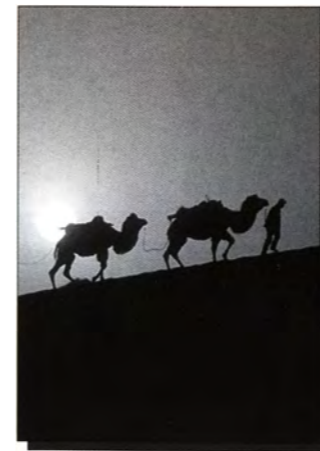


Photo: Corbis Images

**FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK**

**A day for reaching out**

If you ask someone what is the biggest issue to be addressed in today's world they might suggest the Middle East, overpopulation, global warming, the gap between rich and poor, the impact of globalization or any one of dozens more seemingly intractable problems.

Few can doubt that improved human relationships would increase the chance of global cooperation on some of the problems that, at first sight, may seem purely technical.

But whose job is it to build bridges across divided communities or between rivals? Reaching out to 'the other' is so important that it cannot be left to politicians and academics alone.

If every person could meet someone from 'the other group', away from the spotlight and without an agenda, it could be the first step in opening up a dialogue, and perhaps discovering that he or she has qualities on which a basis of understanding could be built.

It would be a long journey from such individual contacts to building better relations between different religious and ethnic groups, let alone nations, but, as the proverb says, 'The longest journey starts with the first step.'

A realistic first step is being promoted by Initiatives of Change. 1 June this year is being designated as a reaching-out day, with the theme, 'Open homes, listening hearts'. Everyone, in whatever country he or she lives, is being asked to open their heart and home to a person, family or group from a community different from their own and with whom they would not normally interact. This will mean crossing religious, ethnic, tribal or social barriers, and being open to hearing the other person's concerns, views and assumptions even—or perhaps especially—where they are contrary to our own. It will be an honest attempt to break down stereotypes and make a contribution, however small, to bridging global divisions.

In this issue of *FAC* we feature some who have reached out to people of other cultures and religions. Through their initiatives they have enriched others and they have themselves been enriched. Reaching out involves risk. You may be misunderstood by your own side, or by the other. But history shows that the risk can often be worth taking.

Kenneth Noble

<http://www.forachange.co.uk>

**FOR A CHANGE**

- closes the circle between faith and action, action and faith. It is for anyone, anywhere, who wants to make a difference to the world.
- **FOR A CHANGE** believes
- that in a world torn by ancient hatreds, the wounds of history can be healed.
- that in the family and the workplace, relationships can be transformed.
- that in urban jungle or rural backwater, community can be built.
- that peace, justice and the survival of the planet depend on changes in attitudes as well as structures.
- **FOR A CHANGE**
- draws its material from many sources and was born out of the experience of MRA, now Initiatives of Change.

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**A NOTE ON INITIATIVES OF CHANGE**

Initiatives of Change (formerly Moral Re-Armament) works for moral and spiritual renewal in all areas of life. It was born out of the work of Frank Buchman, an American who believed that change in the world must start with the individual. Initiatives of Change is open to all. Its starting point is the readiness of each person to make what they know of God and eternal moral values central in their lives. This personal commitment to search for God's will forms the basis for creative initiative and common action: standards of absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love help to focus the challenge of personal and global change. These ideas have given rise to an international community of people at work in more than 70 countries in programmes which include reconciliation; tackling the root causes of corruption, poverty and social exclusion; and strengthening the moral and spiritual foundations for democracy.

Published six times a year by Initiatives of Change, 24 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1RD, UK. Tel: +44 (0)20 7798 6000, Fax: +44 (0)20 7798 6001 Reg. Charity No: 226334 ISSN 0959-311X. Price: £2.25 Subscriptions: 2 The Orchard, Acomb, Hexham NE46 4SZ Tel: 01434 608055 (Giro No 504 1759) Editors: Mary Lean, Kenneth Noble, Michael Smith Regular contributors: Alan Channer, Michael Henderson, Anastasia Stepanova, Laura Trevelyan, Robert Webb, John Williams, Paul Williams Promotion: Tony Hazell Distribution Manager: Chris Sayers Design and Layout: Sloane Design Associates, Faversham, Kent. Printing: BBH Colourprint Group, Leicester. Indexed with Canadian Periodical Index. Printed on TCF (total chlorine-free) paper.



Young Muslims in Aulnay-sous-Bois near Paris. France's 5 million-strong Muslim community is Europe's largest.

# A time for dialogue between the West and Islam

**Frédéric Chavanne** argues that it is more important to get to know Muslims than to have opinions about them.



The dialogue between cultures and civilizations, the need for which has been underlined more than ever by the events of 11 September, is everybody's business.

These last months have focussed attention on the West's relationship with the Muslim world. Do we in the West believe that dialogue is possible? In an article in *Le Monde* (23 November), Henri Tincq, an expert on religious issues, divides those who answer this question into three categories: the die-hards, who think that dialogue is impossible, that the divergences are too great and that it cannot lead anywhere; the sceptics, who have tried dialogue and

been discouraged; and the artless, who believe that dialogue will enable us to evolve together and overcome our divergences.

Tincq states that there is no alternative to dialogue—we have to work to make it possible. Let us conclude then, with him, that we have to proceed with a realistic and stubborn artlessness.

But how? If the Muslim population finds it so hard to feel fully accepted in French society, it is not only because we French find it hard to be welcoming; nor is it only because one naturally finds it hard to approach someone who is different, with whom one may not know how to behave or

what to say. Having a glass of mint tea together is not enough to make the obstacles disappear, as if by magic. There are many divergences, suspicions, fears and resentments which create an invisible but real barrier.

When it comes to doctrine, each faith tradition thinks that its religion is the best. On certain points our conceptions are irreconcilable. We must not set our beliefs aside but carry them with us in this dialogue, in the hope that they will reveal to us what we are and that in due course we shall find it possible to overcome our divisions. The Qur'an says that God 'will make clear to you those things you have disagreed about' (Sura 5.48).

What can be done about the historical, political, social and human barriers that separate us? In France, for example, we are afraid of the radicalization of urban youths who sometimes adopt a fundamentalist approach to religion and are verbally aggressive towards Christianity. What we do not know is that these young people are afraid of us and we must ask ourselves what it is that makes them radical.

On 13 October last year, I was one of a score of Muslims and Christians who met together in the framework of the 'Initiative-dialogue' programme, which for the last four years has aimed to develop exchanges with urban youth. We wanted to talk about the September events and the feelings which they provoked in us.

'When I learned the news of the New York attacks I was immediately afraid,' said Raoudha, a young mother. 'I wondered: what will happen to me? I arrived in France 12 years ago. As a Muslim woman, I have always held to my religious convictions. I put up with all the open and covert racist acts. I made an effort to be at ease with other people. I worked hard at this by joining associations and following training courses. Then this event hits me on the head. I shall have to justify myself all over again, prove I'm a good Muslim and that the extremists are bad. I want to be free.'

Béchir told us that he could no longer bear what was said about Muslims on TV and had temporarily stopped watching it.

'Do you, with whom I have shared so much of my life and faith, have a slight doubt about Islam?' asked Samia, some of whose friends, she says, even have doubts about themselves as Muslims since 11 September.

Have we any idea of the pressure that our prejudices exert on the Muslim population? Our friends' words made us measure the cost of this denial of dignity which makes so many Muslims feel unrecognized or unable to find their place in our society. When one feels excluded in this way, how can one fail to react and become radical?

We who have for long represented a dominant culture find it hard to imagine what it means not to be in a position of strength or to be talking to someone who has always been in such a position. Nor do we grasp the importance for Muslims of following the guidelines of their own culture, instead of systematically adopting our patterns of behaviour.

Finally, there are the complaints about the West's international policies. During our meeting in October Habib reminded us of the main ones: support for dictatorial regimes in the Arab-Muslim countries which stamp out any democratic demands; weakness in applying the UN resolutions aimed at the creation of a viable Palestinian state; the welcome given to extremists in western countries—extremists whom he differentiated starkly from Islamists.

We had no easy answers to offer except

to recognize that we don't listen enough to others, that our governments have too often practised double standards because in the end our interests took priority over justice.

In the eyes of western leaders military intervention in Afghanistan was legitimate and indispensable in order to neutralize those who threaten the security of their citizens and a certain model of society. Military operations have been undertaken not so much for vengeance but to ensure that such events do not happen again.

From the Muslim perspective, western military intervention is perceived above all as aggression. It has provoked a deep frustration, perhaps because it is one more of a long series of aggressions and humiliations. It must be added that the great majority of Muslims are inwardly convinced that the West has only been motivated by its strategic interests, including the control of the energy resources of the region. The divergence of views on a single event is therefore total.

The September attacks have given new life to the frequent identification of Islam with violence. Violence is not the distinguishing quality of Islam. I was particularly struck by a verse in the Qur'an, chanted by an imam during a prayer meeting shortly after 11 September: 'May anger against a people not incite you to commit unjust acts.' (Sura 5.8)

We westerners are afraid of Islam being used for political ends. The day when a Muslim friend told me he shared that fear I knew that I could live and work with him. The stands taken by our Muslim friends will help us establish links of trust.

What we need to face is the destructive

power of hatred. We have to tackle the injustices that provoke hate but without absolving from guilt those who are dominated by it.

Beyond doctrines, fears and points of view, we must aim at the meeting of people, at starting a bond of friendship, at penetrating the underlying way of thinking of the other person. We must reckon to take up questions that we have in our hearts—for example, to speak frankly about the reality of our daily life, the children's education, our family and professional life, our marital difficulties. Recently my wife and I were entertained by new Tunisian friends who had invited us to celebrate the end of the fast. We spoke about the *babouches* (slippers) that we men like to put on while our wives are preparing dinner, whereas they would appreciate some help. So, rather than taking up a rigid stance on theological or dogmatic matters, we can help each other live the values that we have in common.

I would like to propose to Muslim friends that they no longer derive their satisfaction from pointing out Islam's positive contribution in the past. It is *today* that they have their best contribution to give to the world. Those men and women whom I have known have shown me all the richness of their personalities and how much we have to bring to each other.

As for us westerners, we shall get over our fears as we live the values of our own spiritual heritage and become more fervent in understanding its demands and more trusting in the satisfaction that they bring us.

*This article, which first appeared in the French publication 'Changer', was translated by Robin Evans.*



Atlanta, Georgia: 'It is today that Muslims have their best contribution to give'

It's a long way from a remote village in Pakistan to Brighton, England. Imam Abduljalil Sajid tells *Mary Lean* about the encounters which inspired his passion for interfaith understanding.

**T**he bridgebuilding Imam of the Brighton Islamic Mission, Dr Abduljalil Sajid, describes himself as an optimist. He believes the terrible events of 11 September 2001 have opened opportunities for better understanding between the West and Islam. 'Evil exists,' he says. 'It can only be eradicated with good. And good ultimately comes, provided our objective is clear.'

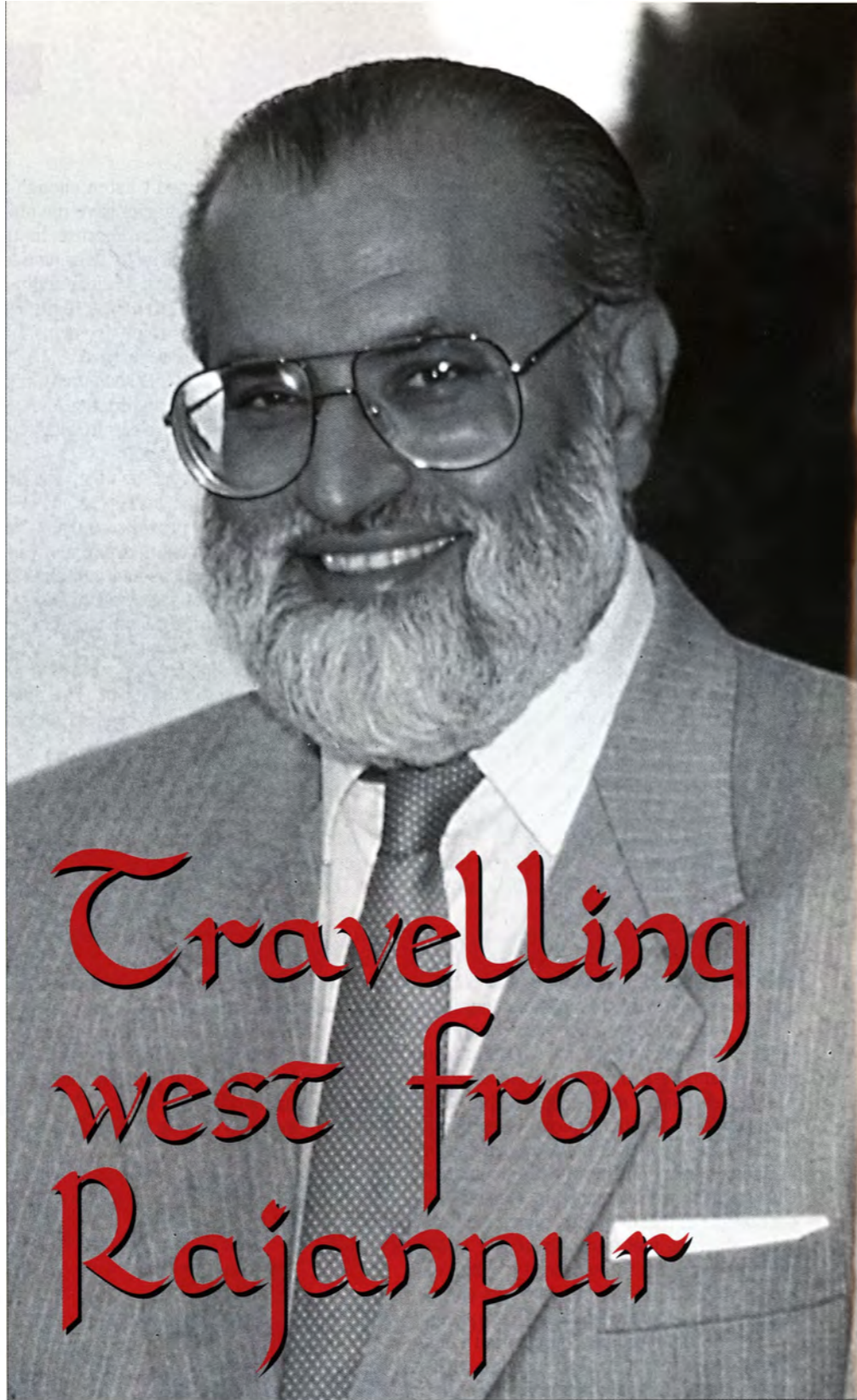
Since he settled in Brighton 22 years ago, Sajid has devoted himself to building understanding between different faiths and ethnic groups. He was one of 200 delegates to a world summit of Muslim leaders in Indonesia last December, which affirmed Islam's commitment to peace, justice and interfaith dialogue. 'Islam is a religion of moderation,' he pointed out there. 'Islam and terrorism are contradictory terms.'

**A**bduljalil Sajid has travelled a long way since his birth in Pakistan in November 1947, three months after the country's creation. 'I'm a pure Pakistani,' he says. 'I don't carry the past baggage of hate between Hindus and Muslims.'

The sitting room of his home in Brighton, where he tells me about his life journey, is lined with books. There used to be even more, until his wife put her foot down and he sent 35,000 to the Al-Hijrah Trust in Birmingham, where they have opened a section in his name. Yet when he was a child the only light he had to read by was the moon.

He was born in the remote village of Rajanpur, in an area which the British Raj had left undeveloped. 'There were no roads, no electricity and all the buildings were made of mud.' He was one of 14 brothers and sisters, in a shared multigenerational home of 47 people.

The house had a well, and food came from



the family farm just a few hundred yards from the house. His father, who had a cloth shop, was the only member of the family to have left the farm, and he was determined that his sons should be educated.

A devout Sufi (Muslim mystic), Sajid's father believed 'that the difference between Islam and non-Islam is knowledge.' He used to wake Abduljalil at 2.30 am for prayers, to study the Qur'an and to hear stories about his heroes, who were not only Muslims.

Sajid was one of the first graduates of Rajanpur's primary and middle schools and then, at the age of 11, his father sent him to study at an Islamic University in Multan in the Punjab. The Madrassa Jameluloom combined Islamic religious education with

optional secular subjects such as English, history and political science.

He left in 1965 with a BA with distinction in Arabic and Islamic Studies, the rank of Alim (religious scholar) and Mufti (the highest degree in traditional religious studies) and a secular BA in Political Sciences. Within four months the Punjab University in Lahore had granted him a first class MA—a course which normally took two years. He was only 18. When I suggest he must have been brilliant, he maintains he simply worked hard. 'I never believed in wasting time.'

When he went on to study in Dhaka (now capital of Bangladesh), his village turned out in force to see him off. One of his mother's friends asked him why he had to go so far to

Tony Hazell

study when he already had his MA and the President of Pakistan hadn't even got a BA. 'Can't you replace him now?'

**I**t was in Lahore that Sajid made his first step towards people of other faiths. He was set an essay on what different faiths believed about honesty. He had never met a Christian or a Jew before, but he set out round the city's churches, synagogues and temples to ask for quotations from the different scriptures. Only the Christians failed to come up with anything.

Finally, he tried the library of the British Council, where he was given the writings of Frank Buchman, a Christian, who initiated MRA (now Initiatives of Change). He found Buchman's emphasis on absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love familiar. 'It struck me that this was what the Prophet, peace be upon him, had said in his last sermon—that the human being cannot become a proper human being unless he is honest with himself.'

The process continued in Dhaka, where Sajid found himself in a multicultural community. He learnt Bengali and began to get to know Hindus and people of other faiths. When India invaded in 1971, he returned to West Pakistan and married Jamila.

Sajid arrived in Britain in September 1972 to start a PhD at the London School of Economics (LSE). His first impression was of 'absolute loneliness'. Throughout his life he had been surrounded by people. He had left Jamila with his family and he was now alone in a country where no one seemed to bother about anyone else.

'In the trains people picked up their newspapers and hid their faces. In the library it was silent. In the university I knew nobody and everybody was rushing. The nights were long and dark. Those three months were really hell.'

As Christmas approached Sajid saw a notice in a students' hostel inviting overseas students to stay with local families over the break. He applied and found himself in the home of a Christian minister in Reigate, Rev Carr, who had 11 children, no TV and would not allow alcohol in his house. 'This was very contrary to my stereotyping of the British that they love dogs and hate children. The prejudices I was beginning to build up went out of the window. I realized that not all British were selfish, greedy, immoral, all the things that had come to my mind during the previous three months.'

Sajid describes those days in the Carr home as a 'turning point'. He decided to stay on in Britain and bring Jamila to join him. 'Carr helped me to understand Christianity as a faith, a commitment, a way of life—he was a man of God himself. He opened a door for me to make my own life straighter. I was an angry and prejudiced man at that time and those days helped me to make my decision to respect others as they are rather than putting them in boxes. I made up my mind that if I was allowed to stay in this country I would

make education and bridgebuilding between faiths my priorities.'

**I**n Dhaka, Sajid had served as an imam, leading prayers at the university. The term, which often confuses non-Muslims, does not refer to an ordained profession. 'Anyone can become an imam provided the community are satisfied that you can recite the Qur'an correctly, give a sermon and lead prayer.'

Sajid continued in this role in London. In 1976 a Muslim from Brighton spotted him at the East London Mosque and realized that his language skills would be an asset in a cosmopolitan city where Muslims spoke Urdu, Bengali, Arabic and English. He started working there part-time and in 1980 moved there with his family. The community bought him a house and with them he raised £300,000 to build and run the mosque.

By deciding to take on the Brighton mosque, Sajid was finally turning his back on his ambitions to work in the Education Ministry in Pakistan. Twice before—after he left university in Lahore and after he returned from Dhaka—he had turned down an invitation to become a professional imam. 'This time I could not refuse God,' he says. He traces the decision back to his encounter with Rev Carr. 'A Christian helped me to help Muslims.'

The post, where he remained for 20 years, was not without its conflicts. Sajid had to see off a takeover bid by an extremist group and twice took legal action against individuals who were inflaming feelings against other communities. In 1998 he moved on to a national role, training imams to work in prisons and hospitals all over the UK.

His decision to become a local magistrate in 1981 raised opposition from those who believed a man of God should not serve a secular state. He argued back with a statement from the Prophet: 'When you live in a community, if you don't work for the common good you are not a Muslim.'

**T**he war in 1971 which led to the birth of Bangladesh had left the Muslim community in Brighton fragmented.

'The Indians, Pakistanis and Bengalis were not on speaking terms,' says Sajid. He went to visit them in their businesses and urged them to find a common voice in the face of their difficulties in Brighton. They set up the Ethnic Minorities Representatives Council (EMRC), whose first project was to tackle racial harassment by the police. 'It brought the whole community together,' says Sajid. 'They forgot their origins, their past, their hatred for each other.' The council now comprises 58 ethnic groups.

The division between Brighton's different religious groups was another concern. In 1985 Sajid helped to set up the Brighton and Hove Interfaith Contact Group (IFCG). Members started by visiting each other's places of worship and discussing common

issues—their view of death, or heaven, for instance—with the aim of understanding what each other thought. Sajid invited a rabbi to address the mosque and, in his turn, was invited to all the synagogues. The organization continues to flourish.

These local beginnings have led Sajid into innumerable national offices, both religious and secular. He is chair of a committee of the Muslim Council of Britain, Vice-Chair of the UK chapter of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, Treasurer of the National Association of Pakistanis and a member of the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia. He has held positions with the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, the Union of Muslim Organizations and, on the international level, the World Congress of Faiths. In recent months he has been called in to advise the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and many statutory agencies.

**S**ajid does not buy into the theory of a 'clash of civilizations' between the West and Islam and was glad world leaders distanced themselves from the idea immediately after 11 September. 'We're not talking about a clash between faiths, but a few individuals who committed a heinous evil crime.'

The events of 11 September, he believes, were 'based on hurt and hate', and any response must go to the root causes. He is concerned about the poverty and the powerlessness of so many in the world, and about the double standards in the West which mean that people from ethnic minorities are treated differently from host communities. He sees 'deep racism, Islamophobia and hatred' in Britain, in spite of laws to the contrary.

The waste to Britain indicated by the level of black youth unemployment upsets him—and it is not just a theoretical issue. Both his daughters have had to go overseas to find jobs. Even with a first in law from the LSE, Fatima could not find a place to do her articles in a law firm—and Sajid believes it was her name that was the barrier. 'We had hoped our daughters would be able to give back to this society.'

He points out that there are few black British at high levels in the civil service, army, police or diplomatic corps. Unlike Sweden and Germany, Britain has no Muslim ambassadors in Muslim countries. He believes the country is missing out on badly needed skills.

Generously, he shows me a passage from the Qur'an which gives a 'certificate of approval' for Christians who believe in God, do good deeds and are actively involved in charitable work. He believes that the faiths must work together. 'We all have ugly pasts. We must learn from our mistakes, apologize and move on to build a better future based on mutuality, dignity and respect.'

After all, he points out, we went through a clash of civilizations in the Middle Ages. We ought to be beyond that by now. ■

# A gamble which paid off

The world lay at **RD Mathur's** feet as a young man—and he decided to give everything to try and change it. He talks to **Mary Lean**.



**W**hat turns a child of privilege into a student agitator? Or makes a budding politician throw up everything to devote himself to a campaign for moral and spiritual rearmament? Looking back on 74 years of turning points, RD Mathur has no regrets: 'When I made my gamble on God I thought I had lost everything. But today I have the joy of knowing that he has given to me way beyond anything I could have hoped for.'

Mathur was born in 1928 in the Himalayan princely state of Sirmoor, where his father was first the tutor and then the finance minister of the young Maharajah. When his father walked the streets, the people used to prostrate themselves, and their respect extended to the nine Mathur children. Servants carried RD's books to school for him and he claims never to have tied his own shoelaces until he went to university. When her sons got too much for his mother, she'd summon an elephant from the Maharajah's stables to take them for a ride.

The children were forbidden to go into the poor area of the town. One day Mathur disobeyed and was horrified to find children looking for food in the garbage heap. 'I asked my mother, "Why are these people having to do this, when we throw away so much food?" She told me to go to my room and study, and not to waste my time on such questions.'

University in Benares and then Delhi liberated Mathur from this protective cocoon. He threw himself into activism in support of Mahatma Gandhi's campaign to get the British to quit India. 'I dreamt of the day when we would build a land of milk and honey where no Indian was hungry.'

His political convictions hardened in Delhi, where he helped to organize a 5,000-strong student march on the Viceroy's Palace. The police stopped the procession and a British officer told Mathur to disperse the crowd within ten minutes or face the consequences. When he tried to argue, he was kicked and pushed away. 'I decided then

that even if I had to give my life I would not give in,' remembers Mathur. The police opened fire and three of his closest friends were killed.

'In my heart I swore that I would not rest until I had taken revenge and got the British out of India,' says Mathur. But when Independence at last came, at midnight on 15 August 1947, he stayed at home rather than joining the jubilant crowds. 'I was wish-

ing that my friends were there to see that day.'

The joy of freedom was rapidly clouded by the horrors of Partition, as millions of Hindus and Muslims fled their homes in Pakistan and India and as many as 200,000 died in intercommunal riots. Mathur's future wife, Prabha, then aged 11, was one of the refugees and witnessed the murder of family friends. Mathur saw murders too.



Indians celebrate Independence in August 1947.

'Fear and greed turned men into beasts.'

Disgusted by the new government's ineffectiveness, Mathur called a student strike. On its eve he joined the crowds at Mahatma Gandhi's daily prayer meeting. 'To my surprise he urged the students to give the government a chance.' Mathur called off the strike and returned proudly the next day to tell Gandhi what he had done. Gandhi pricked his bubble by telling him to concentrate on his studies and leave politics to his elders.

As he watched 'yesterday's heroes' jostling for position and lining their own pockets, Mathur was increasingly persuaded by the Marxist analysis offered by some of his professors. 'We had removed the colonialists. Now we needed another revolution to remove the capitalists. But I was too much of a democrat to accept totalitarianism.' These views put an increasing strain on his relationship with his father, who had by now retired to Delhi.

When he left university, Mathur wanted to go into politics. Instead, with the backing of the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, Mathur convened the conference which led to the foundation of the United Nations Students Association (UNSA) of India. He was elected its first Secretary-General and soon found himself gaining recognition and status.

In 1952, he convened a UNSA convention for all Asia. At a friend's request, he provided seats for some foreign visitors, who were in India as part of an MRA campaign. In their turn, they gave him tickets for a musical play they were staging. A cancelled appointment with a cabinet minister enabled him to attend, and he enjoyed it enough to arrange for a special performance for the 400 foreign delegates to the convention.

The play was an *Oklahoma*-style musical about a family feud over a water supply. Its message of reconciliation niggled away at Mathur's conscience. 'The thought kept going through my mind that I was a hypocrite because I talked of the classless brotherhood of the world, but I couldn't live in harmony with my family.' He lay awake struggling with the thought that he must do something about his relationship with his father.

'I was not a man of prayer or God. But I went into a corner and said, "God, if there is a God, I'm at a crossroads."' When he chickened out of his first attempt talk to his father, he prayed again, this time without the 'if': 'God, I need your help'.

His second try was more successful. 'I sat down on the couch next to my father and it was like a flood pouring out—all the things I had hidden from him. I asked his forgiveness. There was a silence. And then I saw two tears coming from his eyes. The man I had thought was a dictator, who would never understand me, told me that he was lonely. "I have not known how to communi-

cate with you and today you have broken that wall." It was so unexpected.'

Some days later, Mathur had a chance to pour out his anger and hatred of the British to Peter Howard, an English member of the MRA group visiting Delhi. Howard listened for three hours and then invited Mathur back to continue the conversation next day. When they resumed, Howard told Mathur how ashamed he was of his compatriots' behaviour in India. 'But I hate to see a patriot like you spend the rest of your life with the wounds we have inflicted on your soul. You are meant for greater purposes.'

'After a long silence,' remembers Mathur, 'I began to feel how small and petty I was for having nurtured that hate that had become like a liquor bottle that I couldn't get rid of.' The two men agreed to work together to 'remake the world'.

**'The police opened fire and three of his closest friends were killed.'**

This decision led Mathur to accepting an invitation to visit Europe, where MRA was playing a part in the reconstruction and reconciliation which followed World War II. He planned to return to stand for parliament. But, to the distress of his father, the few weeks stretched into a year, then another, and finally to ten. Mathur had come to the conclusion that India had enough politicians, and that a better world depended as much on moral and spiritual change in people's motives as it did on political and structural change. His convictions took him all over the world with MRA campaigns.

Mathur's roving lifestyle, with no salary or long-term security, was not conducive to marriage—particularly under the Hindu

arranged system. In 1957, when his travels took him through Delhi, his father pointed out that custom dictated that he could not arrange marriages for RD's younger brothers until he had arranged one for RD. Mathur procrastinated, but eventually, on his next visit to Delhi, agreed to go ahead. The marriage was arranged with unheard-of speed, so that Mathur—and his new wife—could meet a commitment in the US three weeks later.

It seemed only wise to warn his bride about his unconventional lifestyle while she still had a chance to pull out, but tradition did not encourage premarital tête-à-têtes. Mathur enlisted his sister-in-law who invited both families to the cinema and then swapped seats under cover of darkness so that the couple could sit together.

'As the movie rolled, I explained to Prabha that I had no salary or bank account, but that I had never slept without a meal or a bed. I told her that I expected to be able to sustain her in the way I had been sustained. She was silent for 15 minutes. Then she said, "I do not know what your life is and what your work is, but if it is something which is satisfying for you, I will stand by you." That in my mind confirmed that God and his guidance merge with tradition.' He has no recollection of the film!

Prabha, says Mathur, is the 'heroine' of his story. In 1965, when their first son was on his way, they returned to live in India. In the years that followed, they helped to establish the MRA centre at Asia Plateau, Panchgani, which has won national recognition for its training courses in values for managers and workers from industry, army personnel, teachers and students.

The Mathurs have two sons and four grandchildren and until recently, when their eldest son took up a post in Germany, the three families have shared a home in Delhi. Its name, appropriately enough, is 'Samarpan'—'total surrender'. For, as Mathur says, 'When I face God I'll be able to say that I trusted him fully until the last day.'

## FOR A CHANGE

**'The article by Prof MS Swaminathan (Aug/Sept 2001) is like a light to new farmers like me.'**

*Raju Dandu, India*

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# PEOPLE

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Edited by Anastasia Stepanova

### Aid to Komso kids

As in most hospitals in Russia, the conditions at the Komso Regional Children's Hospital in St Petersburg did little for their patients' spirits before the UK-based Children's Charity Volunteer Group came to their rescue. 'The children can now enter an environment that is bright, cheerful and welcoming and not at all threatening,' says Ken Harper, the Chairman of the charity.

In 1994 the BBC made a *That's Life* charity appeal on the Komso Children's Hospital, named after the Komsomol street it is on. As a result 270 British volunteers went to St Petersburg to renovate the wards, rebuild the operating theatres and install two intensive care units—all within the incredibly short time of eight days.

The Children's Charity Volunteer Group played a key role in that initial effort and have been helping the hospital ever since. Recently they received a gratitude award from the Vice-Governor of St Petersburg for renovating the outpatients' department. 'The true reward,' says Ken Harper, 'is alleviating the sickness and suffering of the children.'

The hospital was built at the end of the 19th century and needs constant renovation. But with inflation outstripping state investment, there is not enough money even for medicines. The charity has been helping not only with the refurbishment work, but also with supplying medical equipment.

Along with the aid to the hospital, the charity helps kids in three orphanages—one in Ivangorod and two in Kingisepp. 'There was one girl there wearing exactly the same clothes she had on two years before.' In November 1999, together with his son Ben, Harper delivered a truckload of



Dave Wilson, one of the British volunteers, with children at the Komso Regional Children's Hospital

'sorely needed clothes, equipment and toys to the orphanages and the hospital'.

During their last trip in October the volunteers refurbished the main entrance hall, staircase, landings, and the radiological department. They also hand-painted a large mural with fairytale heroes. 'The last trip was even more successful than before,' says Harper. 'And it was all done with good heart and spirit.' They also managed to bring two new hearing aids to help a deaf girl, donated by the chairman of Lavis Medical System Ltd.

At present there are over 150 volunteers who come from different professional backgrounds. They raise their own travel and accommodation expenses. Many of them are parents, who want to help children who are less fortunate than their own. Most of the volunteers go on every trip. 'We have a great team of devoted people who know how to work efficiently together and also have fun.' Some evenings while they are in St Petersburg there is a special cultural programme organized for them, from sightseeing to a visit to

the Mariinsky Theatre. At their farewell party one of the volunteers is rewarded with the annual achievers' award, and the children receive gifts, brought all the way over from Britain.

Ken Harper, whose job is as a building contractor, devotes much of his time to the project. He is driven by a strong desire to share his professional expertise.

Recently they have been officially invited by the British Consulate General to participate in the UK part of the programme dedicated to the tercentenary of St Petersburg in May 2003.

Anastasia Stepanova

Website: [www.komsokids.org.uk](http://www.komsokids.org.uk)

### Business for people's sake

'People are the most valuable asset of any business,' says John Stephenson, an international business consultant, who now advises Colombian artisans. As a result of his work last year over US\$1 million worth of craft products from 30 workshops were exported to customers in 11 different countries.

Originally from Britain, married to a Colombian, Stephenson has spent over 25 years working as a marketing director and general manager for multinational companies in Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela. 'The key to good management is getting the very best out of people,' he says.

Seven years ago Stephenson went into partnership with his old friend and former boss, Paul Gervis, who had started a ceramics business in Colombia. While Gervis managed the manufacturing side, Stephenson looked after the commercial. They had hardly completed the construction of a new workshop when the economy took a nose-dive. 'We decided if the business was going to survive we needed to develop an export business.'

Quite early on a potential client asked for help in sourcing other artisans' products from Colombia. 'Exporting artisan products made by other people quickly became a key part of our business.'

Currently Stephenson works with over 30 workshops which produce a wide variety of

products including blown glass, ornamental and forged iron, colonial style furniture, ceramics, candles and textiles. Most of the workshops employ less than ten people. 'The owners do a fine job of designing and making their products but have very little idea of how to distribute or export them,' says Stephenson.

Apart from helping craftsmen evaluate their export potential and identify their clients, he exhibits their products at the international Ambiente and Tendence fairs in Frankfurt. 'I encourage the artisans to go to the fair as well, so they can see at first hand who they are competing with internationally,' says Stephenson.

The exports generated have transformed some of the workshops' business. Four years ago, for example, Oxidos was a tiny business making ornamental iron, employing two people and with sales of less than US\$30,000 a year. Their sales have increased tenfold, they employ 15 people and have moved into a new workshop.

'For me personally it has been most rewarding to use the skills acquired in international

business to help other people make a success of their enterprises,' says Stephenson. 'In my previous jobs any one of dozens of people could have done the job just as well or even better than I. But in this case, if I had not done the job it probably would not have been done and the workshops would not have made the progress they have.'

Adriano Costa

### From Texas with milk

Not content with his comfortable work at the University of Minnesota, Jesse Williams, emeritus professor of animal husbandry, decided to work in needy countries overseas.

Over 25 years Williams worked in development projects in 29 countries. In 1971 he went with his family to Pune, India, on a two-year project for US AID as an animal geneticist and agricultural engineer. The purpose was to develop an educational institution with teaching, research and extension services—direct assistance to farmers—to end famine and malnutrition in



Jesse and Ann Williams—hands-on experience

India. This task took Williams away from the mainstream of his work in Minnesota.

When a dispute between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and President Richard Nixon led to the recall of all but three of the 200 US AID workers in India, Williams was one of those invited to stay. He was offered access to Mrs Gandhi any time he needed it. As a result of his work a university was started and 55,000 cross-bred dairy heifers were sold in the second year, an important contribution to the 'White Revolution' which has made India the world's second largest milk producer.

Williams was one of ten siblings raised on a farm in Texas. His family were Methodists and he grew up listening to missionaries' adventures in other countries. Serving with American Forces in Africa during the World War II increased his desire to work overseas. 'I have always had itchy feet. When I discovered there was some place besides Texas, I went there,' says Williams.

His wife, Ann, also grew up on a farm—in Virginia, during the grinding years of the Great Depression. The hardship she experienced prepared her 'to make do' with the difficulties they later faced overseas—from struggling with the language to food allergies that always plagued her. Many times she wondered what they were doing

there, but she stuck with Jesse. 'That's what I agreed to at the altar when we were married.'

In almost every assignment there was concern for security because of national conflicts, even threats of terrorism. In Syria, India and Nepal, they kept their suitcases packed and their vehicles full of petrol in case they had to leave the country quickly. 'We felt we had to set an example by the way we lived to avoid the "ugly American" syndrome that made more enemies than friends,' says Williams. 'We were always straight and respectful in our relationships.'

He designed and equipped buildings, supervised their construction and taught. The key to success in projects was the on-site manager. Williams always focused on finding and training locals who would get the same passion for work that he had. 'You can have a really satisfying experience,' he says, 'if you come with basic knowledge and hands-on experience of most agricultural operations—from picking cotton to plucking chickens. And the ability to teach them to others.'

Now the Williams are working with Cambodian-Americans on a basic agricultural development plan for the hard-pressed farmers and Jesse, at 83 with two artificial heart valves, hopes to go to Cambodia and help them get something going.

John Morrison



John Stephenson (left) at the Oxidos workshop



## Tackling corruption in paradise

Marie-Noëlle Ferrieux-Patterson is no stranger to controversy. As Vanuatu's first Ombudsman (from 1994-99) she was responsible for exposing maladministration and breaches of the Leadership Code.

I am lucky to live in Vanuatu, one of the South Pacific's most beautiful archipelagos and one of the best kept secrets left in the world.

With its population of only 200,000, no pollution, not one single traffic light, beautiful beaches, unspoilt tropical countryside—I cannot imagine what anyone could say or do to get me to move from Vanuatu.

But, as with all countries, there are two sides to Vanuatu. For nearly 15 years after her independence in 1980 from Britain and France there was no Ombudsman appointed

as required by the Constitution. In 1994 I was appointed the republic's first Ombudsman and during the next five years issued more than 70 public reports implicating elected leaders and other officials in a wide range of abuses and serious crimes.

The free media endured difficult times during the early years of Independence, especially because of political interference, and there were few other checks and balances to the power of the government. When this was coupled with the prevailing view that it was improper to criticize 'big

men' or leaders publicly, no wonder that my public reports came as quite a shock.

The reports' subject matter was quite varied, and what made them more dramatic was that they invariably involved cabinet ministers and prime ministers.

These leaders issued illegal Reserve Bank guarantees representing twice the annual budget; sold passports; plundered disaster relief funds; sold government assets and housing cheaply to themselves; robbed the nation's pension fund to award themselves non-commercial housing loans; and paid themselves illegal compensation from public funds for alleged political grievances.

It is often said that corruption is the Pacific drug, and perhaps such blatant corruption would not happen in a developed country. But people where I live are no different from those anywhere else. How different in essence are the cleverly concealed antics of certain European politicians?

I remember years ago hearing someone say, 'If you want to be seen, stand up. If you want to be heard, speak up. But if you want to be liked, shut up.'

We live in a world of politically correct soundbites and mind-numbing jargon. Bribes and kickbacks are known as 'facilitation payments'. Large corporations vehemently deny making the former, yet I read recently that Unilever and BP Amoco have admitted to making the latter.

I have been asked, 'How did the Ombudsman of a tiny state like Vanuatu gain international recognition?'

By not being diplomatic; by not being put off by the 'bullying tactics' of those implicated in my public reports; by ignoring the insults to me and my family made by leaders in Parliament, on radio and television and in newspapers; by refusing to be intimidated by such extreme actions as an assassination plot, planned against me by a government minister. I can tell you it is a chilling experience to read the statements made by those involved in plotting your death.

But to surrender to these fears only makes it easier for evil people to control how we all live. I was encouraged from the beginning by widespread support from the general public and civil society—the churches, the chiefs and ordinary people.

I was often told, 'Be careful not to offend people.' But I would say that we need to be prepared to offend people more. Surely I am not alone in having discovered that corrupt people have thicker skins than almost any creature alive!

During my mandate the office underwent a series of attacks through the courts.

In November 1996 former Chief Minister Leymang sued the Ombudsman, alleging constitutional breaches. The case finally ended up in the Appeal Court which gave Leymang one final opportunity to provide answers for the Ombudsman's inquiry—which he did.

In July 1997 the Cabinet petitioned the President to dismiss me as Ombudsman. The Ombudsman Office applied for an order declaring the decision illegal and prohibiting further steps. In October the Court ruled the Cabinet decision contrary to the rule of law. This was the first time an executive decision had been both challenged and struck down in Vanuatu's Supreme Court.

In November 1997 Vanuatu's Parliament repealed the Ombudsman Act. Virtually all MPs voting in favour had been implicated for corruption or misuse of power in reports. The President refused his assent and referred the Bill to the Supreme Court for a constitutional opinion. The President later dissolved parliament citing corruption as a reason, and the dissolution was upheld by the Appeal Court. A new act was eventually passed.

Vanuatu and the many other small Pacific countries are not unusual in finding it almost impossible to accept the idea of our leaders being brought to court. We have had no successful prosecutions for the simple reason that none has been attempted. Our most corrupt leaders are still in power. This undermines people's faith in justice.

Over the last few years the Vanuatu Government has ostensibly been carrying out a comprehensive reform of the public service institutions (supported by the Asian Development Bank) but nothing has been done to strengthen the Public Prosecutor's Office and police investigative procedures.

However, the positive result of my work as Ombudsman is that at least the information is in the public domain. Leaders and numerous illegal schemes have been thoroughly exposed which in itself acts as a deterrent. There is a stronger free media—and that makes it more difficult to abuse the public trust, or the public purse.

Until our children, in every country, are taught a doctrine of personal responsibility and self-discipline; and until self-indulgent spoiled parents stop raising self-indulgent spoiled children, it is difficult to be as optimistic as one would like.

As individuals in today's world it is difficult to think we can make a difference. Mergers of companies and countries into increasingly large blocs can make us feel less and less able to influence, let alone change, anything.

Yet small actions can and do make a difference, which is just as well because it is the only thing most of us have the opportunity to do. If an ordinary professional woman and mother like myself can help to change one tiny part of the world in a positive way, so can the thousands of other dedicated people who like me want to leave a better world to our children. ■

*This article is based on a speech given to the 10th International Anti-Corruption Conference in Prague last October.*



Some of the Worldaware Award winners. L to r: Emelda Nyamupingidza, Nyaya Industries, Zimbabwe; Dr Anca Colibaba, Director, EuroEd Foundation, Romania; Gustavo Tuquerres, President, Quesinor, Ecuador. Centre: David Constantine, co-founder, Motivation, Bristol, UK.

## Winners at the grass roots

The annual Worldaware Business Awards in London celebrate outstanding enterprise initiatives that benefit economic development in Third World countries. Michael Smith reports:

If you've had your legs blown off by a land mine in Cambodia's Mekong delta, how do you exercise your basic human right to take part in daily life? Tun Chunnareth knows. The ex-soldier received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 on behalf of the International Committee to Ban Landmines. He sits in a three-wheeler 'Mekong' wheelchair developed by the Bristol-based charity Motivation.

Its wheelchairs have benefited 18,000 people in 14 developing countries over the last 10 years. Motivation's co-founder, David Constantine, who is himself wheelchair bound after a diving accident, received the Worldaware Innovation Award for 2001, which was presented by Britain's international development minister Hilary Benn in London last January. *Continued over*

Motivation sets up local, self-sustaining workshops and, in Cambodia, the Mekong wheelchairs are built by disabled ex-soldiers in a workshop run by the Jesuit Service. They are made with cycle wheels and a local hardwood, instead of more costly steel, and cost £55 each to make compared with £1,200 in Britain.

Each year, the Worldaware Business Awards honour private sector businesses, non-profit organizations and charities for their contribution to sustainable development in the world's poorest countries. As a British charity, Worldaware used to focus on Commonwealth countries, but last year for the first time it opened the competition to the world. Sponsors ranged from Shell International and P&O Nedlloyd to the Department of Trade and Industry and the British Council.

Worldaware's Chairman, Sir Jim Lester, says that best practice needs to be honoured and celebrated. The engine of private growth in the developing countries contributed to a 'safer, more prosperous, more equal world'.

Hilary Benn set the awards in the context of globalization—'the big political and social debate' following the end of the Cold War. People were more and more concerned about 'the disparity in wealth, opportunity and aspiration'. Business had an important role and 'economic development is every bit as important as aid'.

Take the situation facing small-scale farmers in Northern Nigeria. How do you sell your tomatoes, spinach or aubergines at market if they rot within hours or days in temperatures of 40C? Another of this year's award winners, Muhammed Bah Abba, 37, who lectures in business in Dutse, has come up with a simple but revolutionary answer: the desert cooler.

Any new idea, he realized, would have to win over conservative Muslim communities. His brainwave was to put his grandmother's large earthenware pots to new use. If you put one pot inside another and insulate the space between the two with wet river sand, then the smaller inner pot stays cool: evaporation from the sand conducts heat out of the inner pot. Now spinach can be kept fresh for over a week, and tomatoes and aubergines for up to three weeks.

As well as being cheap to make and sell, this 'breathtakingly simple' pot-in-pot design has had a major knock-on effect, said Mark Wade of Shell International's Sustainable Development Group, who sponsored Bah Abba's award. Young girls had been missing out on their education while they hawked their rotting produce at a poor price. Now their parents can make a good price at home or at the weekly Dutse market

which attracts 100,000 people. And the girls are freer to attend school.

Bah Abba publicized his invention by videoing a drama group using the pots. Armed with a generator, he travelled the region, showing his film in villages as an evening entertainment. Now his company, Mobah Rural Horizons, sells some 30,000 desert coolers a year, including some to the neighbouring Niger Republic. Potters make four or five pairs of pots a day at 150 naira (about £1) a pair, which are then sold at 180 to 200 naira.

The Crown Agents Foundation Award went to Emelda Nyamupingidza, from the Zimbabwean capital, Harare. Her family business, Nyaya Industries, began making drip-free candles in 1995, for use in rural areas where four-fifths of the population live and where there is no electricity. Now she and her husband employ 150 people and Nyaya is the largest candle maker and second largest polish maker in Zimbabwe, producing three million candles a month. They export 56 tonnes

of candles each month to Malawi. 'This business has changed me, changed my family and many people in Zimbabwe,' she said. 'When I heard I had won the award it gave me new energy. I am ready to go on for another 20 years.'

The award for infrastructure development went to Crewe-based Bombardier Transportation's joint venture with Uganda Railways, for its locomotive workshop in Kampala. Claiming to be East Africa's best industrial workshop, it has improved servicing and the average time between engine failures had risen from 800 hours to over 4,000.

Anca Colibaba, Director of EuroEd in Iasi, Romania, won the British Council Award for the effective transfer of English language skills. EuroEd teaches English to 1,000 Romanians each year in one of the nation's poorest regions. Learning a foreign language is seen as a passport to economic development. The EuroEd Foundation has also trained teachers from 37 schools in Moldova, whose border is only 10 miles from Iasi.

But perhaps the most colourful winner was Gustavo Tuquerres from the Sierra Norte on Ecuador's border with Colombia. He is President of Quesinor, a band of cooperative dairy farmers which sells \$40,000 worth of cheese a month locally and in the big cities. Receiving his award from Hilary Benn, he wore a black trilby hat, a red wool scarf round his neck, a cape over his shoulders, white trousers and white leather sandals, with a black shiny pony tail hanging down his back—the epitome of Latin American attire.

This was grassroots, bottom-up development at its best and his speech, in halting English, roused the audience to long applause. ■

[www.worldaware.org.uk](http://www.worldaware.org.uk)

**Contributing to a safer, more prosperous, more equal world.**

**B**edan Mbugua had just won a luxury holiday for being declared 'best salesman in Kenya'. 'The sky is the limit for you at Ciba-Geigy,' he told himself as he walked along the beach. Then he suddenly found himself asking how long he would stay with the pharmaceutical company. 'To my surprise the answer came that I would only stay for another six months! I decided then that for the rest of my life I would like to serve Kenya and Africa.'

Journalism might be the best way, he thought.

Leaving his well paid job was a big step as his early life had been a struggle. He had lost his mother and father in the mid-Fifties when he was six and had largely brought himself up, earning his way by looking after cattle for others.

His journalism studies took him to the United States. In his Creative Writing class the professor asked, 'What would you like to hear said about you at your funeral?' The question helped to re-ignite the motivation he had felt back in Kenya. The answer came to him as quick as a flash—'Here is a person who served his people'. By then he was Vice-President of the Students' Union and could easily have forged a career for himself in America. But he knew he had to return to Kenya, which he did in 1979.

When he started working as a journalist in the early Eighties he 'made a firm commitment to truth'. He traces his deep respect for the truth back to the influence of his mother. Although he only benefited from her tuition for a tragically short time, her tireless campaign against falsehood of any kind left an indelible impression. 'To her truth was non-negotiable.' He knew that this meant his path in Kenya would not be easy. Nor has it been.

In 1988, while editing a Christian publication called *Beyond*, he had his first major clash with the authorities. He decided that he must expose the government of the day for running a fraudulent election campaign. It was not an easy decision for a young editor. 'I knew only too well what the consequences might be,' he says. 'I had seen how government security agents treated critics.' At first he says he tried to convince himself that it would be better for the paper if he survived to fight another day and was able to cover future events, rather than be banned. 'In any case, wouldn't I be more effective as a free man rather than as a prisoner?'

The night before the article exposing the fraud was to be printed he could not sleep. The next morning he went to the office very early. 'I prayed for half an hour and read from the Bible. In Ezekiel it said, "You are called to be a watchman." I saw that the trumpet I was meant to blow was my newspaper.' He then called in all his staff, told them that he had decided to go ahead and asked them to pray with him.

It wasn't long before a government offi-



## Free, frank and fearless

cial appeared at his office armed with a banning order. That same afternoon he was arrested and rushed to court. There was no Counsel to represent him. He was pronounced guilty and told that sentence would be handed out after a week.

During this time he was summoned before the President. The case would be dropped if he would just apologize, otherwise he would be sent to jail. 'How could I apologize for telling the truth to Kenyans, I wondered? My response was that it was better to go to prison than to be imprisoned by my conscience.' He was sentenced to nine months.

On arrival at the prison, the warden who received him offered, for a small bribe, to secure easy work, two blankets and extra food. 'This is a prison, you could die,' he added ominously. 'I explained that I had come to prison for standing up for the truth. I would not give a bribe.' The next day he was detailed to break stones and given one blanket. But it only lasted 21 days. A huge international campaign for his release, taken up by journalist organizations and Amnesty International, had generated over a million

letters—all addressed to the President. 'Why didn't you tell me that the small fellow had so many friends?' the President is said to have complained to an aide.

In 1994 he was arrested again—this time for publishing an article in *The People*, of which he was now the editor. He sees the paper as 'an instrument for disseminating truth' and is proud that its banner contains the motto, 'Free, frank and fearless'. His 'crime' was to have exposed an incident where the executive had interfered with the judiciary. He was given the option of paying a fine and apologizing for what he had written, or a prison sentence. Maintaining that 'his conscience was not for sale', he chose prison. This time he was sent to a remote jail for five months. He served three months and twenty days in conditions where he was mercilessly exposed to the sun. His singed hair still bears the marks of that experience.

He brushes aside any talk of his own bravery in his pursuit of honest journalism. 'It's not that I am especially brave. What I

Why would a successful Kenyan salesman give up his career in order to become a thorn in his government's flesh?  
**Bedan Mbugua,** editor of 'The People', talks to **Paul Williams.**

have is faith—and faith gives birth to a strong conviction. I think conviction is courage in disguise.'

On his release he determined to combine studying organic farming as a part of sustainable development with a return to 'bold journalism'. 'I went to the Organic Farming Institute and asked them to "show me in the garden" how it was applied. I wanted to learn it all from the practical angle.' Although now back with all the pressures of editing the renamed *People Daily*, Mbugua sets aside one day every week to pass on his knowledge to groups of villagers. 'At one stage I decided to "de-élite" myself,' he explains. 'Through working in the villages I keep in touch with ordinary people.'

He expected to find that dealing with the threat of AIDS would be highest on the villagers' list of priorities. But they turned out to be more concerned about becoming self-sufficient in growing food. 'It's expensive to buy fertilizers and sprays,' he says. He shows the villagers how to dig trenches, how to 'double dig' their plots, how to build up soil nutrients, how to plant Napier trees to avoid soil erosion and how to prevent wastage of water. 'I tell them, "Don't come wearing a tie, but bring your instruments and be ready to work."' He makes it clear that he is not bringing hand-outs or 'development in a basket'. 'I've not brought food or cash or fertilizers,' he tells them, 'I have come because I have faith in you and because I have faith you can change your situation.' He grows lettuce, celery and maize in his own garden.

One of his plans for the future is to help organize a cultural festival in Kenya in 2003 for the whole of Africa. 'Its aim would be a renewal of Africa's spirit and dignity that has been trampled upon first by colonialism and then by our own dictators.' He sees it as a vehicle for peace in Africa. ■



## BOOKMARK

## Down to earth philosophers

Pierre Spoerri finds both inspiration and food for thought in Alain de Botton's, 'The consolations of philosophy'.

Philosophy, at least here in European lands, seems to be an 'in' subject at the present moment. One first noticed it when, some years ago, the book of a relatively unknown Norwegian author, Jostein Gaarder, *Sophie's World*, suddenly became a world bestseller and was soon translated into 42 languages. The book did not contain violence or sex but described how a little girl learns the basics of philosophy. And now, Alain de Botton's book, *The consolations of philosophy*, is enjoying a similar success. First published in April 2000 in the UK and USA, its hardback edition sold 72,000 copies in the first year in the UK alone.

Is this just a passing fad or are we witnessing something which a BBC commentator described a few weeks after 11 September as 'the end of the age of shallowness'?

After I picked up de Botton's book by chance, I discovered that not a week went by without another book with philosophical content being published. In Germany a major new introduction to philosophy has been written, and the German TV Channel ZDF has renamed one of its most popular

programmes from *Literarisches Quartett* to *Philosophisches Quartett*, moderated by the well-known professor of philosophy, Peter Sloterdijk.

One feature of this development is the linking of philosophy with daily life. Major reviews appeared at the beginning of 2002 of a book written by a professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne University, André Comte-Sponville. Its title: *A short treatise on the great virtues—the uses of philosophy in everyday life*. I have not read the learned Frenchman's book, partly because the author—according to the reviews—seems to be good at raising doubts about everything, including values and morality. He seems to believe in neither God nor absolute and universal moral laws, and ends up getting mixed up in the problem of human free will—the existence of which he denies.

Alain de Botton's approach is quite different. He was born in Zurich in 1969 of a Sephardic Jewish family who had to leave Spain in 1492 and which finally settled in Alexandria, Egypt, where he grew up. In a conversation published on the internet he says he found 'something nice in the idea of a book changing your life for the better'. He

adds: 'The consolations of philosophy is a search for wisdom in the writings of six of the greatest philosophers.... Most of these do not appear on college courses—they are at the liveliest end of philosophy, they are themselves interested in helping one to live. They are practical thinkers.'

De Botton's approach is simple. He takes six issues which are common to every person's life and asks one philosopher to give his answer to that problem. So we look for consolation from *Unpopularity* by studying the life and thinking of Socrates; from *Not having enough money* by studying Epicurus. *Frustration* is dealt with by Seneca; *Inadequacy* by Montaigne; *A broken heart* by Schopenhauer; and finally *Difficulties* by Nietzsche.

The idea of writing such a book struck the author when he was looking at a picture by the French artist Jacques-Louis David in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It shows Socrates amongst his friends finishing a philosophical point while at the same time reaching serenely for the hemlock that would end his life. De Botton writes that the picture struck him so forcefully 'because the behaviour it depicted contrasted so sharply with my own. In conver-

sations, my priority was to be liked, rather than to speak the truth. A desire to please led me to laugh at modest jokes like a parent on the opening night of a school play. With strangers, I adopted the servile manner of a concierge greeting wealthy clients in a hotel... But the philosopher had not buckled before unpopularity and the condemnation of the state... Moreover, his confidence had sprung from a more profound source than hot-headedness or bull-like courage.'

Not all the philosophers in the book may speak to all its readers. But no doubt each one will find some stimulating, even startling, new thoughts—some of them expressed many centuries ago. The popular idea of the philosophy of Epicurus is that he recommended the pursuit of pleasure in all its forms. Yet for him the task of philosophy was 'to help us interpret our indistinct pulses of distress and desire and thereby save us from mistaken schemes for happiness'. So when he made a list of what is natural and necessary for happiness the three first items were 'friends, freedom and thought'.

Obviously, a reviewer cannot summarize the thinking of six great philosophers in a thousand-word article. But he can give a few of the quotes which struck him most forcefully.

Seneca, a philosopher at the time of the Roman emperors Nero and Caligula, faced and witnessed exceptional disasters. Earthquakes had shattered Pompeii; Rome had burnt to the ground. And Seneca himself was first banned to Corsica because of Empress Messalina's scheming and then eventually forced to kill himself by Nero. So his consolation for frustration is not just theoretical but painfully practical: 'Never did I trust fortune, even when she seemed to be offering peace. All those blessings which she kindly bestowed on me—money, public office, influence—I relegated to a place from which she could take them back without disturbing me. Between them and me, I have kept a wide gap, and so she has merely taken them, not torn them from me.'

The French philosopher Michel de Montaigne amazes the reader by his insights and his honesty about himself. 'When good health and a fine sunny day smile at me, I am quite debonair; give me an ingrown toe-nail, and I am touchy, bad-tempered and unapproachable.'

Interesting ideas are to be found in every life, Montaigne insists. However modest our stories, we can derive greater insight from ourselves than from all the books of old: 'Were I a good scholar, I would find enough in my own experience to make me wise. Whoever recalls to mind his last bout of anger... sees the ugliness of this passion better than in Aristotle. Anyone who recalls the ills he has undergone, those which have

## Urgent medicine

When Lewis B Smedes, American author of *The art of forgiving and Forgive and forget*, says that a book is the best he has read on forgiveness, it's worth taking note. Smedes gives his endorsement to Michael Henderson's *Forgiveness: breaking the chain of hate*, an extract from which was published as an article in *For A Change* (Feb/Mar 2000). The book consists of 'a harvest of marvellous stories that add lively support to its urgent message', says Smedes.

First published in the US by BookPartners Inc of Newberg, Oregon, *Forgiveness: breaking the chain of hate* has been re-issued in the US and published for the first time in the UK in an updated edition. Henderson has added new material and revised his preface in the wake of the 11 September tragedy.

The new edition features a foreword by the Indian historian and journalist, Rajmohan Gandhi. 'Michael Henderson offers this new edition... as evidence that the stuff of forgiveness is sterner than suspected,' writes Gandhi. 'It does not condone evil, and evil, on its part, cannot extinguish the power of forgiveness.'

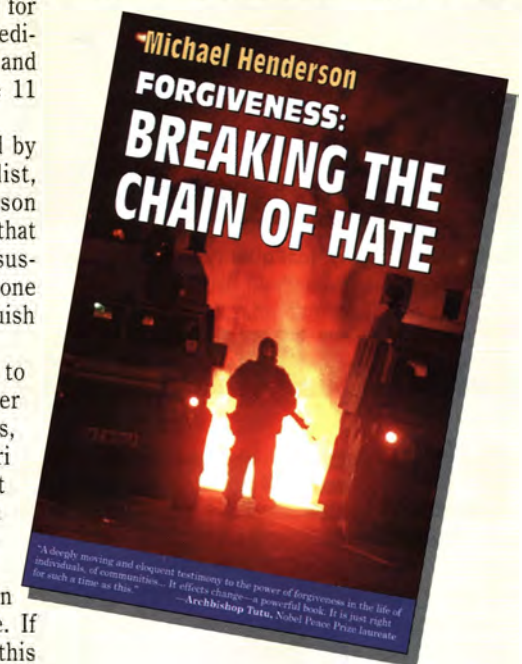
'Even when our indignation appears to us wholly justified, most of us, whether Arabs, Jews, Americans, Afghans, Indians, Pakistanis, Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits or whoever, are also aware that personal bitterness can be like acid that corrodes us from within without damaging those whom we are bitter toward,' adds Gandhi. 'Most of us, therefore, are in favour of some forgiveness somewhere. If that is so, we will find medicine in [this

book] sensitively dispensed.'

The front cover of the UK edition carries an endorsement by Archbishop Desmond Tutu: 'A deeply moving and eloquent testimony to the power of forgiveness in the life of individuals, of communities... It effects change—a powerful book. It is just right for such a time as this.'

Kenneth Noble

'Forgiveness: breaking the chain of hate' is published in the UK by Grosvenor Books, London, price £11.50 paperback, ISBN 1-85239-031-X; and in the US by BookPartners Inc, Newberg, Oregon, ISBN 1-58151-115-9.



Socrates finishes his philosophical point before taking the cup of hemlock which is to end his life. After the painting by Jacques-Louis David



'Improving the physical quality of life in rural India'

# Boundless energy for the rural woman

The award-winning doctor **Banoobai Coyaji** has pioneered health care in 300 Indian villages.

**Russi M Lala** tells her story.



Gautam Roy

**T**he eminent Indian gynaecologist and hospital director Dr Banoobai Coyaji is Pune's best-known lady—and perhaps the most loved. Coyaji, who won the Ramon Magsaysay Award for public service in 1993, constantly works on fresh projects to benefit rural women, especially adolescent girls.

It all began in the 1970s when Coyaji found that rural people were flooding hospitals in Pune, Maharashtra, for minor ailments. The government had its primary health centres, but as they were regarded as second-rate, few patients went there. Coyaji asked the Chief Minister of Maharashtra to

give her one primary health centre to run and to allot her the same amount of funds that the government would spend on it. She insisted she could get her hospital doctors to run the centres more efficiently. She did.

With the primary health centres running efficiently, about 75–80 per cent of the patients were cured of minor ailments. As many as 15–20 per cent of the more difficult cases got treated at two rural hospitals which she had started, and only about 5–10 per cent of the really serious cases landed in her Pune hospital. The rural hospitals were used to train nurses from the countryside, as they seldom migrated to the cities.

Coyaji tells doctors who apply to the King Edward Memorial (KEM) Hospital in

Pune, where she is chair of the governing board, that until they have worked for six months in villages she will not give them a posting.

When she started working there in 1946, the hospital had 40 beds. Today it has 550 and is one of the largest in Pune. It is run by a trust for the benefit of the poor and resembles a government hospital, with crowds milling around. Coyaji's reach extends to 300 villages, and foreign agencies constantly urge her to expand her programme.

One day she got a phone call from a woman with a foreign accent. She was speaking from the Philippines and asked Coyaji if she would accept the Magsaysay Award. She thought a practical joker was playing a prank on her.

Hesitantly she said yes. An hour later, she went to her room at the *Sakal* newspaper, where she is a director. The news editor charged in and said, excitedly, 'Madam, madam, you have got the Magsaysay Award. It has just come on the telex.'

The prestigious award has been given more often to Indians than any other Asians. The citation for Coyaji's \$50,000 award reads: 'In recognition of her mobilizing the resources of a modern urban hospital to bring better health and brighter hope to Maharashtra's rural women and their families'.

Coyaji served for six years on the Scientific Advisory Group of the World Health Organization that looks after women's health. She has visited 120 countries and while on WHO assignments has seen the plight of women in many lands.

Ever since I first met Coyaji, I have been intrigued not only by her achievements but also her energy. The latter is a gift of God to her. Her life is all of one piece and her high energy level, in her mid-80s, is thanks to her sense of purpose, hard work, incredible organizational power and, above all, her positive thinking. 'There are negative thoughts and positive thoughts,' she says. 'Judgement is usually negative. So are anger and jealousy.'

Whatever the provocation, I have seldom heard her speak critically of another person. So her energies are canalized into creative channels. 'You can have all the wealth and health in the world,' she remarks, 'but unless you do something for another person you cannot be happy.' That is another secret of her boundless energy.

Coyaji sets a scorching pace. She wakes at 5 am. The morning goes in preparing papers and speeches. She is often invited to address Indian and international conferences.

At 7.30 am she hears the BBC news, glances at an English and a Marathi paper and at 8.30 am leaves for the hospital. She has been director of KEM, for over 50 years.

She is an authority on rural health, population planning, and the reproductive health of women. Coyaji speaks to young and old alike—to young people on achievement, and to old people on growing old gracefully.

Once when I met her, she was about to inaugurate a programme on 'total quality care' at the hospital. Pune, an industrial city, is home to many competitive companies that strive for quality production. 'Why should we not have total continuous quality care?' she asked. Afterwards, I asked how her meeting had gone. 'I was amazed. Everyone in the hospital at different levels was there,' she said. 'What did you tell them?' 'I told them that to give total quality care, each one needed to ask, "How can I do more?" We need introspection. I said I had

examined myself and realized that till the hospital had about 200 beds, I had visited each patient daily. Now the hospital has 550 beds and I have no time. It takes a minute, but it means everything to the patient if you touch and ask how he or she is.'

From there, she drove 40 kms to her rural project at Vadu—the work that gained her international recognition. She came to our house at 6 pm, having driven back 40 kms. I hesitated to ask her to join me for an important personal engagement I was going to. I knew her presence would help.

'Oh, don't worry about me. I have inexhaustible energy. I am born a Virgo. It is written a Virgo has a back of stainless steel. I am strong as a horse and I work like a don-

**'I am strong as a horse and I work like a donkey.'**

key.' Coyaji was then aged 78.

Those who work like donkeys don't do the strategic planning which Coyaji does. She carries a monthly chart that accompanies her everywhere and every appointment is entered there. The KEM Hospital Research Society which she heads has 31 projects running at the same time, ranging from nutrition of women, to income generation, to training in health and hygiene.

Coyaji's main focus is to improve 'the physical quality of life index' and this includes life expectancy, infant mortality and adult literacy. For more than 26 years her projects have aimed at safe motherhood, maternal nutrition, integrated health care services and reproductive health. She moves with the times, and some of her projects undertake leadership training to empower women—who hold one third of the *panchayat* (village council) seats—to increase their contribution for the betterment of the area.

**T**he girl-child, Coyaji says, is treated terribly in India. Government schemes cover the girl-child from birth to six years and maternal child health, which focuses on the pregnant girl. The snag is that, in between these ages, the girl is left to fend for herself. Women come to Coyaji with other problems also. So from health issues, she has moved to income generation and basic education on hygiene for rural women.

With no regrets for the past and no anxiety for the future, Coyaji is free to concentrate on today. She quotes: 'Yesterday is a

cancelled cheque. Tomorrow is a promissory note. Today is hard cash—use it.'

Till almost 80, she spent most afternoons taking an active interest in the operations of *Sakal*. At 4.30 pm she took off for her clinic for a couple of hours, saying, 'I have to make a living, you know.' She draws no salary from the hospital. When she reached 50, donations were raised in her honour to fund improvements to the hospital.

Coyaji is a pioneer of family planning. She launched a family planning programme in 1946 with Shakuntala Paranjpe. In 1951, the industrialist J R D Tata focused national attention on the subject. When his Family Planning Foundation of India started (now called the Population Foundation), he included Coyaji on the board. In 1996, she wrote to a Tata trust, saying, 'The biggest mistake we made in family planning was to neglect the male and his problems.' She got a grant to start the Tata Centre for Reproductive Health.

I have known few people as well organized as Coyaji. She plans on a grand scale but can also bestow immense care on individuals who are in need. 'By training, I am a gynaecologist. But at heart I am a general practitioner, a counsellor.' When a woman in Bombay, whose husband was ill, needed her moral support, she drove all the way from Pune to be with her, had lunch, and sped back for a 6 pm appointment in Lonavla, reaching home at midnight: a drive of 384 kms.

At the age of 80, in 1999, Coyaji fell down. A swelling appeared on her shoulder. Her son, a Harvard-trained gynaecologist, advised her to go to hospital and get an X-ray. But the woman who headed a hospital for over 50 years defied her doctor. 'I will disappoint the children whom I promised to meet at their school.' She told her daughter-in-law: 'Jeroo, put my sari on for me,' and off she went to the school. After going round the school for half an hour, she felt dizzy, settled down on a chair and was rushed to hospital. For the first time in her life, she was hospitalized and then house-bound. When I visited her, I inquired, 'What is God trying to teach you through all this?' Without a moment's hesitation she replied, 'To find myself'.

A little more than a year later, Coyaji was back in circulation. She was her old self again, doing her work at the hospital and supervising the work in rural areas, which has earned her the blessings of tens of thousands of women. ■

*This article is taken from a chapter in R M Lala's book, 'A touch of greatness', about the lives of eminent Indians, published by Viking, Penguin Books India 2001, New Delhi, and reproduced here with permission.*

# Working with difficult people

**Bjørn Ole Austad** talks to people who face a common source of stress at work—other people.

Some pressures spur us on to do our best at work. Others cause stress that may drain our energy, take its toll on our health or even make us collapse. There is one kind of stress that was not invented by modern industrial and economic life—that caused by difficult relationships. Though it could be that ever greater efficiency demands better and better teamwork, making difficult relationships more painful to live with.

'People who receive encouragement at work experience less strain and stress than those who do not,' a human resources manager in a large Maltese firm tells me. 'Sometimes people feel defeated because of lack of gratitude and understanding for what they do. I believe in care for employees and colleagues. I ask how people are out of sincere interest. Many come to work carrying a burden of problems from home. That causes stress and strain.'

Another source of stress is people's negative attitudes to things that ought to be different, the manager adds. 'Too many people just complain. I ask them: What are you going to do about it?'

Difficult people can change their attitudes and behaviour. Sincerity and appreciation from a colleague or an honest apology about some trouble caused may trigger that change. But what happens when difficult people show no intention of changing?

A person, whom I shall call Jean, thoroughly enjoyed her work in a service profession. Her enthusiasm and warmth were

appreciated, and her customers gave her much praise. Suddenly things began to change. The source of trouble was easy to detect. A new colleague began to make negative comments about her behind her back and run her down in front of her customers. She was clearly less knowledgeable and conscientious than Jean and this was her way of covering up her weaknesses.

Jean was deeply hurt. At times she got extremely angry or depressed and began to dread going to work. After praying and

## Many come to work carrying a burden of problems from home

reflecting in silence about the situation, she decided to have an honest talk with her colleague. She arranged a time to meet and, to her amazement, was able to speak calmly. A number of misunderstandings were cleared up. Jean gained self-confidence and felt less personally offended by her colleague from then on. However, her colleague did not change. Eventually Jean decided that the best thing would be to change jobs within her profession. She did this and regained her enthusiasm for her work.

Another friend of mine, 'Kevin', runs a family business with his two brothers. When

relationships are healthy a family business may enjoy good teamwork and efficiency but difficult relationships may poison the workplace. Kevin told me that the three brothers were supposed to work as equals. But for years he was so troubled by his younger brother's interference in his department that his health and his family suffered. Time and again his brother would try to overrule his decisions and countermand the orders he had given to his staff. The brother would butter up Kevin's staff and humiliate him in front of them. Also, some of the staff would play one brother off against the other for their own advantage. 'At times I would weep alone in my office,' Kevin told me.

One day Kevin blew his top. A member of his staff had appealed to his brother for a change of decision on a particular matter. Kevin phoned the person and said some unkind words. She, in turn, went to his brother and complained.

Afterwards in quiet by himself Kevin searched for the deeper reasons for the trouble. He phoned the member of staff to apologize. In the next meeting with his brothers he brought up what had happened. He said his reaction had been wrong, but went on to question his brother's attitude and asked him to see where he might be wrong.

Kevin then proposed new ways of running the company, and these were accepted. He is now more relaxed although the brother has not really changed his attitude. The key for Kevin was to face the conflict

Philip Carr

squarely and not suppress it.

The manager for human resources to whom I referred earlier, said: 'When I am under stress and strain, I stop for a few minutes in silence. It is like when you climb up a mountain and stop to catch your breath and rest. You look at the view and how far you have already climbed. That makes you gain perspective. It makes it easier to continue the climb.'

The manager finds himself in a conflict of values and ideas with his own superior: 'My boss sees people as tools of production. I see our business as a community of people. What happens to the people inside the community affects the service that we give to others outside. What happens to even one person within the business may affect the service that we provide.'

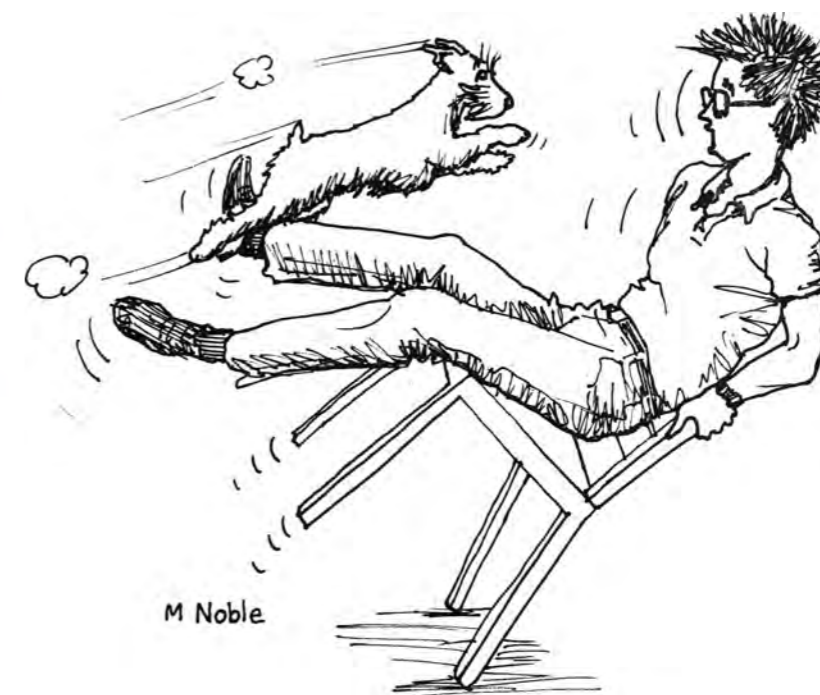
How does he cope with that conflict?

He says that he has to preserve his ability to work with his boss. People use different maps to interpret the reality around them. He has to recognize that the map of reality of his boss and his own map are different. 'I believe in being a diplomatic person. A diplomatic person has a good eye for common ground in a conflict. A diplomatic person moves out of a conflict to see it from outside, to gain a different perspective. That is easy when you are on the outside of the conflict from the beginning. It is not so easy when you yourself are part of the conflict. When I find someone belligerent and his views completely opposed to mine, I do not reject them. I ask how and why he arrives at such conclusions. If someone says that one plus one makes three, I prefer to ask the person why he thinks so and how he arrived at such a conclusion. It may open a dialogue in which I can learn something about my opponent's map of reality.'

Time to reflect alone in quiet and talking with friends whom we trust may give us insight and wisdom to discern what kind of difficult relationship we are facing. We may be able to separate our own faults and responsibilities in the conflict from those of the other person. We may discover that the real difficulty lies with us, or that the main trouble is with the other person.

It is important to begin with oneself. It is a temptation to blame someone else. Yet there are also those who are inclined to keep blaming themselves. They hardly dare to suggest that others may be extremely troublesome.

We are all different. Some people endure difficulties at work for too long and waste precious years and talents that way. For them it may be a liberating step to resign. Others quit at the first obstacle. For them it may be essential to keep at it and cope as best as they can. While we wrestle with these difficult questions, we may gain insight about a deeper calling in life, one that God offers independently of where we work. That calling may in turn clarify the immediate options. ■



# Love at last sight

'The only good dog is a dead dog,' I've been known to mutter, only half-jokingly, as some muddy hound has bounded up to me leaving paw prints that would make a forensic expert drool—in the unlikely event that I should ever want to bring criminal charges against the owner.

I certainly wasn't a 'dog person'. I found it hard to produce a polite smile when, having picked up my then toddler daughter to save her from the attentions of a rottweiler, the owner cheerily remarked, 'He's very playful, isn't he?'

Students of psychology may be interested to know that I was molested by a great dane as a child. In truth it was just being playful, but being flattened was not my idea of fun. Also, having a vivid imagination, I could see all too clearly the impact that those canines—teeth, not dogs—would have if a canine—dog, not tooth—ever bit me.

A word of warning to prospective fathers: one of the dangers is that you may find that your daughter wants a pet. My wife was beginning to waver but I remained impervious to Vicky's demands—until my wife and I read her message to Father Christmas: 'Please can I have a puppy, signed Vicky. PS I hope I aren't being greedy.'

'Who will walk it and feed it? What if we want to go away? Will it destroy the family home?'

Such pertinent questions seemed to matter less to my wife and me than giving our daughter her heart's desire. Middle age stodginess was an insufficient reason to say 'no', we finally decided, so a year or so ago we acquired a miniature schnauzer at no small expense.

For those unfamiliar with the breed, picture a 'salt and pepper' coloured terrier with a moustache and beard that any Victorian gentleman would have died for.

Yes, Blue does scratch the wallpaper; yes, she is expensive to put in kennels when we go away; no she hasn't bitten me (yet); and yes, I do love taking her for walks (even when we meet the local great dane).

Blue has deep brown eyes, outrageously beguiling. Fortunately her needs are simple and her demands unvarying—food, play, food, exercise, food, sleep.... She is a great addition to the family—and who needs wallpaper anyway?

The other day I even found myself offering sympathy to another dog-owner—a woman until then unknown to me—about her pooch's heart condition. (We dog owners are very thick with each other—just like pram-pushers, bird-watchers and, no doubt, ten-pin bowlers.)

I only hope that my daughter doesn't develop a fondness for snakes.

Fletcher Moss Park



# WEBSITE

by Robert Webb

## Unexpected fruits of tragedy

**E**ven the worst of tragedies may bear some fruit. That's clearly the case in America in the wake of 11 September.

Public awareness of the prominence of government in American life has heightened as the role of government has inevitably soared. If this means wider voter participation in the congressional elections in November, it will reverse an unfortunate trend.

On another front, marriages are up. Many couples who 'partnered' decided to wed. Membership of many churches has risen. An Episcopal church choir in Richmond, Virginia, added seven members in recent months. A longtime member of the choir attributes this to the events of 11 September.

Non-Muslims, meanwhile, want to know more about Islam. Newspaper and broadcast commentaries from Muslim authorities try to explain. Sales of the Qur'an are up. Many non-Muslims as well as Muslims are taking a fresh look at their faith. A recent exhibit at the National Press Club by the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, which focused on the wide variety of religious life, doubtless attracted more interest as result of 11 September. There are early signs that a spiritual awakening may be stirring.

An imam spoke in a Roman Catholic

church in the Washington, DC area, and hundreds came to hear him. Muslim speakers are in demand for panel discussions. But while there's a clear hunger among millions of Americans to understand the religion whose fringe elements flew the planes that fateful day, few blame Islam for what happened. They realize that through history other religions, too, have had those who distorted their message.

Americans are reaching out in many different ways to the Afghan people. For example, the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) has asked Methodists to prepare school kits for Afghan children.

One common denominator is the grief felt by those who lost loved ones on 11 September and in Afghanistan. A poignant meeting took place in mid-January in Kabul between four American relatives of 11 September victims with families of Afghan dead. Imagine what it was like for Californian music professor Derrill Bodley, who had lost his 20-year-old daughter. According to *The Guardian* newspaper in London, he was there 'to meet the father of a five-year-old girl who died when a stray US bomb landed on a residential area in Kabul'. They were brought together by

Global Exchange, an NGO which, *The Guardian* said, 'hopes to promote reconciliation between people from the two countries'. The report quoted a Global Exchange spokesman as telling the BBC: 'The Afghans will see that the American citizens are not indifferent to their plight, and the Americans will get a better understanding of the tragedy of the Afghan people.'

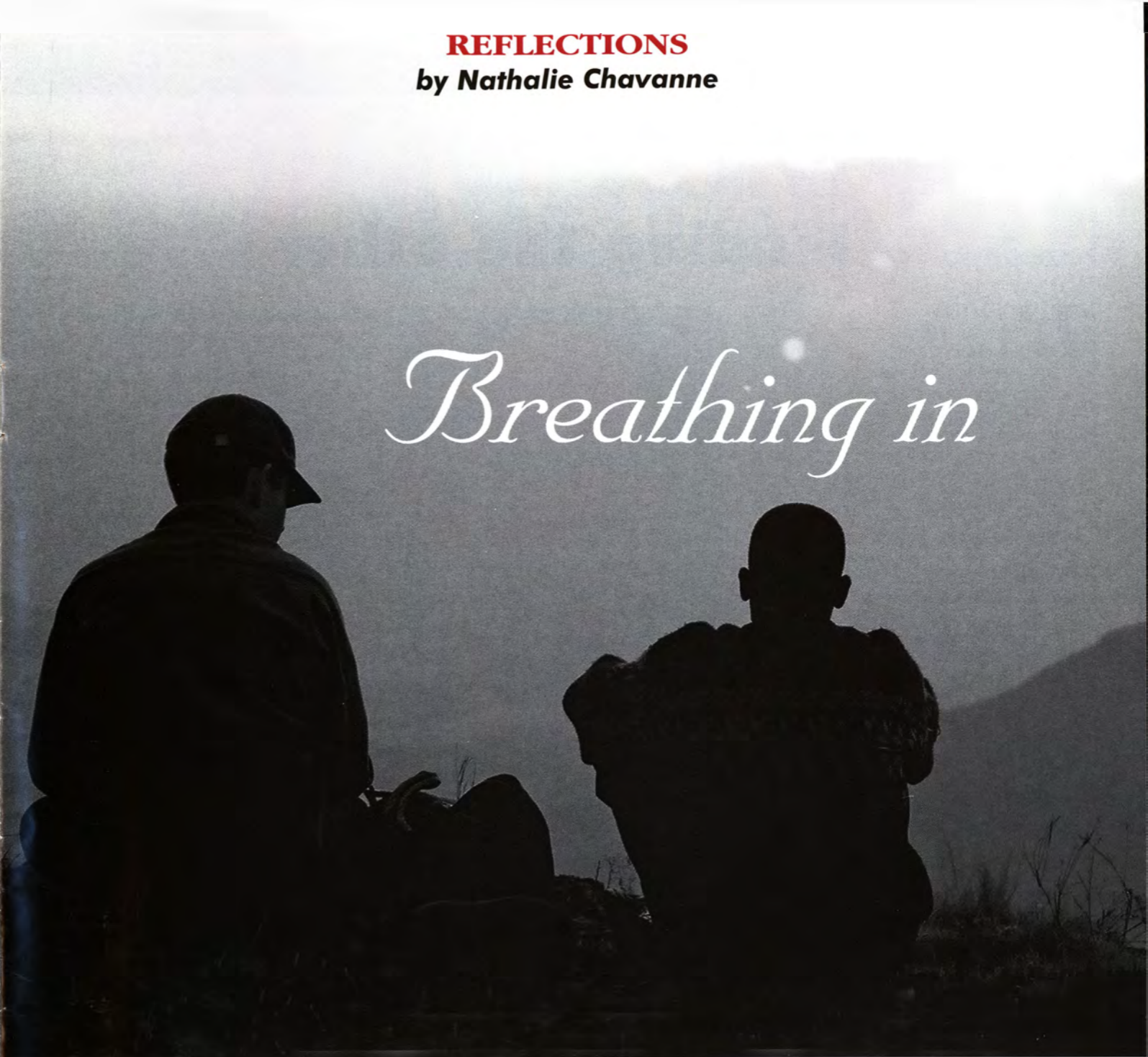
The 11 September aftermath has also helped Americans understand how their foreign policies foment hatred in much of the Arab world. A French journalist who visited Lebanon recently told me he was struck by the anti-American feeling there. Clearly that feeling needs to be taken into account.

'We need to see ourselves as others see us,' says a Christian mother in suburban Washington. An African-American journalist cites similarities between the hopelessness felt by impoverished youths in US cities and that of their Arab counterparts abroad.

Until 11 September most Americans, including federal lawmakers, paid scant attention to foreign policy. But that's changed. Americans are more attentive to the world at large, hungrier for international news. So presumably are their Congressmen. If that concern continues, changes may come in how America relates to the world.

This country, so blessed materially, may become more sensitive to the needs and attitudes of others. We may project more the vision of Abraham Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address as the American Civil War was ending in 1865: 'With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds... and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.'

*Robert Webb is a former columnist and editorial writer for the 'Cincinnati Enquirer'. He lives in Alexandria, Va, USA.*



Breathing in

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**T**he most precious secret I have found for creating happiness is the practice of silence and inner listening.

My daily time of quiet—even though sometimes brief—is first of all a kind of 'breathing in' before the turbulence of the day. Next I try to put myself under the eye of my Creator. I love the simple, unexpected thoughts which sometimes come to me. They help me to manage my life in all its aspects.

One day, I wrote in the little notebook I use for this special moment: 'I need you to be faithful in small things in order to do bigger things with you.' These 'small things' are: the time I go to bed at night in order to fit in my time of quiet at the beginning of next day; the welcome I give to an unexpected person; the way I talk about others... and even, sometimes, the way I drive the car or use the humblest kitchen utensils.

In the absence of special thoughts, I know that my quiet times prepare the ground for ideas or actions to germinate during the day as shoots of renewed life. I offer my very imperfect way of listening to God, who gives his original and appropriate response in his own time and way.

Light may shine on dark corners in my life—on a delicate relationship or a difficult situation. In a quiet time, a remark I earlier heard in passing may suddenly flash into my mind and take on special significance for me.

When my son slams the door in my face; when my daughter's inner world closes up to me and I find teenagers unbearable; when a certain trait in my character irritates my husband profoundly (or vice versa); when frustration or monotony threatens our life together; when I lack patience with ageing parents, I need the gust of fresh air which inner listening gives me. It reminds me that,

despite the tensions, the family is a place where we can learn to love and create happiness.

Sometimes I accompany my husband to far away countries where everything points out our cultural difference. If I ask myself what I am going to talk about with people there, a little voice murmurs, 'Share experiences of new life in your family.' Hearts open and often one discovers how rare happiness is in this primary cell of community life.

When relationship difficulties with my colleagues chip away at my faith, then I must also remember that it is not our merits which create success but our willingness to train what we French call our 'inner ear', so as to discover the next step of growth. ■

*Translated by Rosemary Thwaites*

*Photo by Chloë Smith*