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The Need for a Restraint

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Most families in India bring up children in a positive surrounding which gives the growing children a feeling that everything would be alright if we practise the power of positive thinking. All problems would have a solution, provided, we made an effort to think objectively about a particular problem. As children, the moment my brothers and I began to crib about the cold, the rain or the snow, our mother used to narrate her own experience of mentally coping with extreme cold when she came to Shimla after her marriage in heavy snow as a young bride. She looked outside the window to find lots of birds and monkeys sitting on the branches of the snow clad trees. Next day she also saw a few stray dogs under the roof of the porch of her house. She said that she thought to herself that if the creatures of nature could survive the cold, surely she would in her home which was kept warm by a fireplace in the living room, warm clothes and hot foods and hot milk and tea to drink.

She decided to arrange for *bajra* and broken rice for the birds, black grams for the monkeys and *rotis* (chapattis) for the dogs every day. During the first two weeks she realised that it was not right to give the food to all of them together. She learnt from her experience that the dogs should be given *rotis* first, then the black grams to the monkeys and lastly the *bajra* and broken rice to the birds. She enjoyed doing it and did it for forty-five years in every house that she moved into. She enjoyed looking at trees, plants covered with snow and learnt from the birds, dogs and monkeys how to face the cold. Whenever we cribbed about heavy rains, she asked us to go out with rain coats and enjoy the rain, when we cribbed about cold and the snow, she encouraged us to wear gumboots, wear our caps, coats, gloves and go out to make statues from the snow or go for sledging on the snow. Both my brothers and I stopped cribbing and learnt to enjoy the snow and the rain. The few months that Shimla

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was pleasant we learnt to appreciate the sunshine, the flowers and the butterflies while we used to go out for enjoying the beautiful weather.

This was my mother at the age of sixteen and fifty-five years later, during her hospitalization in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) when she was critical, she was able to check three of us – me and my two brothers from discussing the surgeon who had operated upon her for removing gall stones about ten years back. Her recent investigations including the ultrasound showed the gall bladder intact. Every doctor disbelieved that the gall bladder had been removed. We kept on saying that it had been, as the surgeon handed over to us the fourteen stones, which had been removed from gall bladder, and as a matter of medical procedure, the gall bladder is also removed. There was no reason for us to believe that it had not been removed. The doctors used to come for rounds and discuss why the surgeon had not removed the gall bladder for three days. The gall bladder now had a big stone which was becoming a threat to her life with pancreatitis and all the parameters going haywire. When the doctors left her room, my mother was angry. She said ‘why are you criticizing the surgeon for just one stone, why are you not remembering with gratitude that he had taken out fourteen. There must have been some reason for the surgeon for not removing the gall bladder’. That brought an end to the

discussion and the focus shifted to the future course of treatment. She kept on telling us that we should not panic as with the passage of time she would surely get better. She added that when one panics in the presence of a patient, the patient who is not strong mentally, can give up.

Our father carried out all his official duties and did everything possible within his limited means to ensure the warmth and comfort of our home. He found time to reach out to all those who worked with him, friends and family members who needed his support. He never expressed his physical fatigue or complained about anything to save us from worrying. He kept on telling us that we have countless blessings. He always led an upright life, seeking undue favours was not right he believed. He taught us by his example by bravely facing physical odds. He repeatedly explained to us that it is not good to expect sympathy or support from others when you face an illness or a physical challenge, do not remain focused on that, instead you can think of Helen Keller who was deaf, dumb and blind. She managed her life and work so well without making a noise about it to seek attention or get favours. She was an author of a great standing. Milton, the poet, never complained about his blindness. My father believed and said that now a lot of benefits are available, take them if you really need them, but do not become mentally and physically over dependent on these as then you

will only be thinking of yourself and everything available will be less for you.

As children, we used to go from Shimla to Chandigarh at least once a year. We also used to visit the Rose Garden for experiencing the beauty and colours of roses, the visit to Rock Garden made us appreciate a new concept of making beautiful things out of waste or not so beautiful things. We used to get excited and tempted to go for boating on seeing the Sukhna Lake. My father used to tell us to watch the behaviour of the ducks in the lake for some time, especially, when visitors used to give them something to eat. We discovered that the ducks were peaceful and swam in groups of two; a single duck generally tried to join a group. When they rushed to a visitor who offered pop corns/chips etc., to them, they would squeak and gather in a formation happily. Those who joined late would quietly and patiently find place for themselves without pushing or disturbing those who were already there. Some flew to take place on the steps while the new ones adjusted themselves. The ones who were already there would show acceptance as there was never a fight, even if, some ducks did not find a place, they would go and join the several other formations holding their heads high to greet as many other visitors who were offering pop corns to them. This was another way of establishing a contact with the visitor, the eye contact, the squeak

made us feel as if they were happy to join, enjoy their food and even convey their sense of happiness through a squeak!

My father continuously reminded us of these ducks, their patience, making a place to adjust in the formation without pushing or fighting and their sense of cooperation. He said we could have a similar attitude towards our families, our studies and later when we would all start working. He said competition against our classmates/relatives/ colleagues was not healthy. One could as an individual do well by meeting the target/deadlines which one sets for one's own self. He said by pushing, rushing, losing patience, getting jealous, trying to take undue credit, we would only be impeding our own performance as a student and later in our work situations. One should avoid giving judgements/negative comments about others as these will dilute one's own focus and sap energies. He said it is natural for every human being to notice the negatives of people around – discuss them with others, take advantage of situations, etc. and then projecting these to gain a favour will become a habit. This will pollute the healthy environment of workplace as well as home. We need to make every effort to check ourselves and become aware of this habit.

My husband used to be terribly upset that in offices, homes, shopping places, social get-togethers it is common to hear petty things

being said about politicians. It has become a hobby with many of us as academicians, media persons and common people to keep on finding the minutest of details about politicians, keep looking for what more can be said or written about them. One must do it to raise issues, not to discuss individuals. It has created so much of monotony on the live/print media. The language we use needs to be decent, sweeping generalisations need to be avoided. We need to exercise restraint and focus on social evils which have shaken the public conscience in recent times. Rape of young girls and women, dowry deaths, female foeticide, corruption in public life and many such issues need to be discussed. And we need to expose and be critical of those who are involved in such crimes and perpetuating them, be it doctor, engineers, public servants, politicians, business people or any other. This will save us from wasting most of our time in passing-judgements and get conscious of doing our own work sincerely and objectively.

I keep visiting the Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh which brings back the old childhood memories. I enjoy the lake, the ducks which were resting on their usual resting place, a small green park a few feet away from the walking track. The moment I shout with the pop corns, they begin to move in a group of two – they all come beautifully in a big row, flock together, look up, squeak and keep on joining the group. The moment the

pop corns finish, a large number of ducks begin to turn back, the others who are at a distance, swimming to join the group automatically turn to get back to their place of rest. It is always an hour of sheer joy and laughter for me. Many a times the bigger ducks walk on the walking track. It gives me a great feeling of joy.

Both my husband and I used to get upset on negative over reporting on Commonwealth Games. Each channel of the live media and most national dailies appeared to be competing with each to report/write on all that was left to be done and not on what had been completed with regard to preparations. While the guilty surely needed to be punished, but we needed to have patience till the games were over. An announcement to this effect had already been made by the Prime Minister of our country. We needed to understand the implications of our reporting negative developments. This must have impeded the progress of preparations, demotivated planners, administrators and workers. It carried a poor image of our country's preparedness outside India. The international media followed the Indian media and discussed developments more negatively.

The way the hike of the Parliamentarians in their salary has been covered is in phrases like 'hike over hike' and many other captions for days appeared to be judgemental. These also had an element of

sweeping generalisations. There is a need to talk about politicians and every strata of our society in an objective rather than sensational manner. What has happened over the years is that while politicians are getting continuously scrutinized by media and public as it has become everyone's hobby to gossip about them. For any and everything going wrong, the blame is conveniently passed on to this category. We must understand that in doing so we are letting the many others – teachers, doctors, bureaucrats, technicians, businessmen who join happily as a matter of right in criticizing the politician, forgetting the many wrongs that they themselves do sometimes, knowingly and many a times unknowingly. It is important to check ourselves from passing judgements on any of these categories in a generalised manner and start

using decent language for everyone. All of us need to do our work more seriously and avoid gossip which have social repercussions on families and friends and ruin the work culture at work place and social environment of homes.

Teachers need to discuss the need for restraint with children in classes, during activities as children carry tales, complain and gossip about their peers, classmates and even teachers. It needs to be shared with children that a habit like this is not healthy, it wastes time and contributes to nothing positive, it impedes learning, healthy interaction and genuine concern for each other. She could discuss the spirit of accommodation, co-operation, patience and tolerance of the ducks as positive values and habits which would help every child in positive learning.