

Purpose In Life

--by Geeta Khade



“Each time I visited my father, he lovingly would stress about the need to have purpose in life. During such visits, I remember him telling me about Buddha who said, “Just as a candle cannot burn without

*fire, we cannot live without a
spiritual life.”*

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I had just returned from India leaving my father, who was in the hospital, under the care of my sister. He was eighty years of age, but looked like he was in his sixties. My mind was filled with sadness and confusion. Something inside was telling me that my father’s time was coming soon. Even though my sister could take care of my dad just as I did, I knew I was saying my last goodbye when I left the hospital room. Within three days of my arrival back home in Connecticut in 2015, I heard the news that my father passed the day after my departure. With both my parents departed from earth, I felt in that instant moment I had become an orphan.

From a very young age, I had been very close to both my parents. We were a family of four. My older sister was outspoken, whereas I was quiet and shy. Growing up with her gave me the strength and courage in my school and college years. We had our sisterly loving debates, but in the end, I kept quiet just to bring peace between both of us. My sister got married at a young

age. I was fortunate to stay with my parents for a longer time. Both my parents were my best friends.

My mother was a homemaker. As a young girl, I heard stories from her about Indian gods like Krishna, Ram, freedom fighters like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King. She enjoyed singing, storytelling, reading scriptures, enjoyed learning languages, and listening to the news and talks on the radio. My mother was very creative and enjoyed sewing. A great devotee of the Hindu god Krishna, she worshipped daily by singing songs in praise of him. She celebrated Lord Krishna's birthday every year by decorating and designing the whole house with scenes from scriptures and history, just as Connecticut families celebrate Christmas. My mother would fast all day on Krishna's birthday till when he was born at midnight. To this date I don't know how she got so much energy. We had about 200 to 300 people at our home during this time. Friends, relatives and guests visited us for many days. During these days, she used to arrange games, competitions for little kids and give small prizes to everyone. Those who visited us went home with happiness and gratitude. She used to cater to everyone one's needs with laughter, jokes and smiles.

Once as a child I asked my mother, how she chose my name. To this she replied, when she knew she was pregnant, she started reading the Bhagwat Geeta. And the day she completed her reading, I was born. Thus she gave me my name. Bhagwat Geeta is a holy book for all Hindus. It is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and his sister's husband Arjun on the battlefield. In the book the Lord Krishna explains about truth, reality and spirituality about the universe and human existence. As I began to learn about Lord Krishna, and the philosophy he gave to mankind, he became my most favorite god. Life with my mother till the day I got married was thus filled with joy, fun and listening to stories and fables. Now I celebrate Lord Krishna's

birthday by inviting a few close friends. This celebration brings back fond memories of her and her devotion to Krishna. I share stories told by mother to my friends and their children. They enjoy listening and we sing songs in praise of Krishna.



Me and my mother



My father on one of lecture tours

My father used to be very busy with trips due to his work in the airlines. He was an intellectual, a spiritual thinker who loved reading and writing. He was an electrical engineer from VJTI College (the Indian equivalent to MIT and Harvard), a self-made man with principles and values, a sincere and hard worker. He joined the airlines company as a simple technician, but when he retired after forty plus years, he was the Director of the entire Ground Services Department in Air-India. In his beautiful large office, he had an image of Lord Krishna with words written under as “Work is Worship.” My father was full of wisdom, peace and fun. Conversations with my father were mainly philosophical and about saints, life, spiritual leaders, and great people’s writings. He explained the meanings of the scriptures, their significance in day to day living. He had a unique sense of humor. Spending time with my father was always a serene feeling with so much laughter, peace and wisdom.

Each time I visited my father, he lovingly would stress about the need to have purpose in life. During such visits, I remember him telling me about Buddha who said, “Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, we cannot live without a spiritual life.” According to him, spirituality in whatever genuine form of practice, brings purpose to life and gives us a destination worth going to. I used to reply that I didn’t feel the necessity of thinking about a purpose because I already had a family. My justification was I had a husband and two children. I felt then being a homemaker was my purpose. Following a plan established at a very young age, my father decided to become a monk in his later years of his life. During this period, he wrote several books in English and various Indian languages related to Hinduism, his guru, and significance of human life so on and so forth.

I was married in 1993 and came to United States on August 21, 1994. My mother passed away in 1995. My first son was born in 1996. With life changing so quickly, my father, always

with a smile, gave me the courage and strength in difficult times. Thus I became more close to my father. I called him every day around 10 in the morning. Due to the time difference, it used to be around 8.00 in the evening Indian time. My father would wait for the call and later have his dinner. I learned this later from the members of the monastery who shared their memories after his death. It became a daily habit and I would hurriedly finish my household chores. After my daily duties, I would enjoy the precious few minutes of the day with my father. It was a real joy to both of us.

In September 2015, everything came to an end when my father passed. I was terribly shaken by this experience. Prior to this incident, my belief was different. I thought I could handle any situation. I guess one can never be prepared to see our loved ones leave us. Up till then I felt I was strong and brave. Instead with this shock, I spent hours, days, weeks by myself sad, anxious, worried thinking how would I be able to survive without my parents. I used to force myself to cook or do anything. It was a difficult time. I felt helpless, homeless, and alone. My friends became loneliness and sadness instead of my parents. It was in one such time, I felt my father in his metaphysical form come and sit next to me. He reminded me of having that purpose in life.

After this feeling, I needed change. It was like an electric current through my body. Maybe my father must have recharged my battery again! I began volunteering in one of the nursing homes in my town. The nursing home staff placed me in the recreation department. My time here was to engage in conversations with residents, get them involved in activities like crafts, help staff in arranging birthday parties, games and get everyone to participate in the recreational activities. I had immense pleasure visiting the residents who were mainly elderly. Visiting the nursing home was like having so many parents at one time. Since then, the feeling of being alone, sadness and helplessness vanished. The residents enjoyed my company and it was like I was

reborn again. As days, weeks and months passed seeing my enthusiasm, the nursing home staff offered me a job to which I was not prepared for. After some thought and persistence from my friends, I later enquired about the requirements for the job. My passion to spend more time with the elderly residents, made me rethink again about my life's purpose. The nursing home staff told me that I would need a certificate in the field of therapeutic recreation. At this time, I was unaware of this field and had no experience of going to school in this country. A long time had passed since I attended school. All my education was done in a non-computer age in a different country.

I was nervous, confused but not heartbroken. It was the fear of not knowing where to begin. Thus my journey to Manchester Community College began. The faith that my parents were there to support and guide gave me courage and strength to move on making that first phone call to the college. The staff for initial advising, assessment testing, and the admissions of Manchester Community College helped me at every step in the process. After my assessment testing, I was placed in English 093 class. I still recollect the first day of my 093 class with Professor Lisa Sandoval. I sat in the last row with an inferiority complex inside me. Finding out from the student sitting next to me on how to switch on a computer began my unforgettable travels to venture into the unknown. Initially I wrote everything by hand in a notebook and then copied gradually on the computer. Later on, I took the Business Office Technology class which helped me in my computer skills. I regularly attended the advising group. I did well with A grades in my classes.

Gradually I overcame my inhibitions. This opened new doors to curiosity and passion to learning new things. Professors like Carla Adams, Dr. Giguere, Anna Park, Valerie Pozzato and many others have given me the necessary support and guidance. Professor Joan Jakiela who is

responsible for the therapeutic recreation course gave me immense exposure in the recreation area. During her classes, I visited hospitals and nursing homes to learn various recreation programs, attended conferences related to the recreation field. With every completing semester, I learnt the knowledge in the field of recreation and also became involved in student clubs. Further, under the guidance of Professor Patrick Sullivan, I was admitted in the honors program. I successfully completed an honors research paper on the differences in the long and short term care of the elderly population and also arranged one evening with an Indian traditional meal and cultural program for a group of Indian residents at the Riverside Rehabilitation Center in East Hartford under the support of Dr. MarJo Archambault and Professor Scott Emmons. I learnt the techniques in programming under Professor Stacy Estrella who taught me how to document, write care plans and implement them for residents. My parents' memories remind me that I am on the right track and I am fortunate to be a student once again. I plan to learn piano and take vocal classes, and start a story telling program using my public speaking skills learned from Professor Patrick Sullivan's class to entertain my residents at the nursing home.

Manchester Community College gave me the opportunity to explore and rediscover myself. Soon I will be completing my studies in therapeutic recreation. I believe in quality rather than quantity in life. In the words of Mitch Albom, the American author, professor of sociology in Brandeis University from the book, *Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson*, he says, "Death ends a life, not a relationship. All the love you created is still there. All memories are still there. You live on – in the hearts of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you are here." The wisdom, love and kindness my parents have given me has helped in finding my purpose in life. Manchester Community College has given me the sense of belonging that I am never alone and helpless. I am happy, energetic and satisfied. My profession

as a therapeutic recreation specialist is to bring that eagerness, enthusiasm and passion for recreation to all my residents which I wish to accomplish in the near future. I am in love with life again.



My first Convention

In Professor Anna Park's class

Connecticut Park and Recreation Convention at Mohegan Sun, November 2018