

REFLECTIONS



A Hindu Cultural Center Newsletter devoted to the Capital District's Indian-American community, particularly its seniors

Editorial: A new Newsletter for Our Community

By Ram Chugh, Ph.D.



Namaste! It is my pleasure to send you this inaugural issue of *Reflections*. I would like to thank the Hindu Cultural Center's (HCC)

Board of Directors for sponsoring and publishing this newsletter. *Reflections* will focus on issues of interest to our Indian-American community, particularly its seniors.

It will include articles on healthy aging/living, religion and spiritualism, intergenerational issues, planning for the future, culture and heritage, and will be written mostly by members of our community.

An editorial committee will guide the

content of this quarterly newsletter, which will be distributed electronically to our community through the mailing lists accessible to HCC.

Reflections is designed to promote greater interaction within our large and diverse Indian community. The Capital District (CD) has experienced considerable growth in its population of Indian descent.

For example, in 1965 only a handful of families of Indian origin lived in the area. The current estimate is between 3,000 to 4,000 families. A large number of them have lived in CD for over 25 years and have made it their home.

This expansion of the Indian-American community has created demand for various ethnic goods and services as well as for institutions to meet their unique religious and cultural needs. Consequently, the CD has seen the emergence of several ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, places of worship and cultural centers, and the

formation of associations such as Tri-City Indian Association, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati, Marathi, Bengali, Panjabi and others.

Our places of worship, cultural centers, and associations provide forums for socialization and celebration of religious and cultural events, Indian Independence Day and Republic Day, as well as festivals, music, and picnics.

Through such organizations and activities, the CD's Indian-American population feels connected to their social, religious, and cultural roots and heritage. This newsletter is a humble attempt to promote this connection even further by highlighting issues and events of interest to our community.

Lastly, I thank Leonard Perlmutter, Richa Kaushik, Sastry Sreepada, Maninder Gujral, Pratima Kunchala, Aadya Kaushik, and Gwen Bondi for their contributions to this issue of *Reflections*.

Eight Clues To Happiness

By Khuswant Singh*

Having lived a reasonably contented life, I was musing over what a person should strive for to achieve happiness. I drew up a list of a few essentials that I put forward for the readers' appraisal.

First and foremost is good health. If you do not enjoy good health you can never be happy. Any ailment, however trivial, will deduct from your happiness.

Second, a healthy bank balance. It need not run into crores but should be enough to provide for creature comforts and something to spare for

recreation, like eating out, going to the pictures, travelling or going on holidays on the hills or by the sea. Shortage of money can be only demoralizing. Living on credit or borrowing is demeaning and lowers one in one's own eyes.

Third, a home of your own. Rented premises can never give you the snug feeling of a nest which is yours for keeps that a home provides: if it has a garden space, all the better. Plant your own trees and flowers, see them grow and blossom, cultivate a sense of kinship with them.

Fourth, an understanding companion, be it your spouse or a friend. If there are too many misunderstandings, they will rob you of your peace of mind. It is better to be divorced than to bicker all the time.

Fifth, lack of envy towards those who have done better than you in life — risen higher, made more money, or earned more fame. Envy can be very corroding; avoid comparing yourself with others.

Sixth, do not allow other people to descend on you for gup-shup. By the time you get rid of them, you will feel exhausted and poisoned by their

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gossip mongering.

Seventh, cultivate some hobbies, which can bring you a sense of fulfillment, such as gardening, reading, writing, painting, playing or listening to music. Going to clubs or parties to get free drinks or to meet celebrities is criminal waste of time.

Eighth, every morning and evening, devote 15 minutes to introspection. In the morning, 10 minutes should be spent on stilling the mind and then five in listing things you have to do that day. In the evening, five minutes to still the mind again, and ten to go over what you had undertaken to do.

RICHNESS is not earning more, spending more or saving more, but ... "RICHNESS IS WHEN YOU NEED NO MORE"

* Khushwant Singh was a nationally known novelist, journalist, lawyer, and politician. This piece was written a year before he died at 99.

Falling: A Serious Issue for the Elderly

By Richa Kaushik*, MD



We all have encountered falls or near-falls in our lives. When we are younger, we brush ourselves off, laugh off the embarrassment and go on with our lives. However, as we grow older, falls have a bigger implication.

One in 3 people above 65 have a fall every year. 10% of these falls lead to a major fracture or traumatic brain injury. Hip fractures, specially, carry a very high mortality and morbidity rate. Falls may lead to inability for an elderly person to live independently and are the commonest reason for nursing home placements.

Now that I have impressed the importance of falls in the elderly let's look at some of the underlying causes and the interventions we can do to address them.

-Normal aging leads to decreased muscle strength and imbalance.

Maintaining an exercise program can help maintain strength.

-Use of adaptive equipment like canes or walkers needs to be assessed. If indicated, they should be used properly and be well maintained. Frequently, people will make modifications or hang bags on the equipment making them unsafe and a potential hazard!

-Sensory loss (hearing or vision) also can be a factor. Correcting with proper aids (hearing aids, glasses, cataract surgery) is recommended.

-Environment factors are important as well. Cluttering in hallways, rugs, uneven surfaces, poor lighting should be addressed. Remember how you make the house toddler safe when your child starts walking, it needs to be addressed again for our elderly.

-Medical conditions may predispose a person to fall. Neurological ailments like Parkinson's disease may cause a person to be unsteady. Heart and lung diseases may decrease one's reserve and strength. Osteoarthritis may cause buckling and unsteady gait. Recognizing the limitations a disease causes and managing it under the guidance of a physician are very important.

-Medications are a big culprit in falls in the elderly. Polypharmacy leads to drug interactions and one should try and work with one's physician to take as few medications as possible. Even over-the-counter medications may cause issues and should be discussed with one's physician. Sometimes changing the timing of a medication (e.g. a diuretic) may help avoid falls.

-Controlling pain is also an important intervention. Unaddressed pain may be a factor in leading to a fall.

-Use of alcohol needs to be reviewed in the elderly. Our tolerance to alcohol decreases with age and it isn't cleared as fast by the body. Recognizing the mental and physical impairment caused by alcohol and limiting its intake are important.

-Recent illness may leave an elderly person weaker and at a high chance for falls. Please consider additional help after a recent hospitalization or major surgery.

These are some brief pointers for a "fall-free" life.

Comprehensive multidisciplinary approach (physicians, pharmacy, physical therapy, prosthetics) is recommended in case of a fall or near fall in an elderly person.

* Dr. Kaushik is a gerontologist and works at VA Hospital in Albany.

God-Centered Prayer as Part of Meditation

By Ram Lev (Leonard Perlmutter)*



To encourage you to include prayer as part of your meditation practice, I have prepared a sample God-centered prayer.

Please don't consider this something you should memorize. If certain passages speak to your own situation and heart, feel free to incorporate them into your own prayer. If other phrases feel uncomfortable to you, perhaps they might at least help clarify what you're really feeling. Remember, earnestness is the key. As spiritual food for thought, I offer the following:

"O Lord of Life, O, my Inner Dweller, Thou Who gives me Light, that I might see, Who gives me power to hear, to smell, to taste, to touch, to think, to analyze, Who gives me power to walk, energy to walk, to do things in the external world; O that Center of Power within me, let me draw strength directly from You. You are my only source of strength.

O Inner Dweller, Light of Light and Holy of Holies, with a grateful heart for the bounty and blessings of creation that You unceasingly provide, I humbly pray that your Presence come forward into my awareness and that you lead me in my meditation and my practice.

Teach me to receive with equanimity the pleasant and the unpleasant, remembering that you are the Origin of all; that everything is here for me to use and to enjoy but not to possess, nor to be possessed by.

O Inner Dweller, help me to purify this

body, mind and senses that I might become an instrument of love, forgiveness and compassion, to do Thy will—even in the face of my own likes and dislikes.

O Inner Dweller, though I am attached to the charms, attractions and temptations of this material world, I desire to surrender all my attachments back to You: I surrender my very breath, body, mind and senses. I surrender every concept of I, and me and mine. I surrender all fear and worry, anger and selfish desire. I surrender the ignorance of separateness and the illusion of personal doer-ship. On the altar of surrender I offer You my expectations, anticipations and intentions, my judgments and criticisms, conclusions and opinions—every thought, every word, every deed. I make this offering lovingly, humbly and earnestly, and pray that You will consume this offering in the fire of your compassionate Light. Lead me from the unreal to the Real. Lead me from the darkness to the Light. Lead me from mortality to immortality.

O Inner Dweller, I pray for your strength. I humbly pray for your grace. I pray for your grace through the scriptures. I pray for your grace through those teachers who bring me knowledge. I pray for your grace through the Absolute Reality within. May the voice and light of the Divine Reality Within grow in my awareness. Grant me an ear to hear and eye to see, at all times, in every relationship and every circumstance that I might declare with full faith, in this lifetime: I and my Father are One."

* Leonard Perlmutter is a founder of AMI. ©2005 The American Meditation Institute.

Sikhism: An Introduction

By Maninder Singh Gujral*, MD



Over twenty million Sikhs follow a revealed, distinct, and unique religion born five centuries ago in the Punjab region of northern India. Between 1469 and 1708, ten Gurus

preached a simple message of truth, devotion to God, and universal equality. Often mistaken as a combination of Hinduism and Islam, the Sikh religion is a completely independent faith:

Sikhism rejects idolatry, the caste system, ritualism, and asceticism. It recognizes the equality between both genders and all religions, prohibits the intake of any intoxicants, and encourages an honest, truthful living. Sikhs have their own holy scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. Written, composed, and compiled by the Sikh Gurus themselves, the Guru Granth Sahib serves as the ultimate source of spiritual guidance for Sikhs. While the Sikhs hold their Gurus in high reverence, they are not to be worshipped; Sikhs may only worship God.

Members of the Sikh community are mainly concentrated in their homeland, Punjab; however, substantial Sikh populations exist throughout the rest of India and the world. Punjabi, a variant of the Hindi language with some Persian influence, is the spoken and written language of the Sikh people. Male members of the Sikh religion use the name, Singh (lion), as their middle or last name, while females use the name, Kaur (princess). Sikhs tend to be industrious and pioneering; this accounts for their general success wherever they live and settle. The hard-working nature of the Sikhs is derived from their religion, which can be best characterized as a faith of unlimited optimism.

Basics of Sikhism

Sikhism is the youngest of the World religions. Its history dates back to 1469.

Its founder Guru Nanak Dev was born in a village called Talwandi, now known as Nankana Sahib in Pakistan, in 1469.

The Sikhs have ten Gurus. It is believed that they all had same soul though they had different bodies, and that it was Guru Nanak Dev's spirit, which passed on into his nine successors.

The Sikhs call God as 'Waheguru', meaning that God is great. Their common salutation is Sat Siri Akal

(God is supreme and is immortal). "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh" has a two fold meaning. It denotes a special relationship between God and those who dedicate their lives to His love and service. Also it is the expression of a devotee's faith in the ultimate triumph of Truth over Falsehood. This Sikh salutation means "Khalsa belongs to God and to God alone belongs the Victory".

Guru Granth Sahib is the holy book of the Sikhs. It is believed that the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh bestowed upon the Granth the title of the Guru.

*Dr. Gujral is a President of The Sikh Association of Capital District NY Inc

Message from Dr. Swatantra Mitta, Chair, HCC Board



The HCC Board takes pride in sponsoring and publishing *Reflections*. I am grateful to **Ram Chugh** for suggesting this

newsletter and for his tireless efforts in putting it together. **Rasik Shah, Richa Kaushik, and Sastry Sreepada** provided valuable assistance in this effort. **Aniruddha Mayadeo** helped design and format the newsletter. I thank them immensely for their service. The newsletter is being sent electronically using the email lists accessible to the HCC. Some of you might get duplicate copies because you may be on several e-mail lists. If you don't wish to receive this newsletter, please let us know at reflections.hcc@gmail.com

What My Grandparents and Parents Taught Me

BY Dr. Sastry Sreepada, Ph.D.



My experiences with my grandparents are filled with both joy and learning. As I age from being a grandson to becoming a grandfather, I admire their influence

on my cultural and religious outlook on life.

My great grandfather was an Avadhani, one who is well versed in Sanskrit, Vedas and can perform multiple intellectual activities simultaneously. His son, my paternal grandfather was a Vedic practitioner. I have clear memories of seeing Palm leaf books of Vedic mantras in his house. The teaching of various Vedic and ritualistic practices are essentially from father to son through oral tradition. While knowledge was passed on in a Vedic tradition, we evolved to practice life in the modern world without giving up the traditional methods of learning.

My grandparents and later my parents had well-disciplined practices of worship in the house. Seeing the practices and listening to the chants day in and day out, we learnt without any special effort. This is a pure Vedic tradition of learning through listening. Also, it was a practice to orally teach



us about things in general, counting numbers, names of stars and constellations, stories that may include Puranas.

These used to take place in times of leisure or bedtime lying on the bed outside, staring at the night sky. Their interactions were unconditional. So as a child, I never felt I have to show or prove my progress in learning. We were only proud to show what we learnt. They knew how to individualize their interactions with various grandchildren.

The interactions with maternal grandparents were similar. I clearly remember, during some festivals, several Vedic pundits used to come to my grandfather's house and chant Vedas.

My father studied Sanskrit and became a Sanskrit pundit. He started teaching me Sanskrit when I was about 4 years old. All teaching was, initially, oral. I studied Sanskrit books under his guidance for over a dozen years.

My grandmothers and my mother almost were excellent in taking care

of health and food habits with love. In my case, it has a special significance as my health confined me to bed for a couple of years. The untiring efforts of my mother with not a single complaint are unimaginable. While my father during those years extended the Vedic methods of teaching to educate me in Sanskrit and the basics of mathematics and reading, it enabled me to start my real education in a school at the level of 4th grade. The lessons I learnt are:

- Have a disciplined approach to practice and pursue what I believed in.
- Evolve in applying old concepts (Vedic) to the changing life.
- Never brood on what is wrong, but look for opportunities (as my father utilized precious time in teaching me)
- Teaching, as grand parents do, should be what and how knowledge can be imparted, without expectations other than the learner's pride in showcasing what they learnt

The Population of Asian-Indians in the Capital District 1980-2010

The table shows the distribution of Asian-Indians in the four counties of the Capital District (CD) from 1980 to 2010. The Capital District Regional Planning Commission provided this information. It shows that the population of Asian-Indians in CD increased from 1,422 in 1980 to 9,285, registering an increase of 552%. In 2010, nearly 50% of the Asian-Indians lived in the Albany County, 28% in Schenectady County, 12% in Saratoga, and the remaining 10% Rensselaer County

County	1980	1990	2000	2010	Growth from 1980-2010
Albany County	716	1,284	2,539	4,600	542%
Rensselaer County	228	480	633	924	305%
Saratoga County	181	410	611	1,164	543%
Schenectady County	297	520	1,306	2,597	774%
Total	1,422	2,694	5,089	9,285	552%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and the Capital District Regional Planning Commission.

“Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.” ...**Buddha**

Advance Care Planning – Community Conversations

By Gwen Bondi*



Medical advances have allowed Americans to live longer, healthier lives. While the benefits of these medical miracles are undeniable, many people face complex, chronic problems, which carry a new type of burden, both for the sick person and for the family members caring for him. Technology has advanced to a point where patients with little or no hope of recovery can be kept alive indefinitely. That has made it more important than ever for people to express what kind of care they would want if they were to become unable to make their own decisions. Planning in advance allows you to be the decision-maker when you no longer have the ability to communicate your wishes for treatment. It is a continual process and not merely a document or isolated event.

Important steps in the Advance Care Planning process:

1) Learn about Advance Directives.

The **New York Health Care Proxy** is a legal document that lets you name someone to make decisions about your medical care, including decisions about life-sustaining treatment. The Health Care Proxy form appoints someone to speak for you *any time you are unable to make your own medical decisions, not only at the end of life*. The **New York Living Will** lets you state your wishes about medical care in the event that you develop an *irreversible* condition that prevents you from making your own medical decisions. The Living Will becomes effective if you become terminally ill, permanently unconscious or minimally conscious due to brain

damage and will never regain the ability to make decisions.

- 2) **Remove barriers.** Many people are uncomfortable talking about living at the end of life. It may not be easy, and there may be resistance, even denial. Yet putting loved ones in the position of having to make decisions for you can be difficult for them. Discussing your values and choices now can help. Start with a conversation.
- 3) **Motivate yourself.** Realize that Advance Care Planning helps you to maintain control, achieve peace of mind, and is an important step in assuring that personal wishes are honored.
- 4) **Complete your Health Care Proxy and Living Will.** Discuss your wishes with your loved ones, and be sure they have copies of your documents.
- 5) **Review and Update.** Your wishes may change over time, so it's important to complete a new set of documents and share them with your health care spokesperson and physicians.

Effective planning is the best way to make sure your views are respected by your loved ones and health providers. This process will also provide great comfort to those who may need to make end-of-life decisions for you. And remember, Advance Directives apply **only** when the need arises and you are unable to make your own medical decisions.

For more information, or to schedule a *Community Conversations* program, please contact Gwen Bondi at 860-8965 or gekbondi@gmail.com. Ms. Bondi is a certified Advance Care Planning facilitator for the Visiting Nurse Service of Northeastern New York.

*Ms. Bondi was our inaugural speaker when we launched the HCC Senior Services project; she came to HCC to present these concepts in a highly interactive seminar, and accepted our invitation to hold a follow-up meeting to help our members in

preparing their individual Living Will and Healthcare Proxy.

My Grandchildren: Love of My Life

By Pratima Kunchala, MD

There are many quotes about grandparents and grandchildren. In my opinion some of them are very true.



"Happiness is having grandchildren to love." "The most precious jewels you will ever have around your neck are the arms of your grandchildren."

We are very proud and happy grandparents with five grandchildren. They are Ava (8 years), Cora and Lucy (Identical twin girls, 7 years), Joshua (5 years) and Noah (3 years). The twins live locally (Coxsackie) and we get to see them often. I get to babysit them and have sleepovers and slumber parties and it is a privilege. The other three grandchildren live in London and we get to see them 2 to 3 times a year. It is a pleasure when all grandchildren get together. It is nice to see them play as if they see each other all the time. Thinking about grandchildren always makes me smile.

When you see the grand babies for the first time, you fall in love and it is forever. When our first grandchild (Ava) was born, I said to my daughter-in-law that having a grandchild is the best thing in the world. She said "Is it better than having your child?" I said, yes, because a grandchild is a child of my child. All grandchildren call us Tata (Grandfather) and Nayanamma (Paternal grandmother in Telugu). They are always making little gifts and cards for us and they are precious. It is a lot of fun to watch them grow

and learn. Now the grandchildren are at the age that they call us on our birthdays, give us valentines, etc.

Another nice thing of being a grandparent is to watch our children become parents and see the way they choose to parent (especially when they do it like we did with them).

Every time the grandchildren hug you or kiss you, every time they say "I love you", your love for them and happiness increases. I retired about a year ago because spending time with my grandchildren makes me so happy. I think that it is one of the best decisions I made. We cannot wait to watch them grow.

"If I had a star for every reason I love my grandchildren, I would have the whole night sky."

We encourage you to send comments and stories to Dr. Ram Chugh at:
reflections.hcc@gmail.com

My Dadaji: My Loving Guide By Aadya Kaushik

My dadaji was one of the most loving people I have ever met. I strongly feel that he instilled my compassionate nature in me. I remember him giving me one-dollar bills when I would get A's on my report cards in kindergarten. Since I was so little, I would give the dollars to my mother for safekeeping, and she in turn would give them back to him to give to me.



The love in his heart was immeasurable. The most vivid and long-lasting memory of dadaji I have is from quite a few years back. At the time, he was living with us in Bismarck, North Dakota. The incident occurred on the Ashtami of Navaratri. We have a small dog, Dolce, and he is always asking for food from us.

We tended to ignore him a lot, but dadaji always listened. That night, we were eating poori and halwa, and Dolce was asking for food as usual. I remember, dadaji was eating some halwa, and saw Dolce. Dadaji started to feed some halwa to Dolce underneath the table.

I could see Dolce wagging his tail in delight and satisfaction, and saw dadaji smiling too. This showed me how compassionate he was to all beings, no matter how small. I have tried to be the same way, and every time I eat halwa, I make sure to give some to Dolce.

These seemingly small acts of kindness do not go unnoticed by grandkids, no matter how small. My dadaji was, is, and always will be a lovingly guiding force in my heart.

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