

SMALL CONTRIBUTIONS

FROM ENLIGHTENED

INDIVIDUALS CAN

LIGHT UP THE PATH

OF DARKNESS FOR

OTHERS

by P Venkatesh

# THE CANDLE OF COMPASSION

It would suffice to solve most of the world's problems, if instead of what we do, we do what we are capable of doing," declared Mahatma Gandhi. Undoubtedly, this difference is what can make a big difference to people's lives. However, it often takes a good Samaritan to experiment with the truth inherent in this statement.

Last year, when a new subway opened for public use, nobody expected it to remain plunged in darkness week after week. Quite surprisingly, a Gandhi in the neighbourhood emerged from the shadows to show everyone that it was better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.

"One day while I was passing by the

subway, I found it totally dark. I decided to stand there for some time to observe the people using the subway. The senior citizens were distressed, the women were in discomfort and an old lady fell down in front of my eyes. This disturbed me. I did not know whom to contact to get lights installed in the subway. I went home and thought intensively about how to help all those people using the subway. Thanks to God's inspiration, I hit upon the idea of lighting candles, and immediately went out and bought lots of candles," says Arjun Dev Gandhi.

From that day onwards for the next nine months, this resident of South Delhi (Masjid Moth DDA Flats Phase-

1) continued to walk the extra mile down the pitch-dark subway next to the colony. Regardless of weather, every evening greeted you with the sight of a host of flickering candles strategically placed inside the dim subway. "Starting from 6:30 pm upto 10:30 pm, I went every one hour to light upto 15 candles. This service gave me a lot of satisfaction and I did not miss it even for a single day. In fact, I had made it clear to my family that under any circumstance I would be dedicated to this work from 5 pm to 10 pm daily. They supported me wholeheartedly," recalls this retired employee of Central Road Research Institute.

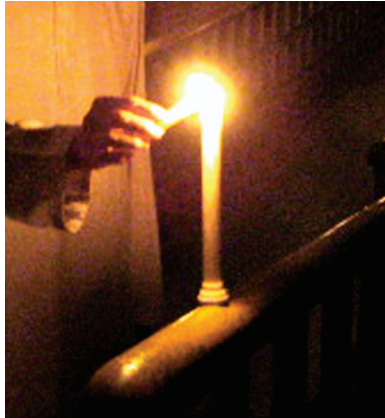
Without ever collecting any money



for the candles, or requesting any person to share the responsibility, or even attempting to attract attention to his service, the enlightened gentleman went about his self-appointed duty in utter silence and with sheer grace. The 65-year old senior citizen shares, "Once I read an essay by Swami Vivekananda in which the saint said that 'Service of people is service of God'. I made the statement the crux of my life. Since, example is better than precept, I do not preach to others and just cannot give this seva to anyone else. I make sure I take every opportunity to do selfless service, as such opportunities come from God's grace only."

Perhaps to describe this, Shakespeare must have said, "How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a weary world." If the candles could speak, they would have thanked AD Gandhi for using them for such a benevolent purpose. Even as thousands of pedestrians use this subway daily, seldom do they realise that they walk the path without a fall, thanks to the empathy of one caring soul. The women, children and senior citizens who were able to safely negotiate the long corridors of the subway must have been especially grateful.

"After nine months, I happened to meet an engineer who helped me contact government officials. After persistent phone calls and correspondence, they have been providing us a temporary light connection in the subway for the last few months. Even today, if there is a power cut in the subway, I immediately call up the officials. Doing good in every way has become a habit with me, and it feels great to receive a lot of praise, love and thanks for my efforts," he reveals. As much as this good Samaritan stepped in from much-cherished anonymity, he preferred to step out into popular obscurity. If no big public acknowledgement has come forth, it is because he has never sought publicity. He believes that one should



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do good and forget about it.

Several years ago, he was appalled when the staff at the ticket counter of old Faridabad railway station simply did not return the balance change money to the passengers. He went about collecting change from various temples. Then, every day before boarding his train for work, he used to spend half an hour standing near the ticket counter offering change of all denominations to the passengers. He also kept a board that said – 'Railways: For one rupee, 100 paise are available'. He did this service for a couple of years until a change in residence made him discontinue. A majority of us may never even

know him by name. Many of us have never met him and may never do so. Even his acts of service may fade into oblivion. However, all of us owe him a debt, which we may never be able to repay directly.

Is it not a wonder that of all people, only one man felt the burning need to do something about the situations we usually ignore? Truly, when a human heart shines with its self-effulgence, no darkness in the world is enough to contain its radiance. Perhaps, dark situations are meant as opportunities for these glittering stars to display their immeasurable worth. Who knows how many such selfless souls are working behind the scenes to make our lives work?

For them, HW Longfellow wrote these famous lines in his poem, *The Psalm of Life*, "Lives of great men all remind us/ We can make our lives sublime/ And departing, leave behind us/ Footprints on the sands of time." Inspired by the candle of one man's good deed, at least we can light some candles of compassion elsewhere so that many other lives too can glow unhindered.

Imagine how beautiful this world will become if we offer a little sunshine of unconditional love to our parents, children, siblings, colleagues, spouse or even strangers. Of course, we can even shower tiny drops of unsolicited kindness on birds, animals and plants. Is it not amazing that just by serving our fellow creatures, we can serve the Almighty? This will also be a perfect way to thank the good Samaritan, in the apt fulfilment of the Vedic prayer 'Asato Ma Sadgamaya' (from the darkness lead us to light).

By lighting the paths of our brethren, we are automatically brightening our own path to eternal splendour. Whether we wish to be a firefly, a candle, a torch, a lighthouse or a star, the choice is definitely ours. ☺

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