

THE POINT

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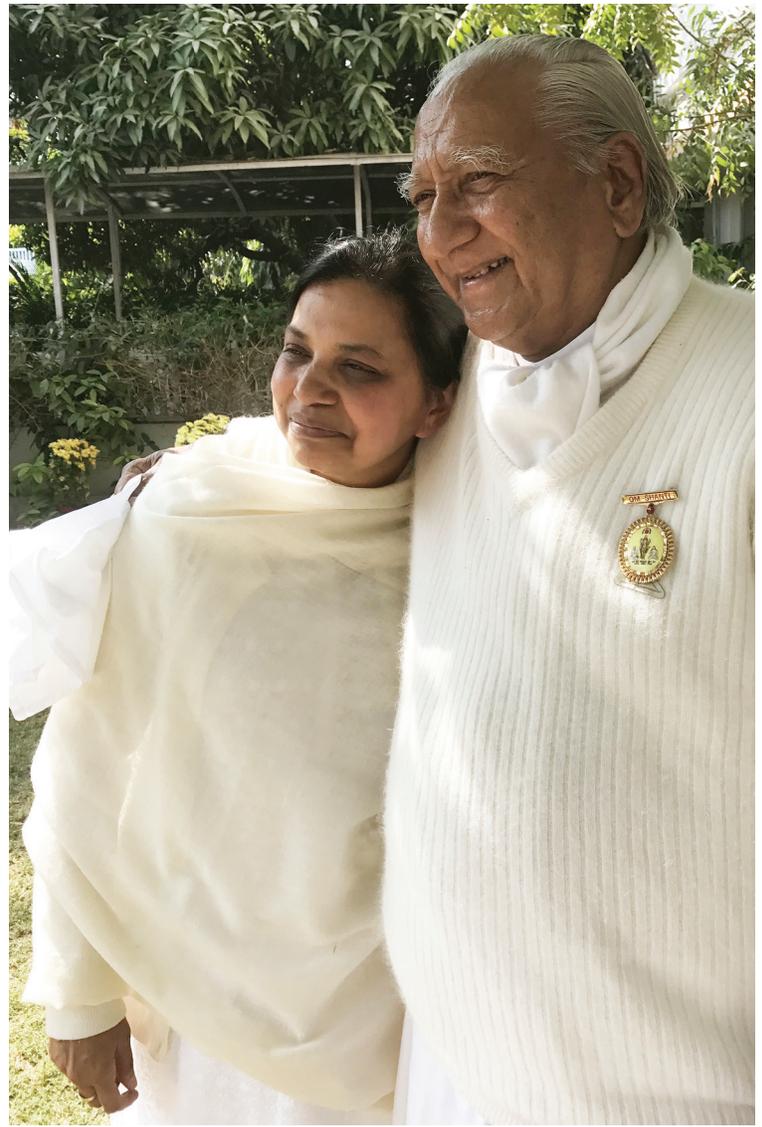
One morning with 'Uncle' Nirwair

He relates stories about Brahma Baba and
Dadi Prakashmani, whose influences are felt
deeply in his company.

ON A MILD winter morning, Nirwair Singh, secretary general of the Brahma Kumaris organization, sat as usual in the chair under a tree in his backyard. He once lived in Mount Abu, the hill station in Rajasthan where the original BK headquarters are located. However, in the past decade, the warmer climate at the foot of the mountain, in the BK nucleus complex Shantivan, has proven more agreeable for him and other senior yogis.

Nirwair has led the expansion of Brahma Kumaris campuses and the hospital and trauma center, also in Mount Abu, as well as all the solar power installations in the complexes—this, on top of supervising high-level conferences in the headquarters. Even so, to many students and friends of the Brahma Kumaris, he is “Uncle” Nirwair, often receiving guests at his cottage and then giving them some delicate Indian confection afterwards.

Lately, he has been meeting visitors under this canopy of the



Nirwair is often referred to as Uncle for his paternal care.

trees. He feels good in an atmosphere of chirping birds and playful squirrels, he says. There's a beehive nearby, too. He seems content that his life is attuned with nature.

He has just finished meeting a group of sisters from India and had groupies taken. One guest from America brought gifts of walnuts, green tea, lemongrass and gooseberry tea.

In conversations with Nirwair, he invariably tells stories about the Brahma Kumaris founder, Dada Lekraj, and the late BK chief Dadi Prakashmani. They obviously left a big impact on his life, the results of which are felt deeply in his company. Invariably, he also discusses deep spiritual experiences.

Divine insight

“I started studying philosophical books of Indian teachers, especially Vivekananda,” recalls Nirwair. The Hindu monk introduced

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PROGRAMS

SEPTEMBER

- IPIP - Sep 22-24
- Knowing Myself, Knowing God - Sep 3
- Camp for Joy-Children and Youth Program - Sep 16
- Parents' Program - Sep 2
- Retreat into Peace: Meditation and Music for Healing - Sep 10

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Indian scriptures and yoga to the West. “I used to practice meditation on my own. I was searching for God. The scriptures teach that the soul becomes God. My conscience would not accept that.”

In 1958, Nirwair, then a 20-year-old Navy trainee, visited the Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Center in Bombay to learn meditation. On his fourth lesson, he says, he experienced being a pure, peaceful soul who belonged to the Supreme. This brought him into a dimension beyond space and time. He realized the truth about himself as a blissful and positive being.

The following year, he visited the headquarters in Mount Abu to meet Dada Lekraj, then already called Brahma Baba. Far from just a casual exchange of greetings, the meeting was another flash of divine insight. Nirwair remembers seeing a shimmer of light on Brahma Baba’s forehead. At that very instant, Nirwair felt he was likewise a being of light. It was as if time stood still and he was enveloped in a deep calm.

“It is the single most valuable experience in my life,” he says. “I had a glimpse of the Supreme.”

Along with the vision of God’s light, Nirwair adds, he felt like melting in the vibrations of love exuding from Brahma Baba’s eyes. He understood that every individual needed this awareness of peace and love to face all the misery and conflicts in life. He resolved to dedicate his life to serving the world through spirituality. Apparently picking up this thought, Brahma Baba embraced Nirwair as a father would an heir apparent.

In the early days of the Brahma Kumaris community, Brahma spent a lot of time with the other students. Nirwair relates:

“I got the clear understanding that the soul is eternal, that the Father of all Souls is eternal, and that we have an eternal relationship which we forget while we play different roles in this world drama. God reminds us, ‘I belong to you. Why do you forget?’ We become awakened and keep His company in our consciousness. That empowers the consciousness. You can see the change when the consciousness level is high. Our vision must be so pure that we don’t look at weaknesses. Words will be accurate. Interactions will be loving and beautiful.”

Nirwair sought an early discharge from the Navy in 1963. In 1964, he began working with Dadi Prakashmani in Bombay. He recalls, “She was my elder sister and I was her little brother. We always had good rapport. She was a guide and source of encouragement. She nurtured centers and formed strong teams to generate new ideas for service. Dadi’s personality was such that she instantly endeared herself to anyone.”

Exceptional role models

Brahma Baba and Dadi Prakashmani were exceptional individuals worth emulating, Nirwair says. He never tires of reminiscing how even their simplest actions were great, having been infused with spirituality. “They were souls on a very high level of purity, sweetness and caring.”

During the mid-’60s, as more students began staying in the headquarters for a few days of retreat, accommodations became scarce. Many had to sleep on the floor, Nirwair says. “Brahma Baba went around asking if they were comfortable, and offered each one a glass of warm milk at bedtime.”

Dadi Prakashmani followed Brahma’s example by showing solicitous hospitality. “She enjoyed meeting groups from many different places,” Nirwair says. “Whether they were children, elderly, or outsiders, she enchanted them. Through her, they felt a sense of



Waving the white hanky for goodbye to the bad days.

EASY MEDITATION

“Whenever you meditate, first prepare your mind for doing something very pleasant and fruitful for yourself and the world. This will automatically bring a smile to your face, removing the burden of negativity, thus making you light and refreshed. You feel good when you meet a great personality. In meditation, you meet God, the Highest and Greatest Being.”

-BK Nirwair, Insights of a Raja Yogi

belonging to this Divine Family.”

These stories of how his mentors inspired him have become sweet reminders of the spirit of giving. In one of his talks, Nirwair explained that giving is an attitude created after understanding God’s teachings. When the experience of God’s love is deep, the soul doesn’t want anything else. We give up desires, be it for respect or love from anyone. Giving without expectations of return becomes a natural outpouring of the spirit.

“Remain tuned in to the Source and fill the self with love, power and divinity,” Nirwair says. “Giving enables the heart to experience the greatest feeling of happiness. Your smile will never disappear—even in your sleep—while practicing this. Thoughts that normally made your happiness short-lived will no longer emerge.”

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:

Flowers and weeds and 'suddenly'

By LETI BONIOL

THEY are often ignored, under-rated, sometimes even uprooted to give way to imported or commercial varieties, but indigenous crops like sweet potato (kamote), yam (ube) and taro (gabi), can spell the difference between life and death in times of disaster.

Certain flowers, considered ornamentals, could be eaten raw and also cure ailments during emergencies, according to Pamela Fernandez, a professor of Agronomy at the University of the Philippines Los Banos. Among these flowers are bougainville, blue ternate, cosmos, hibiscus, daisy, marigold, rose, waterlily or lotus, lilac, squash, cornflower, carnation, geranium, ginger, lilac, oregano, sage, zucchini, thyme, violets, etc.

Fernandez showed samples of these plants and shared valuable expertise during her recent talk on "Survival and Disaster Responsive Foods" at the Brahma Kumaris Meditation Center in Makati.

Niyug-niyugan, or Chinese honeysuckle, can be simmered in coconut milk to make laing, Fernandez said showing the big leaves of the plant that she picked from her own garden earlier that day. The plant has antioxidant and antibacterial properties as well, she said.

Mostly unnoticed, puso ng saging (banana blossom) can be the main ingredient in sisig (a spicy appetizer) or kare kare (Philippine stew with peanut sauce), or part of a green salad. It is a good source of fiber, protein, Vitamin E and flavonoids, Fernandez added. The colorful bougainvillea, which is anti-viral, and hibiscus, which heals boils, can go into green salads as well.

Adlai, a grain also known as Job's Tears or pearl barley, can be cooked and consumed as a rice substitute. It has carbohydrates and phosphorous and is anti-inflammatory. Grains like millet, which is rich in protein, can also be eaten instead of rice.

Root crops enhance intelligence, Fernandez believes, because the soil is the "seat of the earth's intellect."

Sweet potato, a good source of iron, manganese, magnesium and potassium, is ready for harvest in three to four months after planting. The tops, good sources of niacin and riboflavin, are ready to harvest in one or two months.

Moringa or malunggay, a good source of amino acids, vitamins A, C, E, calcium, potassium and protein, is ready to harvest in two to three months.

Weeds like pansit pansitan, (shiny bush), tawa tawa (garden spurge or asthma plant) and purslane or hogweed also have healing powers. Pansit pansitan can be eaten raw alone or as part of a salad, and is a good cure for gout and arthritis. Tawa tawa, proven effective for dengue, is brewed. They need not be cultivated; they grow wild even while dismissed as unwanted plants in the garden.

Scenarios

In planning for disasters, several scenarios might be considered, Fernandez said.

The first scenario is for the days right after a disaster strikes. The second is for weeks after; the third, for months after.

When the Marawi refugees got tired of noodles and canned sardines after a month in evacuation centers, they pleaded for work to buy healthier foods, and for training to plant food crops. The



Pamela Fernandez shows flowers like blue ternate that could be part of the diet, especially during emergency periods.

challenge for relief agencies now is to draw up a healthy food relief package for evacuees.

Before such scenarios happen, individuals, families or communities should identify which food or vegetables are storable, which are fast-maturing, which need no cooking.

Food preparation should be simpler in emergency situations, Fernandez said. Food could be eaten raw, boiled, steamed or grilled.

She recommended, among others, mung bean, which is easily stored and, when the time comes, could be sprouted and eaten raw.

Rice and corn, the bulk of food intake for Filipinos, are most vulnerable to natural disasters, Fernandez noted. "During disasters, we don't have time (for sourcing). We have to be prepared, right off our backyards."

Sustainable

Sharing more insights, she said sustainable food should be locally produced, efficient, self-generating (not hybrid), medicinal, resilient, not demanding too much care, not so elaborate to prepare, has high nutrient content, and has high life force.

Processed foods have no life force, Fernandez explained. Food is rendered less valuable when it is demineralized, denatured, pasteur-

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ized, homogenized, canned, frozen or cooked.

Among plants indigenous to the Philippines, according to the Food and Nutrition Research Institute, are alugbati (spinach vine), alukon (birch flower), katuray (scarlet wisteria), kulitis (amaranth), black-eyed peas, squash, fern, saluyot (Egyptian spinach), sayote (chayote), patola (vegetable sponge), upo (white pumpkin), winged beans, moringa, mustard greens, pako (fiddlehead ferns), cucumber, long beans, talinum (flame flower), and eggplants.

Fernandez identified the plant sources for protein, among them: spinach, kale, cauliflower, cucumber, tomatoes, mushroom, green

pepper, broccoli, parsley, cabbage, almonds, lentils, quinoa, chick-peas and peas.

As it is, Filipinos commonly consume such unhealthy food as white rice, iodized salt, cheap cooking oil, processed coffee, white sugar and bread, instant noodles, MSG, sugary biscuits, and powdered milk.

Which is ironic, Fernandez, said, because nature provides both humans and animals with plants, flowers, seeds, roots, weeds and trees to nurture and heal them. People just have to broaden their food preference outlook during emergencies.

During the sharing after the talk, the Makati Center family displayed some of the medicinal plants that are raising on the rooftop.

IN THE MOMENT

By FELIZ RUIZ



SOULFUL SURVIVAL

Each man's life is his own destiny they say
 Each has chosen his character and roles to play
 Yet be it king or servant, free man or slave, all is noble and great
 Splendidly moving in the scenery of life as has been destined.

As the hands of time tick and go, live with truth
 Let this be our guiding word, be honest, it's our root
 Worry not because truth sets us free
 Relationships are treasured with unity and harmony.
 Live with enthusiasm and optimism
 Be cheerful with each new dawn breaking
 Be thankful with each dusk ending
 In between do all our best as we strive while living.
 Live with courage and determination
 After careful thinking, perform the best action
 Let us do what we have to do, achieve fruits in due time
 Success shall knock at our door as sweet as the bells chime.
 Live with soulful love and forgiveness
 Touch hearts and renew lives with our loveliness
 Become benevolent bestower of altruistic love
 Become a pure giver and well-wisher like the gentle dove.



ENDEARING ENJOYMENT

The aim of life is happiness
 To have the experience of enjoyment
 To record the moments of togetherness that fill us inside
 Life is here, we can enjoy to the best of our ability.
 Live life one day at a time
 With aims, goals that are sublime
 With every thought, word, action
 Let us be true in our relation and connection.
 Yet to enjoy life takes responsibility
 Vices lure the character of one personality
 Enjoyment then leads to destruction of body and reputation
 This is bad side of earthly enjoyment.
 Responsible people are careful and cautious
 First of ill effects of untoward habits to self and others
 We can enjoy in a healthful way
 Togetherness makes a memorable day.
 Enjoy life, be cheerful each day
 Lift the downtrodden, cheer a lonely traveler along the way
 A joyful spirit has positive nature that nurtures the inner self
 Let the goodness spread with smile and lovely words.