

# THE POINT

A bimonthly e-newsletter produced by  
the Center for Spiritual Learning, Tagaytay, Philippines

April-May 2017

## RESILIENCE, the need of these times

GOVERNMENTS worldwide, seeking to restore peace and order, are revising laws and policies on taxation, immigration, crime, climate change and diplomatic relations. Organizations continue to restructure their systems in attempts to be more responsive to the times. Still, at all levels of society, things seem to be turning for the worse.

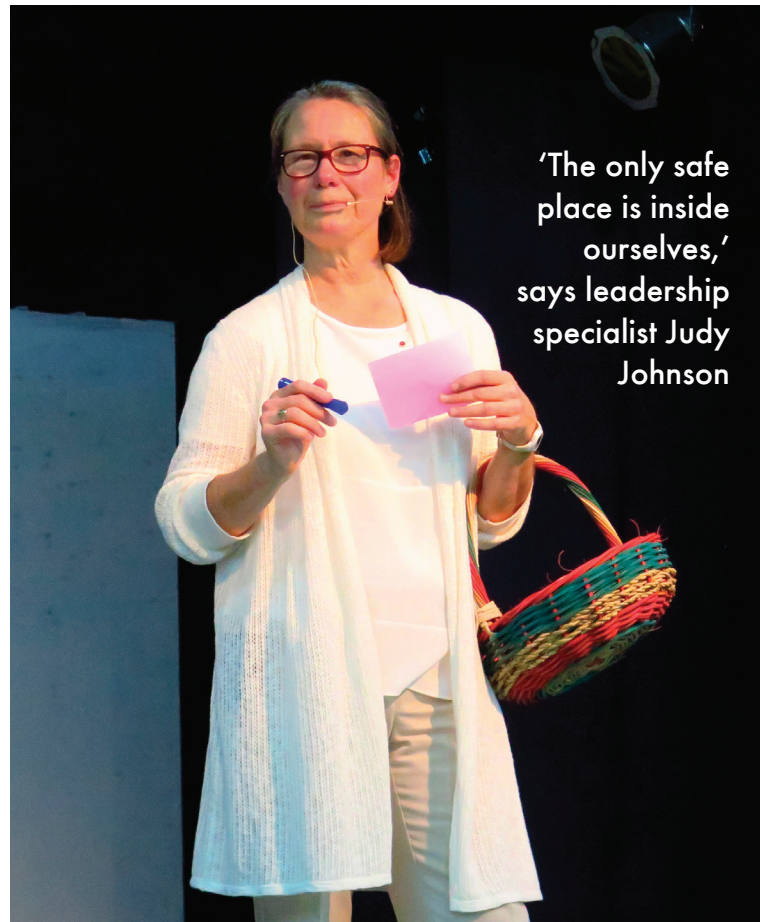
Judy Johnson, a specialist in leadership development and organizational efficiency, points out that this plethora of brilliant plans is just not easy to put in place. "We don't have the energy of cooperation to get traction for our smart ideas," she says. "Good ideas abound, but the stamina to follow through is not enough."

The natural inclination of the soul and of Nature itself is to seek order. However, Johnson notes, "When things become unwieldy and the atmosphere becomes stressful, the tendency of leaders is to add rules to put a lid on the situation."

She explains that resilience is the need of these times that are characterized by intermittent upsets: "There is peace in order, but we can't find it when there is stress, frustration, loneliness and anger, and when we attempt to impose the order from the outside. Resilience is about discovering internal order and bringing it out. The only safe place for us is inside ourselves."

Sad to say, the mind tends to be too busy, entertaining too many thoughts. Many people would rather escape than look inside themselves, saying, "Who knows what we'll find in there? Let's just watch a movie or hang out with friends."

It might be said that the "study" of resilience was born in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the invention of the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan. One of its uses was to monitor the workings of the brain—effectively rendering obsolete the popular psychotherapy method of discussing traumas to release pent-up emotions, the theory being that when a person relived the painful incident many times, the neural pathways fired up the brain. Thus, we used to hear it said, "Neurons that wire together, fire together." The more you run that neuron circuit



in the brain, the more the thoughts or behaviors are reinforced.

Scientists used the MRI to study the brains of people who thrived in chaos. "The term used for these people who thrived, not just survived, is 'resilience' in the context of 'bouncing back.' Thriving is growing, flourishing, blossoming. If you can't bounce back, you can't move forward," says Johnson.

There are three aspects to resilience, compressed into the acronym, AIM, she explains:

**A- Always moving forward and having an aim.** "People who are not resilient keep replaying unfortunate incidents in their minds. They tell their friends and loved ones, or write in their journals, things that happened in the past. Those who are resilient see the possibility of something better and of re-creating their lives with hope and faith. This is how survivors move on. They may still be carrying their baggage, but they do not define themselves as the baggage."

**I-Imagination.** "Those who thrive stand on a solid inner platform. They are unaffected by external situations because they focus on what they want to create and not what happened to them. They use their imagination to see possibilities, not handicaps. Meditation helps here, by showing how to use the mind as a screen on which to create positive scenarios that become a reality." who thrive practice mastery over their minds and sense organs. They understand that although gratification may be delayed, it is guaranteed."

A common theme among these people is belief in a Higher Power.

From the viewpoint of neuroscience: When the synapses or neuron pathways of negative or wasteful thinking are no longer being stoked, cells that insulate the neurons bond with protein to destroy that circuit. When you think positively, the cells around the neurons will strengthen the connections.

All told, Johnson concludes, resilience can be found only in the energy to stay focused. This energy is needed to concentrate on the aim, use the imagination and have the determination to filter out unnecessary thoughts.

"Core energy gives me what I need to go home to myself."

### PROGRAMS

- **Creating the Life You Love**, May 14, 9 am to 4 pm
- **Inner Peace, Inner Power**, May 26-28 4 pm to 4 pm
- **Parenting the Inner Child**, June 3 2 to 5 pm
- **Knowing Myself, Knowing God**, June 4 9 am to 3 pm
- **Untangling Emotions, Feelings and State**, June 11, 9 am to 4 pm
- **Camp for Joy for Children and Youth**, June 17 9 am to 4 pm

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Intrepid Philippine sisters at Christ Church square. Busy place, but noise level is next to zero. Or maybe we went deaf on the second day due to the cold, cold weather.

# Shimla on the side

A cool—freezing—detour  
on the way to Madhuban

By Emmie G. Velarde

"SEE... THERE... YAKS!" Tuni the driver/guide blurts out, clearly excited, in tentative English. But he doesn't slow down and the moment is too quickly gone. Seeing me crestfallen, he says assuringly, "More coming."

Within the minute, we are pulling over to the side of the road where Tipsu and Batel stand passively, their handlers manning a small tent nearby. Fifty rupees (less than US\$1) for a photograph with the animals, one of them says; 200 if I want to get into a Himachal costume.

## Day 1

I am in love. Or brain-frozen at 7,238 feet above sea level. The handler could have said 500 rupees and still I would have jumped. I may never pass this way again or see another yak. Batel, the younger one at 5 years, is a little

grouchy, but Tipsu, 8, lets me stroke her neck. Then again, what do I know about yaks? Only that they are traditional beasts of burden in these parts. But these ones along the tourist strip are very clean and well-kept.

Eagerly, I step into the costume, which looks a lot like Ifugao gear from my native Philippines. I can't stop hugging Tipsu. (See the resulting photo here. That is certainly 200 rupees well spent.)

My first sight-seeing day in faraway Shimla is off to a good start. Four of us sisters from Manila have made the side trip to this hill station, Summer Capital of British India, on our way to Madhuban. ("On our way to..." may not be accurate. From New Delhi, our port of entry, we hired a van to drive up north for eight hours. We are returning to Delhi two days from now to take the overnight train going in the opposite direction to Abu Road.)

From Tipsu and Batel's bend, we proceed to Kufri Snow Point. Tess is deter-

See page 3



mined to be photographed in the snow. The Himalayan mountain ranges, peaks glistening in the distance like vanilla cake frosting, is the bigger thrill as far as I am concerned. Five years ago, this sight eluded me from a viewing deck in Bhutan, somewhere between Paro and Bhutan. But Tess is very distracted, disturbed by the muddy 25-day-old ice on the hillsides. At last, we find a snapshot-worthy spot, she gets her fix, and we call it a day.

## Day 2

It is the end of winter, but still extremely cold for us. Ellen has brought disposable heat pads and they are proving to be lifesavers. We have devised a way to take speedy bucket-and-dipper showers because the hot water turns cold in literally five breaths. Net takes a shower every day at 2 a.m. I know why, but I dare not ask how. I have resorted to laying under the sheets at night the clothes that I will wear the next day, so they don't feel moist and chilled in the morning. I do not intend to get out of my warmers anytime soon.

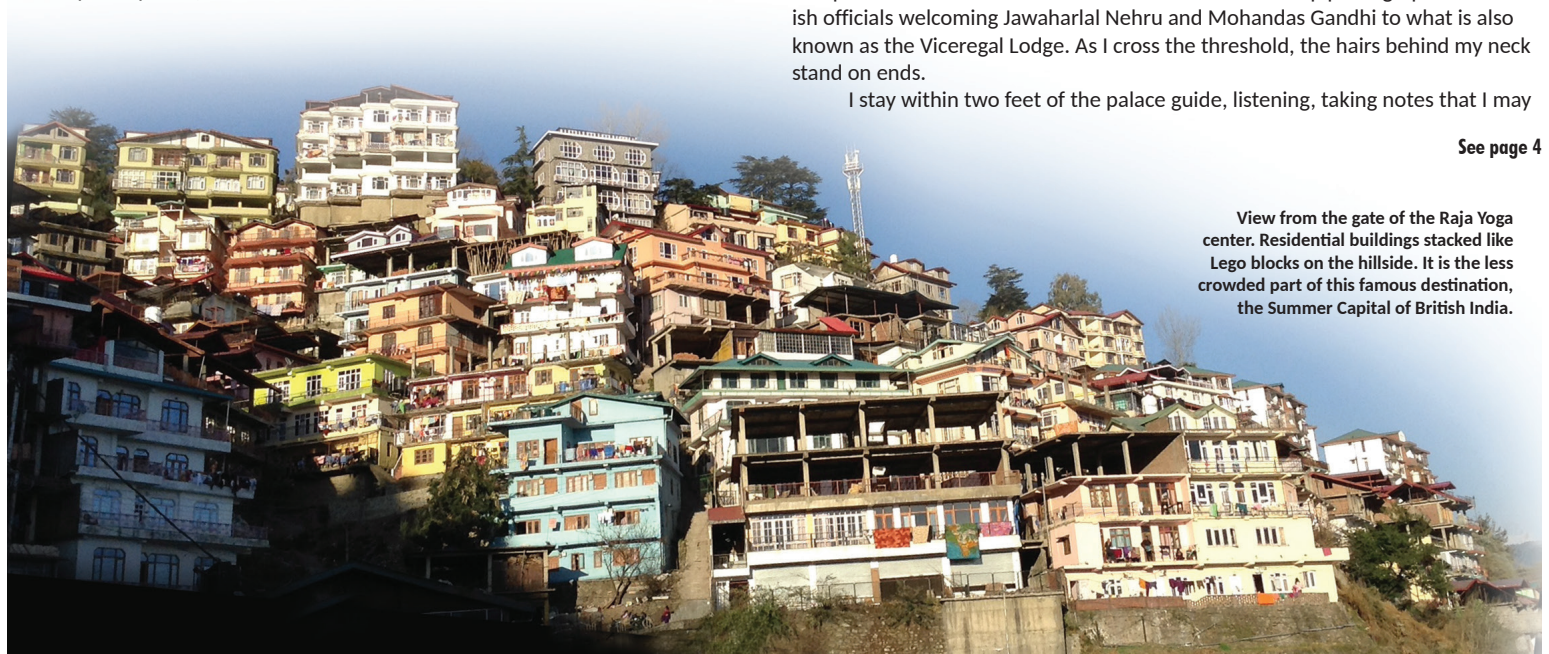
We are staying in the six-story Brahma Kumaris center carved into the hillside as all the buildings here seem to be, one on top of another. Our room has a balcony from which we can watch the sunrise, but only briefly, although it is very picturesque. It is that cold.

Yesterday, my intrepid travel buddies agreed to read the murli out on the balcony. To arrive at that decision, I thought, they must have been stricken with altitude sickness. This morning, it is about two degrees colder than when we retired last night. We all stayed inside for the reading.

Today we're off to the famous square whose image invariably came up when I Googled "Shimla, Himachal Pradesh" prior to booking all travel arrangements. A souvenir photograph in Christ Church square is the one thing I want from this trip.

The square is upwards of another Shimla landmark, Mall Road. To reach Mall Road from the parking lots—motor vehicles are not allowed beyond this level—everyone takes two outdoor lifts. Really, this is just logical, considering how narrow the roads are and how consistently voluminous the pedestrian traffic.

It is a busy square, with the church, a public library, and a monument to Mohandas Gandhi plus, today, an arts-and-crafts fair, but the quiet cheer with which the people are milling about is noteworthy. This level of calm is something I have not experienced elsewhere in India (except on the BK campuses, but these are not public places).



View from the gate of the Raja Yoga center. Residential buildings stacked like Lego blocks on the hillside. It is the less crowded part of this famous destination, the Summer Capital of British India.

We are the only Asians, as far as I can see, and we are ogled, smiled at a lot, and occasionally fussed over.

## Day 3

It is our last day in Shimla, and by now I have stopped expecting Tuni to be the perfect tour guide. I have a list of things to do and I'm not even halfway through it. Fortunately for him, unexpected aspects of this adventure have kept me from impatience:

The younger sisters in charge of the center, much younger than I, are inexplicably happy to have us around. Sunita and Durga whip up authentic and delicious meals and are always ready to serve *chai*. In white sarees and woolen jackets and shawls, they start and finish their daily chores silently and smiling to themselves. Occasionally, they dissolve into giggles watching us devour platefuls of rice. They don't talk much, but we never wonder what's on their minds; we're sure they are good thoughts.

Sunita and Durga make jam out of fresh apples, too, and *chapati* on demand.

A third sister, who lives out of the center, is the intense 30-year-old lawyer Ritu. She's the only one within a 10-meter radius at any time who speaks English that sounds closest to ours and, as such, is constantly initiating and directing conversations. On the brink of being intimidated, however, us four guests are treated one evening in the kitchen to Ritu's spirited demonstration of the *bhangra* (this is on my list!) and all is well.

The only male center resident, Shyam, has taken to calling me "Mother." I let him. Yesterday, he brought us to a Buddhist temple nearby, stopping in his tracks many times to speak to people and (seriously) dogs. I said he could run for public office, having so many friends. He said he didn't have friends. He is stranger than he is funny.

The intermittent sight of beaded teddy bears in toy kiosks along the roads. Only in India, I'll bet.

Tuni is an excellent driver.



My long-lost and now-found son, Shyam. I bet he thought he was looking into a mirror when he saw me at the Shimla center.

## Day 3

Today, he attempts to redeem himself in our eyes (well, at least in mine—it is, after all, his hometown) as a guide. He's bringing us to the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, former palace of British viceroys and governors-general.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century palace is straight out of a "Harry Potter" movie. I am immediately awed. Many historic meetings were held here during the Indian Independence Movement. Inside are numerous blown-up photographs of British officials welcoming Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi to what is also known as the Viceregal Lodge. As I cross the threshold, the hairs behind my neck stand on ends.

I stay within two feet of the palace guide, listening, taking notes that I may

See page 4



find useful later, asking questions. How much of the Lodge has been successfully preserved? Ninety percent. Are these ceiling lamps original? Yes, those in the hallway, too and the ceilings, all the wood-work, etc.

On account of this last outing, Tuni is officially off the hook. For good measure, he takes us higher up to a temple for Hanuman. The gesture is anti-climactic, but earns him a few more brownie points just the same. In any case, if I ever come back here, I'll be sure to get a professional guide *plus* Tuni as driver, and possibly stay two weeks. In the spring.

## The drive back

To mark my 66<sup>th</sup> birthday last year, I went trekking on Mt. Pulag in northern Philippines to see for myself its celebrated "sea of clouds." Of course, I didn't reach the summit, and the sea of clouds that I got to view was another mountain range away.

I remember this now as we drive down near-zero-visibility roads from Shimla. I *am* in a sea of clouds. And then, emerging from the first, I am eased into another, and then another, and yet another. I don't have to pitch a tent, walk 50 meters to the toilet/bath or start climbing at midnight. I don't even have to step out of the van!

## Post Script

Tess catches up with me in class today, exactly a month after the drive down. "Did you know that it snowed in Shimla the day after we left?" Tablet on hand, she shows me a video of people at Christ Church square dancing in a fuzzy shower. Indeed! The first time in decades, the report says, that anything like it happened at the tail end of winter, leaving behind 26 cm of snow.

I'm quite sure that Tess is going back. I tell her this, but she doesn't hear me. She's probably plotting that return trip already.



At times it felt like being trapped in a sea of clouds. Poetic, if you can see farther than 10 feet.



Thanks, Tipsu and Batel. See you next kalpa.

# Deepening Meditation



Healing the world from the top of Taal Volcano

ONE EMBARKS on a meditation practice with the end in view of experiencing peace, love, power, and joy. Trust that there will be spoilers along the way.

In his book, "Spiritual Nectar," the late Jagdish Chander wrote that in order to slip easily into the "zone," it is important to be able to visualize being in a protective bubble.

Chander explained: "The technique (to have) deep experiences in yoga is... while moving around, I should not only think that I am light, peace or purity. There should be no other extraneous thoughts at all. When you are in a challenging atmosphere, come into this orb of light. Invoke the circle of light, love, peace, power or joy so that the atmosphere will not affect you. The more we experience ourselves in this orb of light, the more we will remain free from unhealthy thoughts and other factors. Consequently, we can have deep experiences of meditation."

He underscored how necessary attention is for quality meditation. The mind should be free from the distractions of sensory perceptions, body sensation, thoughts and feelings.

"The body is here, but the attention should be up there with the Supreme." He suggested securing "pockets" of peace within the mind in which to quiet down and connect with God throughout the day to improve concentration.

The practice should be so powerful, Chander said, that even while seeing or hearing a commotion in a public place, the attention remains focused.

He noted that attention is fuelled by motivation: "Will power is the expression of the soul's energy."

Disinterest is crucial to attention, he added. "The more we disconnect from all sides, the better our experience of yoga. If you want to have deep experiences in meditation, lessen the desires and temptations and consolidate your love, which has

been divided. Let it just rest on the Supreme."

Moreover, he said, you have to be detached from unhappy memories of someone or a past experience. "If we have done some topsy-turvy things, memories in our consciousness will not allow us to concentrate because they will keep biting us. We need to forget everything except the memory of the soul and the Supreme."

Having entered that "peace zone," the mind should then be kept steady. "I have to experience God as my Companion. The more I do this, the easier it is to be steadfast."

Walking the talk is essential to the practice. Chander cautioned that lack of tolerance, sweetness, humility, contentment and/or other virtues likewise becomes an obstruction. "You may be having a nice experience...and then the memory of someone who has harassed you erupts." (In this case, the obstacle emerged due to a lack of tolerance.)

The more determinedly one cultivates virtues, the easier for meditation to become stable. "If we don't replace deep-rooted negatives with deep-rooted positives, there will not be a deep experience of yoga," Chander said.

He used the example of a splinter, which can be removed only if the needle delves deeply. "In the same way, love should be deeper than hatred. If we have great hatred for someone, we should find a greater percentage of love for that person. It will not be easy because that person has probably aggravated you to such an extent that no love emerges from the heart. As much as possible, win over hatred based on pure feelings. On the other hand, if someone's hatred is greater than yours, awaken so much love within yourself that their hatred will be extinguished."

At the same time, Chander warned against the subtle ego of showing others humility or any other virtue just to win approval. Ultimately, he said, it is commitment to practice and patience that will bring results.