

Journey to becoming better human being

**This is the story of each member of
The Humanist Movement,
who work together
to become better human being
and contribute to build a better world.**

2019

Printed and Published by:
Foundation for Humanization, Mumbai, India.
Mobile: 9820035900, 9920199251

Introduction

My journey began nearly 40 years ago. Walking on the road, I saw a banner announcing FREE course on personal development. What appealed to me was the word FREE. So, I went on to see what it is.

In the first session, what was told appeared appealing but not so much compelling. So, I remained irregular. However, over a period, I realised that I was already on the journey.

The term about becoming better human being is 'journey' and not 'destination'. It is not that I complete a course and on one day I have become a 'better' human being. It is 40 years and I am still on the journey. Every time I cut a distance and keep moving ahead. Every time I learn and keep 'becoming' better human being.

The word 'better' is important. I become better over what I was yesterday. There is no comparison or evaluation by anybody. I only compare with myself and I am the judge.

Finally, the word 'human being'. It is not one more 'animal'. As explained in the book Sapiens, it has evolved from one of the weakest species, trembling in front of ferocious animals and vagaries of the nature, to what we are today. While human being is a part of the nature, it is distinct. A cow ten thousand years ago and a cow today, both helplessly would get wet when it rains. But a human being is different. It has evolved and continues to evolve.

Each human being has internal experiences. It is not a machine. While there are bodily activities like metabolism, digestion, blood circulation, self-healing etc., there are also feelings. Becoming better human being is in terms of understanding our own feelings, thinking about it and putting them in action. That is why the work can also be called 'internal' work.

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1. What for am I doing, what I am doing?

As I began the journey, one of the things that I realised was the meaning of the word 'meaning'.

In the journey, I had a casual discussion with a friend on the topic of love marriage v/s arranged marriage. A point emerged that it is not love marriage or arranged marriage, it is what you do after the marriage that is important. The point was baffling. Is it that, often we get lost in the secondary aspects and miss out the 'essence'? If so, is it a point of only a debate or it has to do with everything we do in life? That led me to explore the 'essence' of what I was doing. I started doing that with asking a question - 'what for?'

In those days, I was a student and had a pattern for studies. In last one month, I will withdraw from everything, buy books and study for the exams. I was never a topper but would get above average marks. Applying my new learning to this aspect, I asked myself 'what for' am I studying? The immediate response was that I am studying to pass the exams. As I thought, I realised that I was not happy with my answer, so I explored more. The next answer came was that I was studying not only to pass but to get good marks in the exams. I was not happy with even that answer. Passing exams and getting good marks seemed to me necessary but not sufficient. Exploring further finally I got to the essence - I study to develop my mastery in the subject. If that was the essence, was I doing justice to it? That realisation changed my approach to study. Since then I have never studied for exams. I study to develop mastery and then you ask me anything you like.

I started work and took up a job and soon the same question haunted me about my job. What for am I doing the job? The immediate response was that it was to earn salary. Not satisfied, I explored more. The next answer was that I was doing it to support my family. I was not happy with even that answer. Earning salary and supporting family seemed to me necessary reasons but not sufficient. Exploring further finally I got to the essence - I am doing the job to develop my abilities. That realisation changed my approach to job. Since then I have never looked at the watch while on the job and never restricted myself to only my tasks. Since then I have approached every job as a way to develop my abilities. Looking back, I can vouch how it has contributed phenomenally to my formation as I am today.

Same question on friendship – what for? To pass time, to enjoy, to have company etc. All nice, necessary but not sufficient. Then emerges the essence – to help each other to grow in life.

What about marriage – what for? To have companion, continue family line etc. Again, all that nice, necessary but not sufficient. The essence is a relationship neither of possession nor of parasite. Not of a tree and creeper. But a relationship of complementation - two independent trees, human beings, supporting each other to grow in life.

Soon I realised that asking the question, ‘what for’, and exploring the essence, was the meaning of the word ‘meaning’. Understanding the meaning would always bring about a radical change in my approach to whatever I was doing.

I realised that I am moving ahead in my journey of becoming better human being.

2. Looking at parts. Should I look at the whole also?

We were on a retreat. Away from the hustlebustle of daily routine. No phones, no newspapers. Repeating a mantra - when I am in the retreat, I am in the retreat – for a few times.

We did a mental exercise to relax the body and the mind. Reducing the distractions, now we could focus on the topic. Initially I thought the topic was simple. Sharing of our experiences of asking what for and exploring the essence of whatever we were doing, of exploring the meaning of whatever we were doing.

There was a suggestion. What we are doing with parts, can we do with the whole also? I was puzzled. Then came the clarification. While it is good to explore the meaning of the different tasks we are doing, can we ask the same question about our life itself?

‘Why not?’ was my immediate response.

But slowly the significance of the sentence sank in me. I had never thought from this angle. The word ‘life’ itself appeared to me too heavy and philosophical. To think about my life appeared to be very big thing. Are we supposed to live the life or think about the life? Is it not the area of philosophers or spiritual gurus or religion or simply for elderly people?

Being in the retreat I was at peace with myself. Everyone around was in a reflective mood too. The situation was congenial to take the plunge. Like all others, I located an isolated spot, sat there alone and started reflecting. What for am I living? What is the meaning of my life?

A statement made by a friend popped up in my mind. He related life to an ice-cream. Enjoy before it melts. Is it not true? Is life not for enjoying? Eat, drink, dance and enjoy. But in my daily life I am faced with so many challenges, tensions and even frustrations that I rarely enjoy. Am I living the life in a wrong way? But then a doubt appeared in my mind - does this not appear to be too trivial an answer? The meaning of life can’t be just to enjoy. There must be something more. The sentence necessary but not sufficient kept on ringing in my mind.

I explored further. I could think of life all around. Children being born, growing up, school, college, job, business, marriage, having children,

growing them up, aging and death. In the meantime, all along a race to be bigger and better in all streams with a tone of tension all throughout the life. Could life be a rat race running from one goal post to another until 'the end'? While this may capture the external aspects of life of many people this can not be an answer to 'what for' for the life. While birth and death are reality, there must be some meaning for how you live in between the two.

I remembered a religious discourse that I had attended. The speaker was talking something about life that did not interest me much then. He was telling that purpose of the life is to achieve God. It is to get liberty from the cycle of multiple births. I did not understand it much then and even now when I am thinking on it, I could not make much sense out of it.

I realised that this apparently simple question has raised multiple other questions that I have never raised all along in my life.

After a while all us gathered in the hall and exchanged our notes. We realised that it is a difficult question with no easy answer in sight. But we also agreed that it is an important question that we need to think over.

I did not get the answer, but I realised one thing for sure. That I am moving ahead in my journey of becoming better human being.

3. Everyday life is not philosophical

Back from the retreat, few days later we gathered for our regular meeting. With fixed time and fixed place, weekly meeting had become part of our schedule. Will we continue our discussions from the retreat?

A friend started “I have not yet found anything closer to meaning of life, but one thing I have realised is that it is important to be happy in life”. To me it sounded like a tautology, everybody talks about it. But is it that simple? I said “How can one be happy? At this moment I am not”.

I was terribly upset. Earlier during the day, at my office my project proposal was dismissed. I had worked on it for more than a month and I was sure that it will be appreciated as path breaking proposal. I was hoping to be rewarded. Instead now there is a danger of being dismissed. All that is due to the office politics. That manager was vicious. In the past also on two other occasions he had intentionally harmed me.

“It happens. Cool down” said a friend and I wondered how easily he can say so. I also know that it happens, but my that knowledge does not help me at this moment. And how does one cool down?

“He is upset. Obviously when you are upset, you can not be happy.” “Do you mean that becoming upset prevents us from being happy? Then why do people become upset?” Suddenly I realised that I had become a live case study in the group.”

“He is upset because the things did not turn out the way he had expected. He feels that he has been intentionally harmed”

“Do you mean to say that it is his perception that upsets him?”

“Once the proposal was dismissed, he neither knew nor was in any mood to know the other side of the story”

More and more group members were commenting on my case. Our meetings were always very participative and lively. Everyone had a view and would freely express it. The focus was not on the individual but on the learning from the actual experience.

“He told that the manager had intentionally harmed him in the past. That memory of the past injustice also springs up at this time and upsets

him.”

“He also has additional worry about the future. He has a fear of being dismissed.”

I was reflecting on these discussions and was finding that what each one was saying had a point. Why do we become upset? There seems to be three aspects:

1. Perception of the present
2. Memory of the past
3. Images of the future.

The moment one is negative it triggers the other two to become negative too. I perceived non-acceptance of my project as an attack on me. The moment I felt that, I remembered about the past injustices done by the manager to me and I also feared losing the job. Each of the three forces could upset me. And how much? My whole day was lost. With the stressed mind during the day perhaps I misbehaved with some colleagues. And obviously, I was not happy.

Does it mean that perception, memory and imagination when negative, upset one and when one is upset one can't be happy? And we started by saying that one should be happy in life.

A new insight that can help me to understand myself better. A step ahead in my journey to become better human being.

4. Refusal to accept the change could upset me

Next week we continued our discussion on becoming happy in life. We can't be happy when we are upset. Perception, memory and images can make us upset. We decided to explore further – what is in it that causes us to be upset? Can we take some personal examples?

“I am already 20, but my mother still treats me like a child, not allowing me to even travel alone.”

“I have opposite issue. My son is already 20 but still he expects me to do everything for him”

Each side had a point but each one also had a reason to be upset.

“I have something personal”. It was common in our meeting to share personal matters. We had a rule – what is discussed in the meeting remains in the meeting. In any case no one was interested in personal aspects of anyone. It is the learning that is important.

“We are married only for two years. My wife used to love me a lot. But since our child is born, she seems to have become indifferent to me. Has her love for me reduced?”

“My son was caring for me a lot. But after his marriage few weeks ago, he does not have time for me.” Expressed a mother.

“Me and my friend used to meet every week. But since he has got a new job few months ago, he does not have time to meet me. How selfish people can be?”

There seemed a pattern in these experiences. Situations had changed in each case and perhaps the appreciation of the change was not adequate. Discussion followed. The gist of the same is as follows:

Life evolves - moves from one state to another - continuously. It could be about people, situations, relations. It could be about our understanding, our beliefs, our comprehension. In all aspects new replaces old. It is important to understand that whatever evolves, no longer remains the same and requires first acceptance of the new situation and then appropriate response.

Our own life could be a good case in point. As infants, we were completely dependent on our parents for food, shelter and protection from danger. Little by little we learnt how to walk, to speak and communicate

our needs. By imitating elders, we became self-sufficient, and gained more independence. We learnt more things about the world and started forming our own views. The same I, who would accept my father's view without any hesitation, started seeing lacuna in the same views. It is said that often the pendulum moves exactly opposite – rightly or wrongly – from 'mother knows everything' to 'mother knows nothing'.

Evolution is bound to take place. What we have in our hand is to appreciate and adjust our approaches accordingly. If we fail to do it, we may try, but we can in no way turn the clock back and go back to the earlier stage.

This way we learned the first of the twelve Principles - "To go against evolution of things is to go against oneself"

New comprehension and a step ahead in the direction of becoming better human being.

5. Noting is forgotten. Past lives in present

In our next weekly meeting, a friend took up the subject of our discussion few weeks back about my being upset on the dismissal of my project proposal. He asked me about the manager who had been unfair to me. I recounted to him all the unfair things that he had been done to me.

I thought the interest was in the details of his wrongdoing, instead came a different question “are you happy when you are thinking about him and his injustice to you?” I wondered. I was not happy at all. In fact, before the question I was relaxed but elaborating the earlier incidences I had become serious.

“But the incidences are over long back. How come they disturb you even now?”. I started wondering. Actually, I had forgotten about the incidences. It was on being questioned that I recounted.

“Is it possible that nothing is forgotten?”

“You might forget the details of the event. But the feeling generated at that time remain deeply ingrained. Any trigger and it resurfaces, recreating the disturbed state that was caused at that time”.

I was not very sure if I agreed to this view. As we grow all of us encounter so many situations. Some pleasant and some not so much. We do not remember all. Is it possible that still the impact remains on us? May be impact of all events may not remain but at least those which had strongly affected us, the impact is likely to remain.

On that day we practiced a technique called ‘Guided Experience’. In this, one of us read a story and all others with closed eyes, followed the story. The story was in first person and we were to imagine ourselves in that person. Thus, when it was told that I am leaning from 20th floor, I imagined as if I am leaning and to that extent got the feeling related with that. In between, there were pauses allowing time to imagine more about that specific stage of the story.

The name of the Guided Experience was ‘The Enemy’. It was clarified that during the story, we will think of one person who had done great harm to us.

The story started with a scene of a busy street. Suddenly everything come to a standstill and only I could move. I could do all the mischief

that came to my mind. Exhausted with all fun, suddenly I notice that person who had done great harm to me, is in front of me, paralysed. I tell him about all the injustices he had done to me as he helplessly face me. Here there was a pause and I had time to recollect many incidences.

On the scene a mob arrive and announce that if I permit, they will put him to death for such grave misdeeds. I refuse and they disperse. I once again tell him about all injustices done to me and leave the scene.

It starts raining and all life comes to normal. I take shelter under a shed and again that person appears in front of me wanting to share the shelter. Looking at him I think of possible misery that he might have gone through in life. I let him come in the shelter. The story ended there.

After the story we shared our experiences. Some of us could visualise the whole story, some of us had distraction in between. Some of us could clearly recollect the incidences and could not forgive the person and some of us including me could forgive him fully. All of us had a nice feeling at the end.

“Past is not forgotten. It has to be reconciled”. “A set of Guided Experiences contain stories to reconcile with the past”

I learned a new thing. To reconcile with the past and the technique of Guided Experience. A step ahead in my journey to become better human being.

6. Whom should I listen to?

Today was a bad day for me. Once again, the same issue with the manager. For no fault of mine he picked up holes in my work and humiliated me.

“Why don’t you teach him a lesson?” said a friend. We were little early for our weekly meeting and sensing my mood he had enquired the cause.

“Complain against him to his boss”. “Find out his weak areas and punch on that”. “Don’t share with him key information and let him face the music”. “Don’t co-operate on other projects” Poured a heap of suggestions. I was wondering whether I should do that.

“Why don’t you give up the job” came another suggestion. “When you will not be there, he will realise your importance and regret the treatment he meted out to you”.

I was stunned. I had never looked at my job in this way. Here are some well meaning friends giving advise on what I should do with my job. Should I listen to them? In fact, whom should I listen to?

I proposed that as a topic for discussion. Confronted with different issues in life, whom should we listen to? I can’t expect advise from my parents who do not know the complexities involved. My college teacher can teach me a subject, but he himself was carrying on with not so good a job.

“The best way is to look within” “The best source of guidance is deep within you”

Can it be so? If so, a doubt arose in my mind about how I can tap it.

“You can personate your deep feeling in the form of an internal guide. It could be an image of a living person or dead or even an imaginary person. Some people keep their parents or grandparents or teachers or friends or image of some god as an image of internal guide”.

“You can close your eyes and think about the guide. You can feel the presence of the guide and with the guide you can dialogue about the important issues of your life”

“It is important to have image of a fixed person and every time work with the same person. Over time, one may change the person, but it

should remain constant and not changing every now and then.”

I was wondering whom I should take as my internal guide. I could think of so many people around me now and in the past. How to choose?

“The person you chose should have three qualities - wisdom, kindness and strength”.

I closed my eyes and thought of a person. I tried to talk to him about the situation of the job and could see that the idea of doing any harm to my manager was misplaced that I should look at the ‘what for’ for my job and since it was learning I should evaluate whether I am progressing on those lines or not. If yes, I should continue and accept the price and if not, I should leave the job and explore where I will get what I want”

I realised the power of the three qualities – wisdom, kindness and strength. I also realised that through the image of the Internal Guide, it was a voice deep within me that was responding. Now I have a person whose help I can seek at any time and in all situations.

“Internal Guide”. A new learning and a step ahead - In my journey of becoming better person.

7. Personal development is in reaching out to the world

“We are going to take a campaign. Education is not a business, no capitation fees, no donation.”

“We will make posters and banners. We will make leaflets and signature forms. We will take out rallies. We will contact people on the road and house-to-house. We will collect ten thousand signatures”

The proposal looked like some sort of agitation. Have I come to a wrong place? We were talking about personal development, about being happy in life, about internal guide and how come suddenly this discussion on a social issue?

“Do you think it is an important issue?” Agreed. It is an important issue. But like that there are hundreds of issues. Firstly, this issue does not affect me directly and second even if I want, what is it that I can do? Who has time for all such social noise?

“We can’t work on all the issues at a time, but at least we can make a beginning”

“If you think about it, perhaps you can do a lot about it”

“Time certainly is a constraint. But we are talking about only a few hours a week”

I was not convinced. After all, are we not deviating? We were so far talking about important aspects of life and here we have started discussing about social activism. Any way I was part of the group and with tremendous hesitation I participated in the campaign.

Few days in the campaign and I started discovering many unusual aspects

- a. When I was on the street, talking to a stranger and explaining him about the seriousness of the issue, I started learning about my convictions.
- b. Realisation that I am doing something about my convictions enhanced my feeling of self-worth.
- c. At first, I was ashamed of distributing leaflets on the street. But soon my confidence soared. As a friend would say, I started enjoying

looking at people who were looking at us.

- d. I had tremendous hesitation in stopping a person and starting a dialogue. What will they think about me? Gradually overcame it.
- e. Going door-to-door, some places we received warm response and somewhere humiliating rejection. I learned to digest all kinds of treatment without any negative feelings about anyone.
- f. I talked to hundreds of people. Often, I goofed up, but nobody scoffed at me.
- g. At times I was frustrated with poor response. Soon I learned to digest it and start again with renewed vigour.
- h. Screen printing posters on used newspapers, moving at night to paste posters and write messages on wall, approaching people in a train using megaphone and collecting signatures, organising a rally with a marching band and so on. For the first time in my life I was involved in so many different types of actions. At first, I was worried about time. Soon I started enjoying and finding time not a constraint at all.

In the process of the campaign, I started recognising my internal resistances and overcoming it. My earlier concern about the issue not directly affecting me appeared displaced as it was indeed an important social issue and working on it, I experienced the value of self-less work.

“Personal and social change go hand in hand” “When you work on personal change, your abilities grow, and you can act more strongly for social change. And when you are working for social change, it brings in personal change”

I realised that learning is not only in deliberations. Instead it is in doing something about what we deliberate on.

“Self-less actions in the world, reaching out to others without hesitation, is the way to personal development.”

I found that this period of campaign was amongst the most intense period in my life. I learned a lot and enjoyed it a lot. Now I was doubly sure – I was advancing in my journey of becoming better person.

8. Giving or receiving – where is the gain?

Very enthusiastically, I was sharing my experiences of the campaign, with a friend. Instead of getting impressed, he was baffled. “What is in it for you?” “Forget about gaining money, I am sure you must have spent your own money on the campaign.” “Do you think with your campaign the situation will change?” “With same amount of time, could you not have done something productive?”

He was a close friend and a well-wisher. He had a habit of being direct. Concerned as he was, he bombarded me with his questions. He was right. I did not get any money. Instead I spent my money on the campaign. I knew the situation is not going to change with our one campaign. And whether in same amount of time I could have done something productive, perhaps yes, perhaps no. I had no answer. I decided to take up the point for discussion in our next meeting.

We would make a note of points that emerged during the week and look forward to our weekly meeting for taking them up. There was no boundary and we can take up any subject. It is not that we will get answer to all questions. But for sure, we would get ourselves more clarified.

“What do you feel about it?” I was having mixed feelings. On one hand I was still upbeat about the experience but was also at a loss, as I had no answers to the questions of my friend?

“It is usual for your friend to ask the questions that he asked.” “If you observe, those questioned are coloured with certain pre-suppositions prevailing in our society.”

1. It is assumed that getting money is the only important gain in life. Money is certainly important, but to use our common criteria, it is necessary but not sufficient.
2. A strong positive personal experience and gaining some money are not comparable. Yet they are compared.
3. Self-less actions are suspected as a waste of time and energy. Self-serving actions are promoted as meaningful.
4. To receive, is considered as more valuable and wiser than to give. It is seen as simple mathematics.

5. Kids are taught to give but as they grow, the life teaches them this lesson of focussing on gain.

“These pre-suppositions are so deeply ingrained in us that we are unable to value our own experiences which are often to the contrary.”

“It is one thing to believe in values promoted in the society and it is another to listen to your own deep experiences and feelings”

“Would you feel internally great when you help others, or when you receive help from others?” I was reflecting. The other day, an elderly lady wanted to cross the road, I stopped and helped her to cross. A very small act, but I had felt very good internally.

“To give is better than to receive” I thought on it but felt that if one keeps giving money, even a millionaire can become a pauper.

“Your thinking is justified. Whenever there is a proposal to give or receive, it is common in the society to reduce it to money. But money is not everything in life. You can give care, kindness, help, love and as simple as smile.” “Do it selflessly and check your experience.”

“Compare the best moments of your life and you will find that they were invariably connected with the act of giving.”

It struck to me as a very valuable lesson. The correct equation between to Give and to Receive. That is a step ahead in my journey to becoming a better person.

9. Is lack of Giving the root of the problem?

After discussion about giving and receiving in the previous meeting, I started observing the world around for these aspects. We were advised to reflect and observe on whatever we discussed. That would strengthen our learning as well as clarify our doubts.

In a function, chatting with friends, I noticed that the discussion hovered around their concerns about what they eat, what they breathe, what they do for their body, what they buy, what bargains they crack and so on. They also talked about their tensions and their stress.

I observed a pattern. It was all about themselves. I shared this in our next meeting.

“Those who only love themselves a lot, would also love their problems a lot and soon there will be issues”

“People are worried about the intake valves. This is logical. The worry is placed on the point of whether what I receive today is more than yesterday. And so on. The point is, what happens with the outlet valves?”

“If there is a blockage in the outlet valves, everything goes in and nothing goes out, I would become internally intoxicated. I could be very fearful of external contamination, but I would be polluting myself internally. I would be washing myself the whole day, but I would be internally filthy.”

“It is certain that as long as the valve of giving stays closed, people will increase their internal tensions. They are going to increase their isolation dangerously. Dislocations will be produced. Bigger and bigger dislocations will be produced because the valve of giving is closed.

“Such individuals have too much to worry about themselves. A position in which the possibility of real communication with others and genuine concern for others does not appear in the horizon.”

“Despite the explosion of means of communication, they would feel lack of communication. Despite the ever-increasing density of the people around them, they will feel lonely”.

I was reflecting on all that was discussed so far. Personally, I too have registered these feelings of internal tensions. I thought it was because

of my challenges and personal problems. I had never thought that it had anything to do with my inability to allow outlet and to care and work for others. But I wondered when we are running short of time and resources in solving our own problems, when can we think of others?

“We all have our problems. But some live in love with their problems. And some others jump over their problems by placing their intentions outside themselves – by “giving”.

I could relate with what I had read somewhere about being consumer or contributor. That there is nothing wrong in being a consumer but what is detrimental is in remaining a consumer alone. It is when supplemented with contribution – to others, to society and to the world that builds the life.

“Life could be centripetal, where everything goes towards inside or life could be centrifugal, where everything is going towards outside – it is a question of direction of the arrow of life, pointed inward or outward.”

I realised that in our society there was a great element of giving. Larger families, ties with relatives, concern for community and in general helping anyone in need. It is only over last few years that the life is changing. Increasingly ‘mind my own business’ is becoming fashion. But so are the personal tensions and frustrations.

“Our message is based on an existential need of the human being. This is a point of great importance that selfishness is not useful - that giving is of great utility. As long as people do not reinstate that blocked capacity to give, as long as this does not happen, problems will increase.”

I wondered who should be on the front page of newspaper; one who has accumulated the most or one who has contributed the most.

Reviewing my scales of priorities, I am moving ahead in my journey to become better human being.

10. Learning to value internal registers

In Dubai, a speaker in a session on cultural appreciation asked a student in Hijab about why she was wearing it. Whether it is because she was religious, and she wanted to go to heaven? When she nodded, prompt came his response: does it mean that all those who do not wear it are non-religious and will go to hell?

He was making a point that beliefs and rules of behaviour are context dependent.

I started thinking. Is it so? In that case what is good and what is bad? What we should do and what we should not? Does it mean there is no universal code of moral? I decided to take it up in our next meeting.

“It is true. The rules could change from place to place, time to time and are specific to a cultural context. Thus, in India cow is considered as holy and in some other country, beef is a favourite food. Pork is prohibited in Islam but is cherished by many others. Slave trade was a common practice once upon a time and is a crime now”

That left me even more confused. In that case how to decide what is good and what is bad?

“Learn to recognise your internal register.”

Now this “internal register” was a new term. In our meeting it was common that new terms or new meaning of common terms will keep emerging. Almost always it would give us a new perspective.

What is this internal register and how do I recognise it?

“It is simple. All that you need to do is to pay attention to how you feel about the action. You may feel uneasy or you may feel jubilant or you may not get any such feeling.”

“Most of our daily routine involve neutral actions. Brushing the teeth, eating, travelling, reading news and so on. We neither feel uneasy or jubilant about it.”

“There are actions that make us feel bad and uneasy. This is when we feel bad about ourselves. It annoys us and disturbs our mood for quite some time.”

I recollected an incidence of today itself. This morning I got wild when my

mother got few minutes late in giving my lunch box. Throughout on the way, I was disturbed and carried that foul mood in office also. I got wild for whatever reason, but my internal register of the act was awful. I felt rotten.

“On the other hand, there are some actions that make us feel very good and pleasant. They make us feel more agreeable and boost our mood.

I could immediately recollect the incidence of the other day when a colleague suddenly fell ill. I left my work and took her to the hospital. On return, I had to sit late to finish the work but still I had no regrets. Instead I was pleased with myself.

“Once you start paying attention to your internal registers you will notice two possible type of actions. Contradictory and Unitive”

Now these are two more new terms. I knew the apparent meaning of these words, but I was sure there would a new perspective here.

“Contradictory actions are those that make you feel bad. They make you feel bad as there is a divergence between your feelings, thinking and actions.”

“Unitive actions are those that not only make you feel good, feel happy about yourself but also leave a liking of repeating the same in future.
“

I noticed that there are three conditions for the actions to be unitive. Overeating the food of my taste or venting out my anger on someone makes me feel good for a while but I end up regretting for the same. On the other hand, helping my colleague by taking her to hospital, even at the cost of delaying my work, not only made me feel good and happy about myself but I was left with a feeling of repeating such work even in future if need arises.

I reflected on many examples and realised one thing. Unitive actions always had to do with reaching out to others and helping others. And most of the actions that made me feel bad were those that came out of selfishness.

A new moral. Observe the internal registers of actions. Repeat unitive actions. That will make me feel good, happy and improve myself. That is a step forward in my journey to become a better human being.

11. Can feeling bad be good?

During the week paying attention to internal register was not a great experience for me. Most of the time I had a register of bad feeling. Newspaper came late and I felt bad. While talking on phone the tea got cold and I felt bad. There was rush in the train and I felt bad. Because of rains there were water puddles on the road, and I felt bad. There were rarely any occasions on which I felt good.

I tried to recollect the discussions of the meeting. I recalled learning that contradictory actions make you feel bad. They make you feel bad as there is a divergence between your feelings, thinking and actions. I realised that even at that time, I did not understand this statement well. What does this divergence mean? I tried all that I could to find where was this divergence between my feeling, thinking and actions in all the above incidences but to no avail.

I took up the topic in our next meeting.

“Contradictory actions make you feel bad. But they are not the only actions to make you feel bad. There are some other types of actions that also make you feel bad”

“Inconvenience, difficulty and contradictions, all the three could make you feel bad and uneasy. Learn to differentiate between them”

I wondered why was this not clarified in the last meeting itself. But I also knew that the learning here is a gradual process and there is one thing at a time. Now the question is what is the difference between these three terms?

“Inconvenience is something which will make your feel uneasy for a while but leaves no scar on you”

I realised all the experiences that I narrated in the beginning were related to inconvenience. They did bother me for a while but did not have any lasting impact on me.

“Difficulty is something that makes you uneasy as it challenges you. It makes you stretch, and it can be overcome. And when you do that you grow, your abilities grow.”

I recollected a tough assignment given to me in the office. I was afraid. However, I worked hard, found out how it is to be done and finally I

could do it well. In the end I had developed an ability to handle a new kind of assignments.

“If you always you do what you can, you do not grow. Difficulty challenges you and when you deal with it you grow. In fact, difficulties are the only way to grow.”

I realised that in school, every year there are new things, which are at first difficult for us. During the year we learn and develop abilities to deal with them. In the process we learn, and we grow. I wondered how the life at school would be if every year we had the syllabus of only what we knew! We would learn nothing new.

“Contradiction is something that not only makes you feel bad but also leaves with a feeling of regret and betrayal. That is because your action was contrary to your deep feelings. This has a lasting impact.”

I realised why my getting wild at my mother the other day for the delay in giving me lunch box, made me feel bad and that feeling spoiled the mood for a long time. Why did I do it? I didn't want to hurt her, but my selfish concern of getting late made me feel wild and I took out my anger on her without caring about her feelings.

Thus, some actions that make us feel bad may be irrelevant as they are mere inconvenience. Some actions that make us feel bad are good as they pose difficulty and that is the only way to grow. They should be welcome.

On other hand some actions that make us feel bad and leave in us a sense of betrayal. There is a type of divide inside us. We seem to betray our deep feelings. We may have been thinking differently from our feelings and our actions may be altogether different. Thus, there is a divergence between our feeling, thinking and actions. These are the contradictory actions. They are harmful and we should be watchful about it.

Learn to differentiate between inconvenience, difficulty and contradiction. A new learning in my journey to become a better human being.

12. What stopped me from doing it before?

On returning from the last meeting, I sat down and tried to examine my deep feelings. I realised I wanted to be nice and caring with people around me. Next I thought about my interactions with them and how I could do so. Finally, during the week, I tried to put it into actions in my behaviour with them. That was feeling, thinking and action all aligned in one direction.

It was a wonderful experience to be nice and caring with people around me. It was so easy, effortless and fulfilling. I wondered what stopped me from doing it before. In fact, why would anyone indulge in contradictory actions at all? Obviously, I proposed that as a point of discussion in our next meeting.

“The clue to what you do has to be in the heart of what you believe.”
What a poetic prose! But what does it mean?

“Every human being tends to achieve happiness. So, he does things according to what he believes will make him happy. This is obstructed by pain and suffering. Pain is physical and its removal depends on the development of science and society”

I could understand that with illness or hunger one can't be happy. As science will develop, cures for the illness will be found out and as society will develop it will take care of the hunger of the people.

“Suffering is mental, and its removal has nothing to do with science, society or prosperity.”

Does it mean that everyone could be suffering? But most people would not accept that they suffer. Perhaps the word suffering is too much. Yet, almost all admit of having uneasiness, problems and stress. In fact, I have noticed that some people believe that suffering is good. They believe that human being is born to suffer. We idolise the person who seem to have suffered the most. And we attribute it to human nature. Could these all be our beliefs? And as is said above, could this belief be driving our behaviour?

“Pain could cause suffering and suffering could cause pain. Thus, they affect each other too. But what matters the most is to understand suffering - the mental unease - and how to deal with it.”

“Now coming to our original question. What drives people to

contradictory actions? Suffering drives people to do contradictory actions and such actions in turn increase the suffering. It is a spiralling vicious circle.”

I try to make sense out of this statement. If I am feeling insecure, I will become selfish and that in turn will lead me to think and act away from my deep feelings of helping others. If I am jealous, how can I be nice to the other person. If I am resented to one, how can I be kind to him?

I recollected the incidence of my home I had already recounted earlier. That morning I had become wild when my mother got few minutes late in giving my lunch box. Later I did feel awful and I had leant to recognise the register of contradiction in myself.

Why did I get wild? In hindsight, perhaps it was because of my fear of getting late or perhaps the embarrassment of keeping a friend waiting who had come to pick me up. That is the fear of the future. Perhaps it was my assessment of her carelessness. That is the issue with perception of the present. Or perhaps my recounting of it having happened earlier. That is the issue of memory.

I recollected discussion in one of earlier meeting where we talked about the three ways through which one can suffer. Memory of the past, perception of the present and images of the future. It could be one or all of them that drove me. I was uneasy and if I admit, I was suffering. And that in turn made me become wild. An action that later made me feel awful about myself, increasing my suffering further.

Now I understand the vicious cycle. Suffering drives me to contradictory actions and they in turn cause in me further suffering a spiralling vicious cycle indeed. That is spoiling my life.

That being the case, it is important to learn more about suffering and how to overcome it.

Food for thought and need to learn more. A step ahead in my journey to become better person indeed.

13. Do images in our head have so much power?

We were on a retreat once again. Generally, we worked in our weekly meeting of one hour, but from time to time we used to go on overnight retreat lasting from one day to three days and the longest one of seven days known as centre of work. Withdrawing physically from our daily world, being in a relaxed mood, accompanied by wonderful companions in the internal work, intense subjects and profound reflections made these retreats one of the most memorable part of our journey.

When I learned that the theme of the retreat was about the power of images, I wondered what it meant.

“Images are what mobilise tensions”

As I know, images come and go in our head. What could be so important about it? And particularly what it has to do with tensions?

“Imagine a fire, and imagine you are there at the fire. Notice how your muscles become tense. Conversely, imagine that you “put out” the fire and observe how your external muscles relax and you register a relax in your internal sensations”

I tried it and was amazed to see how it works. Sitting on a chair without any other movement, just by imagining fire I could feel the tension and also the consequent relaxation.

“We will do a practice. Close your eyes and follow what is being said” I closed the eyes and paid attention to what was being said.

“Imagine a transparent and luminous sphere up above you. Let it descend from above, enter your head and lower it until it is inside your chest at the level of your heart.

“When this sphere is resting in your chest, begin to slowly expand it or “let” it expand so it gradually grows until it fills your whole body. When this sensation that starts in the centre of your chest has expanded throughout your whole body, a warm sensation of peace and internal unity will appear which you should let operate by itself.

“Sometimes your breathing will become deeper and positive emotions will appear-pleasant and inspiring emotions. However, pay no attention

to your breathing; simply let it accompany your positive emotions and keep your attention on the expanding sensation.

“On other occasions, memories and very vivid images may arise, but you should always have greater interest in your growing register of peace and calm.

“When this register has diffused throughout your body, the Experience of Peace will arise. Remain in this interesting state for a few minutes, and then slowly contract the sensation and the image back towards your chest to your heart. Then, raise it to your head, and gradually let this “sphere” you have been using move outside and disappear.

“This completes the Experience of Peace.”

Wow! It was just a few minutes and only images. But it completely transformed my internal state. I felt completely peaceful. Can such experience happen only in retreats?

“You can practice Experience of Peace at any time in your daily life.”

I decided to experiment with this practice in daily life. Just moving few images and such a powerful impact. Why I didn't know it so far?

“Images always act on you whether you know about it or not. What is important is to learn about how we can manage our images and through that influence our internal state”

I always wondered when people told about managing feelings about how I could do it. Now it seems there is a handle to work on the same.

This was the beginning of the retreat and I knew much more was to come. Anxiously looking forward to the same I was moving ahead in my journey to becoming better person.

14. How does mind body connection work?

The next day morning was cheerful. We all were enjoying the unique experience of the overnight retreat. We began the day by revising the practice of yesterday – the Experience of Peace. It was a wonderful way to start the day.

We had some unique activities – standing, sitting, lying down and noting about our posture. Walking around and noting the posture. Repeating it several times.

It was unusual. In our meetings we had discussions, guided experience but for the first time I encountered activities involving movement of body and observing our posture. What was the point?

“We are going to discuss about Psycho-Physical Gymnastics – a unique system of self-control to re-establish the balance between our mind and body. With this technique you will learn to control yourself better in daily life.”

The introduction sounded exciting and the activities of noting the posture intriguing. What is the link? I knew something important will be coming next.

“Health and strength in the truest sense require balance - an equilibrium. Nothing works better to achieve this balance than to exercise both your mind and body at the same time”

“The mind and body have mutual relationship. If you have ever noticed the difference between the posture of someone who is depressed and someone who is happy, you will easily grasp the relationship. An anxious mind is related to posture of body leaning forward and a leisurely mental state is related to the posture of body reclining backward.”

I could easily verify and relate with the same.

It was suggested that I stand as I normally do and imagine a vertical line passing through my head and body to the ground. Using this line as a reference, I had to notice whether my head was badly positioned, whether my chest was sunken, my stomach was out of line, or if I held my lower stomach in and thus push the buttocks out of line. I was asked not to try to change any incorrect positions; but simply keep them in mind and remember all the details. Then, I was asked to draw

a sketch of my body in my notebook just as I remembered it, both the side view and the front view. I had to mark any incorrectly positioned points and see what I need to correct.

Next I was asked to stand up and start to correct the posture. I noticed that it wasn't easy.

“What is important to know, is that while the mental state leads to a certain body posture, we can make it work other way – that is change the mental state by changing the body posture”.

Psycho is mind and physical is body. The aim is to learn about the relation between the two and how they affect each other. While it will be difficult for us to control our mind directly, we can change our body posture and with that affect our mental state.

When you are attentive the posture is straight and erect. So, by straightening my posture I can improve my attentiveness.

Once I tried the straight posture, soon my body started to ache. How do I deal with that?

“You have cultivated a habit over the years to be in the wrong posture. Obviously if you are going to change it, in the beginning it will be uncomfortable. Do not go to the extreme. Pay attention to the posture and improve it whenever you can. Slowly increase the duration of the correct posture until it becomes a new habit.”

Such a simple thing like body posture can affect the mind so much. I could remember that in the childhood my mother used to scold me for sitting in twisted posture and insisted on my sitting straight. Now I realised the importance of the posture.

Posture was the first part of the study of Psycho-Physical Gymnastics. More was to follow. I was anxious to learn more on the subject. In the meantime, I was advancing on my journey to become better person.

15. How can I influence my mental state?

Experience of Peace and the fact that I can influence my mental state by changing the body posture were good learning in the retreat so far. I was looking forward to learn more about the relations between mind and body and methods to influence my mental state. I wanted to know if there was any way to change at will, from disturbed mental state to calm. That will be a very useful learning.

“The mechanism of our body and mind is controlled by four centers. The lowest being Vegetative center, next Motor center, next Emotional center and finally highest is Intellectual center.

“The influence goes from Vegetative center upwards but generally it can’t go from intellectual center downwards.

I was trying to grasp what has been said so far. Four centers, the hierarchy and their mutual influence. But what are these centers and what do they do?

“Vegetative center regulates the internal activities of our body such as digesting food, cleaning the blood, maintaining body temperature etc. Most of its activities are autonomous and we have no control over it. The only one point where we have little control is breathing.

“Motor center regulates the physical mobility. All bodily movements including the posture.

“Emotional Center regulates feelings and emotions.

“Intellectual Center regulates the thought processes, relates data, and regulates learning.

Now there was some more clarity about the functioning of the four centers. But how do I use this knowledge in changing my mental states?

I started reflecting. If I am angry, it is the emotional center disturbed. At that time, it does not occur to me that I should not get angry. In that way my anger has affected my intellectual center. I realised how the influence goes from the lower emotional center to upper intellectual center. At that time if someone explains me logically about the demerits of getting angry, it would not make sense to me. And in any case if the influence generally does not go downwards, then whatever I think about controlling the anger, it would be futile and of no help.

Now I realise how all the wonderful talk about controlling emotions remain only as a good talk. Be positive, don't get upset, don't panic, control anger and all that sounds too simple, only as advise to be given to others that can't be implemented. It appeals intellectual center and is futile, as generally the influence can't go downward and affect emotional center.

The realisation was sinking in that my thinking about changing my disturbed mood to calm is not going to help me and is not going to work. Does it mean there is no way out?

"A person can modify his negative emotional states by adopting correct postures and changing the way he breathes.

Breathing is Vegetative center and posture is motor center and both will affect higher center. Thus, they will affect the emotions. In my example of being angry, if I take deep breathing, go for a small stroll, have a cup of tea, I notice that gradually my anger subsides.

I could change my mental states not by thinking about it, but by affecting my vegetative and motor center. And the easiest way is to change my breathing and body posture. There is simple technique to change the breathing.

"Sit in a chair using correct posture. Close your eyes and relax your muscles as completely as

you can. Exhale completely, without forcing anything. Then, extend your stomach, stick it way

out, and begin to inhale air. Try to have the sensation that you are "filling your stomach" with air.

When your stomach is "full," hold your breath a few moments.

"Next "pull in" your stomach. This will give you the sensation of the air rising to your chest (this sensation can be reinforced by expanding your chest and pushing your shoulders back). Hold the air in your chest for a few moments.

"Finally, move the air to the upper part of your chest, towards your throat. Reinforce this final

upward movement by lowering your shoulders and extending your neck slightly.

Wow. It works. Changing the breathing and the posture to influence the mental state. So simple and so effective. Great learning on my journey to become better person.

16. The roots are different from the manifestations

We were back from our first overnight retreat. It was a great experience and of course some of the most valuable learning. The Experience of Peace, the technique of complete breathing and the power of breathing and posture on changing mental state.

For my college I had to write an article. I was postponing it all the times and could not get myself to sit and get on with it. I used the newly learned technique. Sat with the correct posture and did the complete breathing for few times. After a while my mood began to change, and I could start writing what I avoided all these times. What a simple and wonderful mechanism to influence our moods!!

I started thinking. All along not only me but I have seen people around me, struggling with bad moods and negative mental states. Pained and frustrated we lose hours and hours in disturbed state. I have been cursing myself for being lazy and what not and have tried to push myself to do things but in vain. In every case, I wanted to change my mood but couldn't. I proposed that as a topic for discussion in our next weekly meeting.

“You will make your conflicts disappear when you understand them in their ultimate root, not when you want to resolve them”

This is one of the twelve principles of Valid Actions. Does it mean in my above case, the issue is not my laziness but the functioning of psycho-physical mechanism? We need more examples.

Rita shared her own situation. “My husband is bitter. I try different tactics to make him happy. For some time, the issue seems to be resolved, but soon it resurfaces.”

Sundar shared his experience “At work, my boss is angry with me all the time. He gives me more and more work and then keeps finding fault with whatever I do.”

In both these situations, personally they were not happy. Rita loved her husband and wanted to see him happy. Sundar loved his work and wanted to see his boss happy. Both of them had tried all the things to the best of their knowledge to solve the problems. But of no avail. This kept them disturbed all the time. They were struggling to

come out. In fact, Rita tried courses on meditation, on positive thinking, and even tried to fix the vastu. Nothing worked.

In both the situations, what was described was the manifestation. What they have been trying to resolve is what appeared on the surface. What if they try to understand the root of the situations? Of course, it is not easily visible and it requires effort to understand and openness to learn.

As it happened Rita tried to go to the root. Spending some quite time together, and opening soft communication with love, she learnt that her husband had suffered a big loss in the business for no fault of his. There was a devastating fire at the place of a big customer who owed them a lot of money and now the chances of recovering the money are very slim. There was huge debt on his head and he is worried that they may have to sell their house as well to pay the debt.

Now that she learnt about the real anxiety of her husband, first thing she realized that there is nothing wrong with her and there is nothing wrong in their relationship. That itself was a great relief. The next thing she realized that though there was a loss, there is very little her husband could have done to prevent it. It was not his fault. The burden of huge debt was shattering and her husband at this stage needed support. When she told him that there was no problem if they have to sell off the house, that they can live in rented house, that she was with him, and finally, she was sure with his dedication and hard work, they will recover again. These words itself gave him renewed vigor to fight with the situation. And of course, their relations reached a new height of proximity and mutual support.

On some investigations, Sundar found that his boss was involved in some underhand dealings. He was worried that Sundar may come to know about it and knowing Sundar's straight forward nature, he was afraid that he may speak it out.

When Sundar learnt about the corrupt practice of his boss, it became clear that the boss wanted to harass him so that he leaves the job and the boss's fear of exposure is reduced. Sundar knew that the boss was very powerful in the firm and he can't do anything against him. He found it wiser to leave the job and take up another one free from this conflict.

Once both Rita and Sundar understood the roots, they realized that

whatever they have been trying so far would have never addressed the roots. They were struggling with the manifestations whereas the roots were altogether different. Now that they knew the roots, there was better clarity and they were better equipped to address the conflict.

Learn to look at the roots and not struggle with the manifestations. A great learning on my journey to become better person.

17. The Human Nature is not natural

While driving to the meeting place, I barely managed the wheels when one person recklessly crossed the road. I got wild. I thought that when faced with such disturbing situation it is natural for me to get wild. A friend seating next to me consoled. "These people will never change; it is their nature to be reckless".

The words nature and natural kept ringing in my mind. What is the nature of human being and what is natural for him? I proposed that as a topic for discussion in our meeting.

"The word nature and natural have been used to ascribe certain rigid qualities to certain people. In that sense there is nothing like 'nature' of the human being."

But how can it be? Confronted with the reckless pedestrian while driving is it not natural for me to get angry? As I thought about it, I realised that not every person will get wild in that situation. I myself may not get wild in the same situation all the time. It depended so much on the situation, my mental state, my expectations and so on.

"Unlike the only immediate reaction in other animals, the human being can also give deferred response. The broadening of the temporal horizon allows him to weigh the outcome."

I needed to digest these words. Temporal horizon means what? It is the ability of the human being to look beyond what is in front of him, with influence of the past as well concern for the future.

"The intentionality of human being allows him to project a meaning."

Intentionality is a heavy word. I need to understand it better. Could it mean that human being has a purpose, some aim, some objective?

Now things seem to be falling in place. For other animals, the world is given. What they are concerned with, is getting their food and survival. But that is not same for human being. Human being can learn from the past and act with an intention for the future. Thus, when it was too cold, humans created warm housing. If it was hard food difficult to digest, humans invented cooking. Whenever the given conditions created limitations, caused pain and suffering, then humans challenged it and tried to transform the conditions.

That learning kept going through generations and each generation added their own contribution. Thus, one generation invented electricity and another invented application of electricity. If we are using today fans and air-conditioner to manage the temperature, it was not created by us, but by human being collectively.

“Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings, transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying toward the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the earth. When you lose your meaning, the earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens.

“I will tell you the meaning of your life here: It is to humanize the earth. And what does it mean to humanize the earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build.

Now it is becoming clear. There is nothing natural in human being in terms of rigid, vegetable, or animal sense. Instead what is natural in the human being is change, history and transformation in the direction of overcoming pain and suffering.

With this understanding how will I relate with others? Each one has his own temporal horizon and intentionality and it is not same as me. One thing is to use others as a tool for my purpose and my intentions and it is altogether different to respect them as they are.

“To feel that which is human in the other is to feel the life of the other in a beautiful, multi-coloured rainbow.”

To live with other humans each having their own perspective, respecting each other and working jointly to overcome pain and suffering is a great project of life. Life now seems purposeful. That is a great step ahead in the journey of becoming better human being.

18. Feeling so good to accept myself as I am

On my way to the meeting, I passed by a beauty salon. Few yards and one more. I wondered, has there been an explosion of beauty salons. A series of questions ran through my mind. Will I go to the salon to look better than what I think I look? Does it mean I am unhappy with how I look? I became conscious of some parts my looks that I was not happy about.

Keeping aside the topic of beauty salons what became more important for me was to understand what can I do about these parts of my body that I was not happy about. Can that be the topic for our meeting today?

“We will do a Guided Experience of Protector of life”

I was aware of the technique of Guided Experience. In this, one of us read a story and all others with closed eyes, follow the story. The story is in first person and we imagine ourselves as that person. Thus, when it was told that I am leaning from 20th floor, I imagined as if I am leaning and to that extent got the feeling related with that. In between, there were pauses allowing time to imagine more about that specific stage of the story.

“I am floating on my back in a lagoon. The water feels very pleasant, and effortlessly looking on either side, I discover that I can see the bottom through the crystalline water.

The experience started and we started following the lines imaging the scenario.

“The sky is a brilliant blue. Close by, washed by the waters of the sea, is a beach of soft, almost white sand that forms a quiet inlet without waves.....

“I decide to turn over, and begin to swim with smooth strokes until I reach the beach, where I slowly emerge from the water.

“On my right I discover the entrance to a cave with a stream of clear water flowing nearby. As I approach the cave, I see a woman standing inside. A crown of flowers adorns her head and I can see her beautiful eyes, but I cannot tell her age. Yet behind her face, which radiates kindness and understanding, I sense there lies a great wisdom. As I gaze at her, all of nature falls silent.

“I am the Protector of Life,” she says. Hesitantly I answer that I do not understand what she means. At this moment a fawn approaches and licks her hand.

She invites me sit on the sand facing a smooth rock wall. “Breathe gently, and tell me what you see.” I begin to breathe slowly and deeply, and immediately a clear image of the ocean appears before me on the rock. As I breathe in, the waves roll onto the beach. As I breathe out, the waves recede.

Then she tells me, “Everything in your body is rhythm and beauty. So many times you have despised your body, without comprehending this marvelous instrument you have for expressing yourself in the world.” At this moment many scenes from my life begin to appear on the rock wall—I see myself feeling shame, fear, and horror about certain aspects of my body. These images follow one after another.

Then she adds, “Even in sickness and old age, your body will be like a faithful dog that accompanies you until the final moment. Do not despise your body when it cannot fulfill all your whims. Meanwhile make it strong and healthy. Take care of your body so that it can serve you well. Follow the opinions of only those who are wise. I who have passed through all the ages know well that the idea of beauty is ever-changing. If you do not regard your body as your closest friend, it will become sad and ill—therefore you must accept it completely. It is your instrument for expressing yourself in the world.

“I want you to see now the part of your body that is weakest and least healthy.” At once the image of this part of my body appears.

The Protector of Life rests her hand on this area, and I feel a life-giving warmth. I sense waves of energy expanding in this area, and I experience a profound acceptance of my body, just as it is.

“Take care of your body, following only the opinions of those who are wise, and do not harm it with illnesses that exist only in your imagination. Now go, filled with vitality and at peace with yourself.”

Upon emerging from the grotto, strengthened and healthy, I drink the crystalline water of the stream and feel completely renewed.

The sun and the wind caress my body as I cross the white sand toward the lagoon. When I reach the water, for an instant I glimpse in the depths the kind reflection of the Protector of Life.

As I enter the water, I give thanks within myself for my body, this marvelous instrument I have received from nature. ...

With this the story ended and we shared our experiences. Some of us could visualise the whole story, some of us had distraction in between. Some of us could clearly identify the parts of the body but still couldn't accept and some of us including me could accept them fully. All of us had a nice feeling at the end.

“Perception of the present could make us suffer. We have to reconcile and learn to accept.”. “A set of Guided Experiences contain stories to learn to accept the present”

That was a new learning A step ahead in my journey to become better human being.

19. My future changing my past

The words 'Temporal Horizon' continued to churn in my mind all through the week. I talked with some people about it. They told me that there are techniques to learn about mindfulness, meaning remaining in the present moment. Some one told me about a book named "Power of now" and a friend advised that all our problem arise from the fact that we are too much worried either about our past or the future and rarely remain in the present.

By now I had learnt not to get swayed by the fads of the society. I also knew that in our meetings there would be no discussion about any of these techniques or proposals as we do not know enough about them. It could be useless for some or could be useful for some and who we are to comment about the rightness or wrongness of their experience? What we can certainly focus is on our proposals and our understanding.

With that clarity I sought more understanding on the topic.

"This is time that appears in its true temporality—that is, where past, present, and future act simultaneously."

I need to make sense out of this statement. Past, present and future act simultaneously. I see a currency note. Factually I see a piece of paper, but I recognise it as currency note as I had learnt in the past about the value of this paper. Would I tear it or throw it? If it was an ordinary piece of paper, perhaps I would have. But since it is a currency note I would not. What will happen if I get it or lose it? I understand now that all the three- memory of the past, perception of the present and imagination about the future - are working simultaneously in my mind without my realising it.

If it was not for the memory how would I know that it was a currency note or for that matter identify it even as a piece of paper. Obviously as I perceive things simultaneously the memory is active helping to identify what I perceive. If it was not images about the future, I would have remained indifferent to this piece of paper.

"It is a structure in which everything that has happened in your life acts simultaneously along with all that is taking place with you at the present moment and all that you imagine may happen to you as possibility, in the more or less foreseeable future.

Everything acting simultaneously! A friend smiled at me. Apparently, a

simple perception. But I remembered a past incidence and could see cunningness in his smile and decided to be careful with him else he may trouble me in the future. A simple smile but so many considerations! In this sense nothing is simple. Though appearing spontaneous, many considerations playing simultaneously.

“What do you want in the future is based on what has happened to you. Your projects of the future are driven by your experiences of the past.”

If in the past I had faced rejection, I would want recognition and I will be driven to things that would earn me recognition. Thus, by default the future projects arise out of the experiences of the past.

“But human being has intentionality and can create projects purely out of own intentions also.”

If I make a project to make difference to the world, that project may be arising out of my intentions and may or may not have any linkage with my pasts.

“What is most important is that your future affects your present and can even change your past.”

This was a startling statement. Past affecting future is understandable but how it can be other way round. Not that easy to understand. We started discussing how it could work.

A friend narrated his experience. He had an extremely troubled past as there was no money to eat at home and he had to start working at very young age continuing education at a distance. There was a time in his life when he saw his future as hopeless and regretted for his past. However, in recent times he has become more confident and is seeing bright future ahead. With this stance he is thankful of his past because of which he learnt to live through tough times and learnt to study on his own helped him to muster meaningful experiences.

Same past. When future appeared bleak, past was regrettable. When future is seen bright, the same past became a virtue.

“So if we have a brilliant project for the future, we will be thankful for everything that happened to us in the past and is happening to us in the present. What can be a better project than to work to Humanise the Earth.”

Realising the importance of self-less project in life that would make my past, present and future bright, I was moving ahead in my journey to become better person.

20. Did I live like this so far?

In the last meeting we discussed about the importance of having a significant self-less project in life. It would make our past, present and future bright. But what happens if we do not have any such project in life? We continued the discussion in our next meeting.

“To begin with, you search for what you lack or believe you lack.”

If I am hungry, I will search for food. That is understandable. But does it stop there? If I believe I lack acceptance from people, will it not lead me to search for acceptance. If I believe I lack security, will it not lead me to search for security.

“That is the mechanism for compensation.”

Search for food is compensation for the hunger. If there was no hunger perhaps that search for food would not have been there. As I think on, I get more and more overwhelmed with the importance of this statement. Does it mean all my life is just a search and compensation?

As I looked back, in my younger days I studied. Perhaps to get acceptance of people around. As I grew, I studied further. Perhaps to get a job that will grant me security and further acceptance. I worked hard to earn more money. Perhaps to buy objects of status that would announce that I have arrived and in turn earn me more acceptance. Even when I am doing charity, is that hope for acceptance hanging around?

If I felt insecure, did I look out for everything that will make me feel more secure. Is my urge to earn more and more money driven by this sense of insecurity?

Does it mean all along my life I have been living only to compensate for what I believed I lack, and will it continue to be so in the future? Only this narrow selfish project in my life?

“In the process, perhaps you end up using other people as objects for your desire.”

It sounds so vulgar. Using people around me for my selfish purpose in my pursuit of getting what I believe I lack. How have I related with my mother? As one to provide me for my needs or as an individual with own life and feelings. How have I related with my friends? As someone

to be around when I need them or those with own life and feelings. If they had different feelings would I have retained them as friends at all? Do I care for people only as long as they are useful to me?

All these questions were quite unsettling.

Running to compensate for what I lack. In that selfish process relate with others only to the extent they are useful to me. Why do I feel so ashamed about it? Is it because it is exactly opposite of what I would have loved for myself? Is this then called life of contradictions?

“Contradiction inverts life. The inversion of the growing stream of life is experienced as suffering. Thus, suffering is the signal that warns us of the need to change the direction of the opposing forces.”

“If you want to build a new life, free of contradictions, a life that increasingly overcomes suffering, you must be aware of two false arguments. The first holds that “I need to solve my personal problems before I can undertake any constructive action in the world.” The second leads you to declare “I am committed to the world!” while forgetting yourself completely.

“You may agree with me or not, but in any case, I will affirm that this is the only way forward: If you want to grow, you will help those around you to grow.”

Mind blowing. I comprehend how I have been living so far. I can imagine how will be my life if I do not make any change now. With this realisation I leap ahead in my journey of becoming better person.