

# HAPPY HEROES



The other day, to the Passport Office as I forgot to carry the original copy of a certificate, the official thereof bluntly and rudely sent me back, asking me to get another appointment date and come.

The second time, with apprehension, as I went back to the office, and my coupon took me to another counter, **I was in for the most unexpected surprise.** The cheerful official at this counter seemed to belong to totally another kind of culture, that was miles away from the hasty and indifferent way of functioning that most of the other employees at this office reflected. This particular official greeted every person he attended to, with a warm welcoming smile, and initiated conversations with them that expressed interest, care, tenderness and ease.

He was there not just doing his fixed job somehow, but was present there **like an ‘angel’, connecting hearts, easing anxieties and earning blessings.** It seemed like he was there as an answer to the people’s prayers. He made me think how I could be doing the same busy job like others, and yet do it with joy, light-heartedness, care, compassion and gratitude. I think these souls have rightly got the **key to TRUE HAPPINESS.**

I also recall years back, when I was yet a non-Christian and expressed my desire to become a Catholic Nun, the UMI Sisters, especially our the then Provincial Superior, Sr. Francesca, didn’t place impediments to this desire, but responded readily in love; happily catechizing me and accepting me to the faith as well as to the religious life. At times, I often wonder, if it were today, I wouldn’t have got such easy admittance and may be would have even lost that holy calling, out of discouragement. Sr. Francesca too is a greatly happy noble soul who simply enjoys generous giving and reaching out.

These days, as I go to the State Bank to collect Board Exam Question Papers, I am left speechless, as I find the Deputy Manager of the bank Mr. Deepak Sharma always there much before us, waiting. He has such joyful countenance and vitality that’s really so rare. One fine morning, I witnessed one of the customers requesting him for a special favour, which this Manager was not at all obliged to return at that time which was still hours prior to the Working Hours of the bank, but so joyfully, the Manager accepted it, telling the customer, *“I understand your constraint. You go for your work. I’ll do it.”*

The speciality in these **HAPPY HEROES**, like that Passport officer, Sr. Francesca, the Deputy Manager and many others, is that they are *not rigid or legalistic, but are the ones who are guided by the spirit of the law, connect in love and joyfully go the extra mile.*

20<sup>th</sup> March marks the **United Nations International Day of Happiness.** It emphasizes that ‘progress’ is about increasing human happiness and wellbeing, not just growing the economy. The theme for International Day of Happiness, 2022 was **“Keep Calm, Stay Wise, Be Kind”**, three basic keys to attain happiness.

In recent years, psychologists have gained a deeper understanding of human kindness and its benefits. One morning, people walking down a street in the Canadian city of Vancouver were asked to take part in an experiment run by the American psychologist Elizabeth Dunn. They were given an envelope containing either a \$5 or \$20 note. Half the people were instructed to spend the money on themselves. The other half were instructed to use the money to buy a present for someone else or to donate the money to charity.

The result of the research brought out that whether they had \$5 or \$20 made no difference, nor did what they bought. **What mattered was who they spent their money on.** The people who had spent it on someone else felt significantly happier than those who treated themselves.

This is just one of many studies which has found that ‘acting kindly’ can improve our wellbeing. Neuroscientific research confirms that the **warm glow we experience when we do something nice for someone shows up in our brain’s reward system.**

Sussex University’s neuroscientist Dan Campbell says, *"Kindness can cost us, yet we experience a sense of reward in parts of our brain when we are kind to others, just as we do when we eat yummy food or have a pleasant surprise. These parts of the brain become active and motivate us to do them again and again."*

Leo Tolstoy remembers his mother in his memoirs. He says she was a very kind woman - so kind that she used to cry in the theater the whole time. They were very rich people, and belonged to royalty. A servant used to be around Leo Tolstoy’s mother with many handkerchiefs when she would go to the theater. Tolstoy says: *"But I was surprised to see that in Russia, even in winter when the cold would be so much, below zero, and snow would be falling, she would go to the theater - and the driver of her coach would go on sitting outside the coach in the falling snow. And almost always it used to happen, the man would die. Because nobody knew when the countess would come out - any moment she would get so much disturbed by the theater that she would run towards home to fall into her bed and cry. So the coachman, the driver, had to be there on the coach and it would happen that he would get so cold that he would die. And when she would come out the driver would be thrown away, replaced by another man, and she would go on. And she would never think about this man, who had simply died there for no reason. And she would go on crying tears for something she had seen in the theater."*

**Kindness is not mere sentimentalism.** It costs nothing to cry, but it costs much to be kind. Kindness goes the extra mile and translates itself into action.

When Alexander was coming to India he went to see one great mystic, Diogenes. Alexander had always cherished the desire to see this man Diogenes, because he had heard that this man has nothing, yet there is no other man richer than this man. He has something within him, he has a luminous being. He is a beggar, but he is really an emperor. So Alexander had become intrigued and went to visit him.

Early morning, the sun was rising; Diogenes was Lying naked on the sand. Alexander said, *"I am happy to see you. Whatsoever I have heard seems to be true. I have never seen a happier man. Can I do something for you, sir?"* And Diogenes said, *"You just stand to the side - you are preventing the sun. And remember! Never prevent the sun. You are dangerous, you can prevent the sun reaching many people. Just stand to the side."*

Friends, Kindness is not something that we give to others, it is simply **‘not preventing the sun’**. Kindness is becoming a hollow bamboo and allowing the divine to flow through us. True kindness is not from us, it is from God; Kindness is not something that we do, it is something that God does.

As we celebrate the International Day of Happiness on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2023, may we be blessed to become those **HAPPY HEROES** who love to get involved in the lives of our fellow beings; allowing the divine rays of KINDNESS to penetrate through ourselves; bringing ease, comfort, joy and hope and making this world a happier and holier place for all to dwell!

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