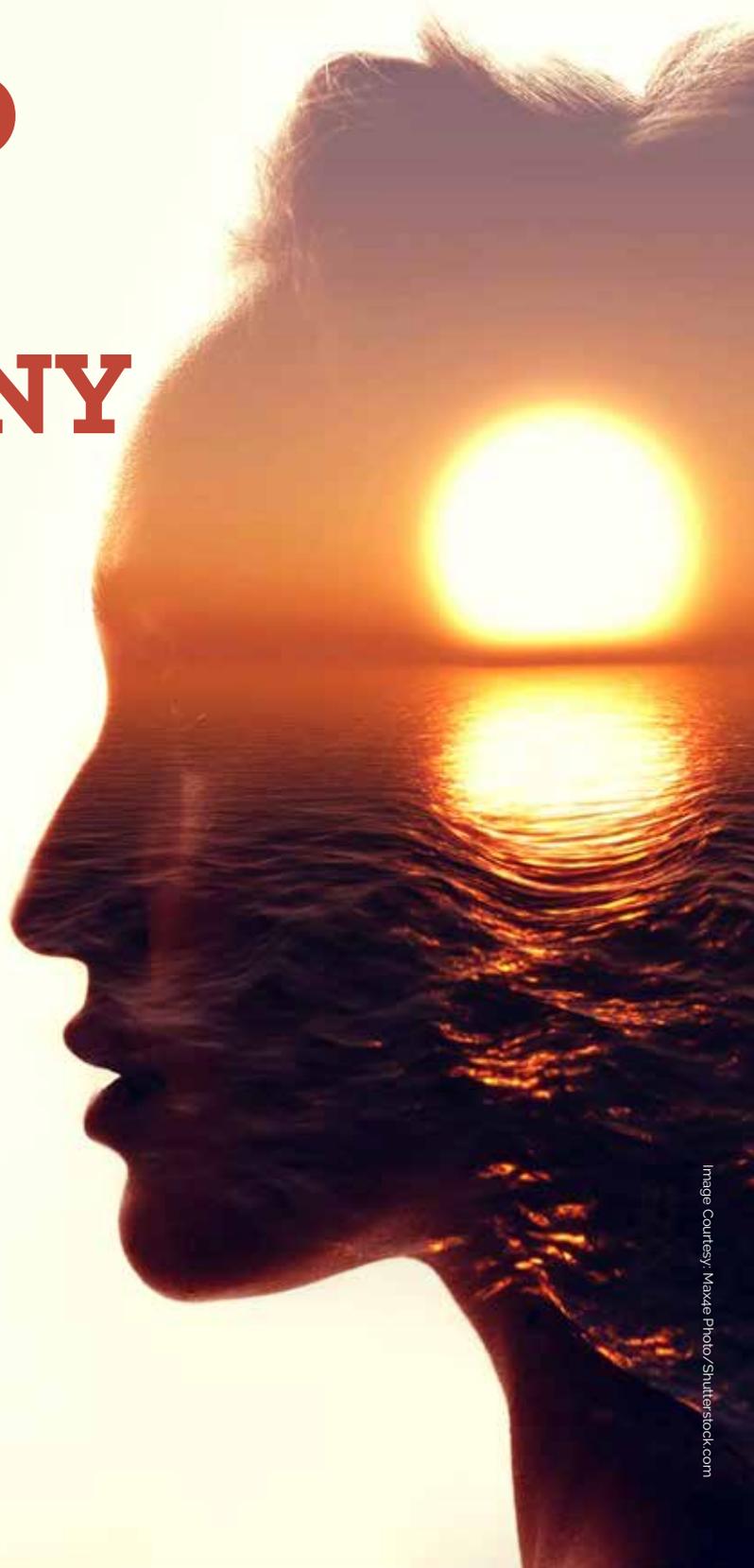


DARE TO LIVE IN HARMONY

By Shraddha Shetty



The times that we have experienced together in the last few months have been unique. There is no doubt that it has been challenging for many, but my attempt in this article is to highlight the special opportunities that I discovered even in such moments.

Due to the lockdown across the world, many were physically isolated from one another for extended periods of time. While this necessary action forced many of us to retreat physically from the masses, it was also a rare opportunity to do the same with our thoughts, to discover our own authentic ideas. In solitude, there is perhaps the possibility to encounter ourselves, and question: Am I happy with the way I have been living so far? What among the various aspects of my life is important for me? What meaning do I want to give to life?

Amidst various roles and responsibilities, it may seem that we never have enough time to reflect on the truth of our own beliefs. But with the lockdown, Mr. Time suddenly appeared at our doorstep and we could no longer continue to blame the lack of time.

Surrounded with communication from the media, and conditioned by majority opinions, it is easy to forget to listen to our own inner voice. It is easy to get influenced, fall prey to herd mentality, and fail to recognize that sometimes we end up automatically thinking and behaving just like everyone else, even though it doesn't make us happy. Amidst various roles and responsibilities, it may seem that we never have enough time to reflect on the truth of our own beliefs. But with the lockdown, Mr. Time suddenly appeared at our doorstep and we could no longer continue to blame the lack of time. We had enough time in hand, and isolation, to begin to ask these essential questions. Used wisely, it could have been a special opportunity to go to the root of our own authentic ideas and thoughts without any fear of being different, being frowned upon, or the insecurity of being rejected by peers and colleagues. It could have been a time to investigate whether our past actions reflect our inner ideas, and how we might redirect our future.

Maybe some discovered that they wanted to continue living in the same way; others may have discovered that there is



need for inner and outer change. Either way, the pause and solitude offered the opportunity to reassess and harmonize life with a fresh perspective. In the words of Gandhi ji, "True Happiness is when what we think, what we feel and what we do, is in harmony."

Personally I realised that in the past many of my decisions were influenced by the desire for personal comfort, at all levels, at the cost of following what I knew in my heart was right. This resulted in dissatisfaction and mediocrity. I came to the conclusion that life is too short to waste time and that now is a good time to get out of my comfort, renew the search for what I don't know, and change the direction of certain areas.

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In my own experience, perhaps for the first time, there was nothing to be afraid of, between me and myself. The unprecedented circumstances of my solitude made it easier to achieve the mental clarity to determine the right direction for my life, one that would be meaningful.

On the other hand, many fortunate ones were locked down with immediate family without many external resources. Naturally, they might have gone through a variety of emotions: frustration, irritation, mood swings, etc. But together we had the wonderful possibility to discover that by developing internal virtues we can harmonize the differences by overcoming our own weaknesses, and support one another to taste unity. Harmony, as many may have realized, is not about making everyone listen to **me**, as the dictator of the family. Rather, it is about learning to accept the differences, and by extending ourselves, finding creative ways to be happy together. You don't get harmony when everyone sings the same note; harmony arises when different notes come together, to complement one another.

I want to note that practically it meant that to bring harmony into the family, every individual had to extend themselves a little bit, in order to bring a little more understanding and patience; to think of what is right for all, before only thinking of one's own self; to put personal comforts aside, and help when it is right to, to clean the dishes when it is right to, to listen more, and speak up when it is right to do. In short it requires compassion, to sacrifice the ego sometimes, in order to help one another.

These moments also allowed us to see our own suffering in proportion. After all, we were all facing similar circumstances; our neighbours, people who work for us, people we work for, etc. Amidst the helplessness, the fear, and anxiety that we all collectively experienced, there was an opportunity to empathize and be sensitive to the fact that there were others who were struggling too, maybe more than us. Everyone needed love, encouragement, and support. Sometimes, even the smallest gesture was enough to touch somebody's heart and make a positive impact on their life. Small acts of kindness, a smile, a message, or a listening ear was enough in many cases, and it did not need mammoth efforts to make a real difference.

In this way, perhaps these moments revealed a glimpse of the glory and potential of our altruism, our compassion. Maybe this is our natural state. And maybe it is in such a state that we are most satisfied and happy. While there are many things that are beyond our control, the lockdown helped me to discover that I had the freedom to choose harmony over discord, prioritize giving before taking, exercise altruism before egoism; seek unity over separation; and discover that in this lies true happiness.

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Let us all dare to live in harmony by allowing our authentic inner voice to direct our every future action. With the certainty of this inner direction it will be easier to walk with confidence into our uncertain future. Our virtues will act as the tools to manoeuvre through pleasant as well as stormy times. Let us stand in unison and take responsibility, both individually and collectively, to recreate our society based on goodness and truth. ☯☯

