

CORONA TIMES – THE DIVINE PLAN

These are extraordinarily challenging times! The month of March 2020 brought in significant achievements for her professionally, however the tide turned on the personal front on March 15- exactly 2 weeks ago at 12:30p.m.

It was a double whammy for her--- the world at large & our country in particular is dealing with the global pandemic –COVID-19 & to her own shock, her husband suffered a brain stroke soon after landing in Varanasi from Mumbai.

Here's the flashback – March 14, 2020, she was pleading with her husband, not to leave for his scheduled travel next morning given the constant news regarding the spread of Corona Virus. She herself was cancelling her outstation trips & tickets while imploring with him. The writing was on the wall given the measures taken by the Govt. progressively to deal with the virus spread.

He turned deaf ears to her requests, was getting annoyed that she was interfering with his social work plans. He called a few people in Varanasi to check the situation there & then started to pack for the trip. She was concerned, however prayed dearly before going to bed on March 14, 2020.

He left home at 5:45a.m on March 15, 2020 to go to the airport in Mumbai, checked in, had good breakfast at the lounge & sent her a whatsapp message soon after saying he had eaten well & was boarding the flight. She went about the morning chores at home, it being a Sunday.

Suddenly, around 12:30p.m, she received a call from his cellphone, however it wasn't him speaking (: Someone else, introduced himself as Mr.Avinash spoke, mentioning that her husband had collapsed soon after he got off the bus, was unconscious & they were rushing him to the nearest hospital.

Her heart sank...she was speechless! It was as if her world had collapsed...what was she to do now (: She immediately called her husband's best friend & then their family doctor. Each one was asking lots of questions, which she had no answers to.

Their family doctor too had received a similar call from the same person...so he was aware. Fortunately, the doctor's wife belonged to Varanasi & she had family there, whom he requested for help.

Mr. Avinash was the Administrative officer of the Ashram, her husband had gone to assist. Doctor's extended family rushed to help & got him admitted in emergency in a good hospital in Varanasi.

So, with so many odds against- new city, no acquaintance...suddenly timely help arrived in the form of Ghanshyamji who was god sent with money & connections to ensure that he was attended to immediately even though it was a Sunday.

What was she to do...she was frantically calling various people to find out about his condition, if he was safe, if he had received medical aid- however, till late evening she did not get enough information about the MRI & CT scan reports. All she knew was that he was in the ICU.

She neither ate nor slept that night...all she did was PRAY.

Early next morning, she tried to book tickets for Varanasi, so she could leave the same or next day after arranging finances, consulting doctors in Mumbai & making arrangements to bring him back to Mumbai once his condition stabilized. Availability of tickets was a big issue given excess traffic due to the Corona Virus fear since everyone was trying to get back home. She finally managed to get tickets for Wednesday-March 18, 2020.

Meanwhile, her husband's best friend contacted a renowned Neuro-surgeon in Mumbai & took an appointment for them to meet him with all reports & status update. The diagnosis revealed an internal haemorrhage in a vital part in the brain which was caused due to something which he was born with (congenital vascular malfunction).

She finally managed to reach Varanasi on March 18 morning & was aghast seeing his state in the hospital. He was so fit, always led a disciplined life in terms of Yoga, proper food, sleep--- then what had come upon him? Was very very hard for her to come to terms with it.

She immediately started speaking with various doctors & tried to understand the line of treatment, tests to be done over the next few days & how long they may need to be in the hospital. This was even more critical, since she needed to plan next steps about travel from Varanasi to Mumbai accordingly in the wake of increasing stringent measures being adopted by the govt. with each passing day to control the COVID-19 spread- starting with announcement of Janata Curfew etc.

It was a tough situation for her personally since she was all alone in Varanasi in the hospital. There was very little local support except contacting Avinashji or Ghanshyamji on the phone if she needed anything urgently like food, water etc.

Her parents were old & ailing, so she had not shared with them, however was confiding in her elder sister & a close friend. No one except a younger cousin from Delhi offered any help from his relatives. When she informed his elder brother, a doctor who lived in the same building as his, just a floor below - he tried helping as long as she was in Mumbai, however withdrew later since his wife had gone thru a major surgery & was coming back home. He clearly told her that his wife & brother do not get along, hence he would not want to be involved any further. Everyone else, whom his elder brother had informed only kept calling to get updates, but neither consoled her nor offered to help in any manner.

His sister who lives in the US was never fond of her & the 2 did not ever get along. She was a deterrent to their wellbeing in the hospital & even later, since she kept calling the doctors late night India time, asking for updates, challenging their treatment, disturbing the patient thru incessant calls at odd hours. The sister bullied the staff so much, that they were forced to bring the phone to him. Amidst all of this, my friend stood like a rock...the doctors had asked her to keep him away from any stress, repeating the incident details, speaking on the phone etc.

She was communicating only with critical people- the 2 doctors in Mumbai, who were monitoring his progress distantly, her husband's friend & cousin brother & her own sister & friend. The latter were her sounding board at all times especially, when she needed to take tough decisions.

She was in the midst of all of this all by herself- the only 2 things which helped her tide thru this was her ultimate faith in the Supreme Power & her own inner strength. During such times when life's winds blow & seas get stormy, we all need an ANCHOR, which we can be tied to-something solid & true. Such is the power of the DIVINE SUPREME FORCE. She belonged to the holy city of Ujjain- Abode of Lord Mahakaleshwar & this incident happened in Varanasi- the Abode of Lord Vishwanath & both of them were devout Shaivaites.....

She contacted one of his acquaintances, Manishji whom he had accidentally met during his earlier trip to Varanasi during the Ganga Aarti one evening. Manishji visited them in the hospital one evening to enquire about his health & was ready to help in any possible manner during this crisis period. He later told her that there was something mystical about the city of Varanasi & that “Kaal tal gaya”. The worst was averted due to their deep spiritual inclination & the Shaivaite connection.

As the measures to curb COVID-19 toughened in the country, there was shortage of staff in the hospital, only the patient was given food....it was difficult for her to find food & water for herself since all nearby shops, markets etc. were gradually being shut. She was up all day & night looking after him, eventually with no sleep & very little water & hardly any food.

On Saturday March 21st, the senior doctor shared that even they will not be available from Monday onwards since they were asked to stay indoors as per the directive from the Health Ministry. So, they advised a CT Angiography of the brain on Monday, March 23 & asked her to plan to leave from the hospital post that.

He was recovering steadily. The stroke in the right brain had affected the left side of his body including hand, legs, vision & speech.... It was gradually coming back. But, he could barely stand or walk...Physiotherapy had started in the hospital & she was learning it too.

She had already begun working on options – Could she travel to Mumbai by Air? The hospital refused to give a “Fit to Fly” certificate & the airline refused to take him in. He also was not comfortable with air travel given the pressure fluctuations. She planned train travel, however soon after booking tickets, all trains were cancelled by the Govt. to contain the Corona Virus spread; air travel was also cancelled earlier; the doctor advised travel by road halfway to Delhi by road- his cousin brother offered to drive to Varanasi to bring him safe--however, very soon all public & private transport was cancelled & all highways sealed. In essence, every option she was planning for, was failing given the growing effect of COVID-19.

The last option was to travel by Ambulance & there were none available. His sister & brother kept sending emails & conveying messages thru the cousin to transport him to Mumbai thru Air Ambulance. Firstly, he did not agree to it, nor did she have the resources to organise one. Finally, she pleaded with the doctors & organised an ICU ambulance thru the hospital he was admitted in.

The CT Angio scan on Monday, March 23rd showed significant reduction in the size of haematoma which explained his steady recovery. Now, the doctors were restless – one, they were fed up with the sister’s constant interference thru her calls ; secondly, they were short of staff , medicines & other resources & finally, the hospital was soon going to be a centre for isolation of Corona positive patients of Varanasi.

She needed to take the final call! She went ahead & booked the ICU ambulance & decided to travel to Delhi in the night. After, clearing all hospital dues, speaking to all doctors & packing up, she finally managed to leave with him at 7:00p.m. The ICU ambulance was a very expensive proposition, but it was their only chance to leave the hospital & the city; it was equipped with 2 drivers, 1 Intensive care doctor & a ward boy. The transport department wanted her to give an undertaking that she would be responsible & deal with the police & any other obstacles on the way incase they were interrogated or stopped.

Trusting her ANCHOR, she set out on a 16 hour long road journey.

Soonafter, she learnt that the Prime Minister of India had announced a complete lockdown in the country for 21 days from March 25,2020 to April 14,2020.

The good lord’s blessings, good wishes from well wishers, her incessant prayers, strong faith & positive approach is what saw her through in these trying times. She managed to tide thru all difficulties on the way from Varanasi to Delhi in the overnight journey through the lockdown situation & brought him safely to his cousin brother’s house on March 25th, 2020 noon.

She was so exhausted, tired & hungry that she collapsed soon after reaching Delhi. However, she was brave enough in the face of all adversity to tide over this crisis single-handedly. The family doctor later sent her a message saying “well done, any other woman would have wilted under so much adversity”.

It doesn't matter if no one acknowledges her great feat or gives her credit for displaying extraordinary courage & determination- what brings her utmost satisfaction is that she did her best to stand by her dear one in the darkest hour & brought him back into light-LIFE. He is recovering well & though the cause of the haemorrhage is still unclear, doctors have assured that he will be his original self soon!

As she narrated this recent life event to me, she also shared her own reflections which are worth pondering for all of us –

1. A lifetime isn't as long as we think....;
2. Let's not take our lives for granted.....anything can change in a fraction of a second ;
3. Life isn't fair, but its very very precious!
4. The biggest risk in life is not taking any risk ;
5. Always put on YOUR oxygen mask first before helping others ;
6. A good friend is a GOLDMINE ;
7. Ability to "Think on one's feet" is a great quality ;
8. There is a reason for everything in life – events, people etc;
9. Man proposes –God disposes, everything happens as per the Divine plan. So, either your plans fail or merge into the Divine plan ;
- 10.Do your duty honestly to the best of your ability , don't bother about the critics ;
- 11.Your clear conscience with utmost inner satisfaction is the best medal ; stop expecting or waiting for external approval or appreciation ;
- 12.Happiness is a choice & requires hardwork ;
13. Stay positive. Hard times don't last, strong people do.

In the end, "Everything Heals. Your body heals. Your heart heals. The mind heals. Wounds heal. Your soul repairs itself. Your happiness is always going to come back. Bad times don't last".

Date : March 29,2020

Place : New Delhi