

Reflections

from

the

Bench



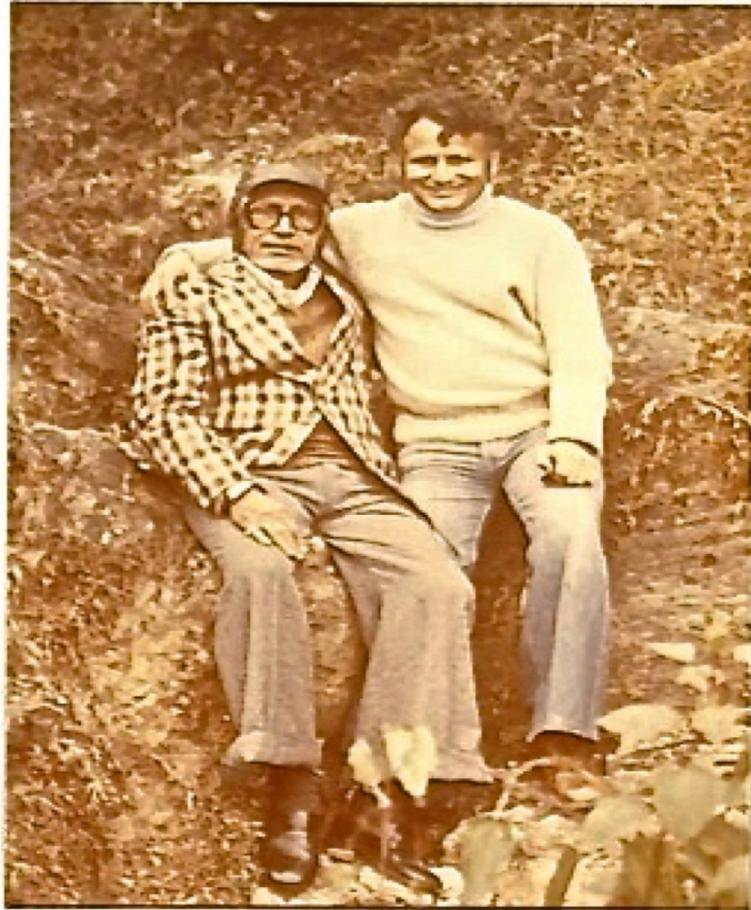
Spiritual Lessons From My Life

Ikram Naqvi

The reflections in this book are dedicated to my father

Inam Husain Naqvi

who was always
loving, kind and forgiving



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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2010 I published my autobiography, 'Safarnama.'

In 2015 I compiled a book of my favourite recipes and called it 'In the Mood for Moghal Food.'

It is available as an E-book on the Amroha International Society website (www.amrohainternationalsociety.com)

This book is a reflection; lessons that I have learnt from life and wish to share with my children, Kamal, Zehra and Yasmin, and to pass on to my grandchildren, Amaan, Aaliya, Zain, Zac, Mia, Zoe and Noah.

I have tried to summarise the most important aspects of life and to do so I have spent many hours on the viewing bench at Pierson's Point, near my home at Tinderbox, Tasmania, Australia, gazing at Bruny Island across the channel and contemplating the contents of this book.

2. SPIRITUALITY

I have been attracted to spirituality as time has passed because it has given me solace and peace. Spirituality gives me a sense of purpose and peace. Spirituality is something often debated and commonly misunderstood. Many people confuse spirituality with religion and bring pre-existing beliefs about religion to discussion about spirituality. Though all religions emphasise spirituality as being an important part of the faith, it is possible to be spiritual without necessarily being part of an organised religious community.

Religion and spirituality can easily be confused but there are some clearly defined differences between the two: religion is a specific set of organised beliefs and practices, usually shared by a community or group. Spirituality is more of an individual practice and is connected with having some sense of peace and purpose. It also relates to the process of developing beliefs around the meaning of life and relationships with others.

People may identify themselves as being any combination of religious and spiritual beliefs but to be religious does not automatically make you spiritual or vice-versa.

I am attracted to mystical spirituality which is based on a desire to move beyond the material world, beyond the senses, ego and even beyond time. This relationship centres on personal relationship and a sense of unity with all things.

One's knowledge assumes spiritual dimensions only when it begins to reveal the existence of the spirit and its magnificence. Proper reflections will reveal that one's actions and interactions, the Spirit, the Subject, alone exists in every thing, everywhere and every time. Spirituality is not a myth or a speculation, as religion can be.

My long contemplation has given me the conviction that it is ultimately the spiritual dimension of life that makes a truly integrated personality.

I believe that there is a kind of nourishment our souls crave for, even as our bodies need the right foods, sunshine, and exercise. Without that spiritual nourishment, our souls remain stunted and undeveloped.

Sufism and Spirituality

I have become more and more attracted to Sufism because it is synonymous with love, boundless goodness, philosophy, tolerance and humanity to heal lacerated hearts. It advocates peaceful co- existence for all faiths; it inspires to raise life from the mundane to the spiritual.

Buddhist Perspective of Spiritual life

Buddhist perspectives of spiritual life also appeal to me. To practice Buddhist spirituality one need not subscribe to a particular set of creedal statements. It is not necessary to believe in God or deny God's existence. Live the holy life, says Buddhism; holding particular beliefs is not paramount.

Clearly, noble persons have held all sorts of beliefs; saints have been christians, and jewish, muslims and hindu, atheist and humanist. The heart of spirituality in Buddhism is the quest for wisdom and compassion. Wisdom and compassion arise together. As we become more

compassionate we become wiser, our compassionate natures are more fully revealed. Wisdom and compassion are innate. We have learned to act and think in self-centred ways for so long that selfishness now seems natural. By acting compassionately and wisely, it becomes easier to be compassionate and wise. Morality is rooted in our very natures as persons. We ought to act in a moral way because it is in our essential nature to be compassionate.

Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician, exhorted his students, 'First, do no harm'. Master Kong the Chinese sage whose teaching became the foundation of Confucianism, told his followers: 'What you do not want done to you, do not do to others'. Imagine the kind of world this would be if we followed the precept to do no harm. Five precepts of Buddhism enjoin us to refrain from false speaking, Wholesome speech encourages us to speak only kind words and to speak them clearly. Harsh and bitter language, sarcasm and meaningless chatter are not conducive to the habits of compassion.

Meditation

Wholesale concentration is the discipline of meditation; wholesome mindfulness is the practice of meditative awareness in daily life. Meditation and meditative awareness create the space for insight and clarity to occur. The thoughts of a clearer mind are free of attachment thoughts, hatred, and confusion; the thoughts of an insightful mind are compassionate and selfless. Such constitute wholesome thinking.

Spirituality & Yoga

Yoga is a holistic package for happy living. It provides techniques to unite the body, mind and breath, and connects the inner core of the spiritual aspect of our lives.

The mind often oscillates between the past and future causing worry and anticipation. Desires, fear, cravings, aversions grip the mind. To remove any conflicts in the mind, it is essential to bring the mind to the present moment.

Yoga cleans the body and mind of accumulated stress and negative impressions. Practising yoga for many years has given me stress relief and release of emotion. It creates clarity of mind and improves body balance and flexibility making one healthy, strong and alert.

Spirituality gives inner strength to manage difficult situations. Being established in the self, your inner pace spreads outwards to make you a more responsible human being full of caring, sharing and love. Meditation, yoga cleanses even the deepest layers of your conscious, leaving you rested and refreshed. Yoga has helped me gain perspective, recognising that our role in life has greater value than just what we do every day. It has helped me to become less dependent on material things and establish a greater purpose. I see spirituality as a way of coping with change or uncertainty.

Success

What 'success' means is unique and personal to each of us. Yet most of us still live in a society where success is determined by what 'people out there' have decided success is. In fact an inward feeling (often hidden) of 'not feeling good enough' because of 'what other people will think' is one of the most common concerns that I see amongst awakening people. Personal worth is still frequently measured by what we have to show for what we have done: material goods, exams passed, property gained, certificates achieved, goals attained or targets reached. By far the biggest determining factor of success is the degree to which a person is accepted and approved by others.

Enlightenment is found through that which is beyond the material world, through that which is the depths of our heart.

"The ideals which have guided me on my way and time after time given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Truth, Goodness and Beauty. The ordinary objects of human endeavour - property, outward success, luxury - have always seemed to me to be compatible." " Only do what stirs your soul." **Albert Einstein**

" Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful." "Remember the enormous value in ' the little ordinary moments ' that often offer our greatest spiritual growth." **Albert Schweitzer**

" I long to accomplish great and noble tasks, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker." **Helen Keller**

Heaven is within - let it shine....

" Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens." Kahlil Gibran

Live life to the fullest

Live every day with a fresh start...

Be true to who you are....

Quit complaining.....

Be proactive....

Rather than think " what if ", think "next time".....

Rather than think "what if", think "next time".....

Focus on WHAT versus HOW

Create your own opportunities.....

Live more consciously each day

" Your time is limited, don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is adopting the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinion drown your own inner voices, And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition, they somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary "--- Steve Jobs

How do you feel about your life today? Are you living every day in exuberance? Do you love what you're doing? Are you excited every single moment? Are you looking forward to what's coming up next? Are you living your best life?

If your answer to any above is a no, maybe or not sure, that means you're not living your life to the fullest. Which really shouldn't be the case, because your life experience is up to you to create. Why settle for anything less than what you can get? You deserve nothing but the best.

Following is a list of principles I have tried to apply to my life.

- Live every day with a fresh new start. Don't be held back by what happened in the past.
- Be true to what you are. Stop trying to please other people or be someone else.
- Quit complaining.
- Be proactive.
- Rather than think "what if" think "next time". Don't think about things you can't change (namely what has happened and thoughts of other people) or unhappy things because these are disempowering. Instead focus on things you can action upon. That's is the most constructive thing you can do in any situation.
- Focus on WHAT versus HOW. Focus us on WHAT you want first, before you think about HOW to do it. Anything is possible, as long as you set your mind, heart and soul to it.
- Create your own opportunities.
- Live more consciously each day.
- Discover your life purpose.
- Set your own life commandments.
- Let go of relationships that do not serve you. That means negative people, dishonest people, people who do not respect you, people who are overly critical and relationships that prevent you from growing.

- Spend more time with people who enable you - like-minded people who are positive, sensitive, successful, achievers.
- Connect with old friends. There is no limit to the number of friends you can have. Reach out to people from the past.
- Do a kind deed a day. What is something you can do today that will make the world a better place?
- Help other people who are in need. Volunteer services you are good at.
- Help people when they least expect it, without reason.
- Give more value than you receive. There is so much unspeakable joy that comes from giving. And when you keep giving, you will find that you actually receive a lot more in return, in spades.
- Be clear in your objectives. What is the end goal you seek?
- Don't criticise or judge others. Respect others for who they are.
- Remember that the only person you can change is yourself.
- Accept and enjoy change.
- Be grateful.
- Don't be afraid to take risks; but take with due thought.
- Remember that a person learn most through making mistakes and experiencing disappointments.
- Be your best self. It is only through being the best we can be that we live our life to the fullest.
- Love yourself.
- Love others.
- Love life.

Quote

" I am always doing things I can't do. That is how I get to do them"--- Pablo Picasso



3. KINDNESS

If kindness is the act of being kind as defined by the Oxford dictionary, it means "caring about others; gentle, friendly and generous". However, I believe that definition can be extended to a message from one heart to another, an act of love, an unspoken "I care" statement". Kindness, when allowed to flourish, is an all-persuasive, all-transcending, flowing current that sustains mankind and is absolutely fundamental within our society and world.

It is not appropriate to try and measure kindness at all. It is far too large and pervasive a thing in lives of people to be pinned down on some sort of pseudo-numerical scale of 'one-to-kind'. The significance of an act of kindness is subjective rather than objective - it might mean nothing to one person while profoundly affecting another. Following on logically from this, in being able to stand alongside any other in terms of importance. Each kind act is simply an act of humanity and is as valid as any other in terms of its contribution to fellow creatures and the world that we live in. In our ability to be kind, we are all equal.

It is essential to establish that a true act of kindnesses is something that is done without expectation of something in return - lest it be confused with something else. For example, at a glance, it seems that kindness is widely and regularly practiced throughout the animal kingdom. Take the chimpanzee that spends hours of its day grooming others around it, something that seems like a kind and selfless act. However, this is done not fully of kindness, but rather in the expectation that it will be groomed in return and also to affirm its position in the hierarchy of the troupe.

The ability to demonstrate kindness is the responsibility of each and every single human who wishes to be part of a society. And we do not only have responsibility to be kind to each other. As inhabitants of this earth we also inherit a huge responsibility to respect and care for the environment and its creatures (now more than ever), and even small acts of kindness can have positive results.

4. HONESTY

The following are benefits of honesty:

1. Honesty brings good health and happiness. While practicing honesty in life, you are free from worries of being caught of the act of dishonesty. Thus you will be free from anxiety and stress.
2. Honesty helps establishing peace of mind. Dishonest people live in fear.
3. Society loves and respects those they are honest.
4. Honesty helps promoting goodwill around you.
5. Your honesty will help making this world a better place.

5. INTEGRITY

Integrity helps to build trust. Others can count on you because you will do what you say you will do. It helps you build healthier, stronger and more satisfying relationships.

6. SELFLESSNESS

Selflessness means putting others' interest above your own. It requires the ability to see beyond your own personal concerns and empathise with others.

7. COMPASSION

Compassion is genuine concern for others' sufferings and the will to remove the pain from them. It brings great happiness when you can practice compassion enough to remove other's sufferings. Dalai Lama puts it like this: " If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy practise compassion".

8. FORGIVENESS

Some time in life we forgive something or someone. We know what it feels like when we can really forgive: relieved and uplifting. Uplifting because it takes great courage to forgive. It takes a strong person to say sorry and even stronger person to forgive.

9. DECISIVENESS

Being decisive helps eliminate anxiety.

10. GENEROSITY

Generosity is the quality of being kind and understanding, the willingness to give others things that have value. When we give, we feel we do good and feel kind and worthy.

11. AGEING

Over recent years, improved healthcare and more educational awareness has meant that people are living longer. More people are taking better care of themselves, which means they are able to enjoy a more active and fulfilled life well beyond retirement age. Maintaining and improving health depends a lot on the choices people make as they get older. By adapting healthy habits and sticking to them, many people are able to still lead reasonably active, independent lives well into the 70s and even beyond.

Eating healthily is probably one of the most important factors in maintaining our health into old age. A balance diet consists of fruit, vegetables and whole grain carbohydrates. If you are carrying extra weight, now is the time to finally shed the extra kilograms as

the extra kilograms as older people, in particular, become much more susceptible to physical ailments if they are overweight.

Exercise, even if that just means an hour's brisk walking a day, can also improve the quality of your life for years to come. For those who feel the need to work out, a well defined fitness program concentrating on rebuilding muscle mass can also make bones stronger.

It is never too late to change bad habits. Even if you have been a smoker for most of your adult life. If you quit, you significantly reduce the risk of suffering from heart disease within a year of quitting cigarettes.

Many of us tend to associate old age with a decline in our mental faculties and, while we are more at risk of suffering from mental conditions the older we get, it is still possible to stave off these kind of effects if we keep our brains stimulated.

Many older people in retirement these days do not necessarily see it as a time to start slowing down and relaxing but as an opportunity to learn new things. It could be attending night classes, to learn more about a particular hobby or interest. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of elderly people feeling comfortable using the Internet to learn even more things to stimulate their minds.

12. ATTITUDE

People who tend to age better are those who see the entire ageing process as an opportunity for further growth and not as any kind of barrier to enjoying life. Those who take the rough with the smooth and remain flexible and accept that life is full of constant changes which they are happy to embrace, seem to fare far better than those who became resigned to getting older and feel that the clock is ticking over.

13. STAYING HEALTHY

Laziness can often result if you are not feeling in great shape physically. You may be eating unhealthy food and/ or drinking too much alcohol or not taking enough exercise. Remember that our physical and emotional well being go hand in hand and that you need to adopt a healthy physical regime and care about yourself in order to become mentally focused and motivated.

Very few of us ever get things handed to us on a plate in life and it takes effort and determination to get the kinds of things we desire out of life. Procrastination is one of the most destructive traits that can affect our lives dramatically for the worst.

Overcoming it is probably one of the most important steps you can take in your personal growth development and to get motivated to achieve your goals and to let go of your 'old' self and ways of doing things (or not doing them) is the first step to achieving this.

14. MY FAVOURITE QUOTES

The following quotations have been a great source of inspiration for me:

Spirituality

"Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them".

Dalai Lama

Religion & God

" God has no religion"

Mahatma Gandhi

"My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness".

Dalai Lama

"God is a comedian playing to an audience that is too afraid to laugh".

Voltaire

" I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purpose are modelled after our own-- a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbour such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotism ".

Albert Einstein

" I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world."

Mahatma Gandhi

" The word 'God' is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honourable, but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish.

No interpretation, no matter how subtle, can (for me) change this."

Albert Einstein

"I am not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Woody Allen

Truth

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

Mark Twain

"Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't."

Mark Twain

Compassion & Happiness

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

Dalai Lama

"Happiness depends upon ourselves."

Aristotle

"Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your actions."

Dalai Lama

"The root cause of all goodness lies in the soil of appreciation for goodness."

Dalai Lama

Knowledge

"The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge."

Stephen Hawking

"Always forgive, but never forget, else you will be prisoner of your own hatred, and doomed to repeat your mistakes forever."

Will Zeus

Education

"Live as you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Nelson Mandela

"The educated differ from the uneducated as much as the living differ from the dead,"

Aristotle

Love

"You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams."

Dr Seuss

"Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

Alfred Lord Tennyson

"The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Where there is love there is life."

Mahatma Gandhi

Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do--- but how much love we put into that action".

Mother Teresa

Hope

"You may say I am a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one."

John Lennon

"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

Martin Luther King Jr

Success

"Try not to become a man of success. Rather become a man of value."

Albert Einstein

"It is hard to fail, but it is worse never to have tried to succeed."

Theodore Roosevelt

The following random quotes of famous people are very inspiring to me.

"We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean will be less because of that missing drop".

Mother Teresa

"Life is about making an impact, not making money."

Kevin Kruse

"I attribute my success to this: I never gave or took any excuse."

Florence Nightingale

"Insanity: doing same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

Albert Einstein

"The true measure of success is how many times you can bounce back from failure."

Stephen Richards

"The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity."

Amelia Earhart

"The mind is everything. What you think you become."

Buddha

"I belong to no religion. My religion is Love. Every heart is my temple."

Romi

"Listen with ears of tolerance. See through eyes of compassion. Speak with language of love."

Romi

"A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can let alone."

Romi

"Let go the past and go for the future."

Romi

"Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people."

Eleanor Roosevelt

"The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will."

Vince Lombardi

"Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life - think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success."

Swami Vivekananda

"Developing success from failures. Discouragement and failures are the two surest stepping stones to success."

Dale Carnegie

"Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by things you did."

Mark Twain

"It is not the years in your life but the life in your dreams that counts."

Adlai Stevenson

"It's only when we truly know and understand that we have limited time on earth -- and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up-- that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had"

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

"The opinion that people have of you is their problem not yours"

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

"The days of life pass as passing clouds on the sky: do good things as long as you are alive."

Ali Ibne Ali Talib

"Life is not always about understanding but also about doing good things."

Ali Ibne Ali Talib

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