Columns
Ministry



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Crossing a river or stream to reach certain villages used to be part of my local travels when I served in a village in the interior of India a few years ago. And many times when I reached midway in the stream, my knees used to tremble out of fear and self-doubt, and I would ask myself, "Will I be able to make it to the other side?"

It looks like that I am not alone in asking this kind of question. The pandemic crisis has caused many women domestic workers to raise this same question, with sighs and tears, as they face loss of jobs, food and fuel price escalation, unfair public distribution systems, violence and abuse in families, and gender stereotypes.

Amid these harsh realities, when women begin to seek alternatives — including the possibility of entrepreneurial activities — they turn towards me in doubt. My response has been an affirmative nod to them, helping them see what they fail to perceive.

I help them realize that in the adversity of the pandemic the process of "reverse osmosis" (an external pressure to reverse the natural flow of pure solvent) is also taking place within them and around them. For instance, in my experience the male members of the families sometimes have no other option but to let go of their ego and controlling attitude, and allow their women to be trend-setters, which was taboo in earlier times. The external pressures, especially the pandemic, have now become an impetus, forcing women and others in the families to rethink their roles and responsibilities from new perspectives, moving far away from stereotypes. Women have started realizing and using their innate gifts like never before.

Accompanying these women, I realize that this mindset reversal has now become irreversible, not just limited to the pandemic era, and will create a lasting impact. I have been experiencing a sense of reverence for these women who have begun making it to the other side — on the path of freedom, equality and dignity.

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I have made a similar observation, but this time from the perspective of women from the middle class and upper middle class. They had a similar question. They also asked, "Will we be able to make it to the other side?" But the only difference here is that this question did not arise from a real need or survival, but from a "myth of arrival." The "myth of arrival," or "arrival fallacy," is a concept proposed by Tal Ben-

Shahar, author of *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*. It refers to the false thinking that arrival at a certain point will bring with it all happiness.

Psychology Today defines the myth of arrival as "the idea that once you have 'arrived' at a certain point in your life, everything will fall into place, and the life you have waited for will finally begin." This idea, that then there will be "happiness ever after," is untrue. These women, unaware of this trap, continue to think that once this pandemic is over, life would be "normal" and they would be happy.

But this belief that things will automatically get better once the pandemic is over can be as damaging as thinking that things will never improve. It is not right to postpone happiness to a future date by basing it on that which is to come, and it can be detrimental to give too much power to this crisis and allow it to control one's life.

I remembered that once when I was being controlled by my fears in midstream, and I asked myself, "*Will I be able to make it to the other side*?" I felt the gentle hands of a colleague on my shoulders, assuring me of her presence as she sensed my fears.

Then I learned for life that it is not about arriving or reaching the destination that matters so much. It is the silent, unassuming presence of a fellow human being walking beside you, in the proverbial journey of wading through the shallow or deep waters of life. This assuring presence says nothing, but means a lot to the one that needs it the most, as if to whisper, "*We will be able to make it to the other side!*"