Columns
Spirituality



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A few months ago, a friend of mine received an award for her entrepreneurship skills. She is a kind person who reaches out to others with compassion. She also provided great support to the social center where I conducted programs for women on entrepreneurial skills. Therefore, I decided to give her a call to congratulate her on this occasion.

When I couldn't reach her by phone, I sent her a note of appreciation. I praised her for both the award she received and the person she is. The following day, she returned my call, apologized for the delay, and shared feeling overwhelmed that I still remembered her.

My "appreciation note" apparently meant a lot to her. After exchanging a few pleasantries, our conversation turned to personal issues. She confided that over the past few months, she had been struggling with difficulties on various fronts. This left her feeling a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness in life. Despite receiving her award, she did not feel happy and was, in fact, feeling more desperate than ever.

Against this backdrop, my little message of appreciation meant a great deal to her, infusing her with a new ray of hope. She felt enlightened and inspired to start anew. As I listened to her, I was astonished by the power of this "little message." I had no idea that what I considered a simple congratulatory note was actually a source of inspiration!

How often do we pay attention to such "inspirational" moments? Though we use this word quite often in our day-to-day vocabulary, we seldom realize its significance. The word "inspiration" or "inspire" is derived from its Latin "*inspirare*" which means "to breathe into." Inspiration is the act of "breathing into" — bringing new energy into one's own life or the lives of others, breathing life, abundance, wellness, goodness, kindness, peace, etc.

Deeper still, it is the breath of the divine Spirit breathing into us in the form of inspirations. It is a divine illuminating spark — an invisible force of energy that sustains us in our weakest moments. It rests at the core of our being and prompts our actions towards all that is generative and creative. Wherever it is sown and wherever it flows, it generates life and replenishes the dried areas! Those who receive it cannot hold it unto themselves, for it is always "outpouring." With whomever it is shared, they change for the better and feel transformed. It nourishes

the soul of the giver and the receiver.

In it we live, move and have our being, though many at times, we are unaware of it. The famous mystic and poet Rumi says, "The inspiration you seek is already within you; be silent and listen." This is all it takes to make room for divine inspirations. We need to cultivate an inner disposition of stillness and attentiveness to listen to our inspirations. Such attentiveness will increase our capacity to see the fingerprints of the divine in the ordinariness of everyday life. Inspirations also emerge in the ordinariness of our life experiences, and quite often, they are unassuming and may even look "insignificant."

There are different levels of inspiration, but the noblest is the level at which one is no longer self-centered. At this level, one is inspired to tap one's own creativity and giftedness for a "larger purpose" or a "bigger scheme of life." Such a person looks at the final end, but is aware that the process is much more important than the end itself. The process gives the person the energy to persist, even if the end is not seen in one's own lifetime.

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Furthermore, what I have noticed about people who have inspired me is that they are not preoccupied with inspiring me or others! They simply live their lives and are oblivious of their own capacity to inspire and influence others. They are unassuming and often disappear into the shadows where no one hears of or speaks about them. They are neither celebrities nor popular figures, nor are their names recorded in history. Yet, their level of inspiration inspires others.

What I also noticed in such people is their capacity to "hold themselves" during periods of "turbulence" — hurdles, sufferings, difficulties, misunderstandings, inconveniences, etc. They do not submit to their will to "quit," rather they face their turbulences and sustain the fight to the very end. Not quitting is a countercultural testimony with which they bear witness to the world.

What I admire most is their nonconformity to "instant" patterns found in today's cultures. Our culture today seems to be driven by the demand or yearning for instant success or accomplishment, instant solutions, instant decisions, instant relationships, and instant quitting. This tendency towards "instantness" thrives

among non-reflective people, and we are left to witness instant reactions of hatred, violence and polarization. Many inspirational people, however, are reflective and driven by a passion for life-giving values such as peace and harmony.

Thankfully, we have many such ordinary persons today who are nonconformists to "trendy cultures" and thus make a difference today. They do not harbor feelings of fear, prejudice, anger, unforgiveness, suspicion, apathy, lust, greed, or jealousy towards others. In our midst are people who strive for interrelatedness and value relationships with one another and the entire cosmos. They work toward compassionate coexistence. However, since we have been conditioned to look up only to heroes, grand events, persons in authority, and crowd-pullers, we often overlook the ordinary.

That friend of mine reminded me that all that one needs is to "look deep" and inspiration emerges even from the ordinary, for the extraordinary is hidden deep within the ordinary. I learned this lesson that day and I am inspired!