



Newsletter ~ Vallabh Vidya Mandir ~



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An Expression...

During the winter months, with its long nights, cold weather, and snow-covered mountain ranges, nature's rhythm is unique. Winter's arrival signals animals to hunker down into their hibernation period. Hibernation is a state of inactivity and metabolic depression in animals characterized by lower body temperature, slower breathing, and lower metabolic rate, which allows them to conserve energy. Hibernation may last several days or several weeks, depending on the species, ambient temperature, and the time of year. To me, hibernation is like meditation – a deep sleep. Something is growing inside. Although externally it may appear that there is no movement or growth, in reality the organism is growing immensely!

Meditation is a mental discipline by which one attempts to get beyond the conditioned, "thinking" mind into a deeper state of relaxation and awareness. Meditation often involves turning attention to a single point of reference. It is recognized as a component of

almost all religions, and has been practiced for over 5,000 years.

I have often noticed that during the winter months all the plants, the bulbs and roots may seem dead. In reality, however, they are preserving themselves and gaining strength, buried under the cold earth. With spring's arrival they will sprout young leaves and will grow again.

We all need these quiet moments of growing internally, within our consciousness, and into our deeper self. Often we must shut ourselves away from worldly noise, attractions and distractions to reach our goals.

So as we, during this winter, find our own caves and burrows to hibernate in, we hope as all creatures do, that upon the arrival of spring we will be rejuvenated. Perhaps we will emerge as more wholesome, stronger, and motivated beings after we delve into our selves and nurture the tiny planted seed of potential this winter.

Seventeenth century English writer Jeremy Taylor once said,

"Meditation is the tongue of the soul and the language of our spirit." So with the hope that you may be able to nourish your soul and guide your spirit this winter season, I wish you very happy holidays and a happy new year!

Phalguni Kikani

No Classes

**Dec 21st & 28th 2008
(Christmas Break)**

Classes will resume on

January 4th, 2009

See you on 4th!!

The March is On..

Each month I go through my collection of good write-ups and select the one that I consider educational and or inspirational. The real purpose of the educational program at VVM is to help our children build a good value system and help them learn valuable lessons. One can learn a



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lot from others experiences.

STOP TO LISTEN

Raj, a young and very successful executive, had just bought his first Mercedes and was joyfully driving around the city. Suddenly and brick sailed out and – thump – it smashed into the Merc's back window. Loosing his temper, Raj slammed the brakes and spun his car around to where the culprit, a 10-year-old child stood.

'What the hell do you think you're doing?' he yelled, adding "That's my new Merc and that brick you threw is going to cost you a lot of money.

Why did you throw it?"

The kid was in tears and explained. "I'm sorry but I didn't know what else to do! I threw the brick because otherwise you wouldn't stop. It's about my brother. He is crippled and moves around in a wheelchair. He's rolled off the curb and is hurt. He is too heavy for me and I can't lift him. Please help me," he pleaded.

Moved beyond words, the young executive tried desperately to

swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. Straining, he lifted the young man back into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts, checking to see that everything was fine. He then watched the younger brother push him down the sidewalk toward their home. Raj decided to keep the glass pieces as a reminder not to go so fast that someone had to throw a brick at him to get his attention.

Seniors Classes....

Free Classes for Seniors

Sundays at 10 AM

Taught by Dr Anand Vyas

We live a fast paced life and rarely stop to see whether we miss out on someone who may need our help along the way. Don't run so fast that you stop being compassionate and empathetic towards others. Who knows, when you call out for help may be there'll be no one to hear.

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

The Dalai Lama

"Wars begin in the minds of man, and in those minds, love and compassion would have built the defenses of peace."

U Thant

Sureshbhai Patel

..Important

If you are not receiving my e-mail, please send an e-mail to

kikanis@earthlink.net

Phalguni Kikani

Special Thanks..

Friday, Nov 21st, was VVM's very first lock-in. A lock-in is an event in which kids spend a night having fun and games. The lock-in was held at our Mandir. The kids had pizza in the evening and woke up to a variety of bagels and cream cheese. We played board games, ubhi kho, and hide-and-go-seek,



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while the adults played antakshari. Then we all huddled up for some movies during the night. While it was cold outside, we were all warm and well fed, and had a great time. As an attendee, I dub the event a success. This would not have been possible without the support of Phalguni Kikani, Preeti Parikh, Manisha Vyas, Pragna & Kishor Bhalara, and Dinaben & Dhirubhai Gajjar who were brave enough to spend the night with us kids. Thanks for everyone's support, and we all look forward to the next one.

Raveena Bhalara

Kids Corner..

What segregates the people of the world, the reason why we aren't all "Earth-lings" or why we aren't often considered "World citizens" (environmentally that term is starting to arise). The reason why - things are so expensive in London, saris take lessons to learn how to wear, women in Africa shave their head, peasants in rural China count jars of pickled veggies until they marry their daughter off, and the reason Buffalo wings aren't

really made out of buffalo (and the reason there were never any Buffalo in Buffalo, New York to begin with) is really just due to one reason. That reason is culture.

Culture makes us an American, an African, an Indian, an Australian. Culture determines our dress, politics, rituals and currency. Culture determines what we are and what we do. Culture becomes who we are. The reason Mahatma Gandhi remained so strong was because his mind and heart was infiltrated with his culture, and that is how he managed to fight continuously. Culture affects us with the customs, appreciation, and that moment of truth.

I grew up with in Indian family in modern day America. As a kid, I knew I was an Indian and was expected to behave like one. I was told I was Hindu, and was expected to be a Hindu, however I was never told what any of this meant. I was never told what it meant to be an Indian or a Hindu.

I knew that even using my fingers and toes I wouldn't be able to have nearly enough phalanges to count all the gods and goddesses. I knew that I couldn't eat meat (a

decision that I was left to make by myself). I knew that Indian's got together way too often. I knew chanting was fun, but the silence that followed was often not. I knew that Indian weddings were the only places where you could never ever be overdressed.

As a kid, I knew all this, but I didn't know what it meant. I didn't realize that the reason we have many gods, is the notion that no one is perfect and you can't learn everything from one person. I didn't realize that getting married to an Indian meant getting much more than an "I do". Culture comes with appreciation, and it's the appreciation that I had never fostered.

Appreciation is not something that is slapped onto you like a name or frilly clothes your parents shoved you into as a child. Appreciation can be a gradual understanding, or it could be a life-changing event. For me, it was the latter.

Indian's are known for cows, dances, and extravagant clothing. One of the lesser-known things about us however is the music. I was the Indian, who dreamt to be a ballerina, figure skater and Frank



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Sinatra back-up dancer.

I have tried Indian singing and dancing but I couldn't develop enough interest. I have friends who are experts on the southern violin, friends who perform two-hour solo dance recitals and friends who have moved in with their guru's, (teachers) for a week, just to practice their art harder. None of this was of any interest to me until very recently. My dad grew up in India and came hand packaged and stamped with the best and worst of us. He often takes me to these concerts and shows that guarantee me a 2-hour nap. Although each Indian classical artist's (and Bollywood actor's) local arrival always perk up the ears of the Indian's, I noticed that this particular artist caught more attention. His name is Zakir Hussein and he's said to be the best Tabla player in the world.

Tabla is an Indian percussion instrument which comes in a set of two - a larger one, and a smaller one, and is made out of wood, animal skin, and aluminum. Tabla is played by hand and is used as an accompaniment in dances,

religious ceremonies, weddings, or simply classical music. Of course, my dad jumped at a chance for tickets to this concert, and yet again, I was dragged along. I went with high expectations, given all the fuss that was being made over these two tiny little drums. Amazingly, I was not disappointed. Zakir Hussein was accompanying a band, which was supposed to meet a multicultural standard. I saw the mariachi, I heard the Nigerian "talking" drum, I noticed the modern American drum set, but I couldn't keep my eyes off the tabla. The way Hussein's fingers moved, they became a blur, his beats strung the program together, and the inflection that they posed became a story. During the soft beats I was in a rainforest, under the sea, with the dolphins and as his beats sped up, I rose to the skies jumped off clouds, and attacked a shark. The chaotic mixes of cultures were put together with Hussein's two little drums. In those two hours, my nap forgotten, I was taken to another world to experience magic. What I felt was culture. *My culture.*

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The nation's culture resides in hearts

and the soul of the people, no culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive." Culture not only ties people together, but it takes people to bring about a culture.

Cultures are shared and similar, yet unique in their own way. They all have gatherings, festivities, politics, and religions. They all have music, and magic we experience. So many opportunities and aspects make each culture unique. And to the world it may be just one other exciting day, but to you, it may be the world. And with that one experience, we become our culture. As Gandhi says, "In a gentle way you can shake the world"

Raveena Bhalara