



Spring 2012

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INDIA

Coming to stay here every year is like peeling an onion. Each year I think that I am beginning to understand the subtleties of a different way of life, different customs, different languages, different ways of relating to each other and the outside environment, and then another layer drops off and I realise that I know so little. But people say that the English were in India for three hundred years and after all that time they still didn't understand India. So I've got a few more years to go!

NEWS

The Foundation continues to consolidate its work. The garden at Advaita Garden School, where there are over 220 children enrolled in eight classes, is now providing us with freshly grown vegetables. The guest room is now finished, thanks to our generous donors who contributed enough to plaster the walls and ceiling and install windows and doors last year. The toilet/shower room is being installed soon. Yesterday one of the cows gave birth to another calf – at last a female!

Last month we hosted eight young visitors from Delhi who have been doing some charitable work of their own and wanted to come and see the Foundation in action. They have formed a group called 'Aashayein' – you can follow them on Facebook. It is inspiring to meet such keen young people committing themselves to helping others who are not so fortunate. Last week they returned for another visit and also went to see Isha the cancer patient at Tarini Cancer Hospital.



Kd, Isha and Sateesh, the Childline co-ordinator

Fund raising has been successful for Isha's treatment. Many thanks to those of you who have sent us money. It is being well used.

It is heartening to know also that increasingly money is being raised from donors in India. Sateesh and the Childline team organised a press campaign for Isha's treatment in Alwar and 'Aashayein' have helped a lot with raising money. They have been posting regular updates about his progress on their facebook page. The medical team at Tarini have decided to try and save Isha's leg – he has received the required blood transfusions and is presently undergoing a course of chemotherapy. Isha has Ewings Sarcoma which is actually easier to treat than other cancers. We will know soon how successful the chemotherapy has been and what surgery will be necessary. The Hospital regularly has patients who cannot afford the necessary treatment and I shall be applying to Trusts here in UK who work specifically with cancer for financial help. We are also sending money to pay for continuing treatment for an adult woman with breast cancer.

Work is almost finished on building a new classroom at Kalsara Bagh village. Money for this project has been donated by the One World Children's Fund in USA. Such work brings with it its own problems, not least that the villagers kept changing their mind about whether they wanted to loan us the land or not, even though work had already started. The present school is situated right on the main road which runs through the centre of the village. The new classroom is on the edge of the village well away from this noise and bustle.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

On January 1st/2nd the Foundation had its annual New Year's Day Study Trip. It's one of the few occasions in the year when everyone can be together in a more informal way. The Foundation has three groups of workers – the Childline Team (about fifteen), the Bodhivriksha Group, comprising about twenty teachers from the different schools, and the gaushala (cowshed) and maintenance group (including the driver– about six.) There is quite a lot of crossover between the groups and everyone knows each other.

We visited two other N.G.O's (non-government organisations – the equivalent of a charity in UK) in the region of Shekhawati in Rajasthan. Kasturba Public Charitable Trust runs an ashram with 48 children as residents, some of them parentless and many of them disabled. Asha Ka Jharna is a project which involves itself with special education especially mentally challenged and hard of hearing children. It was fascinating being introduced to sign language in a completely different 'spoken language' situation. I would have liked to stay longer in both these places. The children were eager to learn and meet new people and were a delight to be with. The region is famous for its havellis (mansions based on Mughal architecture often elaborately painted) and we visited some stunning examples.

We had an interesting overnight stay at the home of Karan, one of the Childline workers. We had intended to stay in a dharamshala (accommodation often connected with a temple or ashram, especially for pilgrims and devotees) but there was some confusion over the booking and when we arrived there they couldn't accommodate us. So Karan rang his family, said he had a few friends who needed somewhere to sleep for the night, and duly turned up half an hour later with forty five people in tow. Indians cope with these numbers admirably. Extended families often run into such figures and when there is a big family occasion such as a wedding or funeral, accommodation needs to be organised for such numbers. We had a comfortable night in spite of it being cold at that time of the year, and it was far more hospitable and interesting than staying in an impersonal dharamshala.

JANUARY 14th

January 14th was Maker Sankranti, when the school hosts an annual wrestling tournament. Hundreds of boys and men come from miles around to either participate or watch. Events start in the morning with children competing to win five rupees. By the afternoon the men have taken over and eventually the winner of the final earns thousands of rupees. Traditionally it's a 'male-only' affair. I'm not quite sure what the women and girls get up to, apart from enjoying a male-free village for the afternoon. Finance for the occasion comes from the villagers themselves. (When there is an election looming it is very well supported as the different candidates vie to woo the villagers with their generosity!)

JANUARY 28th

January 28th was Basant Panchami which traditionally honours Saraswati, the goddess of music and learning. Advaita Garden hosted a music concert by local classical musicians.

FEBRUARY 14th

Valentine's Day – February 14th – is another occasion when most of the Foundation workers get together – this time for a more formal meeting when everyone presents a report on their work over the past year.

TRUSTEES

Satvikananda and Joanna, two of our other trustees from Towards Nirvana, have both visited in the last three months. They especially enjoyed visiting the new hostel at Paitpur which is run by the Foundation. This hostel, which I mentioned in the last newsletter, is financed by the government. It is an example of how the Foundation has to constantly adapt to not only the needs and requirements of the area but also the effects of new government legislation concerning the workings of NGO's and education.

Whilst writing this I was surrounded by piles of books intended for a new project in the village of Sodabagh. Here there is a government school in which the Foundation will be running a library as well as a class for children who need special attention.



Satvikananda at Ram Ghar School in December.

MONEY.

Here in UK we are sending off our first claim for gift aid to the Inland Revenue. Such a lot of work has been involved in this not least because in the early days our record keeping was not the most efficient! Special thanks to Adrian Wallace for giving so much of his time to prepare our gift-aid claim.. He has had to postpone the 'fine tuning' of our new website in order to devote time to preparing our application to the Inland Revenue and improving our record-keeping. This will be useful as in the next financial year, with the addition of Gift Aid, we will have an income exceeding £25,000. This means that we have to have our accounts inspected and approved by an independent examiner.

With the help of Company Solutions we recently applied to fifty charitable trusts for funding. If anyone has time and is interested in helping with fund-raising there is a very good course on Legacy Fundraising which is run by Gareth Edwards, from Company Solutions, on April 17th in London. We can pay the course fee (£99) for anyone willing to take on this potentially lucrative fund-raising aspect of our work. (Contact KD if you are interested or send e-mail to towardsnirvana@gmx.co.uk)

FACEBOOK

For all you Facebook fans. A reminder that Nirvana Bodhisattva, the director of the Foundation has a page on Facebook where he regularly uploads photos of events. Nirvanavan Foundation also has a page. (I also have one –Richard Roberts - but have to admit that it rarely gets the attention it needs! It's all I can do to keep up with my e-mails!) However, Facebook is a very good fund-raising tool. Any Facebook fan who feels motivated to start a page for Towards Nirvana – and give it the regular loving attention that it would need - please feel free to contact me or any of the other Trustees.

FUNDRAISING

I am always moved to hear about the different fundraising activities which people organise. Here are a few examples: Moya gave a fundraising dinner for friends. Carole sold some of her late father's old books. Jayne and her partner will be collecting donations at their children's christening celebration next month.. Gary and his partner asked for contributions in place of wedding gifts. The lovely Mrs Edge, mother of Andy and Nick, has made over fifty beautifully knitted teddy bears which Satvikananda is selling to her students (and their friends!) Gemma organises an annual yoga day for children. Minu organised contributions from her father's funeral. Joseph sold some of his old toys. Karmal donated income from babysitting and Reiki treatments. Karuna held a sponsored slimming event. Peter and Jane donated the profits from a car boot sale. Hridaya gave a special yoga class –'towards nirvana' – and donated the income. Joanna, Savikananda and KD asked for donations instead of presents for their 60th birthday celebration.

Not only do these kind of events bring in money but they are also ways of letting new people know about the Foundation and how they can help us move 'Towards Nirvana'. We are presently sending £1,500 each month to India. Over 500 children are receiving a free education. Over forty people are employed by the Foundation. As Nirvana Bodhisattva (the founder and director) says: "We are a small organisation but the work we are doing is important."

Thank you all of you for your generous support.

I have returned to UK early this year. On March 16th I am starting a two year Vedic chant teacher training with the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandir based in Chennai. (The course is actually in UK but the teachers are travelling from India.) I did a two week course with them last October and was motivated to do this longer course. The course dates mean that I will not be returning to India till December this year.

“Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them. So, spread your love everywhere you go.”

“Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.”

Mother Teresa



TOWARDS NIRVANA

Nirvanavan Foundation Trust, reg. Charity No. 1124427

YES I would like to pledge my support with ____ a month.

Please complete the details on this form and return it today to:
Joanna MacDonald, 28 Fitzwilliam Road, London SW4 0DN (alternatively, you can make a standing order arrangement yourself with your bank, letting us know once you have completed the process.)

My Name: My telephone number is:

Address:

.....

Postcode: My e-mail address:

Instructions to your bank or Building Society to pay Standing Order:

I want to start making a regular contribution ofeach month until further notice, starting on (Please allow at least three weeks between signing the form and the date of the first payment).

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)

Bank or Building Society Account No.Sort Code: - -

Name and full address of Bank or Building Society:

Please pay The Nirvanavan Foundation the stated amount by standing order from the above account..

Signed: date.....

Receiving bank details: Co-op Bank, Northampton NN4 7WZ

Account name: Nirvanavan Foundation Trust

Account Number: 69379439 Sort Code: 08 92 99

SIGN HERE SO THE TAXMAN CAN HELP TOO

Gift Aid allows Towards Nirvana to claim tax back from HMRC on all your donations. For every pound you give, they'll add an extra 25p from your taxes and it doesn't cost you anything. All you need to do to qualify is pay enough income tax or capital gains tax to cover the amount we will reclaim on your donations

Example: Sally gives £10 per month - £120 a year. We are entitled to claim a quarter of that - £30. She must have payed at least £30 to the taxman for us to be able to reclaim that amount.

I am a UK taxpayer and am wiling for my donation to be treated as Gift Aid.

Name:

signature.....date

