



---

# NEWSLETTER

ISSUED IN CHRISTMAS 2019

**MAY YOU ALWAYS HAVE WORK  
SOMETHING FOR YOUR HANDS TO DO  
ALWAYS A LITTLE MONEY IN YOUR POCKET  
A PENNY OR TWO  
MAY THE SUN ALWAYS SHINE ON YOUR WINDOWSILL  
AND MAY YOU BE SURE THAT THE RAINBOW FOLLOWS THE RAIN..  
MAY A FRIEND'S GOOD HAND  
ALWAYS BE NEAR YOU,  
AND MAY GOD FILL YOUR HEART WITH JOY  
AND HOLD YOU UP WITH COURAGE.**

*Irish Blessing*

---

## **DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SHANTI-FAMILY,**

When I packed my cases to return to Germany at the end of October, the country was filled with an amazingly festive mood, everybody, young and old, preparing for the big Hindu "Tihar" light festival. The Nepalese people use the occasion to get together with their families before the cold winter comes.

### **TIHAR – THE LIGHT FESTIVAL**

We in Germany do not think it a special thing "to meet and party with our families" - we simply go where the party is going on, using the roads and traffic infrastructure and our money.

But this is a wholly different thing in the mountainous country of Nepal, where a journey is a problem. Family visits are a lot more dangerous. There

are not enough paved roads; elevations are steep, slopes are deep and unsecured, there are often falling rocks. Old, rattling coaches are so overfilled that passengers often travel sitting on the roofs of the buses.

But Tihar is a festival that is of special importance to everybody. They go to great lengths to manage everything, they travel in any way to be together with their families.

They ask the Gods for protection before the "dangerous season", the cold winter; the family members bless each other.

We at Shanti also want to organise a wonderful party for all of those we care for from our hearts, each year in the same way! They are especially craving



for community and closeness, as many of them were cast out of their original families, as you know. It is the orphans, children, who feel all alone during such festival days.

Bijendra, our Junior Chef, has a good heart, and he loves his Nepalese culture. We love to plan the festivities with him. He elects some rich families a long time in advance, where the children will sing carols at the doorstep, hoping for sweets - as we use to do on Saint Martin's day. They rehearse the dances belonging to the festival with much verve.

The children draw pictures and make colourful decorations, and together with the teachers they spread a beautiful mandala with coloured powders in the inner courtyard of the clinic.

Last but not least Tihar is an occasion for special food, like all festivities in other cultures. The smell alone creates memories. Most of us will love the memory of a Christmas aroma of vanilla and cinnamon, when the biscuits in the oven are turning brown. In Nepal, people look forward to a curry followed by yoghurt with fruit, seasoned with cinnamon and cardamon. Our cooking staff are going to prepare traditional food according to old recipes.

When the most important day has come, the „Tika day“, our old people bless all Shanti children and press the red spot onto their forehead. How we love to feel the power of community through this loving rite, letting the longing for their families of origin fade!

When I look into the content, relaxed faces, I would like to have all of you, dear friends, with us, because: you are indeed the source of such festivities, allowing us to pass the feeling of a home to some people.

### NEW CLOTHES

In Nepal, you get new clothes for the light festival as was the case with our families for Christmas. I remember when I was a child after the war, I got sturdy shoes and a warm pullover as a present each Christmas. In Nepal, the houses and huts are not provided with heating, people often get ill due to the cold weather in the Himalayas. We did this: We bought many, many running meters of warm cotton corduroy, and every Saturday, the sewing machines in our tailor shop were busy, even on free weekends.

We were impressed how the women from Sindhoupalchowk worked hard with their knitting needles, for weeks on end. They had been instructed by our talented Sunita, during the time after the big earthquake, when the trauma of it all became visible: most of their farmland had been irrecoverably lost by landslides.

Every single one of our Shanti school children had been presented with a warm knitted cardigan made of pure wool - red for the girls, blue for the boys by the brave wives of the farmers. I was deeply touched when the knitters put the cardigans on the children with great care, and how they answered, smiling brightly: "Thank you, Aunt!" This knitting project does not only warm the Shanti children, but also our hearts. The women have a meaningful work project, for which we pay with fairness, and our children have warm, protecting attire. When they are too big for the cardigans, the next generation will inherit them - like a habit in large families.

### WOMEN FROM THE SLUMS

In the same way that Sunita has taught the women to knit, our tailors instruct three women from the slums in the art of sewing. I saw the women when I looked in the neighbouring yard through the windows of our paper manufacturing shop. I was





shocked when I noticed a girl of three helping with the sorting of dirty and dusty plastic waste.

I asked Bijendra to accompany me, and we went to the neighbours. We wanted to make an offer to the little girl's mother that her baby girl be permitted to come to our nursery.

The young mother brought her three children to us, and two of her friends came along with their babies, too. Our doctor examined the children and found that they all suffer from severe malnutrition and are too small for their age. One little girl, seven months old, only weighed 5.5 kilograms. Another one had the typical old man's face, a sign of malnutrition.

The children and their mothers now get a freshly cooked, rich meal from Shanti every day. While the mothers learn how to sew, their children can play in the kindergarten.

The mothers are so proud working on the sewing machines. We make sure that they have a ready piece they have themselves made to take home every day. The first day, it was a cloth bag made of linen, the next they could take home for their children the "boto", the typical Nepalese vest made of cotton. It has a simple cut and is fixed with bows on the shoulders.

You can imagine how proud the women were when they presented these little vests to each other and when their little children tried them on! Self-made clothing for their babies, from a new fabric they could select themselves...

I think I cannot imagine what it must have been for these women to learn something really important for their lives. They gain self-confidence by such work, and they can hope to earn their own living

some day in the future, as their husbands are no big help: they drink and are often aggressive. We are going to hand a simple foot-operated machine to each of the women after the training.

We are definitely happy to see their joy, and that they all arrive dead on time in the sewing shop every morning.

I sat with them on many evenings at the table, and they fed their children with good, fresh meals. My heart went out to them, feeling great gratitude to all of you, who offer us their reliable support so that we can provide so many meals to the people - about 1,200 every day! We would be unable to prepare the women for an independent life. And the meals we give them has another positive side effect: The women no longer have a need to cook over an open fire in their huts - which presents a real danger to be feared. Their huts do not even have chimneys, because people fear that bad ghosts, the "buris", come through them into the huts. The biting smoke makes the women suffer from bronchitis.

A few days before the women arrived with their children at our station, the daily newspapers were full of reports about a subject Nepal is still suffering from: the malnutrition of children. The reason for these publications was the World Nutrition Day on October 16th. Statistical figures are horrible: I read that 43% of the children showed grave signs of deficiencies. Our cooking staff mortar and cook porridge from rice and peas and beans for the children who are too small every day. This meal is well digestible and full of calories.

#### SANJU AND RUBY

In this context, I would like to tell you about Sanju. She did not actually suffer from malnutrition, but she is of small growth due to a genetic defect. She was born at Shanti 21 years ago. Like all of her



sisters and brothers, she had inherited the “moon-shine disease”, the skin reacting most sensitively to sunlight, and this disease is not healable. But in Nepal, you can hardly protect yourself against sunlight!

Sanju accepts her fate stoically. She likes to put on nice clothes, she cares for herself with great attention. Her friendly helpfulness and happy and satisfied nature make her popular with all of us. I met her when I came to see Ruby, the patient from the slums suffering from lupus disease, in the hospital.

Sanju had taken over the night watch of Ruby with a friend of hers. Ruby was in such a terrible condition that our doctor had had her transferred to a hospital. Our station does not have an emergency ward but is more a nursing home with an outpatient department for the poor.

Ruby would have to undergo a hernia operation which was planned for three days later. This was when Bijendra had the idea that Shanti could possibly save the money for his stay in the hospital and the cost for the operation. He asked the hospital management for a free bed for the poor.

This changed everything promptly. Within the next half hour, we were presented with the discharge letter for Ruby: she was fully free of symptoms and does not need an operation!

We were horrified by such an apparent greed for money! I paid for the invoiced amount of examinations Ruby had undergone so far and her in-patient stay in the hospital and took her back to our nursing station.

During all this time, Sanju stood by her side with touching helpfulness. She held watch during the entire night.

We are going to nurse Ruby back to health for a first time, and then have her operated in a more human clinic. When I arrived at the tailor’s shop the next morning at 10 o’clock, Sanju sat at her sewing machine, a happy smile on her face. She was beaming when I commended her for her commitment. “But Ruby is our sister”, she said, followed by: “I would really like to learn how to sew properly – and that’s why I came to work this morning. I am somewhat exhausted by the night watch, but then I’ll go to bed earlier tonight”.

We are really encouraged by such experience of loving solidarity within the Shanti family. Our vision of a community of diverse ethnicities and religious denominations, of healthy and sick, of old and young - this dream may come true in a small world, be it only on our small “island of Shanti”. Challenged by horrible news of lies, brutality and strife in the whole wide world, the things that happen here reinforce us to continue on our way to peace (and “Shanti” means “Peace”).

#### GLOBAL CLIMATE STRIKE ON SEPTEMBER 20TH

There is another thing that reinforced the feeling of a community at our Shanti family, too: the global climate strike on the 20th September. Millions of people went onto the streets in around 150 countries on our earth in order to push for a careful use of our earth.

Shanti was one of them. For many days beforehand, everybody was feverishly excited waiting for that day. Bijendra had prepared what was necessary, together with the music school where our children are instructed, and the school for the poor, Balsarati, which we support with food donations. He even organised police protection for the marching demonstration.





Everybody who could afford it in any way marched along: from the baby to very old women and men. They were carried (babies), they went by foot, with crutches, with rolling walkers, wheelchairs ... They all had the green scarves and beautiful posters, painted with many colours by our painters, including everything Creation has made and what should be protected by us: animals and flowers, vegetables and fruit, rivers and snow-clad mountains. The children were singing, drumming and dancing, while they walked along the streets.

The rain had been pouring all the days before, because the Monsoon was still prevailing. On that day, it was dry however, and the sun was shining brightly.

These events were so incredible for me: The people who are still despised by society, who went into hiding in former times fearfully, they go out into the streets bravely and self-confidently, feeling themselves to be an important part of society! What kind of attitude must Shanti have lent them! This makes me deeply grateful and happy.

The demonstration was not the only thing that happened visibly and audibly - we wanted to act after all those words we heard on that day. The children planted 40 fruit trees, already rather tall, in Sundarijal, where our organic vegetables are grown.

#### A GLIMPSE INTO EVERYDAY LIFE

Again and again, we have the chance to see how our guardian angels protect us at our large Shanti family - as they do in any other family everywhere in the world. We were terrified when for example our favourite grandma came into our office, crying: "My grandson fell out of the window!" Our male nurse, Shankar, took the little child to the next hospital for an examination.

The child was really lucky: he only suffered from a hairline fracture to the scalp, which got better after some weeks.

In such situations, I must think of you, my dear friends, with all my gratitude! We never have to hesitate for any moment whether we should take the people we care for to a hospital or not in an emergency: We simply know: we have to do and can do the next thing necessary, which will mitigate the need - as we do it in Germany - even without health insurance, which does not exist in Nepal, with the help of your support. We had to pay the 230 euros for the child's treatment immediately in cash, for sure, when we came to take her home - as always. Grandma Sushila presses organic bricks, and her monthly salary is 80 euros, which is the minimum salary imposed by the Government.

How could people like Granny Sushila ever pay for such an emergency? They would have to take out a loan. But moneylenders take usurious interest of up to 30 per cent from the poor. The banks will not give them money at all.

I have to explain the notion of "minimum salary": They get it from us cash in hand. They also profit from free medical care and a monthly ration of rice and lentils every month, which are the basic ingredients for their daily (!) Nepalese Dal Bhat. The children are cared for in the nursery/kindergarten and school at no cost, the parents getting 15 euros child support for each child.

Granny Sushila would be a pensioner actually, under Nepalese principles, and would get precisely 16,30 euros from the very poor country's Government for support.



### ABOUT BUILDING

We could be nothing but depressed by the daily news of hate and violent outbreaks and our own powerlessness in the world every day. I am especially happy that I can share a ray of light with you which will give you some hope. It is the expectation that the houses shall soon be finished in Sindhoupalchowk.

As you know, I had to tell you time and again that the authorities had hindered us in the reconstruction of the houses in the epicentre of the 2015 earthquake. The building stop is now been finally repealed and we hope to finish them in the autumn of 2020 - as soon as we have the money necessary to do so.

The governmental conditions forced us to completely redesign the houses. They have to be smaller, the house skeleton should be welded, the walls built from large square expanded concrete blocks. The price had to be reduced to 7,500 euros from 10,000 euros, as the Government only offers 2,000 euros per house for its reconstruction projects. This is not enough to build quake-safe, however!

Only 155 houses will be built, not the planned 220, for many families left the region. We still need money for 33 houses.

Our hard-working, committed architect Prabin accurately showed us the current state of building

work in an impressive pdf presentation. Every bag of cement spent was exactly documented by the accounting staff - a transparency which is a novelty in Nepal for us! We will report any news about this to you!

And something else at last: you will get this letter by mail, including a tree or window decoration for you as a little Christmas gift, made by our patients with great care. They were inspired by an angel painted by my five-year old granddaughter once as a Christmas present for me.

I wish to thank you once again from all my heart in the name of the entire Shanti family for your good deeds and loyalty, through which all of you keep Shanti alive.

Wishing you and your families great happiness for the Advent and Christmas season, and some light where darkness is lurking!

Stay protected, all of you and your loved ones - in the coming year, too!

Yours

Marianne Grosspietsch