

News from the Shanti Family

Christmas 2020

Practical Hope

Hope walks
Hope rides a bicycle
Hope goes on a train

Hope watches clouds
Hope greets the moon
Hope finds the time

Hope defends hedgehogs and trees
Hope hides asylum seekers
Hope buys from the Third-World shops

Hope falls and rises again
Hope climbs mountains
Hope swims through the ocean

Hope remains curious
Hope finds the context
Hope looks for allies

Hope can do without
Hope knows how to enjoy
Hope kindles the fire of love

Hope may become angry
Hope may be sad
Hope laughs subversively

Hope fights for the rights of others
Hope celebrates and dances
Hope makes tender

Hope has nothing
Hope wants everything
Hope prays to God

Kurt Marti

Dear Friends of our Shanti Family,

“There is nothing good except someone does it” said Erich Kästner. And the following advice has been told us by the Great Master, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: “If you want to be happy in life, give happiness to other people because the joy we give returns to our own hearts!”

These two quotations lighted up in me and helped me during the last, very difficult months again and again - when I saw all the good you did - the help you lent to the Shanti family.

You yourselves have certainly had your own problems due to the dissemination of the Corona virus. But by looking beyond your difficulties, you have been perceiving the misery of the poor in Nepal and supported them. A great thank you for this!

What you initiated by this is pure joy and courage. I am going to tell you more about this in my present letter - so that the joy may flow back into your hearts.

First of all, I wish to speak of the gratefulness the Shanti family receives for the many hundreds of hot meals giving out to the hungry every day, and continuing to do so. On peak days, more than 1,700 meals were distributed.

[photo] *A hot meal and a boiled egg will result in such a heart-warming, beaming smile*

Litho

It became more and more worrying for us to feed the multitudes of impoverished people in a meaningful and nutritious way during the months that followed. The longer the poverty reigned, the less nutritious the food - with all the bitter damage in the wake.

We decided to expand the food offer. In Nepal, all relief organisations are distributing bags with the similar contents of basic food: 5 kg of rice, 1 to 2 kg of lentils, salt, oil and two lumps of soap. Which is a little one-sided, as nobody has the money to pay for eggs and vegetables any more, and this for many months now.

There is an old tradition in the villages in Nepal that mothers and often grandmothers mix together a nutritious puree made from cereals, lentils and peas and nuts. We started to buy this healthy wholegrain mush, the “litho”, by commercial ways. One kilogram of which is sold at four euros.

Heiko, our son, had then the idea of buying an electric grain mill for Shanti at 495 euros. We get the electricity for this from our photovoltaic equipment on our roof. Now we can grind the mush on our own - at exactly half the price, two euros per kilogram!

We have reported in earlier letters that we are closely collaborating with the Himani Trust founded by the highly committed former Royal Princess Himani. Every week, the Director, Uttam Niraula (Uttam-Jee), holds a Zoom conference with Heiko and me, and he found the idea to help to distribute litho at regular intervals very good. He raised his daughter with litho, buying the commercially sold product for her.

He was happy to support our proposal to revive the old tradition of producing the mush by the people themselves. In one of our Zoom conferences, we established the plan to make it known in the whole country that you can grind litho using pestle and mortars. So the children and old people are enabled to produce food in a healthy and nutritious way with their own resources - depending on the produce the land in each region is able to offer them.

[photo] *The little girl from the slum next door holding fast to her bag of litho*

Chicks

Healthy food will need some protein, of course. As fish and meat are exorbitant expensive for most, we have started some time ago to give the poor families in the slums from five to ten chicks as a gift. The breed is a robust, Nepalese one feeding from kitchen waste and green plants, not requiring any expensive additional feed.

The women will make baskets from bamboo which they put over the chicks so that they are protected from the birds of prey. Some months later, the chickens will lay eggs for the entire family. The mothers are so happy about this - and the children no less:

[photo]

Our intention is to make these two projects known in the entire country, not only in the Shanti neighbourhood. But is this really feasible - on a *national basis*? You will think this is very ambitious - Shanti is perhaps too small for this?

Planting trees - on a national basis

During the last few months, a lucky opportunity arose from the cooperation with the Himani Trust which we are very pleased with.

The whole thing started with our shock about the severe landslides in the summer due to the monsoon. More than 300 people died from them this year once again. One of the main reasons for the landslides is the fact that trees are cut down on the mountainsides. But the prices for fruit are ever rising - too high for the poor people to buy such a luxury. But fruit is an important supplier of vitamins, like vegetables.

Fruit trees will offer a double advantage, their roots fixing the top soil - and the trees bearing fruit rich in vitamins, too! Nepal is a country rich of aromatic fruits - think of our last letter in which we named some of the fruits you already know, and some more like avocado and mango, pomegranates, guavas, lemons and many others.

You certainly know about our "Plant a tree in Nepal" campaign which we have been supporting for many years. You have the chance of having planted a tree in Nepal for a loved one or at a special occasion in Nepal about which you get a certificate for a donation of 20 euros, and you can choose your own text for the document.

[photo]

When we told Uttam-Jee about this, he loved this idea immediately, and the Princess with him. They made a call to young people via the media to become volunteers, and the resonance was overwhelming for us: More than 900 youths from the entire country have wanted to become volunteers!

The first campaign has already been completed by Bijendra (our Second Manager) with the help of five volunteers: With your donations, we have bought 350 different fruit trees, guavas, peaches, plums - the fruit growing in southern Nepal.

Bijendra drove the truck loaded with the precious trees, which cost between eight and twelve euros each, making use of the quantity discount and a special price. He brought the trees to the Chepang, a community of semi-nomades generally living from hunting small animals. But they

are more and more starving as no animals can be found and hunted in the forests any more. They dearly wish to settle down, and the former Royals gave them some land on which they would farm and live, many years ago. This is the land where the trees were now planted by Bijendra with their help and the five volunteers.

Once they bear fruit, the Chepang will be able to peddle the fruit they cannot eat with the vegetables and cereals their neighbours produce. In these remote regions, money is not the rule.

On his way, Bijendra took five of our patients to Peter Effenberger, the Demeter farmer, who has been operating a farm in Nepal for 16 years. They wish to learn from him in an agricultural training course how to produce your own compost.

Four siblings

Bijendra had another mission on his journey to the south: He picked up four children of whom Heiko had read in the Himalayan Post. They had a bad fate, their father died, and their mother left them for another man. Now the children lived alone in a hut, where they lived from begging. The hut was so badly built that they feared that it would crumble any time. This is what the newspaper wrote about.

We asked Bijendra to find out via the journalist where the group of children lived. He was able to contact the village chief, and he achieved to have the parental rights transferred to Shanti. With his fatherly manners, he had a calming effect on the children and had no problems to take them on the long rode to Kathmandu.

They grew friendlier and more trusting at Shanti. The youngest child is six years old. The twins are eleven, and the eldest, Lokendra, investigated Shanti and his wish was to become a tailor. So our tailors took him up with pleasure and gave him training in their art. The first task he has in our protected workshops is the making of masks.

[photo]

His three siblings are surrounded at Shanti by children who had a similarly terrible fate and who were equally terrified and unsure at first. They deal with the “new ones” with a loving empathy. Kussum, the little girl I told you about, who was pushed around all the time, integrated Bifana, the smallest one, to her group of friends immediately, and showed her her new bed.

[photo] *Bifana: front right. The little girl to the left in front lost her mother during the earthquake. Her father tried to raise her for two years. But they both starved and still suffer from the consequences of malnutrition. Kussum (second from left) can smile again, and Assa came to Shanti as a baby. Assa kam schon als Baby zu Shanti.*

The siblings arrived here with a tiny rucksack with a few belongings in it. Thank you, dear friends, that you enabled us to pay for bed sheets and clothes, school material and eating utensils for the children!

Corona at Shanti

You surely ask yourselves how the pandemic has hit Nepal, and how much Shanti is suffering from it?

Every day that I get news from Nepal, I am thankful for our life her in Germany in a secure and regular way!

The infection numbers are rapidly rising in Kathmandu. The government remains passive, as before. They admitted to have been occupied with party-internal quarrels so that for 80 (!) days they did not even discuss the Corona subject matter.

Hospitals are totally overstrained, even refusing any more admission of patients now. The daughters of our trainee tailor had to experience that their father who had been infected with Corona, asphyxiated in the taxicab while they desperately looked for a hospital bed for him. Some weeks ago, Shanti suffered from so many infected persons that we had to rent a hotel next door as a quarantine station for one month. An old man has died, all others have convalesced.

[photo] *The master tailor in his tiny shop with a Shanti guest*

But some days ago, our renal patient Shyam was tested positive because he got the infection during dialysis in the hospital!

We can save the money for the hotel rent this time, however. We have been using the classrooms over the workshops which are ready and newly finished, for the quarantine patients who were in contact with Shyam. Unfortunately, there are so many...

Our children

Our medical team has been organising the protection for the rest of the Shanti family with great prudence, especially that for all the children.

For months, they have not been to school, and they are not allowed to move outside the centre. But they are nevertheless active and happy! They practise applied mathematics, for example: Bijendra had bought a load of old plaster stones for our inner yard at a good price. The children stacked the stones to blocks, calculated how many fit into a square metre, helped to lay them and - had to repeat everything when the quantity was too small and another truckload of cheap red stones had to be bought! This time, our construction specialists, Shaila and his assistant, laid a decorative pattern of red coloured bands between the grey stones, always caring that the rainwater could seep between the joints ensuring that our fountain was supplied with enough water.

[photo] *Children packing Himalaya salt*

The children also help to weigh packages of five grams of Himalaya salt in these days, and to fill them into small plastic bags. Afterwards, they will pack our Christmas gift for you, the thailies.

Shoes for Dashain

The children also completed another calculating task.

The Dashain festival was going on, the big feast of the Hindus which may have a similar importance for a family as our Christmas fest. Normally, the families give each other presents of new clothes. But this year, the feast was only allowed in a very small framework; the rule was the lockdown, and no family had much money.

But we were lucky: We could buy a remainder of sports shoes from a factory, one pair at around five euros. The stock of shoes consisted of 1,248 pairs! The children counted the pairs for the Shanti family. Then, 80 pairs were towered up for the children of the beggars' school Bal Sarati. In addition, there were the 54 pairs for the orphans from the Inderani home in the neighbourhood. And then matching sizes had to be sorted for the families in the slums.

Everybody was committed with pleasure - they were so happy about the unexpected gift of a pair of new shoes for every child, and you can see their happy faces in the photo! They always wore some plastic flip-flops, even in the wintertime.

[photo]

The Temple

The children are not the only ones to be active. One of our talented painters, Shyama, created a special work of art during the Covid time. She lives in Sundarikal and is one of the few Christians in our centre. She came to us as a 14 year old, 22 years ago, sad and desperate as she had been outcast by the villagers of her home village for her leprosy.

She has been coming to our painter's workshop in town and also painted our practice rooms in the clinic. She is not allowed to leave her village now, of course.

The Hindus in the village next to Shanti's parcel of land asked her to paint out a small Hindu temple which was dilapidated, using motives from the Hindu world of Gods. So she, the Christian, started to paint and created wonderful and multicoloured wall paintings. Everybody was surprised by her imagination and her knowledge of the Hindu mythology.

To thank her, our Shanti craftsmen have equipped her hut completely new and ecologically with recycled material: the bed and a shelf made from pallet wood, patchwork carpets for the cold floor, Radi rugs (self-woven, felted wool), gaily planted flower sacks outside the hut made from car tyre rubber hose - any free patches of the wall were painted by herself, of course!

Dear friends, now that I reread my letter to you I feel that a warm feeling of thankfulness flows through me.

Everything I reported, all service of help and all support, every plate of food and each pair of shoes: It was you who have joined to give these gifts to people in need with a humane gesture of yours!

What is more, you have done so in times where your current lives certainly are affected by some problems due to the situation. So your help makes me doubly happy and grateful!

Your loyalty and your solidarity with poor people are an encouraging sign of hope, especially in the Christmas time, which is for us Christians the fest of hope, in the midst of the coldness of winter, a feast of remembrance that God's incarnation wants to bring us a warming closeness.

My wish is that you go through your lives - not marked by social distancing, but with the experience of signs of human closeness around you.

May this letter be a bridge from the Shanti community to all of you.

I wish you a blessed Christmas time - in the name of the entire Shanti family. Stay protected, you and your loved ones, in the New Year as well.

Your

Marianne Großpietsch