

SPRING
2020



SHANTI LEPAHILFE
DORTMUND E.V.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUED IN SPRING 2020

RECIPE

**DISPENSE WITH YOUR FEARS
AND THE DREAD OF THE FEARS**

...

**IT IS TRUE WHAT THEY SAY:
WHAT IS TO COME, COMES.
DO NOT INVITE SUFFERING.
AND, WHEN IT COMES
LOOK IT IN THE FACE, QUIETLY.
IT WILL PASS AWAY AS GOOD LUCK DOES.**

...

**CARE WELL FOR YOUR HOUSEHOLD.
GREET YOUR NEIGHBOUR FRIENDLY.**

...

**DESTROY ALL YOUR PLANS. BE PRUDENT
AND BELIEVE IN MIRACLES.
THEY HAVE HAD THEIR PLACES IN THE
BIG OVERALL PLAN
FOR A LONG TIME.
CHASE OUT YOUR FEARS
AND THE DREAD OF THE FEARS**

Mascha Kaléko



*Friends, it is a finger hint when
the almond twig is loaded heavily
with blooms, to show you that life
has been victorious again!*

Schalom Ben-Chorin (1942)

To be emotionally close to each other – this means that we let others participate in all the things they are occupied or worried with.

I would like to tell you now what our charges are doing in that far-off country.

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SHANTI-FAMILY,

I have always found great solace in these strange and disturbing times by this verse written by Schalom Ben-Chorin. A blooming twig at his window, right in the middle of World War II, brings him the hope that "life will overcome everything in the end". I would really like to transmit you this kind of hope!

The end of March, and the streets are empty and quiet outside, for many days already. The sun is shining from a cloudless sky. A cold wind is blowing. We find much pleasure in the fact that we are allowed to walk or ride outside in the green nature, enjoying springtime (at least this is the case in our state, North-Rhine Westphalia).

All of us have experienced something we never had to before these days. We are all held and admonished to look for company, maintain contacts, visit the lonely, sick and elderly – but now our Chancellor has to remind us, much to her own distress: "Only holding distance is a sign of real care at the moment". I add to this: And a sign of real love.

They talk of "social distancing" in this context. But I would call this a physical distance, which is absolutely necessary. Emotional closeness is still there, however; we have to be emotionally close during these unreal, hard times if we wish to overcome them without damage inside us.

CORONA IN NEPAL

The virus has reached Nepal too, now. Their precautionary measures are much stricter than here in Germany. They have ordered a total "lockdown" - which is being prolonged on a weekly basis. All (!) the shops are closed. Nobody without a special permit is allowed to leave their house; the country borders are closed.

For Shanti, this is a big and special challenge. I am really lucky that modern technical equipment allows me to participate (without charge) every day in everything our Shanti team does in order to prudently solve any problems.

I have already told you the story of Bijendra, our Junior Manager, many times. When it was clear that the supplies would become rare, he immediately bought basic food for four weeks; rice, lentils, oil, salt and the other spices for their dhalbat. Where should he store all these supplies, however? Bijendra had the bigger boys empty a classroom, where they arranged the sacks – because our school was closed like all the others!

I was scared when he told me about his action on the phone: What shall we do if the rats find the sacks? While talking, I remembered that Shanti has two good rat hunters: our two dogs, Sonam and Fudje! We let them into the storage room twice a day – no rat is safe from their hunting instinct!



.....

This may sound like the hampering many people have done here. But in Germany, supplies are rather secure, although there are a lot of exceptional rules. We are sure to be reliably able to buy food, toilet articles and everything we need for our everyday life in the future. But in Nepal, the black market now has pushed prices so high that poor people can no longer afford to buy the most urgently needed things.

For sure, **beggars** have no income whatever, nobody coming along in the streets or into the temple area and they are suffering excruciating hunger. So Bijendra with his special permit drives to where he knows the beggars are staying every day, distributing dry food. They have to come to Shanti for water, in isolated queues! It is pure chance that we are able to cook with our eco-bricks made from paper chips and saw chips – there is no gas and no kerosene anymore! We really are becoming increasingly afraid that people will start cutting off entire trees again so that they can cook – as we experienced this during the earthquake five years ago, when the borders to India were closed too.

All the while, our team is prepared to convert our Sundaridal farming parcel into a **quarantine station** for about 200 people; our tailor shops are sewing a huge number of breathing masks.

You may ask yourselves how we can secure the nourishing and care for our patients in spite of total lockdown? Our cooking staff has got passes to enable them to come to us. And they live near the Centre luckily. But the nurses caring for the severely disabled children live far away and are not allowed to come. I have found this rather challenging. This morning, in a phone talk with our manager, **Sajana**, however, she told me that she is unable to come to the Centre but is maintaining close phone contact to **Bijendra** and our male nurse, **Shankar**.

Do you remember Shankar who was the subject of my letter a few years ago? He has been with us since he was eight. His father threw his leprosy mother out, together with the child. Shankar attended our school, at first, of course, which did not include more classes than five. He was deeply unhappy when he had to change to a governmental school and wrote us something like "I was allowed to think myself and ask questions here. If we dare ask something in this school, we are punished, and they call us disobedient and stupid!"

He would be the first of the Shanti children to undergo medical training – thanks to your gracious donations! He became a Health Assistant, after intensive studies during which he learnt rather broad medical knowledge, including midwifery. He is responsible and competent, and he has accompanied many of our dying during the last few hours of their lives with great compassion. With natural responsibility, he took over the care for all patients coming to our clinic, especially the children who were in need of special care.

We were happy that we were offered help by a total of six students and volunteers from the workshops. They indeed know the members of the large Shanti family, and they know what many of them need. They live on the premises and can care for the children in day and night shifts, while Shankar manages and supports them.

He married three months ago! His wife Subarna grew up with Shanti, too, studying banking. It was a love marriage – which is really special in Nepal, where most marriages are still arranged by the parents.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE?

Such an "arranged marriage" had been planned for their daughter Rabita by Birendra with his wife,



who have lived with Shanti for 20 years. Now, their daughter is 18 years old and is currently graduating from school.

When I arrived at the station in February again, Birendra and Rabita came to meet me in the office, with a worried expression, and he hesitated to confide in me. When he finally did, I was informed that he and his wife had planned for their daughter's marriage with the help of a relative. She was going to marry a trainee policeman living far down south in Nepal, and she only knew him from a photo!

But the problem was that the young man wanted the big sum of 4,000 euros as the dowry. We in Shanti however provide the girls with solid professional training, not money. Professional training – that's the real "dowry" for their future lives! And during the conversation, another, more horrible fact was revealed: Birendra and his wife did not dare tell the bridegroom's family that they both suffer from leprosy. At the wedding party at the latest, they would have noticed it, and would have immediately driven Rabita and her parents off in disgrace. We reminded him of that in full clarity, advising him to call everything off.

In our familial community at Shanti, this news spread around – everybody in the Shanti family worrying, talking a lot about it. After a few days, he met me and told me to act according to my advice – the marriage was cancelled finally. He was apparently more relaxed, and everybody present applauded, laughed with mirth and was relieved at his decision.

We still talked a lot about this non-marriage later on, and I was happy to be approached especially by wives with daughters, who thanked me for helping their daughters - I heard this again and again, and I do not hesitate to pass this on to you, our "enablers".

It is your faithful support which gives these women liberty and safety at the same time!

What about Rabita now? She will now complete school and start some professional training. After which she is free to select her own future.

FIRE IN THE COWSHED

My most recent stay started with terror this time. In the morning after my arrival, Bijendra called me on the phone early: a cowshed including freshly stored feed had just burned down. One calf had died. We went there immediately, because I wished to calm the worried patients and provide as much help as we could. We were relieved to see that the neighbours had arrived at once when they saw the fire, and they had succeeded in saving their residential huts from the flames. All residents were unharmed, although you could still see the terror and fear in their faces.

The mother cow mooed relentlessly, and we heard from the deep sound that she was mourning for her calf. I noticed that her udders were knotted and swollen up; apparently she terribly hurt from engorgement. Suddenly, I saw myself as a small girl, standing in the cowshed of the farm where I grew up until I was seven. I heard what our farmhand said in my inner ear: "Go give it a massage, carefully! And use milking grease on your hands!" I asked Bijendra to explain this to the milker. When the cow noticed that help would be coming, she held still, and after some stroking of the udder a fat beam of milk shot out into the bucket. You should have heard the jubilation of everybody present!

DANCING FOR THE GODS

The Corona virus certainly had a noticeable effect on the lives of children and the young. In Germany, you will have a multitude of chances of occupying yourself: the school homework you should



complete reaches you at home via the internet; radio and TV broadcast exciting extra programmes; all media will launch new ideas and advice how to spend unusually long days at home in the family.

All this is not true for Nepal. So I asked myself and our staff how the children arrange their days at Shanti? I had to smile a little when I heard what they did: Our housemother, Anita, used the chance of the hour and organised a large cleaning and sorting action in the entire Centre: bedrooms, workshops, inner court, kindergarten, classrooms - they had to sort and clean everything! And there was plenty of time for such action.

Apart from that work, entertainment was also to be had: the children sing and dance some of their traditional songs and dances, with the older, talented ones leading the young ones. At the beginning, they will sing a special song, the Shanti song: "We are one family and Shanti is our home. We live and love together in our lives - we are all one!" After that, all groups in the large Shanti family contribute some of their music.

For some time, our children rehearse particularly eagerly, because they have been specially honoured: They are allowed to present a dance in honour of God Krishna on the temple stage, including singing the Shanti song! Every evening, at a certain hour, selected groups will sing and dance on that stage in honour of the many diverse gods. Now, our children hope to be invited again, which is what makes them further enthuse.

While I am writing this, I vividly recall the event in February. I had taken a new patient in a wheelchair to the general rehearsal in the inner courtyard of our clinic. He had begged for alms on the street, and a reckless car driver squeezed his right foot half up to his calf; the police took him to a (govern-

mental) hospital, where they amputated the foot. He was dismissed after four days - without any painkillers, without any further assistance, because he could not pay. The responsible people asked us if we could take him up. He had now a roof over his head for the first time since many, many years, and loving care, too. When he saw the children dance with joy, he deeply suffered from having lost his foot. I promised him with a handshake: "You will get a nice, lightweight prosthesis, and then you can learn to walk again!" This was an obvious solace for him, because he smiled.

When the event started, I sat on one of the plastic chairs with a guest from France, full of expectation. A colourful image was presented on the stage: beautifully clad dancers, both male and female, moved harmoniously and in flowing gestures to traditional music. My chair neighbour asked whispering: "These are really the children of outcast lepers? They really dance wonderfully, dreamlike!" They exactly do this - you might notice some of it from the photos perhaps.

A LETTER BRIDGE

A moving friendship is being formed in the present forceful break from all those activities: Marlon, an eight-year-old from Dortmund, had heard many stories from his mother, and especially from Rajiph, whom you may know already: The boy who was already fed alcohol as a baby by his parents, who abused him.

Marlon had the idea to send him an email - and Rajiph reacted overjoyed: the first letter of his life!

For Marlon, the letter comes from a totally different world, he himself living in a loving family here with his two sisters - and Rajiph suffered so much at home that he never ever wishes to return to his parents. Comforting emotional closeness and joy -



.....

this is something you can apparently give others
across many thousands of kilometres!

Dear friends, I always remember the song of the
almond twig whenever I see the flowers of trees in
early spring and can enjoy them. Our neighbour
in Nepal also had a beautiful peach tree, whose
flowers and fruit I happily remember. Peaches and
almonds are from the same family ("prunus"), child-
ren loving peaches more than almonds, of course!

I called Bijendra, asking him to plant a peach tree
for all Shanti children together with our patients.

He has already ordered 210 saplings from the tree
nursery. We hope that we can plant them outside
before the monsoon comes.

I am so thankful to all of you that you enable us
to give so many diverse forms of help, which turns
misery into joy!

Stay protected, all of you - and stay healthy!

Yours

Marianne Grosspietsch