

SPRING
2021



SHANTI LEPAHILFE
DORTMUND E.V.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUED IN SPRING 2021

IF YOU AND I
IF ALL OF US
DESPITE ANY DIFFERENCES
IN OPINION AND VIEW
VALUES AND RELIGIONS
ORIGIN AND SKIN COLOUR
NEEDS AND WISHES
VISIONS AND DREAMS
SAT DOWN TOGETHER
HELPED EACH OTHER
TALKED TO EACH OTHER
CARED FOR EACH OTHER -
THEN MANY THINGS WOULD BE EASIER
SOME THINGS WOULD BECOME NICER
A LOT OF THINGS BE MORE SUCCESSFUL
AND LIFE MORE WORTH LIVING.

Max Feigenwinter



DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SHANTI-FAMILY,

Springtime is coming! The sky is shining blue again, the sun is much warmer, and nature highlights the colours - even though it might be a bit cold or even should snow fall sometimes. But what is terrible is a grey haze of fatigue after all those months of fear of getting an infection and the helplessness about what to do next and what will come next...

And in spite of all this: Like the light drawing the spring flowers to the source of light I would like to inspire some joy in you - the joy about all the good your donations have done and what your humane generosity has achieved for the needy children in Nepal and their parents. You would not believe how much that actually was!

LITHO AND PARASITES

You may recall our Christmas letter in which I told you of litho, the nutritious, basic mush of cereals, beans, lentils and nuts. Once a month, our medical doctors visit the slums and schools for the poor in Kathmandu together with some nurses and volunteers, issuing food packages for the children and their families there. Basic food is being supplemented by a layer of eggs for each family and two kilograms of litho for every child.

Our patients, both female and male, weigh the food with much patience - hundreds of individual bags are filled with rice, oil, beans, lentils, flour, salt etc. - every day. We even found a supply of biodegradable plastic bags for this task.

In the beginning, there were some problems with the distribution: mothers pushed their way to the front because they feared they would be left with nothing! But a solution was found soon: the

smallest children are the first to be served! And with a touching precision, they walk back to their mothers, small step by small step, never losing sight of the egg carton! They hand over their treasure to their mothers with pride and relief.

During the distribution campaign, our nurses noticed that the bellies of the children were bloated. Our doctor found out that almost all of them had worms, so that he made the right decision that the children be dewormed before we feed them the basic mush so that the parasites are not fed before the children are!

In Nepal, like in other countries, parasites are a largely spread evil which will strongly affect the children's development. They sleep badly, they become anaemic, tired and lose concentration. The WHO recommends treating all children in the poor countries against these troublesome inhabitants at least once a year. But only the countries Laos, Cambodia and Bhutan have followed this recommendation so far. During such a famine, however, we should do everything to allow the children to use any food for their own development!

Our nurses have explained the context to the mothers patiently, and they understood that it is important that their children be treated against worms. It is an easy procedure, just some tablets which you can even get in Nepal at a low price everywhere. The mothers just do not know what symptoms they have to look for so that they can give their children the tablets.

We see to it that the villages around Kathmandu are also supplied with litho for the children. We told you about our cooperation with Crown Princess Himani's foundation, and that Uttam-Jee, its director,



was able to recruit some 900 volunteers who ensure that the basic food is distributed.

Our litho program is being so well accepted that more than 2,900 needy families are now relying on us with all their hope. Sometimes, when we meet some exhausted elderly people around our medical camps, we also give them a portion of mush, of course.

At Shanti, the mush is ground and mixed in a centralised manner. The regional coaches will bring it into the villages. This is how we always guarantee its identical quality, creating new workplaces at the same time. The volunteers then distribute the mixture throughout the villages.

For a long time to come, Nepal will suffer from that famine. The country will remain among the poorest nations of the world. The pandemic has set back the development for years. This could be a reason to depress us and make us resign. But instead, we take consolation from Hoelderlin's poem "Patmos": "And wherever there is danger, rescue will not hesitate to grow!"

MULBERRY TREES

Keyword "growing": In our two most recent letters, we informed you about the tree-planting campaign we have extended to the nation at large. I am surprised, again and again, in a grateful way how many different, wonderful fruit-bearing trees actually grow in Nepal.

We rediscovered a tree that was fully forgotten in Nepal - the mulberry tree, "kimbu" in Nepali. People have been growing it in Nepal since primeval times, and the fruits, sweet berries, are not only delicious, but also a source of vitamins and proteins.

It was during one of our trips to the poor villages of western Nepal. Our team had packed the car up

high with litho, and they paused to visit Peter Effenberger, the Demeter farmer, our friend. Our responsible staff at Shanti is always invited to learn new things about organic farming and our goal to protect the environment. They were delighted when they saw that Peter's mulberry trees were fully laden with ripe berries, and everybody enjoyed them very much. They were reminded of their childhood when they had loved these fruits. They regretted that there are no longer, or only rarely, any trees like this.

Mulberries ripen over a period of two months. During this time, you can harvest the berries continuously as new berries get ripe all the time. The trees are bushes at first and then grow to become high trees. The berries perish very soon, however. But the sun shines for many months in Nepal. We can sun-dry the berries. Shanti has often sun-dried vegetables by ecological methods before. I got to know the principle in Bangladesh many years ago, so that our smart craftsmen were able to build solar driers themselves: The produce to be dried is spread on wire netting under a glass pane, the humidity being able to escape through two air slits arranged opposite each other.

In Germany, dried mulberries are regarded as a so-called "super food" - as everybody likes their valuable contents! I saw that a kilogram was sold at 20 euros on our weekly outdoor food market. So I asked Peter how we could find some mulberry trees. And I almost saw through the phone how happy he was. He said, "You can get them from me, of course!" They grow easily after transplantation, and after the first two years, they will have the first berries. And they can grow at high altitudes - precisely suited to Nepal!

So the next event we are all looking forward to is the result of the fact that Princess Himani was equally



enthused by my idea to organize a large tree-planting campaign in many regions of Nepal. Bijendra suggested choosing the 6th of June for this, the international day of the environment, which is also suitable as it is right in the monsoon time, which is tree-planting time.

The Princess is going to plant a fruit tree symbolically, together with a small girl and a boy, while at the same moment volunteers are planting fruit trees in the same way throughout the whole country. A lot of volunteers have already registered for this task, and we have already reserved the small trees for the campaign at tree nurseries.

You may wonder why I am explaining the tree planting in detail once again. What is driving me is the idea that it is important to repeatedly plant new, strong signs of hope against all hopelessness, and so become active. Fact is that in southern Nepal a lot of forest fires have broken out over a number of weeks and they are still devastating large areas of forest at this moment in time. The smoke development was extreme, and unfavourable winds have borne the black air right into Kathmandu. The sky with the sun was invisible under the impenetrable pall of smoke. The children suffered from burning eyes and massive breathing issues so that all schools had to close for three days. The government issued a statement of concern and had the fire sources counted.

MOTHERS WITH CHILDREN

You see that even during these complicated times we are always holding close contact with our staff in Nepal from Germany. I am so thankful, as always, that modern communication technology enables us to do so at no cost as often and as long as required. We in Dortmund are as always deeply moved by the fate of some people which we can hardly imagine, living in Germany.

For example I was shocked to hear from a small family belonging to the "Untouchables", the Dalit. The mother lost three of her children because they simply died of hunger! She has a baby who is three months old - weighing only 2,800 grams. This is way too little for this age group, but she cannot breastfeed him as she is too weak herself. She went to the health centre of her village, asking for help. But she was rejected rudely: There were so many needy ones - nothing could be offered to her, although the government has stated that hungry children would be supported. Such a rejection must have been bitter for the poor woman...

Shanti took her and her family into its care, the father being an albino needing medical help in the neighbouring eye clinic. The mother is carefully fed and Bikas, the baby boy, is given the necessary milk. We were reminded of the fact that Shanti had succeeded in raising the undernourished triplets through their difficult first months - they are strong chubby-faced boys now.

During such experiences, we are repeatedly thankful that you support us in a reliable and generous way enabling us to help wherever it is necessary - just like a short time later when I found a report in the Kathmandu Post on the web which I immediately sent to our team in Nepal.

ANAKA FROM THE COWSHED

A journalist discovered an old lady living for many years hidden in a cowshed in western Nepal as she had got leprosy. Her family cast her away from the house, refusing to contact her. Our staff contacted the report's author at once, Ashish Paudel, who took the old woman to the Shanti premises. She had never seen a car in her life, much less an airplane! As she lived in western Nepal, which is a three-day car drive from Kathmandu, Ashish flew with her to Kathmandu, which cost 260 euros for



both. A good friend offered us the money for that special purpose.

Anaka never wants to return to her "cowshed prison". She likes her life in the company of Shanti's loving old ladies, such as Granny Mina and Granny Champa. They both have had a similarly hard life as Anaka. Granny Mina was married at thirteen; she had her baby at 15 and had to work hard from the beginning: Fetching water from a long distance, cutting feed for the animals and carrying it home, cooking and washing for the entire family... In Nepal, people live in large family compounds, the wife moving into the husband's family.

When she got leprosy, she was cast out. We found her 23 years ago when she was begging at the temple and took her to Shanti. Both Granny Mina and Granny Champa accepted Anaka as a matter of course into their circle, listening to her with empathy. This alone, to be listened to, is a remedy for a terrified, lonely soul like Anaka.

Such individual stories of life let the Shanti family members recall their own fates, reminding them of their helpless despair when they first came to Shanti many years ago. They are able to extend the necessary care to the newcomers, feeling with them.

SINDHUPALCHOWK RECONSTRUCTION

I am writing this letter almost exactly six years after the big earthquake on 25 April 2015. I sometimes think of the big earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 - the world being informed of the disaster only some weeks later as there were no telephones then. Six years ago, people heard of the earthquake in the news all over the world within a few minutes.

I very drastically recall the traumatic scenes, which I escaped without any harm. Which is a reason for being very grateful!

For three years, we have done our best to care for the surviving people from the Sindhupalchowk epicentre. The former mountain farmers are now living in a refugee camp in Kathmandu. Our son Heiko developed it rather quickly into a training camp where the women learn how to sew, weave and knit. They were made lethargic by the traumatic experience of the earthquake. So learning something new apparently strengthened their vitality.

They can still earn their living with knitting today as their former home cannot feed them - quakes and landslides have decimated their land so that it is impossible for them to live from farming there.

We got much overwhelming help and solidarity from you during those times. I am proud to bring you the pleasant news finally: Your reconstruction donations for a designated purpose are currently being used to build 90 houses in Sindhupalchowk. We will probably have an official opening party in autumn.

But in the meantime, frustration has often prevailed. The families did not dare go back at first. They were full of fear of more seismic shocks, which had gone on for some weeks after the big quake. Then there were the big landslides, burying everything that the families were able to save from the remains of their houses.

With terror in their hearts, people only returned after almost three years - when neighbours in Kathmandu had filed complaints against the camp right next to their homes!

They lived in livestock sheds and huts. It was cold and moist, and they suffered. We were eager to use your money and build as soon as possible - but the government imposed a construction stop, which hit us hard.



The plans we had filed intended a construction of earthquake-safe houses with 50 square metres of living space for each family at a price of 10,000 US dollars (= 8,300 €). This was resolutely rejected by the authorities as it was too expensive.

But the government itself finances small buildings of 16 sqm per family at 3,000 dollars (= 2,500 €). How can you build earthquake-safe at such a price? But we were not prepared to dispense with such safety - so we were forced to halt the construction measures. We had to wait for more than one and a half years until we got the permit again - with the condition that we only use 7,500 dollars per house (= 6,300 €).

Wonderful, human relationships developed in the camp, by the way. When the landslides had torn so much land away, not every family still had enough space for a house with a small parcel of land around it. A lady who still owned a relatively large parcel of land offered part of it to another woman where the latter can build her small house - they had met during a knitting session and become friends!

I must admit that I was really ashamed (ashamed for others) so that I no longer mentioned any reconstruction issue in my letters to you although Shanti was not responsible for the delay. I imagined that you gave away your money in a spontaneous act of generosity so that the people could benefit from a protecting roof over their heads during the hard weathers of north-east Nepal - and then those abrupt, hard brakes were applied. We were working hard to make it happen, we did not give up, always hoping...

I deeply ask for forgiveness for my restraint. I was helpless, I could not exert power, and I could not even describe our frustration in the right words. But I felt so sorry for the suffering people in Sindhu-

palchowk at the same time. We gave them all warm sleeping bags, jackets and knitting orders for the women.

But now it is soon finished! The works are going on promptly every day. We had to build some support walls at an unplanned 50,000 euros, but such walls are wanted by every one of us. The purpose is to give people a safe roof over their heads after all the terror.

I really thank you for all of your patience and trust. And we are convinced: A happy outcome is worth waiting for.

From all my heart I wish that you will not tire or get bitter by the restrictions we have currently to live with. Let new vitality grow in you - like the growing life in nature around us - for example by the good deeds that you initiate with your help in so diverse ways. Take care and greetings to all your loved ones, too!

Yours
Marianne Grossspietsch

UPDATE FROM 29 APRIL

Dear Friends,
we can pick up our Spring Letter to you from the print shop tomorrow and pack it for the mail. While it is still being printed, the Covid-19 situation in India got so much worse - as you have certainly heard in the news. India has an approx. 600 km border with Nepal so that Nepal is directly affected by the situation in India. So I wish to give you some news of the situation in Kathmandu, too.

The Nepalese government wishes to close the borders with to India, but this is factually impossible.



There are a lot of small boarding houses around Shanti, in which many Indians live, hoping to escape to foreign countries by way of Kathmandu. Our centre is right next to the airport, as you know. Every day the number of infected people grows at Shanti. We bought oxygen equipment and set up isolating stations in our classrooms and in Buddhainilkantha. All students of medical professions are working too.

The queues at the vaccination centres are kilometre-long. Look at the photo - people are too close to each other. But not all of them keep the peace while queuing: Our medical staff has experienced terrible punching and fighting, so that they escaped to another centre where peace reigned in front and inside.

We are currently hoping and doing everything that our people in the centre will be directly vaccinated by a vaccination team. Shopping is only allowed for two hours twice every day - which means that people are crowding closely during these times. No vehicles are allowed from today, the only exception being ambulances and supply trucks. We are very lucky that our cars are recognized as such and have a sign on them. We are grateful that we can continue supplying the slum inhabitants, within Kathmandu at least.

The worst scenes are those in front of the hospitals. Bijendra called them riots and civil war scenes. People are crowding before the doors, wishing to pick up their dead. But they are only given to them if they pay for the hospital bill immediately.

But the bills are so excessive that no normal being can settle them: we had to pay the forty-fold monthly wages of a worker for the three days the brother of our tailor Ramesh was hospitalized! Bijendra managed to bargain the 4,000 euros down

to 800 (which is "only" eight monthly wages) - but this is still an amount hardly anyone can pay, the poor definitely not. But it is a terrible sin in Hindu religion not to depart from his dead family members performing the correct rites. This will affect further incarnation, the soul of the dead not finding any peace.

So the closer family are in real despair. The crematorium is totally overloaded and cannot cope with the number of cremations.

As reported in the "Himalayan Times" from 27 April 2021, the government is pampering economy, meanwhile, equipping a new industrial centre, demanding from private initiatives and local authorities that they battle against the virus and relieve the most imminent misery.

We are really thankful to you for helping us absorb at least a small portion of the misery. Bijendra bought a lot of supplies so that we can grind the litho as before, and some 200 volunteers help us to distribute it in the slums - maintaining hope in this way.

Take care all of you! Your M.G.