

RETURN TO INDIA

By Pat Moriarty (December 15, 2018)

Sometimes in my life I have stumbled into lessons that seem unusual and unconventional. On my recent trip to Mumbai, India I found myself a student once again. The topic was acceptance. I had returned after almost three years for what I hoped was a final round of major dental work, to an exceptional clinic and an oral surgeon who had become a friend. India taught me much during my first visit, and the lessons only deepened this time.

Mumbai is a city of 22 million people, most of whom reside in crowded slums. To say the city is over-populated is a breathtaking understatement. I spent my days in a dental chair and my early mornings on long walks through the neighborhoods surrounding my hotel and clinic. One such neighborhood, Dharavi, morphed into my classroom, a community made famous by the movie "Slumdog Millionaire."

Dharavi juxtaposed abject poverty with unbridled vitality in ways that made no sense to me. The physical conditions inside the neighborhood were simply mind boggling:



- Dharavi spans an area of just 535 acres, with 1.2 million people,
- The population density is 869,565 people per square mile,
- There are 5,000 businesses, 15,000 single-room factories.

- The literacy rate of 90% is among the highest in the country.
- Many residents are highly trained, tech-savvy entrepreneurs,
- More than a billion dollars of commerce is generated annually,





- The average rent is \$4.00 per month,
- Only 26% of the community has access to clean drinking water,
- 4,000 cases of disease are reported daily,

- 80% of Mumbai waste is recycled, much of it in Dharavi.
- Toxic levels are three times the safe limits.



- The average wage is \$1.25 per day,

And yet the people projected a sense of contentment and well-being. Dharavi taught me poverty need not destroy the spirit; prosperity is a point of view, not a destination. Happiness is not a monetizable commodity. What is enough is a matter of choice. Acceptance has the power to transform a little — into enough.

Don't get me wrong. My lesson didn't come easy; I needed something in me to change for me to see what was staring me in the face. For this to happen I needed to get out of my head and into the streets of Mumbai, through the tight, crowded communities, in order to test my preconceptions and introduce a new perspective on my own life.

These scenes of:

- Cheery-eyed children going off to school,
- Precarious shacks hosting cutting-edge technology,
- Women preparing meals in glorious fellowship.



Happy scenes, juxtaposed against jaw-dropping conditions of what looked like abject poverty, were more than I could comprehend. How could such vitality exist in such an environment? And yet I could not deny I saw the same level (if not more) vitality as I'd find in my own community.

I felt not blessed for what I had, but in need of what they had.

The spectacular question came to me: When is it that I decide enough is enough? I couldn't help but ask myself, why is it that I place so many preconditions on my happiness. Why was my enough so much more than their enough?

During my time in Mumbai I was introduced to an answer in thousands of people in makeshift shelters, lining countless sidewalks, living their lives who, not for a moment, considered themselves homeless but occupants of "homes" of a different sort.

My big lesson came with one particular woman who lived on a sidewalk close to my hotel. I would see her preparing a morning meal next to the tarp that provided shelter for her family. She greeted me with a sweet, toothless smile, exactly the same kind of smile I'd traveled 7,000 miles to eliminate.



I left India having been taught an unforgettable lesson. My life would be a more congenial reality if I'd learn to dial down:

- what I think life owes me,
- what I think I've earned,
- counting my blessings in stuff,
- comparing myself to others.

My trip to India taught me the starting point to a good life is and always has been accepting that my life right now is — good enough.

Just a thought...

Pat

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