

Message from

RI President 2015-16



We in Rotary aspire to great deeds. We admire those who gave great gifts to humanity: Abraham Lincoln, who gave the gift of human dignity to the downtrodden; Mother Teresa, who gave the gift of compassion to the forgotten; Mahatma Gandhi, who gave the gift of peaceful change to the oppressed. Their very lives became gifts to the world.

We can be inspired by their example. We can be inspired to ask, how can I, in the life that I live – without neglecting the responsibilities that are so dear to me – how can I, too, become a gift to the world? As I considered my theme, I thought of the lessons I have learned through my Hindu faith. I thought especially of the story of Sudama.

Sudama was a poor child and a bosom friend of Krishna, who was born in a royal lineage as an avatar – an incarnation of the divine. As the two boys grow up, they drift apart, and while Krishna becomes a military leader and king of great repute, Sudama remains a humble villager.

The years go by and Sudama's poverty deepens. Finally, he lacks even food to feed his children. His wife reminds him of his childhood friendship with Krishna: Perhaps it is time to go to the mighty ruler for help. Reluctantly, Sudama agrees, but resolves that he will not go empty-handed. He gathers together a few handfuls of rice – all the food his family has left – and wraps them in a piece of cloth as a gift for his friend.

When Sudama enters the palace, he is overwhelmed by the grandeur and by Krishna's gracious welcome. His meager gift, so carefully prepared, seems a humiliating reminder of his poverty. Krishna embraces Sudama, who hides the hand holding the rice behind his back. Krishna asks what he is holding.

Far from being disdainful, Krishna accepts the rice with gratitude and consumes it with joy as the two sit and talk together. Hours pass, during which the pleasures of their rekindled friendship push all thoughts of his desperate plight from Sudama's mind. When evening falls, Sudama sets out for home – and only then realizes that he has neglected his task. He is returning with nothing, and Krishna has eaten his family's last grains of rice.

Sudama steels himself to return to his hungry children. But standing before his gate, as dawn begins to break, he sees that the hut he left yesterday has become a stately home, and waiting to greet him is his own family: well-dressed, and well-fed by the baskets of food that appeared in their kitchen as Krishna ate each grain of Sudama's rice.

Krishna understood what Sudama had brought him: everything he had to give. In return, Krishna gave him everything he needed. It is never the material value of a gift that matters – it is the love that comes with it. Just as Sudama's gift to Krishna became a gift to Sudama, what we give through Rotary becomes a gift to us. And we all have a choice: whether to keep our gifts to ourselves or give them to others, and Be a Gift to the World.

We have only one chance at our lives. And we will have only one chance at this new Rotary year. This is our time. Let us grasp it. Let us Be a Gift to the World.

K.R. "RAVI" RAVINDRAN

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