

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

We are facing many kinds of problems today - corruption, exploitation, and violence in society, strife in family, and lack of satisfaction in the self.

1. What are the current problems a reflection of?

The source of current problems seems to be an emphasis on physical facilities, glamour, consumerist lifestyle, and a false sense of satisfaction in competition and one-upmanship ('neighbours envy - owners pride'). The focus on the external things leads to ignorance about the concerns of the self. It leads to a blind race for wealth, position and jobs. Many times, in spite of achieving ones goals, the individual remains dissatisfied - jobs and positions that are intellectually and mentally unfulfilling, and wealth that breeds chaos in family, problems in society, and imbalance in nature.

Physical facilities are needed to lead a proper life; however, there is a need to examine how much physical facilities are needed and what their role is.

It is also important to ask the question - besides physical facilities, what else is important in human life? The lack of attention to relationships leads to strife in the family, in spite of all the worldly successes. It is human relationships and human values that are a source of our perennial happiness. We all possess these human values inherently, and what is needed is to bring them out in each one of us.

The workshop addresses the self in the human being. It draws attention to human needs - need for human relationships, inherent desire to seek knowledge, and the joy that we naturally derive from these. In our current situation, we might be seeking different things. Thus, it brings about a dialogue between what we are and what we want to be. It does not posit happiness in an after-world, but here and now, based on a "humanness" common to all human beings. The approach is rational, secular and universal.

2. *Experiences of earlier workshops:*

The approach is holistic, covering a large canvas, and it has made a tremendous impact on people from different walks of life. Some experiences are given below. Although, the concerns of each of the groups are different, what they realize at the end is that there is a need for human values and relationships and that is founded upon the knowledge in the self.

2.1. Young students in engineering

The workshop was included as an essential part of the academic curriculum at some engineering institutions a few years ago. It has led students to reflect on what their goals are, the place of money in life, the joy one derives in relationships; a focus on the pursuit

of knowledge and not merely on jobs and the money they get out of it. They have become relaxed in their self, and become more sensitive to relationships with their friends and family, and regarding society and nature.

2.2. People from different walks of urban life

People from different walks of life are affected by the workshop. Many realize the lack of time they give to their family in their relentless pursuit of wealth, and even more importantly, the way they behave with their children, spouse or old parents.

Many such people are affected profoundly and come back to further workshops with their family members, again and again.

2.3. Criminals in jail

The workshop touches criminals in jail most directly. Those who are seething with revenge, slowly start realizing that in fact their "enemies" are not bad. They are to be pitied and not hated.

In turn, they themselves get depressurized and relaxed. This eventually gets reflected in their day to day behaviour with other jail inmates and with jail authorities. Bilaspur jail experience shows that some of the most violent criminals with also the worst behaviour inside the jail, got totally transformed.

2.4. Social workers from NGOs

People working for uplift of the downtrodden in rural and urban areas are greatly affected by the workshop. It dawns on them that along with work on employment generation, agriculture, irrigation, health, sanitation, scientific temper, it is also important to work on "understanding" of the self and on relationships, without which their work and successes are short lived.

2.5. Farmers and rural folk

Rural folk today are in a state of demoralization. They are being told that they are backward, and need to be developed; that they are ignorant and do not know what is good for them; that they need to study English and IT without which there is no future. The present political structure and political parties have led to a breakdown of community decision making. High powered marketing along with TV has led to a loss of community life and led them to yearn for the "luxury of city life". They do not notice what they might already possess - clean air, clean water, and a stronger possibility of a wholesome life with fulfilling relationships in family and community.

The experience of rural people who attend the workshop has been that they feel a sense of empowerment regarding themselves and what they can do at their own place. Rather than treating farming as an unworthy activity, they see value in what they are doing. The importance and necessity of physical labour for all, comes out as a corollary.

There are established business men who have done the workshop and been motivated to take up sustainable or "zero-input" farming where all the required resources for farming are generated from the farm land itself. Several experiments in renewable energy are also in progress. They are deriving happiness out of farming and physical labour.

2.6 People with a spiritual background

People with a spiritual background usually take time to come to terms with the possibility that one can talk about "human values" without bringing in elements of mystery or the unknown. Many are elated at this discovery. People from different faiths - Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity - have started getting deep into a process of self-exploration after doing the workshop, and are able to see that human values can be derived through this process of self exploration by each one of us and are the same as those professed by their respective faiths.

3. *What the workshop is not*

3.1. The Workshop is not a course in moral science. It does not tell you DOs and DONTs. It does not tell you what you should become, or what you should do. (It only seeks to connect you with your Self and encourages you to seek answers within self.)

3.2 The workshop does not talk about rewards and punishments in an afterworld. (The goal is happiness here and now. It puts forward the proposition that the basic human values are inherent and intact in all of us, what is needed is to be aware of them. When we follow what is innate in us, we derive joy and happiness. The listener is free to do self investigation and self exploration and come to his own conclusions.)

3.3 The workshop does not say physical facilities are unimportant and must be shunned. It rather talks of prosperity in every family. (It says that there is place for facilities in life and encourages people to fix their place in their own life. This also requires separating needs from desires generated by TV and consumerist culture, where the irony is that accumulation of wealth is accompanied not by a sense of fulfillment but by a sense of deprivation, The workshop presents this aspect forcefully.)

3.4. The workshop is not the representation of an organization or society. It does not insist on any specific faith or any specific belief. (It only proposes and asks its listeners to investigate and explore into their own inner self and connect to what is innate and intact in all of them as something which is universal, natural and all-fulfilling for them as well as others. They can do this irrespective of their own religion or faith or beliefs.)