In his address at the European Parliament in Brussels on November 12, 2019, Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, a Math Shiromani and 1 Gram Panchayat Coordinator from the parish which is home to the peaceful, well-trained farmers, flew to Hyderabad to attend a 2-day orientation program on the theme of women empowerment held at the NIRDPR campus in Hyderabad from 8th to 9th November 2019. The participants were further felicitated by NIRDPR.

Kisan Mahotsav in MP

Gurudev addressed a huge crowd of students and over 30,000 farmers at the Kisan Mahotsav and Chhatra Samagam on November 4, 2019, in Borawan, Madhya Pradesh. Success stories of the farmers engaged in natural farming dispelled the notion held by a majority that natural farming is not profitable. With proper training in natural farming techniques, farmers can cultivate their farms at a minimal cost and produce food that is chemical-free and healthy. The Art of Living has so far trained 2 million farmers in natural farming practices.

Kamlesh Barhwal

Appointed as Honorary Advisor of Yoga

As part of The Art of Living’s Action Research Project in collaboration with the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) and the Government of Jharkhand, to strengthen grassroots governance in 134 selected gram panchayats of Jharkhand, 14 elected women representatives from rural Jharkhand, including two Mahulis and 1 Gram Panchayat Coordinator from the parish which is home to the well-trained farmers, flew to Hyderabad to attend a 2-day orientation program on the theme of women empowerment held at the NIRDPR campus in Hyderabad from 8th to 9th November 2019. The participants were further felicitated by NIRDPR.

People Were Willing to Cooperate in Ayodhya Matter, Says Sri Sri in his EU Address

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Learning Financial Skills steadies Women for Entrepreneurship

YLT graduate Ajey Kumar from Trissur, Kerala, is a model worth emulating. Ajay has established a food co-operative among Women’s Food Courts (WFC) that are owned, managed and run by women. A Hotel Management graduate, his mission was to train and empower women from disadvantaged communities to own and operate food hospitality enterprises that provided healthy, traditional food to the public. The women in the WFCs receive ongoing, end-to-end training in finance, book-keeping, food costing, inventory management, commercialisation and related equipment, hygiene planning and so on. Support and consultancy are assured. Today, the WFCs have 18 entrepreneurs and 50 staff, helping a team of 125 women operate 150 units. The women take full responsibility for the daily operations. Investments are below Rs. 50,000, and several of these women are now earning over one lakh a month. Former wage-earners now employ other women! They are the mainstay of their families and give better education to their children.

A well-trained entrepreneur can make a difference, but if this entrepreneur can’t think with a larger objective, her success will be short-lived. Many women have now become entrepreneurs and are the proud owners of a successful milk processing unit, Agro Products, in Partho, Jalna district. The Happiness Program conducted by The Art of Living helped these young men discover their full potential and played a vital role in boosting their entrepreneurial skills. The four young men set out on their entrepreneurial journey by joining hands to set up a milk processing unit which they named “Agro Products.” The unit was set up after conducting a detailed study of market rates and supply analysis of milk processing units in the region.

Once this is done, they must always try to resolve those problems and not discuss about their problems.

Happiness Program Empowers Entrepreneurs in Rural Maharashtra

Jalna, Maharashtra: The Art of Living, under the dynamic leadership and guidance of Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, has been working tirelessly to create a stress-free and disease-free world. The numerous projects and courses of the organization are based on a tried and tested combination of yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, breathing exercises, and practical wisdom. One of its pioneer courses, the Happiness Program, is helping people across the globe discover themselves and live their true potential.

Bappasheep Suresh, Ashok Kade, Parmeshwar Bajrind, and Shiraj Deshpande are the proud owners of a successful milk processing unit, Agro Products, in Partho, Jalna district. The Happiness Program conducted by The Art of Living helped these young men discover their full potential and played a vital role in boosting their entrepreneurial skills.

Rajaleela Patil

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Very soon they were able to procure 10 acres of land on lease on which they built a cow shelter for 30 cows. The milk processing unit gave the farmers in this drought-prone region a new ray of hope. Depending on the quality of the milk, they could get 40-50 rupees per liter. Agro Products has made steady progress and today it is wonderful to note that they process 700 liters of milk daily and supply milk to more than 14 villages. They have also been able to provide employment to several youths in the region.

Additionally, milk products including curd, ghee, lassi, shrunkhali, and other items are also being prepared from the available milk. Ashok Kade says, “The Happiness Program conducted by The Art of Living helped us immensely in our entrepreneurial life. After attending the program, we developed greater clarity, focus, and better intuitive capabilities which proved to be valuable tools for informed decision making, planning, and execution.”
Rain Water Harvesting to Prevent Waterlogged Roads

On November 16, 2019, The Art of Living Women’s Club in Sundernagar, with the help of students from several colleges and other self-help groups conducted a rally for ‘Plastic Free and Drug Free Sundernagar.’ Rahul Chauhan, 26, a Sundernagar resident, who was the chief guest on the occasion, congratulated The Art of Living for making this rally a reality.

Funfair in Sundernagar

The Art of Living Women’s Club, Sundernagar, had organized a fun-filled fair on November 17, 2019. Rajiv Kumar, Registrar, Central University, inaugurated the fair. Some of the highlights of the fair were a Baby Show, Mother-Daughter Show, and a colorful cultural program. Rita Khurbania, The Art of Living faculty and Director of the Women’s Club says that in the four years since its founding, the club members have been involved in several projects geared towards uplifting the downtrodden including serving free breakfast daily to patients and their caretakers at the Civil Hospital.

Children’s Day Celebrations in Etah, UP

The Bal Chetna group of The Art of Living family in Etah, Uttar Pradesh, had organized a creative and educating interactive program for the primary school children of Gnan Gyan Mandir, a residential school for underprivileged children. Children enthusiastically participated in several competitions, singing, hobby-related activities, and had discussions on what they would like to be when they grow up. Chocolates, biscuits, and color pencils were distributed among the children. Sports goods and equipment were donated to the school.

Winds of Change in Kalahandi

Kalaburagi, Orissa: Kalaburagi district is Odisha which is known for its glorious past and great civilization in ancient times is a place of natural scenic beauty and is famous for its folk dance form ‘Ghumura.’ Sadly, in the 1980s, this place which was once known as Karonda Mandala, a treasure of precious stones, became associated with poverty, backwardness, and starvation diseases or “Kalaburagi Syndrome.”

People of Kalaburagi are largely dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. Many migrate to the cities in search of a better life but due to lack of skills get trapped in ill-paying jobs. Those who remain back in the villages have hardly any sources of income. It was under such circumstances that The Art of Living stepped in to ring-in changes in the fields of health, nutrition, education, skill development, and basic infrastructure to bring new hope to the people of Kalaburagi.

Over the last 10 years, The Art of Living has been working on a number of projects in Kalaburagi. Prominent among them are the development of 5 Model Gram Panchayats under GDPD, opening of 3 branches of Sri Sri Gyan Mandir (free schools run by The Art of Living), 68 Sri Sri Bal Vika Kendras, rural PMKVY Skill Center, RPL, certification in Yoga and Agriculture, setting up of a Temple of Knowledge, and organization of numerous padyatra. Under the leadership of Bholanath Jena, Director of Social Projects in Odisha, and Lokhimoni Jena, The Art of Living faculty, assisted by hundreds of devoted volunteers, several programs and workshops have been conducted to make people aware of the benefits and creating awareness during the PEETHA Camp of January 2019.

Receiving the award in recognition of the high degree of transparency of Chhilipa Gram Panchayat of Dharamgarh block, Kalaburagi District, towards distribution of 50 acres of land for a research and development institute. Today, The Art of Living has reached every single block of Kalaburagi and, to a large extent, has succeeded in erasing the scars of poverty and hunger by introducing the people with new skills and giving them new hope.

There are 3 types of Seva:

One is when you feel sorry for someone. For example, when you see a beggar, you give him something to eat. Second is when you see someone is sad and you feel like doing something for them.

Third is, “My own Self, the Divine has done it. I just do it because it is my duty to do it. Whatever I do, I do it for the good of everyone. I do it with the best of intentions.”

This is the real transformation.
The Mentor Worth a Mention

Dantamohan village, tucked away in the quaint Mayurbhanj district of Odisha hadn’t yet seen much development, hadn’t yet garnered an idea of the big world that functioned outside it. Little Jyotish Mishra grew up here as the son of a devoted homemaker mother and a father who worked with the agriculture department. There was nothing to set him apart in the big world other than a sharp entrepreneurial streak that began manifesting itself from a very tender age. Inspired by the agrarian environment, Jyotish would curate his own kitchen garden and maintain it with the utmost care. A large part of the family’s daily kitchen needs were met by his modest garden. Jyotish exclaims with pride, “Even when I went to college in the much bigger city, Bhubaneswar, I did not take money from my father.” He would toil away at odd jobs in the nearby market place to earn his own money. This money took care of his hostel fees and food for all his years in college.

The strongest influence on Jyotish, however, was his elder brother, Pritish Mishra, an Ayurveda doctor and a dedicated volunteer for The Art of Living. Pritish inspired his siblings to participate in the Happiness Program which was being conducted around 20kms away from their place. With all due respect for his brother, Jyotish was unwilling to participate. “Yeh sab mujhse nahi hoga!” Jyotish recalls his reply to Pritish. But as fate would have it, their youngest sister wanted to participate but the venue was far and required them to cross a forest on the way. Pritish being away, the responsibility of chaperoning her fell on Jyotish. He decided to wait outside the venue for his sister, but by the second day of the program he got called in to participate. That was 2005, Jyotish experienced his first Sudarshan Kriya and before long found himself opening up to the larger possibilities of life. He next travelled to 20000 people in the Youth Leadership Training Program and has never looked back since then.

A few years ago, following Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s vision to revive the ancient wisdom and practice of Ayurveda among the masses, Pritish encouraged him to become a micro entrepreneur for Ayurveda medicines and other products. His jump into the game with his keen entrepreneurial streak. But this was uncharted terrain; there was no precedence of this work available to him. Jyotish would set up stalls at the venues of The Art of Living programs and interact with the participants and organisers to build relationships. If need be he would take charge of delivering the orders himself; he was determined to leave no leaf unturned. Profits were still hard to come by. For several years he either ran into losses or barely made even. But he held strong in spite of the failures and the hardships because he could fathom the magnitude and scope of Gurudev’s vision. And then Gurudev opened up the project for creating more micro-entrepreneurs across rural India to empower the youth and provide an income generation option for them.

Jyotish was now an experienced senior in the area and was thus required to take up the role of a mentor. This role too came with its own set of challenges. Most of these young boys and girls had neither education nor the skill sets for sales. Few even lost interest mid-way and would want to drop out. But Jyotish knew what a transformation it would bring to their lives and the gates of an earning opportunity opened up to them. He made it a point to meet up, listen to and address each one of their concerns once every week or two. He went to the extent of handing out products to them even if they did not have the money or were running in losses. He held them close to his heart and worked hard to show them the ropes. After years of barely making through, the tides started turning. The last financial year, Jyotish and his proteges brought in an enormous sale, bringing in surplus income for all of them. Today, Jyotish along with a couple of his friends mentors around 40-60 youths across Odisha, ushering in a new wave of empowerment.

Storming with Surrender

The 7-year-old Soniya, like many other 7-year olds was told by her parents that an angel gave her to them. And then unlike most others, an unlikely thought came to her, “Why did the angel give her away!?” Questions beyond her own comprehension would mould Soniya’s growing up years and never really leave her in the years that followed. A sensitive child, growing up with the stories of her freedom-fighter grandfather, she saw the world around her and realized that too many children around her were not as privileged as her; too many of them grappled with poverty and the lack of basic opportunities. Nevertheless, she grew up, bagged a degree in engineering, then MBA and then a smooth place to earn his own money. This money toil away at odd jobs in the nearby market to  his years in college.

But he held strong in spite of the failures and the hardships because he could fathom the magnitude and scope of Gurudev’s vision.

A couple of years later, in 2018, Gurudev launched ‘Project Bharat’, an ambitious project to touch every single village in India and work together with the local community to bring solutions to their everyday concerns. Gurudev had envisioned the project with the objective to create a renewed wave of empowerment. And at its very initiation Soniya found herself as the National Coordinator of this colossal project. Beyond her wildest imaginations, she had been thrust into an unknown ocean. “Where to begin with the challenges!” Soniya says with a broad smile. It was so new, there were no systems, structures or parameters in place; and the operation had to be on a pan India scale. Everything had to be figured out from scratch; she had to find the clarity in every finer nuances of the project and convey the same clarity to people working on it across the country. Design the project, design the office, frame roles and responsibilities, find the right people to do the jobs, coordinate with people from across the country, bring all of them on the same page for everything, mind the finances, document every detail - you name it and that was part of Soniya’s job. What her biggest challenge was, Soniya says with an embarrassed grim, “I was such a newcomer, hardly knew anyone, was too unsure of my footing and I was required to work hand in hand and offer solutions to the seniors in the organization who had been working on several projects for like 20 years!” That is when she realized the spirit of belongingness that guides us on this spiritual path. She knew this would require her to give her all. Her first decision was to make herself available to the needs of the project 24x7. She even informed her family that for the next two years she would keep very busy. “Fortunately”, Soniya adds, “I never looked at Project Bharat as a job. It was my seva to this nation and my Guru. That made it easier to surrender and strive harder.” Today, you can find Soniya sprint through meetings on her scooter, still seeking solutions but with a much firmer footing and an enormous faith.