

## The Power of a Free and Simple Mind

I was speaking to my Mother last night. It was the night of April 16<sup>th</sup> in the US, it was the morning of April 17<sup>th</sup> in India. It was my mother's birthday; I always tell her that she turns 17 every year on her birthday and then 16 the day after. That essentially makes her 16 forever. There are several reasons why I say this. But one of the main reasons is that she has an open mind. She almost always remains hopeful and positive. She still believes that almost anything is possible. This kind of thinking is usually associated with the youth of our world. This kind of free thinking is associated with a young mind; one that isn't tainted with the adversity that one faces through the experience we call life. But for someone to have such a mindset at her "age," is simply truly inspiring. Today, I will share with you excerpts from our brief conversation on the morning of her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.

During the course of our conversation, my mother mentioned that a few members in her housing community back home in Bangalore wanted to cut down a tree because its leaves were polluting the water in the swimming pool. Most of the members of the community protested this and hence the tree remained rooted. However, the family who wanted the tree uprooted, decided to leave the community. This left the manager of the housing community rather annoyed at the fact that he lost a client. My mother had no firm opinion on the whole episode, but the one thing she did tell me was this; she said, "If every one of us plants just two trees, it will make the entire place a lot greener." She said it was something I should write about and propagate here in the US (where I study). She said it was similar to what Amitabh Bachchan once said after the Tsunami hit India. Something along the lines of how every Indian donating a rupee would amount to a few crores. I told her it was a great Idea and that I will definitely write about it. But that was it at the time and our conversation moved on.

Later on in our conversation, I told her about the recent shooting in Virginia Tech, where a gunman went on a shooting rampage (the current toll is 32 victims). She was as affected by the incident as I was, even though she was so far away from all of it. She was as lost as most people are over here, and couldn't understand how or why anyone could do such a thing. In an attempt to explain things to her and myself, at that moment, I gave her my two pennies worth about how modern culture seems to devalue human life and the human connection. How young minds spend hours on end killing virtual entities on their video games. And finally, about how guns are easily accessible and how there is a powerful gun lobby that allows the sale of assault weapons. At this point, my mother replied by saying that she heard about something similar in India, where parents were advised to keep their children away from most cartoons, because even cartoons often have violence in them (even minor acts like pushing or beating each other). And finally she said that the lobbies, however powerful they are, eventually tend to dissipate. She said that if there is a strong resistance to a particular lobby and if the case for the resistance is strong enough and justified, then all that the lobby needs to do is to find some "new place

to make money," and eventually the lobby just gets weaker and dies. I agreed with her, and cited the example of the tobacco lobby, that hasn't really disappeared from America, but has certainly weakened their stronghold and simply shifted their base (industry focus) to other countries (mainly in Asia).

I've always had a high regard for my mother's views on issues such as these. One example that comes to my mind was the comments she made after her first visit to America in the late nineties. She was touched by the friendly attitude of Americans in general, but she was also concerned that Americans were sometimes too trustworthy or carefree. She cited the security at airports as an example. She was surprised that most people could walk right up to the departure area and were hardly checked the way passengers in India are. Most people scoffed at her concern and the usual response was "They (Americans) know what they are doing, their systems always make sense." Sometimes, her concern was met with an even more negative remark about how the Indian systems were just paranoid and not really effective. Still, at the time, my mother stood firmly by her views. Of course, after the unfortunate events of September 11, it seems that she was proven right after all. The reason I mention this anecdote about airport security, is simply because there are often times when we tend to lend too much emphasis on the views of experts or analysts. But most often, the answers are fairly simple and intuitive. It's getting to act on these basic truths that are not easy. Hence, in order to convince yourself and the world you have to get down to searching for justification from analysts and experts.

So what are the basic truths about a greener environment, or the shooting sprees in America? In the case of the greener environment, it is clear that we need more trees, and planting them will help. In the case of the shooting incident, it is clear that whatever the state of present culture, restricted access to powerful assault weapons will reduce the incidents of gun related deaths. So, assuming these basic truths are identified. What can we do about them? This is where it helps to have an open mind. This is the reason I mention the conversation with my mother last night. And brings me to the events of this morning.

I woke up this morning and found myself automatically turning on the TV to see if there were any updates on the VTech shooting. During the course of the coverage, I happened to come across an interview of a young student named Craig Scott. Craig was present at the Columbine shooting that occurred in 1999. He lost his elder sister, Rachel Scott, in that shooting and clearly went through a lot of trauma after the incident. In a more comprehensive interview with Craig the previous day, Craig spoke about how he was filled with anger and how it was hard to get on with his own life because of that anger. It came to a point where he would begin to vent his anger on other people dear to him. This is when he realized that things were getting out of hand. He made a change to his life and he began that change by forgiving the Columbine shooters. He then got involved with the work of his father. His father had started an organization to spread the message of compassion and kindness in school students across America called [Rachels Challenge](#). This morning, Craig was on TV

once again. At the time, I didn't think much of it, I turned off my TV and headed to work.

On my walk over to my university, I was still lost as to all that happened at VTech. It's hard to make sense of senseless acts. But I did come to one conclusion. After hearing what my mother had said to me during our conversation the previous night and after watching the story about Craig Scott and his family. I realized that there are three ways in one can react to adversity. One was is to react negatively, go on the offensive. With the case of the planting of trees, one can go about cutting them down, maybe selling the wood for a profit. Everything seems doomed, why not join the trend and perhaps make some money? Or gain some fame out of all it in the meanwhile. Another way to react would be to remain in the state of gloom and inaction. In the case of the shooting tragedy, this would mean to remain in a state of anger or mourning. The third way to react would be with positive action. In the case of planting trees, it would mean actually planting a tree or two, and asking everyone around you to do the same. In the case of the shooting tragedy, it would mean spreading the message of compassion and kindness, or spreading the message of stricter gun laws. In the event of serious tragedies, I do not believe a person has much of a choice as to how they react, or how they recover. I think that these tragedies are so severe, that it takes a brave soul to take positive action in a way that Craig Scott and his family have. But in the case of less traumatic events, such as planting a tree to tackle the effects of urbanization, I think we do have a choice as to how to react. The one thing we have to realize is that our individual actions make a difference. This is where the power of an open mind plays a vital role. And this is the reason I write this today.

I mention just one conversation with my mother, but I am not the only soul she has touched. Her enthusiasm and positive attitude is universal and applies to anyone who may ever meet her. Over the years I've seen my mothers concern grow from that towards our family, to our community and to our country. When she decided to do something for our country, she spoke to some people in the political field, and was advised against actively joining politics, but instead, she was advised to write to editors of newspapers. She was told that this little action actually helps and it actually makes a difference. She was told that editors are human and when they hear your concerns, they may not act on them immediately, but her continuous writing and action will make a difference in the long run. She took the advice positively and began to write to various newspapers and agencies whenever she came across anything that concerned her. Her positive influence began to spread and influence others, some were inspired, others understood and some others may have even continued to disagree. But the positive chain of events had started and they never stopped.

When my friend approached me with the idea of writing about various challenges that face Indian society and writing about how they might be resolved. He mentioned that the pen is mightier than the sword. I may have heard of that phrase many times before but if I weren't for the actions of my Mother, I wouldn't have received my

friend's ideas with as much conviction as I had done at the time. My positive response perhaps, in turn, inspired him to create silent change.

Some of the challenges that we are trying to resolve, such as passivity, have plagued our people for hundreds of years. When I think about how we may even attempt to change something of such a magnitude, I think about what my mother said when I asked her recently, "do you think you can fly" She thought about it for a few seconds and said, "I used to think I can, but now I'm not so sure."

In the world of modern science, we have two opposing views. One view is that—what can be seen and measured is, "If I touch something, and it feels hot, then it is hot". The other view is—what can be seen, measured and essentially what we know, applies only to the paradigm that exists at the time, "What we know today, is only applicable to our present world view." I always naturally tended toward the latter philosophy of science. Then I read and learnt about all the various scientific phenomena ranging from the field of neuroscience to quantum physics. Today I'm convinced of the latter philosophy of science. What we know today applies simply to this day and age. It is in our hands to expand the boundaries of possibility.

I doubt my mother needed to read all the science and philosophy to think she could fly. She simply is a free soul with an open mind and a positive attitude. She is not the only such soul out there. There are many. Their influence is powerful enough for us to recognize and realize a great potential in ourselves. Powerful enough to motivate me to write this article today or plant a tree tomorrow.

*You can forward any questions regarding my mother's idea to plant trees by commenting below. Or we can send you her name and you can contact her directly by searching for her profile on one of those popular community websites.*

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