

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

you know that conceding to the request might entail juggling your own competing priorities or losing a few hours of badly needed sleep? If the answer is "yes," you are not alone. I happen to be one of those individuals who find it hard to refuse people when they ask for a favour. This is not to claim that I am more compassionate than others. It's just that I have failed to master the art of saying "no" and feel guilty and lousy after rejecting a request for help!

In most cases my main motivation for obliging a friend or a family member is to genuinely help out. Then, why is it that what starts out as a selfless act of kindness often becomes a cause for stress and frustration? Is it because I bite more than I can chew and end up resentful and stressed-

out? The negative feelings are exacerbated when there is not much appreciation from those receiving the favours. Perhaps, I am at fault because I fail to express in definitive terms how much time and effort have been invested in the task.

Each time I go through one of these "yes, I can help" experiences, I promise that I will be more discerning about offering my services next time.

Nevertheless, within days I find myself in the same tight spot. My frustrations have prompted a rigorous exercise of self-questioning. However, I am yet to reach a firm conclusion as to why many of us have difficulty saying "no" to requests for help. I wonder if it's because we have a strong need to be liked or we are afraid that a refusal might isolate us from collective activities. Or, may be, saying "no" requires that we make a considered decision and it's easier to flow with the tide and say "yes." There are, of course, some that help others for truly altruistic reasons. However, the problem arises when over-commitment lands us in situations where we are stressed and sometimes

angry with the person who we are supposed to be helping.

The frustration heightens when we discover that people who have made demands on our time have the leisure to enjoy all the things that we would, in fact,

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like to indulge in! I am reminded of an interesting anecdote from my past . My neighbour in New Jersey had a 10-year old son, Nate, who attended the same school as my children. She would often ask me to bring him home from after-school activities, since she had a part time job. I would bring the boy home three to four times a week. This was not easy, given the multiple demands on my time with two small children of my own to care for.

One day I overheard my son ask Nate where his mom was. The child responded with innocent candor: "Well, today she said she was going to get her hair done.

That really did it for me! Here I was sweating it out in the kitchen making special pasta for Nate's western palate and the mother was sitting in a swivel chair getting her hair made up, and that ,too, on my time? Needless to say, the next time she

asked me to fetch her son from school, I politely made up an excuse and got out of the commitment.

I learned a crucial coping lesson from the episode.

When someone asks for a favour, we need to be discriminating about what we can do and what we cannot. One strategy may be to buy time with a polite and somewhat positive response: "I would love to help. However, I need to think about it -- can I let you know in a day or two?" At least this gives one the opportunity to reflect on the implications. Also, it's easier to send an email or call and say "no" rather than reject a request upfront. In some cases I have resorted to assuming partial responsibility and my answer is: "I am really over-committed at this time. But I do want to help. Can I just do 'this' and not 'that'?"

The point is, as long as acquiescing to a request for help does not create an imbalance in our own lives, we need to do what we can to contribute to the well-being of those around us. But if we feel grumpy or edgy about giving, we are better off avoiding such obligations. It's important to find the right equilibrium between our daily commitments and what we can do for others. After all, time is not an elastic commodity and investing time in others may require fine tuning our own priorities. We also have to accept the fact that, despite all our good intentions, some occasions will demand a firm "NO!" As Gandhi said: "A 'no' uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a 'yes' merely uttered to please, or worse, to avoid trouble."

What is the best way to say "no" and yet ensure that people don't feel rejected? Unfortunately, I have no silver bullet answer. If any of you have a foolproof strategy that works and want to share it with others please let me know and I can help spread the word around. Oops! Did I just say "yes, I can help?" I mean "send me an email and I will let you know if I can help!"

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank

Holy Spirit in the life of the Church

REVEREND MARTIN ADHIKARY

TODAY, Christians all over the world commemorate the "birthday" of the Church. The Pentecost Sunday is the fiftieth day after the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday. The Holy Spirit came upon the earliest band of Christ's followers, giving them a unique spiritual experience. Originally "Pentecost" was the Old Testament Harvest festival, which started seven weeks before and culminated on the fiftieth day.

The word "Pentecost" comes from the Greek "Pentekostes," meaning "fiftieth." This day was also celebrated as the day of God giving his law on Mount Sinai after the Israelite slaves were freed from Egyptian slavery. As a token of gratefulness to God for the harvest the people offered a portion of it to Him. This festival continued for seven weeks, and on the fiftieth day it consummated into special festivities.

Centuries later, the first followers of Christ, who were Jews, gathered together in Jerusalem, situated on Mount Zion, to celebrate both those ancient feasts in praise and prayers. At that time, the Holy Spirit came upon them as a result of which they experienced a seminal transformation in their lives.

They became a new kind of community of people. Fifty days after Christ's personal exodus through his death to his resurrected life he formed his Church to whom he gave his Spirit and also his life transforming Word. That is how the Church came into being and the disciples spread around with Christ's message and preached the same boldly in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit changed the life-style of the Apostolic community into a community of sharing with and caring for others. They glorified God by performing miracles also. The Holy Spirit gave them a new vision and hope and strength to transform the lives of other people. The entire book of The Acts of the Apostles, the first Church History book, is a testimony to all these.

To the Samaritan woman searching for the meaning of life Jesus said: "God is spirit, His worshippers must worship in spirit and

in truth." Worshipping God essentially has to be in the Spirit. All God's revelations, His work, is done in through his Spirit. The miraculous birth of Jesus and all his miracles were done in and through the power of the Spirit.

The Church is a sign of the Kingdom of God, which was initiated in the coming of Jesus into this world, and the work that he did was to be carried on by it by the power of the Holy Spirit. On the temporal plane this work is transformation of relationship manifested in peace and harmony, right relationship with one another and, above all, with God.

Unfortunately, the spiritually unique experience and life of the early disciples of

a life which is lived in right relationship with God and all His creations. This is not easy in our world!

The ministry of the Holy Spirit renews the challenge of renewal in our lives to love God and uphold all godly values for peace and goodwill in the Church and society at large. The Bible says that a spiritual person is to be distinguished from a carnally minded person by the virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Today, many of our religions are mere rituals without touch of real life and celebrations without commitment. This is true with every religion! These so-called religious activities cannot save us, cannot be a source of blessings from God unless we change our ways.

Christians in our country should internalise the inalienable significance of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise there is no authentic faith, no genuine witness to the transforming Gospel of Christ, whose message is the message of redemption from the bondage of sin and all its paraphernalia which characterise the life of our people.

Ours is a faith that believes in the continuous revelation of God. This He does in the continual ministry and work of the Holy Spirit and is ever willing to redeem, regenerate and renew all of his Creation in the power of His Holy Spirit. God the Father and God the Son work through the Spirit as the Church lives and has to operate in the Age of the Spirit. The two most direct Old Testament promises of God to his people were: "I will put my Spirit in you (Ezekiel 36:27); and I will put my law in their (your) minds" (Jeremiah 31:33). He has given us both. The Feast of Pentecost is an ongoing challenge to live up to both. The Spirit continues to guide us into truth and life. Let me conclude with the following first

few lines from the poem "On the Holy Spirit" by the famous Greek Orthodox Theologian, Bishop Ignatius:

"Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away, Christ stays in the past, The Gospel is a dead letter, The Church is simply an organisation, Authority is a matter of domination, Mission a matter of propaganda, The Liturgy no more than an evocation, Christian living, a slave morality."

The writer is a Theology teacher.



ELISE PEARCE

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Christ did not last long. It faded away in general as a result of the institutional Church's life becoming entangled with worldly power and politics during the later centuries. But if we look at the history of Christianity down through the ages there have been great people, who did great works with the power of the Holy Spirit.

When there has been wrong it has been because of the lack of willingness to depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I must add here that leading a spiritual life does not mean that we should stop all our material businesses. What we need to do is to live a life that is true, just and peace-loving,

GAVI -- Saving children's lives

KEVIN RUDD

THERE is something about a child under five -- those baby years, when you witness their first smile, their first step, their first word. There is a magic to that which never fades, even when replaced by the development of an extraordinary teen and then the adult they become.

Every year almost 8 million children with entirely preventable diseases never make that special 5th birthday. And all too often the lack of a simple needle -- your everyday baby checkup and immunisation -- is the reason why.

Dead for the want of an inoculation. These deaths occur overwhelmingly in developing countries, denying children a life, parents the joy of a growing child, and nations their future.

But while the task of delivering routine child immunisation equitably across the globe is easier to say than do, it is within our grasp.

Over the past ten years, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI) working with stakeholders such as governments and health services, private philanthropists, civil society and multilateral organisations, pharmaceutical suppliers and financiers, has started making inroads. The results speak for themselves.

Since its establishment in 2000, GAVI has funded vaccinations that are estimated to have saved over 5 million lives. That is, the population of Sydney, or Singapore, or Johannesburg or Los Angeles, all saved by the routine immunisation against diseases such as measles, tetanus, whooping cough and yellow fever.

Through innovative funding arrangements, GAVI has been able to reduce the price of vaccines to a fraction of their cost, and with GAVI's support, vaccines are becoming available almost simultaneously in both developing and developed countries, extending the same opportunities enjoyed by children born in rich countries to those born in poorer countries.

How does this work? One way that GAVI draws on private-sector thinking and new partnerships is to borrow on capital markets against legally-binding commitments by donor countries to generate more money in the shorter term for GAVI's programmes.

Since GAVI launched its International Finance Facility for Immunisation in November 2006, it has raised US \$3 billion

-- a stunning success.

GAVI and its health partners also negotiate hard with big pharmaceutical suppliers to change their business model to invest in what GAVI is turning into a longer-term, commercially viable market -- a market that purchases lives on an unprecedented scale. Now the call for pledges is going out to business and governments again -- the goal is a further US \$4 billion over the next 10 years, and the promise of an additional four million lives saved by 2015.

The Australian government and the Gates Foundation will be making pledges. We do this because GAVI delivers results. It is starkly apparent in Australia's region.

In 2009, GAVI supported Bangladesh to introduce a new 5-in-1 vaccine to protect children against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B and for the first time haemophilus influenzae type b -- a disease that causes severe pneumonia and meningitis. The vaccine is provided under the routine immunisation programme to nearly four million children every year.

GAVI has left a similarly impressive footprint in Vietnam, raising significantly the number of infants vaccinated against whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus.

GAVI has also inspired new partnerships.

Australia is working closely with the Gates Foundation, as well as the United Kingdom and World Health Organization, to tackle a major threat to child and maternal health -- malaria in the Mekong region.

Recently, malaria resistant to artemisinin -- the key component of the most effective malaria drugs -- has appeared in the Thai-Cambodia border region and parts of Burma.

Our collaboration on containment efforts in the absence of a replacement drug are vital for preventing this resistance from spreading across Southeast Asia and potentially to Africa.

The nature of disease means that we cannot take a narrowly parochial approach -- we must turn our efforts to where they are needed most.

Through GAVI and the partnerships that are growing from it, we are able to dramatically expand the reach and impact of our aid.

But we still have a long way to go. 1.7 million children die every year from vaccine-preventable diseases. We cannot allow as simple a solution as child immunisation to elude us.

The writer is Foreign Minister of Australia.