

P a h a l

Disha IISER Pune

Volume I, Issue I

The Coordinator Speaks

Heterogeneity is an inherent quality of any environmental system. Human societies are an example of such a complex system, and variation in human beings is not only on a genetic basis but also on a cultural and traditional basis. These facts naturally lead us to ponder over the human ethical concept of equality in society. What does it mean to say that we want equality in the society? I don't know an answer but I will present here some personal views...

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An Editor's Comments

It was realised that days go by in unhappy ignorance with blind eyes turned to those who need to be seen. It was realised that so much is said and so little done in this country where a billion mouths need to be fed. It was realised that you need to be the change you want to see in the world.

And so a fledgling was planted. Disha, they called it. It took root in the spirit of youth, was watered by the drive of individuals and was tended to by kindered souls hungry to help. The sapling took naught but what it needed and gave holistic development to those who formed a part of it.

But there is only so much a nursery can do. Every plant needs to be transplanted. And thus, with a heavy heart and eyes of faith, the founder handed the sapling to the next in line. He placed it in solid ground and allowed it to bear the brunt of the real world.

Through scarcity of resource and loss of hope, the plant persevered. It shed its cotyledons and gained independence. Soon it was so big that its branches knew not what soil surrounded its roots and its stem couldn't tell the colour of its flowers. Hence, they came up with "Pahal".

What does "Pahal" want? For you to know what's happening. For you to feel the joy of teaching and the hopelessness of fighting in Disha's every uphill battle. For you to be a part of Disha.

Be a part of the movement. Be a part of this platform for ideas. It's time to do what you know is right. All it takes is a little push. Help us be that push.

Notes on the Someshwarwadi Abhyasika

The Someshwar Wadi Abhyasika centre tasted a fair amount of success during the period of Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. There were improvements in many aspects of working and coordination and currently it is operating really well.

The initial problem of lack of volunteers was overcome by the entry of the fresh and enthusiastic batch of 2012. The main problem at that point of time was that children of even 4th or 5th standard didn't know how to read the alphabet. Our job started off with overcoming this problem and then tackling newer issues. Now, almost everybody can read the alphabet and also write proper spellings of small words.

Teaching basic mathematic operations was our next goal and we started to do that simultaneously. The current scenario looks promising, with every kid being able to do addition, subtraction, elementary multiplication. The elder kids can even divide, thanks to the effort of their school teachers.

Now that we have started with the basics, we aim to improve even further and work towards holistic development, in addition to the daily study routine. Thus, we have spared one day, viz Friday, of every week exclusively for playing indoor games with the kids. Also, we will now move on to tougher areas of study, like algebra, geometry and human physiology (at the very basic level) for them.

The last year has been very fruitful and we hope to raise our bar and work more than we did in the coming year .

Shrinidhi Mahishi

(Coordinator of Someshwarwadi Abhyasika)

The Happenings of the Construction site Abhyasika Spring 2013

The Construction site Abhyasika started last term with a lot of hopes and plans. The small team of volunteers had laid out a plan to introduce activities apart from the ones going as usual. Before the classes began, we made a visit to the construction site *vastis* and tried to create awareness about education among the people living there and many of them were ready to send their kids as long as we escorted their children to and from the Abhyasika.. The main concern of the parents was the safety of their daughters and some refused to send their kids despite repeated efforts to convince them about their safety. Nonetheless, the first day saw as many as 25 kids of the age group 4 – 11 which comprised the old kids who had been studying in the Abhyasika during the previous term and some new kids. While the new kids were excited about starting their lessons and using their very first pencil and books, the old kids were just as glad to meet their 'teachers'.

We started out with a team of 13 volunteers which had 10 students from the 2012 batch and 3 from 2011 one. With 13 volunteers and 2 days of teaching, we in effect, could assign 3-4 volunteers each day, with each volunteer individually responsible for 3-4 students. The volunteers were encouraged to use the board to teach as well as notebooks. The volunteers were advised to deal with the children with patience and not lose hope even if the student repeatedly failed at a particular task. On a general note, we felt that it was unnecessary to ask the volunteers for a donation of 100 rupees as they were volunteering of their own accord. We felt that donations must not be made a compulsory act as it would hinder participation.

After a smooth-sailing first week, we decided to introduce new activities like singing, dancing, some basic exercises, etc. for the kids by dedicating one day of the week to this purpose. However this did not go down well with the kids who couldn't tune themselves to this unusual freedom from writing and counting. So we had to scarp this plan by the end of February. We replaced it with storytelling sessions which the kids enjoyed a lot.

As weeks went by, the kids got a grip of the whole process and were trying to do their best. A system of noting down the progress of each child everyday was introduced such that the next day's volunteer could teach accordingly. Along with this we had made groups based on the knowledge levels of the kids so that those with same knowledge could work and learn together. Each group was handled by the same set of volunteers throughout. During the 2nd and 3rd week of March, we had Science demonstrations of some basic phenomena like the working of lungs, the magic of lenses, reflection, dispersion etc. Though this was more a source of enter-

tainment than of learning, the kids could at least relate to this and could tell us something about it when asked.

There were two meetings held, one during February in the week before the mid-semester exams and the other before we ended in the first week of April, which was aimed at learning the difficulties faced by our volunteers as well as to come up with some methods to improve the efficiency of teaching. Last semester there was an extensive use of teaching aids such as puzzles, picture-words and story books, aimed at making learning more fun.

We faced the constant problem of having to go to the *vastis* to call the kids and this would take up almost 20 minutes of the teaching time. Sometimes there was miscommunication between the volunteers and kids which caused many kids to back out. When the kids were available the volunteers weren't, due to personal commitments. Sometimes a single volunteer had to handle up to 10-14 kids which lead to the kids not receiving individual attention. This meant the kids getting distracted, in which case the classes needed to be cancelled.

"the new kids were excited about starting their lessons and using their very first pencil and books"

On the whole, last term saw the progress of the centre and the kids in general. The old kids had a good knowledge of general arithmetic with some knowledge of English and Hindi alphabets. The new kids also made their way through with good counting skills and recitation of the alphabets. In fact most of them were able to write all the English alphabets. Some the kids had been introduced to some very basic scientific phenomena which they seemed to be excited about. In the light of

these improvements, we hope that we do much better next term and bring in much more innovative methods.

The plan for FALL 2013 will be chalked out by the current general volunteers Harini Suri and Prasanth at the beginning of the semester. We would like to have a more rigorous plan at hand but because of the involvement of DSS I think we are only passive players now. We will discuss it in the general meeting and would like to draw up a supporting plan for DSS. We would like to supplement the DSS with science experiments, story -telling, teaching with puzzles and picture blocks. All in all, we look to walk forward in the spirit of DISHA.

Harini Suri and Nihal Srinivasa Rao

(Coordinators of the construction-site Abhyasika)

The Happenings of the Construction site Abhyasika Summer 2013

Door Step School (DSS) undertook Disha's activities at the construction site Abhyasika in the first week of June. The center is running at the same place (near the Mendeleev Block where Disha volunteers used to hold their classes). DSS has ample experience of a little more than twenty years of teaching kids at construction sites in Pune and Mumbai.

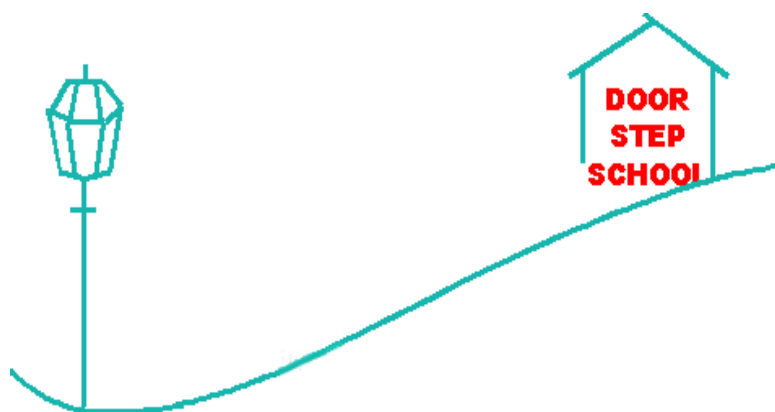
At present, DSS is sending around 10,000 kids of construction sites to the nearest school. At the IISER construction site, it is sending 20 kids to a school in Pashan and holding classes for the kids of lower age at the center alongside. The school-going kids are also given after-school tuitions from 2 pm onwards to help them in their studies. There are two teachers who take classes from 10:30 am to 5:30 pm and this is their full-time job.

As a result, the working of DSS requires considerable funding which was initially a problem for us. The problem was almost immediately solved by the very generous contributions from the faculty members of IISER Pune. We express our sincere

gratitude to them.

The construction site Abhyasika is no more controlled by Disha but IISER Pune students/teachers can contribute by teaching them in the aforesaid time interval. The teachers working there teach mainly Marathi and simple counting. One can help them by teaching higher arithmetic and English to the relatively older kids.

"IISER Pune students and teachers can contribute by teaching them"



How We Spread The Smile

"Spread the Smile" is an outreach activity of Disha which is organised once a year. This one-month-long activity is aimed at providing everyone an opportunity to interact with and understand rural India by reaching out to village schools around Pune, on weekends, with various educational activities.

The objectives of "Spread the Smile" are,

- To spread the joy of education among village kids
- To provide exposure to the interesting world of science, technology through experimentation and logical inference
- To inspire the students towards further education as well as developing a proactive and creative attitude to solve the various problems associated with their life.

This year we had conducted this activity in the month of February 2013. We selected six villages in a 70 km radius around Pune. We chose high schools located in villages which did not have any higher secondary education facility. In addition to science demos in physics and chemistry, biology field trips, math puzzles sessions and art sessions, we also focused on cleanliness and health-related issues. We also showed them documentaries and videos helping them understand the importance of these things.

We asked them to come up with any ideas that might make their life in their village better than their current one. We called this "the idea competition" and got really unexpected ideas from them. We also held a science exhibition during the last weekend of the program where we asked the schools

students to explain and perform all the experiments which were demonstrated to them during the program.

Apart from these sessions, we also had a special session for the volunteers where all of them went for a morning walk and saw village life for themselves. It was a very new experience for most of them.

We got a tremendous response from IISER and other colleges in Pune. About 120 volunteers participated in this program.

We plan to make this even bigger next year and hope to add more people to our team.

Sharvaree Vadgama

(Outreach coordinator)

The Coordinator Speaks

Heterogeneity is an inherent quality of any environmental system. Human societies are an example of such a complex system, and variation in human beings is not only on a genetic basis but also on a cultural and traditional basis. These facts naturally lead us to ponder over the human ethical concept of equality in society. What does it mean to say that we want equality in the society? I don't know an answer but I will present here some personal views regarding the same:

Understanding and appreciating the unparalleled diversity among individuals and social groups is extremely important. The concept of equality which stresses on every individual being identical is inherently faulty. The key is to identify that an important component of establishing social equality is ensuring that every person has equal opportunity to succeed.

However, the fact remains that we have not really achieved such equality of opportunity in society. There is no need to be cynical. A careful analysis of history tells us that we are very fortunate to live in a peaceful time, and the long sightedness of some prominent world leaders and philosophers have made the current society a healthy one. The sad fact of today's globalised and relatively peaceful world, however, is the lack of awareness and insensitivity about simple social facts amongst youth. We need consistent efforts, mostly on the part of young men and women, to appreciate social differences and understand social problems, realize

the immense potential that 'a group of like-minded individuals' possess and convert our energy in a well-directed manner to create a sustainable environment.

We at Disha, are a group of IISER Pune students who are trying to understand our complex societies, identify social problems and actively attempt to address some social issues through voluntary work. It is a very small but nevertheless an honest effort. We have come up with the following vision and mission statements of the organization based on our collective convictions and understanding:

Vision:

Creating a sustainable environment which will provide equal opportunities for all towards holistic development

Creating a culture of thinking beyond self among the youth

Mission:

Removing education inequity by providing necessary forms of education to the underserved children through voluntary work

Inspiring children to become self-dependent

Creating a force of youth who are proactive towards bringing about social change

Nishad Mandlik
(General Coordinator, Disha)

A Look at the Lamanvasti Abhyasika

Laman vasti Abhyasika run by Disha in the year 2012-2013 was a really different experience for us as volunteers. Our aim was the personality development of the children who live in the slum area and are deprived of quality education.

Initially, we introduced a level system in which we divided the students according to their level of understanding of subjects (and not according to their standards in school). But this was not as effective as we had expected it to be. So instead we allotted two days a week for different topics each, including maths, history, art, games, etc. We tried to teach them simple addition, multiplication, subtraction, etc. by conducting interesting games. In the art section, we made them draw different things to trigger their imagination.

In the beginning of 2013, we conducted a Vigyan Mela for the students of both Lamanvasti and Someshwarwadi in which we organised many workshops like bag-making, kite-making, origami, clay-modeling, science experiments and

competitions like rangoli, paper-cutting, drawing and best-of-waste. This was a really great experience for the volunteers and the children. They were encouraged by the prizes that they received in different competitions.

The Abhyasika then continued. This time we made them create charts which included facts, quotes, tables, months, seasons, do's and don'ts, etc. We were not able to continue the Abhyasika after March due to many problems.

The people living in Lamanvasti were not interested in this program and hence were not cooperative. The Samaj Mandir where we used to conduct the Abhyasika had no electricity. The children were not regular because the Abhyasika timings were in the evening when they usually played and hence were unwilling to learn. In spite of all these problems, we cannot call it a failure because it gave us a different attitude to look for and solve the problems of our society.

Prachi Atmasiddha

A New Venture

“So, is it a wonder if the kid wants to work all day and eat three meals a day with his/her family rather than go to a school and get a free meal a day for him/herself?”

We have all, at one point or another, enjoyed hot *vada-pavs* or *bhajis* on a rainy day at the close-at-hand Pashan market. We pay the bill, get the change and head out without looking back or giving it a second thought. But have any of us ever wondered how the kids who work there, who have never been to school, can do the math (faster than some of us, I must add!) and give us back the right change when we pay them?

Even though child labour is illegal, these kids are forced to work instead of going to school. Although it is easy to imagine an uprising against child labour, it is not a very practical option due to the subtleties involved.

The Constitution (Eighty-sixth Amendment) Act, 2002, was inserted in Article 21-A in the Constitution of India to provide “free and compulsory” education for the children in the age groups of 6 to 14 years. This is looked upon as a child’s right to elementary education. This act has provisions for a lot of things except for (in my opinion) the ones needed the most. The Act is inefficient both in its drafting and implementation.

In drafting the Act, the most seething problems these children face are not taken into account. On a cursory reading of the draft it appears that the government has paid a lot of attention to urban schools where the

question of donation and caste arises, leaving out the rural schools and the problems that are faced there. In rural schools, the question is more basic: does a kid in a given family get to go to school at all?

A kid who works in Pashan market earns upto Rs. 1500 per month. This, for many can mean the difference between everything and nothing. Now, if the government were to “compel” him/her to attend school, it is taking away the earning of the family. So, is it a wonder if the kid wants to work all day and eat three meals a day with his/her family rather than go to a school and get a free meal a day for him/herself?

As for the morality of the given way of earning, human instinct is: survival beats morality.

As for the implementation of the Act, I just ask you to look around you. I’m not really complaining as, if the Act were to be effectively implemented, it may mean starvation for a lot of families.

All of this said, there is little we can do to change the Act right away. So instead we came up with something that won’t harm anyone and will also mean that some kids can at least be minimally literate, i.e. write their names, at the very least. This is to teach them ourselves when they are not working. For most kids who work in the market this time is between 3 P.M. and 5 P.M. So, we bring them to Sai Trinity and teach them there for a couple of hours.

For now we have two kids who are really bright and enthusiastic, whom we are teaching. The hope is that their enthusiasm spreads among the kids who work in nearby shops that we don’t know about yet, and that they too will come forth to learn something. As these kids have never been to school before, we plan to teach them the basics-like the Hindi and English alphabet, numbers in

English and advanced arithmetic (as they already have a really good handle on the basic addition, subtraction stuff- due to their “profession”, so to say).

As for where we teach, on a temporary basis we are using the empty semi-balcony-like space on the 6th floor of the Sai-Trinity campus, Third Wing, away from the mainstream activities so as not to cause any disturbance to anyone working there. We would of course, like to have a better place, a little more covered and sheltered from rain.

The little catch in this is that most of us have classes during this time on most days. So, those who would like to spare some time for this, please contact DISHA at disha.iiserpune@gmail.com. We welcome any suggestions or criticisms.

Chaitra Agrahar

(Pashan Coordinator)

“This act has provisions for a lot of things except for (in my opinion) the ones needed the most”

For contributions, feedback or suggestions, please email :

*disha.iiserpune@gmail.com
or call :*

Shruti Paranjape

(+91 9923442665)

How Outreach Reaches Out

The Outreach team of Disha started a year ago with the motivation of continuing activities in villages where the Spread the Smile program had been conducted. We felt the need to do more and thus decided to make it a regular activity.

We aimed to focus on depth over breadth and planned to carry out projects on a continuous basis in various villages. We as volunteers also wanted to make efforts to understand the holistic social environment of the students in the village and plan activities accordingly.

We also wanted to incorporate expertise from established organizations (working in specific fields) to develop and carry out projects at the school.

Our initial steps were at a village called Kusgaon located on Nasik road at around 33 kms from Pune. As it was our first ever outreach experience we initially tried a few methods and then by making little improvements every visit, we continued this activity. We aimed to improve education by taking karyanubhav sessions for 7th ,

8th and 9th standard kids in the village school. Karyanubhav is a programme started by the government of Maharashtra to inculcate hands-on activities in schools.

We looked at the Karyanubhav textbooks and activity books and then with a little bit help from them, we planned our own activities.

Our team consisted of 4 to 5 students who visited Kusgaon every Saturday and took a three to four hour session in their Karyanubhav class.

We started with some activities related to their academic curriculum, a few things related to art and then a few activities designed to imbibe in them a general sense of awareness regarding cleanliness and health.

As one of the aims of this program was to make students aware of the problems in their village, we conducted a detailed survey. We sorted out village life activities into six different classes. They were Agriculture, Poultry, Water Harvesting and Management, Waste Management, Animal Husbandry and Forests. We then

(with a lot of thought) came up with survey questions. The survey was then conducted by the village students during their December holidays. A few students had taken a lot of effort and this kept us going to this village regularly. We faced lot of difficulties from language to volunteer issues. But amidst all this we managed to visit and carry out activities for around 20 times in Kusgaon.

We could not bring any great social change in the village, as it is a very slow process but we did have some significant achievements. The volunteer team learnt a great deal on how to work.

Our future plans aim at working on project bases in three to four villages. And also to have a residential camp in IISER for some gifted kids from our Spread the Smile activity. With this, we hope to inspire them to study hard and reach good institutes.

Sharvaree Vadgama
(Outreach coordinator)

Pictures Worth a Thousand Words



Talk For Twenty



The resource team's job in Disha was recognised to provide internal strength to the organisation. And an organisation basically runs on a set of ideas or an ideology, without which its existence cannot be assured. The more deeply the ideology is rooted in every member of such a group, the more the chances that the group will achieve what it is after., Human beings need a reason to fight, their actions should be guided by the ideology of the group and this guidance should come from the inside rather than from the outside. With this principle in mind the Resource team of Disha has started a series of talks in IISER Pune which will be revolve around the great ideas and the great leadership that has provided hope for change for the better in society.. Talking about the work of these people and their great ideas will help us build a proactive attitude towards solving social problems, the very concept Disha is based on.

The first talk in the series was held on 11th August, Sunday. Anandita De spoke on the Barefoot College, a college that teaches what is actually important - technology to the illiterate. Thus giving them the right to change their lives the way they want to. It challenges the very definition of the word "professional", giving equal honour to traditional craftsmanship that is fast-dying-out in villages. Bunker Roy, the

founder of the Barefoot College has proved that the poor and the illiterate can be taught to handle technology and that this very small step can change the power equations at many levels. In a TED talk, Roy says that the solutions lie within, one just has to 'listen' to the people, and their solutions are far more sustainable than what the policymakers sitting in their air-conditioned offices offer. He ends with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi: "*First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you and then you win*". This is an extremely important statement and reflects the very theme that runs behind such success stories; in the battle for equality and freedom, people win when they are given the chance to fight their own battle. Talk for Twenty is a platform to celebrate and discuss the amazing initiatives that give people that right.

Every alternate Sunday there will be a public talk on a topic, with emphasis on its social impact. The talk can be given

by anyone from any age and any profession. The issues raised can vary in their context from local to global. The talk must be informative and at the same time provoking. Every speaker will have strictly twenty minutes to put forth his/her views. A The following ten minutes will have questions and discussions.

Before the talks started, almost all the slots were packed, which shows that people do want to talk about these issues and we are assured that we are giving them a right stage. We are trying to reach out to maximum people because we believe that great ideas should be discussed widely. The abstract of the talks will be updated on the blog regularly. The best of the talks will be uploaded on the YouTube and we are trying to get guests speakers who actually work at the ground level with their own great ideas.

To participate as a speaker please contact :
Chaitanya Afle,
chaitanyaafle@student.iiserpune.ac.in (+91 9921071997)

To give feedbacks to the team and for the submission of abstract etc. Email us at: resourceatdisha@gmail.com

Himanshu Badhani
Resource Team

From the Founder



Kaustubh Deshpande, the founder of Disha is a student of the 2008 batch. He is currently working at HRI Allahabad.

Disha will complete two years of its formal, organized existence on the coming 26th August (and of course around 3-4 years of informal, disorganized existence). I can clearly remember the first general meeting held on 26th August 2011, with the appeal “Be the change you want to see!” I feel extremely happy and proud that Disha, which started as an informal group of a few friends has grown and reached an organizational structure (whatever be its current scale). It has so far been fairly successful in providing a “platform” for the expression of those who want to make a difference and bring about the change in a constructive way.

What is this “platform”? What are its foundations? What does Disha actually stand for? Having been asked these questions on a number of occasions by colleagues (and myself too!), I will try to attempt to answer them through this article.

Let me start with the analogy of a “bridge”. A bridge connects geographically separated (by river, valley etc.) regions by providing a means for exchange of goods, etc. thus integrating the lives of people across. Does Disha aim to build some kind of bridge? Yes indeed. If we observe our lives carefully, we can certainly identify barriers in society separating us from different kinds of people. A professor at say IISER, can’t relate to the life of a construction-site worker. A child from a small village finds no relevance in the life of an undergraduate student at an elite institute.

Even a student based in a metropolitan city can’t connect with the world of his/her classmates who come from rural or not-so-well-off financial backgrounds. Disha aims to break these barriers by forming “communication bridges” across various sections of the society. Through its activities, it stands for connecting the lives at IISER with adjacent slums, urban life with villages and also student volunteers with different socio-economical backgrounds. Strength of a society or nation certainly lies in the unity of its various sections. This unity will be there only when there is good dialogue ensuring knowledge exchange, treating everyone with equal dignity in a holistic

“This is our nation, our society. If we want to see a change happening, we are the ones who should be proactive and shoulder the responsibility.”

manner.

What is the underlying connecting theme for building these “communication bridges”? That lies in the vision statement of Disha – a culture of “thinking beyond self”. Whatever be your social, economical, or educational background, every human being really wants to do something good for others, in a selfless way. That is the expression of the “purest part” of a human being! (Call it conscience, soul, God or whatever else you like.) Disha stands for making an appeal to that part within everyone to create a “culture” of “thinking beyond self”. Now, “culture” is something which is contained very deep in the mind of a person and forms the foundation of his/her expression, in general. This is the ultimate vision of Disha for its volunteers and also what the activities

are targeted at. “Thinking beyond self” should form the fabric of the life of a person and thus not be restricted to a particular activity (e.g. teaching at Disha *abhyasikas*) or other circumstances. A very natural way towards this is the broadening of the idea of the “self” thus gradually incorporating others in your “self”. I believe this is in the real direction of “self development”, in the broadest possible sense.

Does all of this sound too philosophical and very passive? Philosophical, yes. Because philosophy forms the major (if not the only) part of one’s “fabric” of life. Passive, certainly not! A real bridge is meaningless when just on paper. “Culture” is equally redundant when just a thought or at an abstract level. Any kind of words or thoughts acquire meaning only when reflected through actions. So being “proactive” is another motto of Disha.

This is our nation, our society. If we want to see a change happening, we are the ones who should be proactive and shoulder the responsibility. The youth in particular, who are defined by extreme energy, have freedom in thought and dream to conquer any hurdles to achieve what they want!

Quoting Nobel laureate Prof. Mohammad Yunus from his speech at the Indian parliament – “Events in the world are driven by dreams of the people, not by the past and the present!” Let us all have full faith and conviction in our collective dreams! Let us commit ourselves to create appropriate concepts, policies, technologies, organizations and institutions to bring those dreams into reality!

What is this all for, you ask me? Honestly ask this question to that “purest part” within you. I’m sure you will discover that this is the only thing it ever wants you to do!

Kaustubh Deshpande