

The meaning of vibhuti

I have known Visham since he was thirteen years old. He, Amal, Rose and I were good friends and were inseparable. Visham was lively, fun and very honest. We went to college in Rose-Hill and sometimes we would leave school and go to his place or mine, but we never had a problem with our teachers. Soon, he left the college and began vocational training at Vaqua. But we remained good friends, and on Sundays we would get together. The *mandir* in Vaqua fascinated Swami. At first I wasn't that interested in going there, as I thought the best form of prayer was service to humanity. But he wanted to attend the *bhajans*, so one Sunday I went for the first time and thereafter, we went regularly.

One day Swami stopped giving me *vibhuti*. I didn't ask why and wasn't paying too much attention.

Once he asked me, "Do you know why I haven't given you any *vibhuti* for a year?"

When I told him I didn't, he replied, "Because you don't need it. It is only important for people who don't understand the meaning of *vibhuti*."

Swami is a constant reminder that all of our material attachments will inevitably return to ashes.

Impossible dreams coming true

In 1996, I completed college and was waiting for my final grades; then I got an interview for a nursing officer position. When Swami and I were discussing it one afternoon, I expressed it was my dream job. "Why are you worrying about it?" he asked. I said there was much competition for the position and he reassuringly said, "Don't worry, you already got the job". I became carefree, trusting in what he'd said.

Later I interviewed before the board responsible for approving the prospective candidates and their concluding words to me were, "Consider the job yours". The next time I saw Swami, I happily said I'd got the job and he said, "This is just the beginning. Take my word for it; you are going to be a

doctor very soon". His statement was completely unexpected and seemingly impossible to me because my finances did not permit further study.

So I continued with my job as a nursing officer and in my spare time worked as a first aid officer. I devoted all my time to this work, but soon had some problems with the organisation which forced me to leave. I felt completely crushed and lost. This was such a big part of my life and I didn't know what to do.

Then a friend called one day to suggest that since I'd done so well on the first aid training course, I could apply to medical school to become a doctor. I told him I didn't have the money. He suggested I attend school in Russia and pay annually: He said he'd arrange it for me at the University of St. Petersburg. So I contacted St. Petersburg University, sent in my application and was accepted. At the time, I was working as a nursing officer at a hospital and couldn't break my contract. No one was being granted a leave, but I wrote the hospital a letter requesting leave-without-pay to further my studies and bought my airline ticket to Russia. The date of the flight was growing nearer and no answer had come from the hospital ministry. I simply trusted what Swami had told me and thought whether they accepted or rejected my request for leave, I didn't care. The date of my flight arrived and I left for St. Petersburg. It was a Saturday. Two days later on Monday, the letter approving my leave application arrived.

As a student in Russia, I was very fortunate and bonded with my new professor. I was staying with him, which was very unusual. The other students had begun their course two years earlier. Despite this obstacle, I scored first in my final exam, which I put down to my professor's faith in me.

Arwin – Mauritius