
My Father In His Last Days

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(Editor's Note: Dr. Suresh Tiwari is a member of the Board of Trustees (BOT) and a past Chairman of the BOT. His late father Pundit Rajani Kant Tiwari recently died at the age of 102 years. Late Pundit Tiwari was a remarkable person in that he was fully active and alert until the last day of his life. For the last several years he was living in the USA with his only child Dr. Suresh Tiwari. Here are some fond memories of his father written by Dr. Tiwari.)

All his life he was always helpful to others. He was a person to find work and keep himself busy anywhere and anytime. However, during his last days he appeared to be losing his patience. It was getting difficult for him to continue doing anything for more than half an hour. He used to feel refreshed by switching over to something new after about fifteen minutes to half an hour on any self-assigned work. However, in some gatherings he could continue a discussion for hours until and unless the discussion was immediately after his main meal. He usually needed some nap after a meal.

Throughout his life my father always had fixed times for going to bed at night and getting up in the morning. He enjoyed getting up early in the morning at 5:30, and he hardly missed it. He became more and more rigid about doing things at fixed times as he advanced in age. During the fag end of his life he was very particular about punctuality. With him we too had become very punctual in all our works at home. My wife Shanti, a physician, would leave for her work at 7:00 a.m. everyday. My father would prepare his own tea in the microwave oven at 7:15 a.m. Then at 8:00 a.m. he would take another cup of tea with me, which I would prepare to drink with breakfast. My wife would prepare the breakfast for us before she left for her work. One day, looking at the way we performed our chores at home, he remarked, "This is not a home but an *Ashram*."

On a warm sunny day he did not like to be confined to his room. He would read news of India in the sun, would clean the porch with a broom or would collect dry leaves from the backyard. He did not like the cold winter weather, when he would have to stay inside the house and would have to read in the electric light rather than in the sun. However, then he would enjoy watching the cold weather from inside the house, sipping hot tea at the same time.

After a month's visit to India with my wife Shanti, I came back to the USA at the end of November 2003. Then I visited my father, who was at Jackson at the time, with my son. From his smile I could see that he was very

happy to see me back. He was also eager to hear all about the developments in India and the news about our home in the village there. He was delighted to know about the Bal Vikas Kendra, about the tree planting campaign, about my surprise visit to Ashrafi Kanya Vidyalay in Deokuli, about Sheo jee and Gayatri family of Patna and last but not least about the family at our village home, to which he had contributed considerably during his entire life. He was pleased to see the photograph of the well, which was deserted earlier but is reactivated now. He was also curious to know about the place, where he had built a bungalow, long time ago, for his father to retire peacefully. The bungalow is not there any more. When I told him that there is a neat platform at that site, which is being used as a school to teach students in the winter under the sun, he was very happy. He said, "The place where your forefathers lived is a powerful place. It has some cosmic power achieved through their devotion to God and love for their joint family. I am glad that everything is progressing well under your care. Now I would prefer not to communicate to anyone. I do not like to read or write either unless it is necessary."

Now that he had a glimpse of our joint family in India he wanted to have a close interaction with his own grand children and great grandchildren. So, one day he asked me as to when Pinky and Mike (my daughter and son-in-law) were coming. I told him that I did not know when they were coming. It so happened that after about a couple of weeks I fell seriously ill. I was hospitalized in Jefferson County Hospital under the care of my wife (Dr.) Shanti. Later, I was moved to St. Dominic Hospital in Jackson, Mississippi under the care of my son (Dr.) Salil. I was sick so seriously that at times I wondered whether I would survive that illness. One day I meditated on Lord Shiva of the temple at Ramobaria, on which I have a great faith. I prayed to Him and told Him that He could not do this to me while my 102 years old father was still alive. I think He heard me and I recovered quickly. In the meantime, while I was sick, Pinky with her family came to see me twice, once while I was in the hospital and the second time after I had moved to Salil's residence. Thus my father also could see his extended family consisting of Tiwaris

and Wilsons. One day, while everybody was present, my father mentioned that he had a burning desire to cook the complete meals, including chapatti (bread) and vegetable curries, for the entire family. I said, "Babujee (Father), your proposal is unacceptable to us. You have hard time in walking, how can you cook food for so many people?" Then he agreed that perhaps it would be too much physical work for him. This is an example of how eager he was to do something for others even at the cost of his own physical and mental pain.

After my recovery from that illness I, with my wife and my father, returned to our home at Fayette, Mississippi. I had an opportunity to spend many quality hours with my father. I recall that I had some strange interaction with him. He was an excellent person and a very loving father. He was a person who had good wishes for everyone, without any malice towards anyone. He had great faith in God. During my recovery a physical therapist used to come to help me do some exercises. We decided that those exercises would be beneficial to my father too. So the physical therapist, Mrs. Simmons, helped both of us for almost fifteen days. When she was finally leaving, she said, "He (my father) sure is a remarkable man, but please watch him when he is walking by himself, because at times he seems to be losing his balance."

After that we decided to provide an indoor commode for my father so that he did not have to walk outside the house at night. Actually one night at 11:30 p.m. I did see him staggering and almost falling. Fortunately I was behind him and I could hold him to save him from falling. Finally we got that indoor commode, but he hardly used it for two nights. He decided to use the outdoor rest room only. When I asked him why he was not using the new commode, he simply said that walking was good for him and for me too.

I was still keeping a keen watch on him. I used to observe that when he was in his room at times he would hold his forehead with his palm in sitting or lying down position. One day I asked, "Babujee, does your head hurt?" "No," He said, "I pray to the Almighty in that posture." "Do you see Him?" I asked, He said, "I see nothing. I pray to the formless but the Almighty God." I asked, "But still you must be visioning something." "Yes," he said, "Suppose He appears like you or anybody else, then I try to concentrate on that person's good qualities and pray to the Almighty for those qualities to come within me. That's all."

A day before his death my father talked about his own father. He said about him, "He was a saintly person. One evening he said he was not feeling well and did not want to eat anything, but would like to have a glass of milk. We served him a glass of milk. The following morning we found him dead in his bed."

My father himself was a saint. I did not know that what he described about his father was going to be repeated for him too. He too was found dead the next morning in his bed, as if he was in a peaceful deep sleep.

He was a clean person and was particular about his personal hygiene. During his last days when he was living at Salil's residence, Salil gave him a good hot bath with soap. Then Salil requested me to take my father to a podiatrist in Fayette to get his nails clipped. When I took him to my house in Fayette I myself carefully clipped his nails with a special nail-clipper. I could see that my father liked that.

One night, just five days before his death, at 11:30 p.m. he lost his balance and was about to fall. Then I grabbed him from behind just in time. In the night of February 12th, at 7:00 p.m., he had his dinner with us, just normally. Then he started walking to his room slowly. I asked him if I could come to his room to use the computer. He said, "Sure, the light does not bother me. I can sleep well even when you are working with the computer. Come and stay there as long as you want." I remained in his room until 11:00 p.m. and then came back to my room to go to bed.

The next morning, on February 2004, I got up at 7:00 a.m. after a bad dream. I do not recall the subject of the dream anymore. I suddenly jumped out of my bed and went to the kitchen, where at this time usually my father would be making his tea or would be drinking it there. I did not see him or his used teacup in the kitchen. My heart started pounding fast. I rushed to his room and found his motionless body lying there in front of me. I examined his body and realized that he was gone! Gone forever!! First I could not believe it. In a hurry, to go on his final journey, he not only had left his favorite morning tea but also left us all, his loved ones, behind for good. Alas! from now on, there will be no one to bless me with "Anand." when I bow with "Pranam" to him with my folded hands. All his things were left in his room in a well organized fashion as if he was gone somewhere only to come back later. The fact that he was never coming back to us took some time to sink in our mind. ■