# **BALANCING MODERNITY**

n contemporary society, there is a apprehension about the erosion of cultural values and the rise of sedentary lifestyles, particularly among the youth. There's a sense that people are increasingly disconnected from the rhythms of life that once brought fulfillment and meaning. Instead of engaging in activities that promote personal and societal development, there is a tendency to indulge in passive forms of entertainment, such as excessive screen time and virtual distractions. This shift towards a more leisurecentric lifestyle raises questions about the value we place on our time and the impact of our choices on both individual well-being and the broader fabric of society. It underscores the importance of promoting a balanced approach to life, one that prioritizes cultural preservation, healthy habits, and active engagement with the world around us. By reevaluating our priorities and embracing a more mindful way of living, we can strive to reclaim the joy and purpose that often seem elusive in the hustle and bustle of

# **Harmonizing Science and Faith on the Lark Advantage**

### **■ MOHD YOUNUS BHAT**

he term "lark" is inspired by the lark bird, known for its early morning activities, and describes individuals who naturally wake up early and retire early in the evening. Such individuals are often most energetic and productive in the morning, embodying the timeless adage, "Early to bed, early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise." This gender-neutral saying not only bridges the gap between scientific understanding and religious teachings but also stands as a universally accepted principle that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. It highlights the benefits of aligning one's habits with the natural rhythms of day and night, underscoring the wisdom in early rising and its positive impact on one's health, prosperity, and intellectual well-being. The confluence of scientific validation and spiritual enlightenment supporting this adage is illuminated in this piece highlighting how an early sleep regimen is pivotal for nurturing physical vigour, economic success, and intellectual sharpness, concurrently resonating with spiritual disciplines for a comprehensive state of

Scientific investigations suggest a subtle link between sleep timing and self-assessed health, challenging the straightforward benefits traditionally associated with early sleeping and rising. While some studies find no significant correlation between early sleep/wake times and outcomes like health, wealth, or wisdom, others underline the cognitive advantages of early rising, such as enhanced attention and memory, potentially bolstering economic and spiritual pursuits. Additionally, exploring the effects of early morning activities on sleep and alertness reveals potential drawbacks, including reduced sleep time and increased stress. These insights collectively focus on the importance of a balanced approach to sleep habits, aligning with natural circadian rhythms for optimal well-being, and offer a more complex view that both questions and supports the age-old

## **Economic & Spiritual Prosperity**

Theearly sleep-wake habits contribute to economic productivity is a notion supported by both scientific research and the teachings of major world religions. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism each shed light on the importance of discipline, diligence, and the wise use of time, underscoring the link between early rising and material

In Christianity, Proverbs 6:10-11 warns against laziness and underscores the value of diligence for economic stability ("A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest- and poverty will come on you like a bandit. The practice of the Fajr prayer before dawn in Islam encourages a productive start to the day, aligning spiritual discipline with economic well-being ("And in the early hours of the morning, they were found praying for Forgiveness," Quran 51:18). The concept of Brahmamuhurta in Hinduism suggests that success in material and spiritual matters comes from rising early (Laws of Manu, Chapter 4, Verse 92) Buddhism, through teachings in the Anguttars Nikaya, advocates for diligence and mindfulness in daily work, implying an early start is conducive to both spiritual practice and economic activity.

# Cognitive Enhancement

The confluence of religious practices and scientific insights reveals a universal appreciation for the early morning hours as a time of spiritual and cognitive rejuvenation. Christianity emphasizes preparedness and mental alertness, akin to the cognitive readiness advocated by the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). Islam sanctifies the early dawn with the Fajr prayer, seen as a blessed time for spiritual and mental clarity (Quran 17:78). Hinduism identifies the Brahmamuhurta as an auspicious time for meditation and intellectual pursuits, harmonizing spiritual practice with cognitive enhancement (Rig Veda, Mandala 1, Sukta 125). Buddhism regards early morning meditation as the key to developing mindfulness and decision-making skills, linking spiritual discipline with improved cognitive functions (Dhammapada, Verse 293-

This synthesis of religious and scientific perspectives underlines the early morning as a pivotal time for both spiritual awakening and cognitive optimization, suggesting a holistic approach to enhancing well-being through early rising and engagement in reflective or meditative practices.

A Universal Truth The principle of rising with the first light embodies a universal truth revered across Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, underlining its profound impact beyond mere lifestyle advice. This shared value across diverse religious teachings emphasizes the principle's role as a spiritual discipline, suggesting that early rising is not just beneficial for physical health and productivity but crucial for spiritual growth and alignment. This alignment with the natural rhythm of daybreak is seen as a conduit to a higher order of living, integrating the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of well-being. The unanimity among these religions on the importance of embracing the dawn reflects collective wisdom: that the discipline of early rising nurtures not only the body and mind but also the spirit, paving the way for a fulfilled and harmonious life.

The ageless saying, "Early to bed, early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise," finds robust backing both in modern scientific studies and age-old religious doctrines, providing a comprehensive framework for achieving overall wellbeing. This convergence of evidence suggests that by adopting early sleeping and rising habits, individuals can tap into a wide range of benefits that encompass physical health, economic success, cognitive sharpness, and spiritual peace. It suggests that the early morning, with its inherent tranquillity, offers a unique opportunity for personal growth and fulfilment. This shared wisdom across scientific and spiritual realms advocates for a lifestyle marked by discipline and mindfulness, underscoring the early hours as a crucial period for setting the foundation of a balanced, productive, and enriched life.

# Beyond weight: The public health challenge of Obesity

#### ■ DR LUCKY GUPTA & LOVISH BATRA

-t is a lesser-known fact that every year, fourth March is observed as World Obesity Day. The day dates its significance back to 2015 when it was first observed by World Obesity Federation and WHO to "lead and drive global efforts to reduce, prevent and treat obesity.

Obesity is defined as an increase in Body mass index (BMI). For Asians, the accepted WHO cutoff level of BMI is ?27.5 kg/m2. BMI is calculated by dividing person's weight in kilograms by the square of height in meters. Due to the lack of awareness and information regarding the subject, many people believe that obesity is just an abnormality of increased weight and that a few extra kilograms cannot hurt anybody. Obesity might feel harmless, but over the past few years, various studies have shown the negative impacts of obesity on the physical, mental, social, environmental and economic well-being of not only an individual but the community as a whole. Causes of obesity include unhealthy eating behaviors, lack of physical activity, poor sleep, surrounding environment, high amounts of stress, associated other health issues, medicines and genetic causes.

### The magnitude of the problem

According to the National Family and Health Survey five, the prevalence of abdominal obesity in India was found to be around 40% in women and 12% in men. Studies also predict that by 2040, India will be in an epidemic-like situation with obesity.

Health, environmental and economic effects of obesity In today's time, obesity is a significant

health challenge. In 2019, 50 lakh people died prematurely due to obesity, which makes it one of the foremost causes of death around the globe. Various researchers have



found a relationship between obesity and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes mellitus, gall bladder disease, arthritis, and sleep apnea, among other

The spectrum of problems is not limited to physical issues but also mental health issues. Multiple studies conducted around the globe show that the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in obese people is about 20% to 60% higher than in the general population. Within this spectrum lie a multitude of problems like depression, anxiety, eating disorders, poor self-image, social stigma, discrimination, physical abuse and even substance

The effects of obesity are not only limited to individuals suffering from it but the whole economy. According to a 2019 study, obesityrelated costs are nearly 0.8% of the economy of India. Obese people are also reported to be less likely to be employed and promoted. The economic impacts are rooted in the increased medical costs, among various reasons.

Obesity also takes its toll on the environment. Obese people have 20% more emissions than normal-weight people due to increased food consumption, increased metabolism and raised fossil fuel usage for transportation.

### Prevention and Treatment

Obesity is a lifestyle-related disorder and is easily preventable by subtle modifications in current lifestyles. Also, the preferred treatment of obesity is lifestyle modification with the primary goal of reducing excess weight, thereby decreasing the risk of related comor-

## Lifestyle Modifications-

The dietary modification makes up a significant chunk of the lifestyle modifications for obesity. These include taking a low-calorie diet rich in fibre, whole grains, fruits and vegetables along with reduced intake of fat and carbohydrates. Studies have found these low-calorie, low-fat, low-carbohydrate diets consistently related to weight loss. Use of unhealthy foods like refined grains and sweets, potatoes, processed meat, and sugary drinks should be limited.

Exercise is a crucial factor for weight loss and overall better health outcomes. WHO recommends that adults have about 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity for better wellbeing. Evidence-based smartphone applications are easily accessible and have proven to be very beneficial in combating obesity.

Another important factor is limiting television time, screen time and other "sit time" to reduce the sedentary habits which contribute towards obesity.

#### Treatment-

The treatment part includes medications, surgery and therapy/ counselling, depending upon the circumstances. Treatment of Obesity is a months-long process, and emotional support from family and experts is pivotal for the successful completion.

Bariatric surgery (weight loss surgery) is preferred when all other methods fail to show the expected results. Surgical interventions are better than other methods in preventing the incidence and risk of other asso-

In patients with eating disorders, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has the best patient outcomes in addition to other treatments available.

As mentioned earlier, obesity is a rising matter of public health concern. Awareness, education, proper address and prevention can help us to limit the extent of not only obesity but also related disorders like heart disease and diabetes. Also, the importance of research and policy formation in preventing and managing obesity cannot be ignored.

In summary, even though initiatives like awareness campaigns, health education, lifestyle modifications including meditation, along with psychological assistance, initially appear like baby steps but are definitely the need of the hour and will be very impactful in the years to come.

(The writers Dr Lucky Gupta is Assistant Professor, Department of Pediatric Surgery, AHMS, Vijaypur, and Lovish Batra a student of 2021 batch, AIIMS Jammu)

# Sri Ramakrishana Paramhansa: A Spiritual Giant

ri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was born in a little village Kamarpurkar in Bengal on February 18, 1836. His father and mother were God fearing and pious. Poor were they in the wealth of the world, but rich in the treasures of the heart. And though there were occasions when they did not have sufficient food for themselves, they did not hesitate in sharing what little they had with the poor and starving ones.

From his childhood, Sri Ramakrishna who was called Gadhadar, was brought up in an atmosphere of poverty but also of contentment. He was endowed with an unusual mind and from his early days, his mind was inclined towards God. In other ways he was full of fun and frolic, love and laughter. He was sent to school but he did not take interest in school subjects, least of all in mathematics. Arithmetic was the subject he simply could not learn. His teacher tried to pump knowledge into his head but Gadhadar was unresponsive until one day, in a mood of exasperation, the teacher sent word to his elder brother: "It were easier to teach the desk on which Gadhadar writes rather than to teach Gadhadar. Please do not send the boy to school any longer.'

As he grew in years, he grew in beauty. He grew in the power solitude. When he was sixteen years old, he came to Calcutta and began to serve as a priest in the Dakshineshwar temple, where worship is offered unto Kali, the Divine Mother of the universe.

Gadhadar regarded kali as his own mother, he called her his Divine Mother. The Divine Mother to him, was not a mere idol, a mere statue. He would often say, Even as I dwell within this body, so does the Divine Mother dwell within this idol." And he would cry out again and again and still again, "O Mother Divine Reveal thyself to me! Reveal thyself to me!"

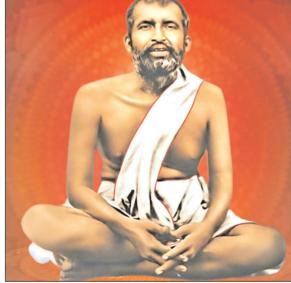
The Spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna cover a wide range. He had the vision of the personal God and he realised his complete identity with the impersonal God, the spirit, the universal son! Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Sri Rama, he had vision of Sri Krishna, he had a vision of Jesus Christ.

Sri Ramakrishna always lived as a child. As a child he talked to himself, to his body. He was fond of sweets known as jelabi. He used to call the jalebis the viceroy's carriage." He said that there is always room for the viceroy's carriage. Every other food must make place for jalebi. When jelabi comes, all other foods must make way!

It is said that his small room in the Dakshineshwar temple was like a miniature parliament of Religions, where men of all faith congregated, to seek his blessing. Through parables, metaphors and songs, he taught them deep religious truths.

In April 1885, the first symptoms of throat cancer were noticed in him. After a terrible physical ordeal, he attained Maha Samadhi on August 16,1886. He left behind his wife, the Holy Mother Ma Saradamani, and a devoted band of disciples led by Swami Vivekananda, who would carry on his spiritual legacy.

This great spiritual heritage lives on, in the Rama Krishna Math, which is committed to spreading his



# AN INSTRUMENT OF LOVE DIVINE

The story of Ramakrishna is a story of inner life. His adventures were in the inner realm of the spirit. A spiritual genius, Ramakrishna was a union of the mystic, prophet, poet and saint. The central note of Ramakrishna's music of the flute was this-All religions are true and all worship is an offering to God.

Everyworship, Ramakrishna taught in his own childlike way, was a note in the one sympathy of life. So, when they asked Ramakrishna, "What is the way- the easiest, the simplest, and the most effective, to God?" He answered, "Bhakti Yoga." And when they asked him further, "What is Bhakti Yoga?" He said, "union with the life divine, union with the mother through love.

Ramakrishna became an instrument of love divine. Therefore, words of wisdom came out of his lips. And men, who listened to him, marvelled. Ramakrishna's Lotus Face was a picture of peace and love. His love went out to all. He realised that God moved in every form. "Yes", said Ramakrishna, "God manifests Himself alike in the sage and the sinner.

Ramakrishna's teaching was an emanation of his life. Love all, he taught; pray for love, for pure love. And on even those, when the world discards as sinners, pure love, nothing but love! There is a passage gleaned from saint's conversation with a disciple, a passage penetered with such pure beauty that I am tempted to quote it at length:

"To my Divine Mother, I prayed only for love pure.

At Her Lotus Feet, I offered a few flowers and I prayed, "Mother! Here is virtue and here is vice: Take them both from me. Grant me only love, pure love for

Mother! Here is knowledge and here is ignorance: Take them both from me. Grant me only love, pure love for

Mother! Here is purity and here is impurity: Take them

This God-intoxicated man was destined to thrill the hearts of men and women in many parts of East and

both from me. Grant me only love, pure love for thee!"

Ramakrishna saw one light in all religions. Therefore, he vowed in reverence to all prophets and saints. Therefore, were dear to him all religions, none was an exclusive revelation of Truth, none was the only path to God, each was but a few rays of the divine light. Therefore, he stressed that all religions should live in harmony, one with the others; and let all nations live in peace, one with the others: Each is a flower in the garden of God; each is a note in the one music, the one sympathy of the

# HE WAS CALLED PARMAHANSA

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was a lover silence. He lived far away from the fever of life. Rightly has he been called "Paramhansa." This word means, literally, "the highest swan," "the swan supreme." The hansa, the swan. separates milk from water and drinks in milk only. In the world around us "milk" is mixed with "water". Milk is the Purusha. Amritam is the word used with regard to the Purusha, the Supreme, in some of the ancient books. Milk is the Divine Spirit: and water is maya. Sri Ramakrishna separated milk from water. He drank in God daily!

He used to say, "Unalloyed love of God is the essential thing. All else is unreal. I have now come to stage of realisation in which I see that God is walking in every human form and manifesting Himself alike through the sage and the sinner, the virtuous and the vicious. Therefore, when I meet, different people I say to myself, "God in the form of saint. God in the form of sinner. God in the form of the righteous, God in the form of unrighteous.'

Sri Ramakrishna developed through the power of induction and sympathy a wondrous vision of the soul. He grew in understanding and sympathy until he saw, as theologians and thinkers have not seen, the essence of the great religions of the world. That is why he is called Paramhansa. Wonderful was his love for Sri Krishna. But Ramakrishna's love went out, also, to Sri Isa. He adored Jesus at Dakshineswar and burnt incense at the picture of Jesus kept before him. He spoke of Jesus as the "embodiment of love" and again, as the "Master Yogi in union with the eternal!"

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa had love for Muhammad, too. There were days when he recited Namag and Verses from the Quran. Ramakrishna served all religions and prophets. His heart was wide as the sea-wider. It embraced in love and reverence the great ones of humanity. We can give but a partial picture of this great soul. His "sayings" are so wonderful. They enshrine his message-for me, for you, his message for India, his message for the modern world.

"My child! I shall not go. I shall stay here with the poor. I cannot bear to see my children being starved, ill-fed, ill-

Religion is life, said Ramakrishna. And the secret of life is love: the more you love others, The nearer you are to God. Why seek Him in buildings? See Him, touch Him, in Man! Different faiths are but different paths to reach the Supreme. Only be sincere!

# Shivratri: A Festive Celebration for Kashmiri Pandits

# **■ DR. SHIBEN KRISHEN RAINA**

ur country's rich cultural heritage comes alive through its varied festivals and rituals, spanning from Holi's vibrant hues to Diwali's illuminating joy, from Dussehra's triumph to Pongal's harvest celebration, and from the message of compassion of Christmas to the message of brotherhood of Eid and profound spirituality of Shivratri. these, Shivratri, Mahashivratri, emerges with a deep significance for Hindus not just in India but also in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and beyond. This year, the festival falls on the 8th of March, marking the day with divine observance and joyous celebration.

Devotees across lands come together in devotion to Lord Shiva, revered as Mahadeva, celebrating Mahashivratri, or the 'Great Night of Shiva'. This festival

commemorates the legend of Lord Shiva consuming a deadly poison to save the universe, capturing his role as the Protector. The fervor and zeal with which this day is celebrated are unparalleled. Mahashivratri is also celebrated as the day of Lord Shiva's union with Goddess Parvati. Women, celebrating the festivity, engage in Pujas, venerating Goddess Parvati or Gauri, praying for blissful married lives.

In the scenic valleys of Kashmir, Shivratri is named as 'Herath', a festival of profound emotional and spiritual significance for Kashmiri Pandits. Despite adversities, their celebration of 'Herath', derived from 'Har-Ratri' or the Night of (Shiva), remains steadfast. Traditionally, Kashmiri Pandits, while residing in Kashmir, maintained a dedicated worship space in their homes called 'Thokur Kuth'. The preparation

for Shivratri involved a thorough cleansing of their abodes and the setting up of various clay-urns, representing deities including Shiva and Parvati, adorned with flowers and containing walnuts symbolizing the sacred Vedas. This elaborate Puja stretches over several days, underlining the sanctity of the festival.

On the eve of Amavasya, the Kalasha/urn of Vatuk-Bhairav (Shiva) is ceremoniously taken to the banks of the Vitasta (Jhelum River) for the immersion of worship materials. A symbolic dialogue at the doorstep upon return invokes Lord Shiva's blessings, continuing the celebrations with the distribution of walnuts from the urn as Prasad, especially to married sisters and daugh-

The day following 'Herath' witnesses the heartwarming 'Salam' tradition, where neighbors, including those from

the Muslim community, extend their greetings to their Hindu (Pandit) counterparts, weaving a great tradition of unity and harmony in the region.

Shivratri, for Kashmiri Pandits, is not just a festival; it's a deeply embedded part of their philosophical, spiritual, social, and cultural ethos. Despite facing numerous challenges, their spirit in celebrating this festival reflects their enduring reverence and faith. As this auspicious festival nears, let us join in prayers for the well-being of all, hoping that this festival brings joy, prosperity, and solace to every corner of our nation, including the Pandits who have continued to observe this festival with deep conviction and faith, wherever they may be. May Lord Shiva bestow his infinite blessings. ushering in happiness and peace for all.

IIAS, Shimla).

(The writer is Former Fellow