

The Unparalleled Power of Seva

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The train came to a screeching halt along the platform of a station in the countryside of Gujarat. The sun beat down relentlessly, and enveloped the dessicated land. I disembarked from the ten-hour train ride and immediately saw homeless children desperately selling their products in the station--the epitome of life in India.

After a tedious two-hour-long drive along a dirt road, we arrived at a school in the rural village of Datha, Gujarat. As I walked across the dirt-covered campus of the poverty-ridden school, I observed hundreds of children smiling at me, with pure bliss. India is a country plagued with poverty, with millions of individuals living below the poverty line. For students, most schools charge tuition for education, but government schools are free, and are generally for lower class families. As a government-run school, this building housed students from less-fortunate backgrounds, but in spite of their socioeconomic hardships, they lived contently. Just seeing them happily living their life with satisfaction demonstrated the power of simplicity and *aparigraha* they practiced.

As I explored the school, I saw merely two classrooms--no electricity, no air-conditioning, not even running water. I observed hundreds of underprivileged children. A haphazardly built wooden stage resided in the center of the dirt courtyard, and the children performed songs and dances to welcome my family.

The next morning, the sun rose as over the land, as my family and I sponsored a day-trip into the countryside. We all boarded two massive, rickety buses with over one-hundred school children, as we set off into the mountains. As we inched further into the hills, civilization begins to disappear. We traveled together to Hastagiri, a lesser known offshoot of our sacred tirth, Palitana. By the time we reached the top, the sun beat down on us aggressively. I complained of heat and thirst, but the children around me laughed and smiled, unbothered by the heat, but astonished by the scenery.

As we returned to the school, I worked with the children, and offered them new school supplies, to encourage them to pursue their education. They smiled happily, with tears in the corners of their eyes, grateful for everything in their lives.

As I stared at the kids, I realized the power of seva--the power of service. The smiles on their faces were indicative of gratefulness, and of every moment of their lives—the good and the bad—that had led up to this moment. As I gave back to this community, to these young children that have struggled throughout their lives just to survive thus far, I realized

how much you can learn through *seva*. These students practiced *aparigraha* every single day of their lives as they surrounded themselves with simplicity and self restraint. They wore simple clothes and ate whatever they were presented with. They studied in an incredibly underdeveloped school. But they lived their lives happy and satisfied with what they had. They were thankful for their lives, and thankful for their karma that brought them to where they were now. As I found myself in that moment, helping hundreds of young children, I realized the impact of just one deed of *seva*.