

My Journey with Sumi



January 22, 2020

Rochester Hills, Michigan

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My Journey with Sumi: Part 13

Learning from Mother Nature to Become a Better Care Partner for Sumi

August 21, 2018

I've recently looked back through some of my past posts. A few stood out to me with their themes of nature and how it inspires me to become a better care partner. I'd like to share with you these posts from last autumn, winter, and earlier this summer.

Sunday, October 22, 2017—1:55 pm—73°F (23°C)—A clear sunny day with blue skies and crisp air



Today was a beautiful autumn day and unusually warm. The sun reflected off the colorful leaves and created a breathtaking collage of colors. Sumi sat in the van in our driveway while I cut the grass in the yard.

When I perform diverse chores, such as cutting grass, doing yard work, taking care of Sumi, or writing in *MJWS* I go into Zen mode. I get immersed in the task and creative thoughts randomly pop up in my mind, which gives me fodder for my writing.

In autumn, to clear the thin layer of fallen leaves from my yard I use a leaf blower. While I work to blow the leaves into a pile the high velocity of air from the blower travels under the leaves,

making an air-tunnel that pushes them airborne. While the leaves are in the air they also catch prevailing winds from Mother Nature and fly their own way. Often they fly *away* from where I want them to go. Watching the leaves flying through the air is a meditative moment and has relevance. When I take care of Sumi, many times she is like the airborne leaves. She wants to go her own way. All I can do is learn to direct or divert her attention.

Today I got about a 2.5-mile walk while cutting the grass and blowing leaves. Bending various times to empty the lawn bags helped my back and blowing leaves gave my hands a workout. On top of all this, I got to breathe fresh air. An active lifestyle is what I'm aiming for my well-being so I can take care of Sumi. And Sumi, sitting in the car, was able to have tranquility while soaking up the sun and watching me work. She smiled at me whenever I looked at her.

Monday, December 25, 2017—12:35 pm—21°F (-6°C)—Overnight snow of about 6 inches,

sunny



Merry Christmas!

Every child and adult wishes for a white Christmas. And this year we got one, with about six inches of snow overnight.

This morning I cleared the snow from the driveway with a snow blower. Working with the snow blower reminds me of vacuuming inside the house. Both chores leave the ground clean. Instead of collecting dirt in a vacuum bag, though, you blow the snow away. Also, snow blowing means

bundling up in layers of clothing to protect against the cold. And checking to see which way the wind is blowing to take advantage of it. By adjusting the chute of the snow blower, snow is thrown in the same direction. You work with Nature, not against it.

In Humans, Nature—our cells and genes—make us what we are and have significant roles in our bodies. On the other hand, Nurture—where we are born, how we are raised, and our values—also play a significant role in our lives. There is always a Yin and Yang relationship between Nature and Nurture. In Sanskrit, a close approximation would be Prakriti (Nature) and Sanskar (Nurture).

A person with Alzheimer's disease loses much of the Nurture part as things they learned throughout their life are slowly degenerating and forgotten. Then the Nature part becomes more dominant. Sumi is now more Nature than Nurture as she has her own ways and ever-changing moods.

While taking care of Sumi I apply the lessons I learned from Nature. Just like when I am working with the drifting snow in the wind, I don't fight. I go with the flow and re-direct or divert her!

Saturday, August 4, 2018—81°F (22°C)—Sunny, a beautiful day



Our daughter, Parini, came home this year for Mother's Day. A few weeks after that our son, Jasen, and his fiancée, Jessica, also visited. Since they all live in Los Angeles I cherish their visits. When they were here they helped buy and plant flowers. As Jasen and Jessica were planting I parked our Pacifica sideways on the driveway so Sumi could enjoy watching us from inside.

This year, Michigan has had nice summer weather with many sunny and warm days. The flowers my children planted are now in full bloom and pleasant to look at. It brings vibrancy to our lives.

A friend from West Bloomfield recently wrote to me: *Birth is the start of life, beauty is the art of life, love is part of life, death is the last of life, but friendship is the heart of life. Happy Friendship Day! KC, looks like Sumi is getting the creativity juices flowing out of you. Today is a great day to cherish our friends and family for all the good times we had together.*

And my friend is right, for all these years with my technical education and working in a corporate office the left side of my brain got exercised and became dominant but now Sumi has opened up the right side of my untapped brain. It enables me to think out of the box and apply creativity in what I do now.

When I write on *MJWS* it is not me who is writing. Sumi has put the Kalam (pen) in my hand and given an unlimited supply of Syahi (ink). I am just the instrument.

Taking care of Sumi is like tending to flowers. It requires gentle love and nurturing to which they respond positively. With Sumi, I get a smile and cooperation and with flowers, I'm awarded their vigor and vibrancy.

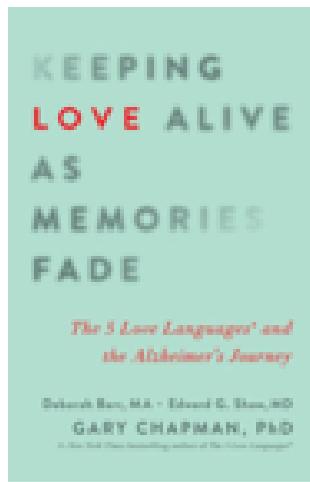
As flowers orient themselves toward the sun for energy, Sumi now revolves around me.

Happy Friendship Day!

My Journey with Sumi: Part 14

5 Love Languages®

Monday, February 4, 2019—8:30 pm —50°F (10°C)—Very warm for winter, with rain



In November 2017, I wrote about a book I read in *My Journey with Sumi* called *Keeping Love Alive as Memories Fade* by Dr. Gary Chapman, Ed Shaw, MD, MA, and Deborah Bar, MA. The premise of the book is that there are '5 love languages' and the deep human need for love does not disappear when a person has Alzheimer's disease.

Now, I am reflecting on this book again with additional facts I've learned based on medical science.

To begin, medical science tells us there are four hormones that determine a person's happiness: dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin.

In our journey through life, various levels of dopamine are released when we accomplish tasks, both little and big. When we are appreciated for work we've done at the office or at home we feel accomplished and good. That is because our bodies released dopamine.

When we exercise our body releases endorphins. This hormone helps us cope with the pain of exercising and makes us happy which lets us enjoy the exercise. Laughing is another good way of generating endorphins.

Serotonin is released when we act in a way that benefits others. When we transcend ourselves and give back to others, nature, or society, our body releases serotonin. This is because using our precious time to help others helps us feel valued.

The final hormone is oxytocin. It is released when we are close to others. When we hug our friends or family or shake hands or put our arms around someone's shoulders various amounts of oxytocin is released.

Taking these hormones and thinking about the 5 love languages, that is words of affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch, I'd like to share my reflections.

The first love language is words of affirmation, which are unsolicited compliments or words of appreciation like 'I love you,' or 'you did an amazing job,' or 'you look great in that dress.' While taking care of Sumi, her two caregivers have learned a few phrases in Sumi's native language, Gujarati. They constantly tell her 'Sumi bahu gamey,' which means 'Sumi is liked a lot' and 'Sumi bahu saras,' which means 'Sumi is very good.' These words of affirmation are understood by Sumi and she responds positively. This has increased her trust and bonding with her caregivers. When Sumi accomplishes big and little tasks and hears these words of affirmation, it must release various levels of dopamine to make her happy.

The next love language is quality time. Giving someone your full, undivided attention lets you share thoughts, feelings, desires, and experiences. Sumi's morning caregiver is usually busy with chores while her evening caregiver is able to relax and spend quality time with Sumi. This has made a huge difference. Sumi's engagement, enjoyment, and laughter have increased while her agitation has decreased. Opportunities for me and Sumi to have quality time can be walking in the park or at the local YMCA. The exercise also releases endorphins to make us both happy, as well as our laughter does.

Gifts and receiving gifts is the next love language. The effort behind giving a gift sends the 'I love you' message. Being physically present and giving the gift of your time is also an intangible and precious gift, especially in times of crisis, illness, or celebration. Sumi is not capable of receiving and appreciating tangible gifts but while I feed her and give her sweets I can see the joy and happiness on her face. It is like she is receiving the best gift of all. Sometimes, she even wants to feed me the same sweet I put on her plate as if she wants to gift me with her precious

possession. Many of our friends and relatives have also given us intangible gifts—the gift of their time. They have stayed with us, visited us, invited us to their homes, gone out for dinner, or brought home-cooked food for us. These freely given gifts help release serotonin, which aids our happiness.

The fourth love language is acts of service. This is doing helpful things for others, such as setting the table, walking the dog, washing dishes, or anything that lightens the load of another. When we act in a way to benefit others our bodies also release serotonin. When I am taking care of Sumi I do many helpful things for her safety, hygiene, and well-being. These acts release serotonin and helps keep me happy.

Lastly, the fifth love language is physical touch. This is deliberate touching that requires your full attention like a back rub, foot massage, hug, kiss, or holding hands. Whenever physical touch is involved our bodies release oxytocin, and makes us happy. This is especially valuable for a person with Alzheimer's. Physical touch gives them assurance and security which translates into less agitation. Kissing Sumi on her forehead, holding her hand while walking, or holding them while in bed before she falls asleep has a calming effect on her on top of any oxytocin effects.

In a normal relationship between two people, the above 5 love languages are reciprocal. With Sumi, they are mostly intentional and unidirectional—from me to her. When Sumi is the recipient of any of these 5 love languages I look for the smallest clue from her, in a way of a smile or reduced agitation and it is gratifying.

My Journey with Sumi: Part 15

The Practice of Vipassana Meditation vs. Care Partnering for a Person with Alzheimer's

March 22, 2019—5:45 pm—41°F (5°C)—Sunny and pleasant

Lax Kenia, a college friend from India, visited me and Sumi at our home in Michigan in November 2018. A few days later I went to Costa Rica with him, six other college friends, and their wives. Lax has been an accomplished Vipassana meditation practitioner for many years.

I recently learned the meaning of Vipassana, which is a Buddhist meditation practice. It's a compound Sanskrit word of *Vi*, short for *Vishesh* and means special or distinguished, and *Paśyanā*, meaning insight. Putting it together, Vipassana means looking for 'special insight' into the true nature of reality or truth. Practitioners learn to develop a clear awareness of exactly what is happening while it happens.

A month after our trip to Costa Rica, in December of 2018, Lax went for a demanding thirty-day Vipassana retreat in Mumbai, India. Every day for him was filled with rigorous meditation sessions that started at 4:00 am. For the entire thirty days he could not speak with his fellow practitioners, use sign language, or gestures. Lax wrote about his experience and his article was published in the March issue of a Gujarati language magazine in Mumbai called *Prabudh Jeevan*, which translates to *Awakened Life*. I enjoyed reading Lax's concise and well-written narration and got a great deal of insight into the practice, process, and expected benefits of Vipassana meditations.

Lax's article led me to reflect on the main goals of Vipassana, namely, cultivating morality, *Samavṛtti* (equanimity), and mindfulness to live in the present. Now, one can voluntarily achieve these goals by arduous and voluntary practice. Or, one is thrust into practicing them, as I have been as Sumi's care partner.

Every minute of caregiving I am faced with challenges to maintain my *Samavṛtti*, mindfulness, and live in the present. In situations where Sumi's behavior is difficult from anxiety, anger, aggression, or apathy I have to figure out how to soothe and calm her. If I get angry or frustrated it creates more anger and aggression in her. So, cognitively, I have to practice equanimity and

mindfulness by being attuned to every detail throughout the day, which is watching ‘what is happening while it happens.’ May it be waking Sumi up, showering her, toileting, cleaning, dressing, preparing her meals, or feeding her. I have found that I am learning the goals of Vipassana not by choice but by being forced into it.

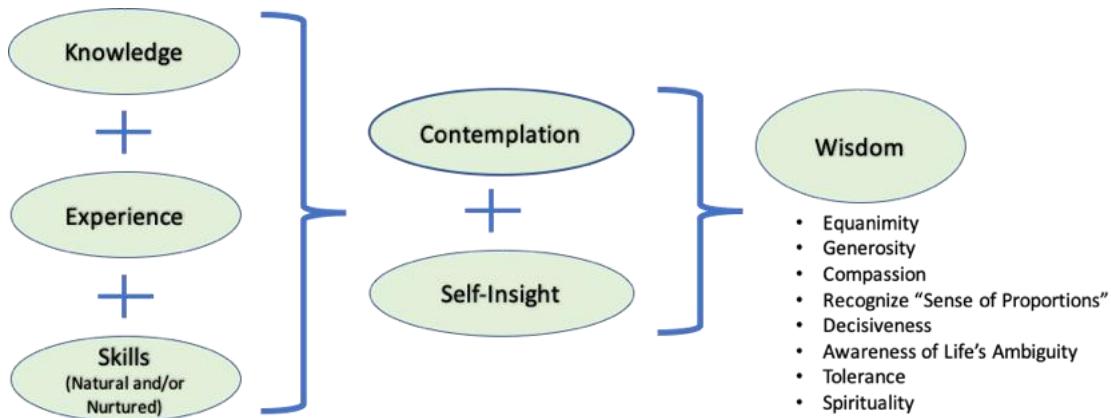
Furthermore, by practicing Vipassana one learns to tame three poisonous vices: greed, anger, and ignorance. To do this one must turn them into positive energies, such as: greed into generosity, anger into compassion, and ignorance into wisdom.

Greed is not necessarily related to hoarding money or hedonistic possessions. Greed can be about your time and self-indulgences. When I am taking care of Sumi I turn my greed of self-centeredness into generosity by devoting my time for doing many helpful things for her safety, hygiene, and well-being—I have to think about her first to ensure she is okay. And when she is okay, I am okay too. It’s like a mother-child relationship! This increased awareness from a ‘me first’ mindset to a ‘you first’ mindset has made Sumi’s and my lives easier. Once I became a care partner with a ‘you first’ mindset, I developed empathy for everyone I interact with.

In regard to anger, there are many occasions where I get frustrated and angry while taking care of Sumi. But slowly and steadily I have learned to turn these feelings into compassion. I have to be mindful that when Sumi is difficult it is not her but the disease and when she smiles it is not the disease but her true self.

And it is interesting to note that ignorance is not being turned into knowledge, as there is a big difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge can become self-righteousness, whereas wisdom can be more forgiving, more encompassing.

As shown below, one way to understand wisdom is that it is a combination of knowledge, experience, natural and nurtured skills, contemplation, and self-insight.



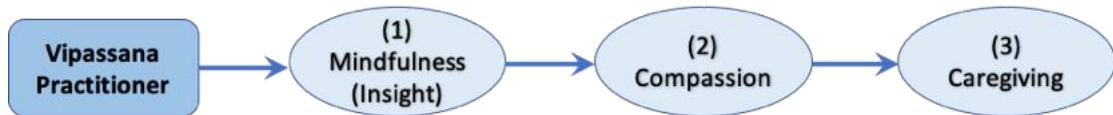
Wisdom is gained by self-insight and self-analysis. And being willing to learn and cultivate personal growth by acquiring new skills and making new relationships and new friendships. Learning to recognize a ‘sense of proportion,’ like essential vs. frivolous or control the controllable and manage the uncontrollable. Also, to look at life differently and understand that priorities and values, including our own, are not absolute. Wisdom is aided by developing an awareness of life’s ambiguities such as poor health, traumatic events, calamities, etc. and by increasing gratitude and acceptance. I found reading exhaustively on the subject of Alzheimer’s disease and listening more, in general, helped too.

I am reminded of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. If you are not familiar with the story it goes like this:

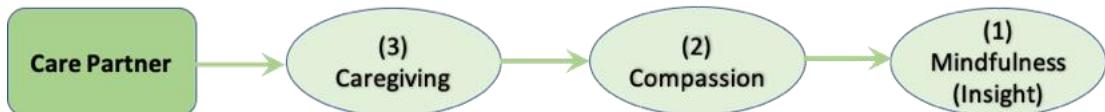
Dronacharya, a royal guru and master of military arts, was restricted to only teach members of the royal family. He gave Arjun, a royal, formal archery training but when Eklavya, a non-royal, asked for training Dronacharya had to refuse him. Rather than feeling dejected, Eklavya decided to learn archery on his own. He created a statue of Dronacharya and resolutely practiced archery in front of the statue. Over time he became an accomplished archer—even better than Arjun.

Just as Eklavya received inspiration from Dronacharya’s statue, I have received inspiration to practice a reversed form of Vipassana from Sumi.

I say a reversed form of Vipassana because a true Vipassana practitioner first develops mindfulness and insight in order to gain compassion which would potentially make them a good caregiver. This is shown in the diagram below:



But for me, as a care partner, I am starting in reverse. Being thrust into becoming Sumi's care partner has taught me compassion which has led to my self-insights which can develop into mindfulness. See the diagram below:

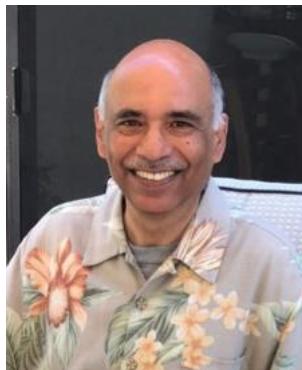


This reversed process can even be extended to Mother Theresa in India. She became the ultimate caregiver to the sick and dying and gave them dignity in their death.

In my reversed process I may never achieve the level of special mindfulness and insight attained by Vipassana practitioners. However, our ultimate goals are the same even though we are approaching them from two different directions—like two sides of the same coin!

P.S. Someday, I would like to meet an accomplished Vipassana meditation practitioner who has a spouse with Alzheimer's disease. I'd like to understand how formal training in Vipassana meditation has helped them be a good care partner.

My Brief Bio



Kanu C. (KC) Mehta – President, KC Mehta Consulting, LLC

Mr. Mehta utilizes his extensive automotive industry experience in corporate strategy, business partnerships, material cost management, and product processes and development, as well as his skills as a strategic thinker. Mehta has a keen ability to create new initiatives in technical and international assignments.

His 40-year storied career in Automotive includes 23 years with Chrysler, 8 with Ford and 6 years of consulting with Tata Technologies and 3 years of consulting with Michigan Economic Development Corporation. After working on several advanced vehicles at Ford's Body and Chassis Engineering group in Dearborn, Mr. Mehta joined Chrysler in Highland Park, initially in Body Engineering. He then held a senior position in advance product development at Chrysler's Liberty Project, where he honed his skills in advance product creation, material, and other cost savings.

In 1993, he moved to Chrysler's International Operations as an executive, where he developed new corporate relationships with companies in Asia Pacific, especially India, to assess the market feasibility of Chrysler's products for sale. Mr. Mehta developed a wide network of Auto Industry contacts in India by closely working with Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, Bajaj Auto, Hinduja group, Maruti, Hero Motors, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) and Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM).

By 1998, Mr. Mehta returned to Chrysler's Advance Vehicle Engineering, in Auburn Hills, serving as key liaison for his company's advanced vehicle engineering work with Design Office and the Platform Engineering. In 2004, he assessed the potential for profitable long-term participation in the Indian auto industry for DaimlerChrysler. Later, assignments for the German-U.S. automaker included a significant electric vehicle business study, a material cost management study resulting in a \$6 billion gross cost reduction over 5-years and development of a Chrysler's recovery and transformation plan.

Mr. Mehta was Senior Consultant to Tata Technologies for 8 years - from 2007 to 2015 where he was instrumental in the development of Passenger Electric Mobility Concept vehicles called eMO1 and eMO2

Mr. Mehta holds a Master of Science degree in Mechanical Design from the University of California at Berkeley and a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Walchand College, Sangli, India.

Since 2015, Mr. Mehta has been a full-time care partner for his wife who has Alzheimer's disease.