

## **NEVER GROW OLD.**

*Excerpts from the book "The Foundry Worker and the Gardener" of Fr. P. Ribes, s. j. Published by the Gujarat Sahitya Prakash.*

### **Intent of these note**

- ✓ *Keep the "Child" within you fully alive, even if you 100 years old.*
- ✓ *Childlikeness is necessary for a happy living and to make others happy*
- ✓ *Un-childlike people cannot enjoy friendship and intimacy.*
- ✓ *Never grow old!*

## **The Story**

**Narrator:** Poor Satya! With his back bent by the weight of so many years, he was a grumpy old man! He was good for nothing. Alone and friendless, he spent long hours in a near-by park. Sitting alone always on the same bench, he used to while away his time looking at children playing. Quite often, he muttered to himself:

**Satya:** Oh, you, children....children....how happy you are! Full of fun and frolic...for ever running, jumping, yelling.... Oh, if I only could have a body like yours... so supple, agile, delicate! Then, I, also like you, would have friends, fun and joy. I am feeling so lonely now!

**Narrator:** One day, tears rolled down his cheeks....He kept on mumbling

**Satya:** To be child! Oh! To be a child again! This is all I want.

**Narrator:** The next day he went to a famous street magician. All over, people said that he could make people feel young again

**Magician:** Do you want something from me?

**Satya:** Yes, Sir, Look here. I'm sick and tired of this body of mine. So old, so bent, good for nothing! Kindly, sir, can you give me the body of a 10 year old boy? Yes, a body healthy, supple, fresh, bubbling with life and joy?

**Magician:** Hum!, Hum! That's all you want, the body of a ten years old child? That much I can do for you. Yes. I'll do it. I'll give you the body of 10 year old boy. All you have to do is this: Take this potion for 10 days, at 10.00 p.m. Add 10 drops of fresh blood from a young fowl and on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, at 10.00 p.m. you will have the body of a 10 year old boy.

**Satya:** But, Mr. Magician, you're sure it works?

**Magician:** Of course, like magic man..., you won't have to see me again....just takes this portion as I said. Don't miss one single day....10 days at 10.00 p.m.

**Narrator:** Wonder of wonders. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day at 10.00 p.m. Satya found himself having the body of a young, strong, charming lad of 10. He was beside himself of sheer joy! That night he could no have a wink of sleep.

**Narrator:** The next day, very early he went to the park. There, he eagerly waited for his young companions. Unrecognized, he joined them. What fun he had! He jumped, yelled, sweated, ran. How happy, Satya was!

**Narrator:** After a while, two boys began quarreling....when a fight began, Satya intervened:

**Satya:** Children, children.....don't fight! Listen to me! I said it. Stop it! Fighting is bad.... Good boys don't fight! You have to be kind and loving. You have to forgive one another. Come on! Now, shake hands!

**Narrator:** The children looked at Satya with surprise, then, they looked at each other...at the end, in annoyance, all shouted at Satya:

**Children:** Shut up! Who do you think you are? You, don't interfere!

**Narrator:** And the fight went on.

**Narrator:** Later in the morning, a beggar came to the garden. He begged from the children. One of the boys gave him all he had on. Immediately, Satya admonished him:

**Satya:** What? You give him, all your money? No, no, you mustn't be too generous. Think about yourself too. If today you give away all you have, you will have to beg tomorrow

**Narrator:** Without knowing exactly why, all the boys felt drawn away from Satya. He was so queer!

**Narrator:** Next day, Ramu, the sweeper's son came to the garden to play. Without more ado, he joined the game with all the kids. Satya shouted:

**Satya:** Stop! Stop it! I am telling you! Stop him from playing with us. Do you not know who this boy is? He is the sweeper's son. We all, are Brahmins...ours is a high-caste! We are not allowed to play with children like Ramu.

**Narrator:** All the children yelled at Satya:

**Children:** So what? That doesn't matter. Ramu is a good player, better than you...we need him for our game

**Narrator:** Satya remonstrated again

**Satya:** All the same... we mustn't play with him. If your parents come to know that you played with Ramu, they will be very angry. If Ramu plays with us, I can't play

**Narrator:** The children booed him out of the game

**Children:** Then, don't play...get away idiot...we don't want you!

**Narrator:** Sad and dejected, Satya went back to his old bench...again he sat down there, all by himself. Sobbing, Satya, kept mumbling:

**Satya:** "I can't understand why the children do not want me to play with them? I can run, jump, shout like any of them! What's wrong with them?"

**Narrator:** Like on his old days, Satya felt unloved and unwanted... alone and lonely again  
Weeping, he whispered

**Satya:** **In spite of having got a young boy's body, nothing seems to have changed!**

### **Questions for Reflection and Sharing.**

1. Why was Satya sad when he grew old?
2. Why, later on, when he was given a body of a 10 year old boy 'nothing seemed to have changed in his life'?
3. Did, Satya, really, become a child again? Why?
4. Is there any difference between being a 'child' and being 'childlike'?
5. Describe the characteristics of 'childhood'.
6. Describe the characteristics of 'childlikeness'?
7. Was Satya 'old' or rather 'oldish'? Explain.
8. What is the difference between being 'old' and being 'oldish'?
9. Describe the Characteristics of "oldishness"
10. Can one be 'old', and yet 'childlike'? How?
11. 'Is it possible to be 'young' and yet 'oldish'? How?
12. Point out the differences between 'childlikeness and childishness'?
13. Have you ever met people like Satya in your life? Share your experiences. How do such people look, how do they speak, how do they behave?

### **AN INPUT. SUGGESTED THOUGHTS**

#### **A) Need for 'childlikeness**

- ✓ For real joy and happiness in life, we need to be 'Child-like'
- ✓ For peace of mind we have to be like a child.
- ✓ For health of mind and body, we have to be 'Childlike'.
- ✓ To be able to follow Christ, we have to be 'Childlike'
- ✓ To find fulfillment and satisfaction in what we do, we have to be 'Childlike'..

- ✓ For “successful living” not necessarily for ‘success in life’, we have to be ‘Child-like’.
- ✓ To make friends, to enjoy intimacy, we have to become like Little Children.
- ✓ To be able to laugh at ourselves and have a sense of humor, we need ‘Child-likeness’.

### **B) The paradox of “Childlikeness”.**

- ✓ To be truly mature and grown-up, we have to be ‘child-like’
- ✓ The more ‘Child-like’ we are the better and more mature persons we shall be.
- ✓ To be ‘child-like’ is not a matter of physical age.
- ✓ It is not the body of a child that Satya needed but the mind and the heart of a child.
- ✓ Although Satya was given the body of a child, his mind and heart remained as old as ever!
- ✓ To become like ‘little children’, we have to shed the sophistication and cynicism life taught us and regain the freshness of heart and mind of our childhood days.
- ✓ One can be young in ‘old age’ and old in ‘young age’!
- ✓ Children - *and the ‘child’ in each one of us* - sense very quickly who is young and who is old!
- ✓ The child that nests in our hearts – unless we have smothered it - will readily accept a young ‘old man’ and promptly reject an ‘old youngster’.
- ✓ Children feel comfortable with ‘Child-like’ people, both young and old!
- ✓ In this instance, too, the old saying comes true: “Birds of one feather flock together”.

### **C) What is “Childlikeness” and what is “Childishness”.**

“Child-likeness” has nothing to do with “Childishness”.

1. **Children**, by the very fact that they are children, **possess certain traits and characteristics.**

Some of them are **positive**; like, simplicity, spontaneity, feeling, friendliness, mischief, frolic, etc.

Others, **negative**; like credulity, pettiness, greediness, dependency, moodiness possessiveness, selfishness, sulkiness, etc.

2. **The positive traits are assets**; actually, they are strengths never to be lost or shed away later on in life.

**The negative traits are liabilities**: They are not healthy, nor helpful. They are to be discarded and shed away, in the passing of years.

3. **When a child grows in age he should never lose or suppress the positive qualities and strengths of childhood.**

Those positive characteristics of childhood have a perennial value! They should be retained right through life. **They are precisely what make us childlike.**

4. **In like manner, as a child grows and matures, he should shed and suppress the negative traits of childhood.**

They were not strengths but weaknesses to be transcended in the process of growing. **Were those negative characteristics of childhood to stay, a person will remain 'childish' for the rest of life.**

#### **D) Three types of persons keeping in mind Growth and Maturity:**

##### **First type: The "Childish" person:**

- ✓ It is the person, who, although physically grown-up, still possesses and exhibits the negative traits of childhood. Psychologically, he is still a child.
- ✓ Such a person has not left behind or transcended the weaknesses of childhood. Emotionally and psychologically, he has not grown-up. He is a **'big-grown-up-child'**, in other words, a 'childish person'.

##### **Second Type: The "Child-like" person:**

- ✓ A 'child-like' person is the person who, in the process of growing to adulthood, left behind all, or most, of the negative characteristics of childhood while he retained all or most of its positive characteristics.
- ✓ Such a person, although physically grown-up, has retained the freshness and spontaneity of the child. He is full of feeling, of wonder, of laughter, of joy, of charm.

##### **Third Type: The "Oldish" person:**

- ✓ In actual fact, he has killed his 'child'. There is no 'child' left in him. That is why he is 'oldish'. He is too parental, preachy, stifled, stolid, stupefied, formal, solemn, officious, sanctimonious, joyless, fond of protocol, aloof, critical, judgmental, authoritarian, stereotyped, legalistic, traditional, stiff-necked, unbending, lacking in a sense of humor, paternalistic and over-protective.
- ✓ **Such person is 'diminished' and deprived of what is best in human nature.** Actually, he is not mature but 'mummified'. Such people turn to be hopeless and unloved parents and teachers. The youngsters and the youth of today abhor such characters. They are drags and bores.

## **APPENDIX**

### **HOLDING THE MIRROR TO YOURSELF CHECKING ON "How Childlike Am I?"**

#### **A) YOU YOURSELF:**

- ✓ Do I laugh a lot? Can I laugh at my mistakes, shortcomings and foibles?
- ✓ Do I take myself and my duties too seriously?
- ✓ Do I crack jokes? Can I laugh at the things I love and still love them?
- ✓ Do I, sometimes, play tricks and pranks? Am I playful and reasonably boisterous?
- ✓ Do I allow myself sometimes to be off-beat and even a trifle nutty?

- ✓ Am I scared of doing mistakes? Do I give up trying for fear of failure?
- ✓ Do I readily accept people and events as they come?
- ✓ Do I normally trust people? Can I believe in them?
- ✓ Do I talk with them frankly without mental reservations and prejudices?
- ✓ Am I open to new ideas, new ways of doing things, to new thinking and to new experiences?
- ✓ Do I enjoy getting to know new people and making new friends?
- ✓ Do I love seeing new places, taking new jobs and facing new challenges?

**After answering the questions above, ask yourself:**

**How do I see myself ?**

1. Am I childlike, childish or oldish?
2. Am I happy the way I am? Why? Write it down.
3. Should I change something about myself? What?
4. What is it? Am I ready to change that? Write it down.

**B) YOU AND OTHERS**

- ✓ What sort of persons are my friends: 'childlike', 'childish', 'oldish'? (*A man is known by the company he keeps*)
- ✓ Do I enjoy the company of playful and boisterous people?
- ✓ Do I play tricks on my friends? Do they play tricks on me?
- ✓ Am I informal, casual and relaxed in the company of others?
- ✓ Have others to be on their guard – on their best behavior – while in my company?
- ✓ Do I easily take offence by what others say or do?
- ✓ Do I feel 'constrained' or 'intimidated' when dealing with my bosses and superiors?
- ✓ Do I demand apologies from others?
- ✓ Do I find it hard to offer apologies to others my mistakes?
- ✓ Do I expect 'titles', 'honorific treatment' and 'formal introductions' when meeting new people?
- ✓ Do I tend to give advice to others? Am I preachy?
- ✓ Do I feel threatened, insecure or confused when others behave in an expected or an unpredictable way?

**After answering the questions above ask yourself:**

**How do I see myself:**

1. Am I childlike, childish or oldish?
2. Am I happy the way I am? Why? Write it down.
3. Can I change something about it? Write it down.
4. What is it? Am I ready to change it? Write it down

**C) YOU AND CHILDREN.**

- ✓ Do I like to be in the company of children?
- ✓ Do I find it easy to talk with children? Can they communicate with me?
- ✓ How much time I spend with children, youngsters and youth?
- ✓ Do I, in any way, play with children, fool with them, play tricks? Do I have any true friends among children and young people?
- ✓ Do children like me? Do they come to me on their own?
- ✓ When I am with children can I forget for a while that I am an 'adult'?
- ✓ Do I enjoy looking at children playing and listening to them talking among themselves?
- ✓ Would I, sincerely, like to be a child again?
- ✓ Have I patience to bear with the: "childishness", fickleness and moodiness of children?

**After answer the questions above, ask yourself:**

**How do I see myself?**

1. Am I childlike, childish, or oldish?
2. Am I happy the way I am? Why? Write it down
3. Can I change something about it? What?
4. Am I really, willing to change that? Write it down