

Thursday , May 3, 2007



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A close encounter with greatness**By Kamilla Hemandas**

What is the attraction of Shri Shri Ravi Shankar, 50-year-old Indian charismatic founder of the Art of Living Foundation, that has won him a following of millions from all over the world? Jaime Licauco put it very aptly when he addressed the audience of over a thousand at the Shangrila Ballroom who had gathered to hear him speak. "Shri Ravi Shankar's wisdom transcends religion. He is not here to convert anyone. Simply to teach us the skills to lead happy healthy lives. After meditating for 10 days and observing a vow of silence during the period, he conceived the core ideas of the Art of Living Foundation to benefit all mankind irregardless of race, creed, color or religion. I was initially skeptical about it, but now am grateful for what AOL (Art of Living) has done for me".

Art of Living volunteers of the Manila chapter, treated a select group of the local press to a sumptuous vegetarian lunch at the home of the very gracious Winny and Sanjiv Sarin. During the press conference that followed the local press had the opportunity to listen to his compassionate ideas on how to start a culture of happiness and overcome terrorism and violence that seems to be escalating. His views provide a beacon of light to many, jaded by conflict and disappointment. Below is a brief version of the nuggets of wisdom shared with the reporters.

Q. In a nutshell, What is ART OF LIVING and why does it stress so much on meditation and volunteerism?

A. Art of Living is a mental hygiene that teaches individuals how to deal with all the negative emotions that crop up during our daily lives. When we are unable to cope with these negative emotions like anger, greed, pride, and jealousy, then we become stressed, unhappy and sometimes ill. Meditation takes us to our basic core which is nothing but love. When we tap on this well-spring of love we become inspired with all this loving energy. We need to expend this energy and the most positive way is serve others. Volunteerism, or service is one of the purest expressions of love.

Q. The Philippines has been cited as the most corrupt nation in the world. We are also holding elections this month. Why do you think this is so, how does a society breed a culture of corruption? What advice would you give our politicians?

A. Corruption is caused by a feeling of not belonging. When a politician feels he is separate from his people then this is how corruption can start. But if he feels like he is part of his community, whatever he does for himself and his constituents will be same. There will be no conflict there. Belongingness is the key value to having a peaceful and productive society.

Q. The news has been filled with images of the Virginia Tech student who shot more than 40 of his schoolmates. The Korean was a depressed student who later took his own life. What are your views on this?

A. I feel responsible for him. If only AOL had gotten to him, we would have been able to help him cope with his feelings of violence, loneliness and depression. We all get depressed but schools do not teach us how to cope with it in a positive way. With the right mental perspective, pranayama and yoga these feelings are greatly reduced. We are naturally loving and happy. The "kingdom of God" is within you. Isn't that what Jesus said? He was an intelligent boy, if only he got the right help... we would have been able to turn him around. AOL works regularly with convicts and criminals. Our prison reform program is a very effective method of helping prisoners deal with violent and hostile feelings.

Q. Much violence and terrorism is committed in the world today in the name of religion. What are your thoughts on this?

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