

Lakshmi Narayan: The Divine Is In Each of Us

Lakshmi Narayan was born in 1928 in the city of Bhaga in Bihar, India. She is the mother of one son, Umesh Chandra, and the grandmother of two, Chris and Michelle Chandra.

Lakshmi Narayan is well-known throughout her adopted home of Ojai, California, as the kind and gentle librarian at the Katrona Library.



Lakshmi grew up in the city of Bhaga, in northeast India. She is one of six children born to P. Ramaswami and Meena Pillar, early members of the Theosophical Society in India. “My father became a member in the early 1900s, and at that time, if a husband became a member, the wife automatically became a member.”

“We believe that the divine is in each of us, and that the divine is in all life, including plants, insects, animals, birds, all life. The Theosophists believe that all life is one, no matter what religion, nationality, country, language. The divine we aspire to is already there in all of us.”

Her parents’ example of how to live became an important foundation for Lakshmi in how to live her life. “I was fortunate to be born to good parents. We were very fortunate growing up. My father was very strict, but kind and loving.”

“He taught us not to pick too many flowers, not to brush down weeds and grass, but to be kind to all life. Growing up we had gardens, and flowers, and we had servants in the British days. My father stressed the importance of treating all people like our family,” which was different from how much of India at the time viewed the world. “We had to be obedient, neat, speak politely, and treat people kindly.”

Becoming educated was important to both Lakshmi and her parents. She earned her degree in geology and was the first woman geologist admitted to the Geological Survey of India, headquartered in Calcutta. She spent a year working in the field and then moved into a lab position as a petrologist, a job she held until the birth of her son, Umesh Chandra, when she chose to be at home.

Lakshmi said her marriage to her husband S. Narayanaswami was a marriage of love, not one of the arranged marriages so common to women of her generation in India. "I was actually introduced to my husband by my father. We were allowed to go out and see each other and get to know each other. My husband was a geologist who traveled all around the world, including Russia. He was Deputy Director General of the Geological Survey of India Airborne Mineral Survey. It was an important position in India. Although he wasn't a member of the Theosophical Society, he lived it. He practiced the principles of kindness and equality in his work and in his life."

Lakshmi said it was the death of her husband that spurred on her life's greatest turning point. "My husband's death was the greatest difficulty in my life. He died of a heart attack in the prime of our married life. He had just retired and we had built a beautiful home. The news that my son was getting married to an Irish girl had just come. We were so happy. We were planning to go abroad to England and to travel abroad together. I thought the world had come to an end when my husband died. He was not just my husband, he was like my parent, my lover - he was everything to me. When he died I went blind. I was completely lost."

It was out of the depth of her loss that Lakshmi turned to the Theosophical Society. "I was searching for a place and suddenly I walked into the Society one day without thinking and became a member myself."

"I would say the values of the Theosophical life and the Theosophists kept me going. They gave me all the encouragement and accepted me into their family. There were two young girls in their 20s who came to my home every evening to play music and sing. Another woman, a good friend, came in every day. She told me, 'Come out with us. Look out the window. If the door has been shut, you have to look out the window that has been opened. You can't change the past, but you have to move forward.' They gave me the strength to keep on going. We live in a world of dreams. You have to accept life and these are challenges."

After working as the head librarian for the Theosophical Society at the international headquarters in Chennai, India, Lakshmi came to the United States in 1978 to work at the Society headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois. "My son was in England when his father died, but he moved to America in order for me to come here. He wrote to Dora Kunz, the President of the Theosophical Society in America, and she invited me to come here and work."

It is in the little things that she can do in service that Lakshmi has found her greatest strength – love. "It's important to strive hard to do the best we can to help humanity. However small and insignificant a job may be, we should do it with love."

Lakshmi said that for many people today love has lost its true connotation. “Girls fall in and out of love all the time, but love is more respectful, more spiritual. In the world today fathers, teachers, priests are abusing children. That’s not love. It is sad. I don’t blame them, I feel sorry for them because they haven’t learned love, kindness and duty right from childhood. We are all one, and we are all divine. If we treat each other that way, we are helping the world.”

Despite being a librarian, Lakshmi says it’s not book knowledge that teaches you how to love. “You have to do learn it from your experience. Don’t forget to respect mother earth, our human friends, and all the other life around us. Look at yourself and see what it is you are doing each day. Look inside. What are you doing that is causing things to be taking place on the earth. Ask yourself, what have I done this morning? Did I speak kindly? If a friend is rude, don’t retaliate. If you do, they may not ever know love and kindness.”

“You don’t have to do Herculean jobs. Even little jobs done sincerely, with love and appreciation – humanity needs that. People are suffering and dying, but we can show our love and sympathy and it will carry them and us to higher realms.”