

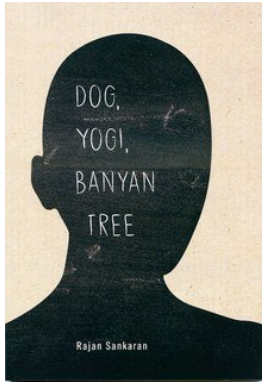
Rajan Sankaran DOG, YOGI, BANYAN TREE

Leseprobe

[DOG, YOGI, BANYAN TREE](#)

von [Rajan Sankaran](#)

Herausgeber: Homoeopathic Medical Publishers



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Passing It On

“Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

George Bernard Shaw

I landed in Zurich airport one cold, wintry day. The airport was, as always, spotlessly clean and very quiet. I made my way to the immigration desk and presented my passport. The officer behind the counter studied the passport, stamped it. She handed it back to me with a warm smile and the words, “Happy Birthday.”

More than twenty years have passed since that day, but I still often remember that smile and those words, from such an unexpected source.

Back home in Mumbai, I have noticed during my walks on the beach, which is outside my home in Juhu, a blind beggar with one leg missing. He sings every day in a loud, hoarse voice while drumming on a plastic can, hoping that someone will drop some money into the small metal pot that sits in front of him. Hardly anyone pays attention to him: his begging bowl remains mostly empty.

However, one day, something unusual happened. A young man, who looked like an affluent college student, sat next to him and accompanied the beggar's singing by playing on a guitar. This was something novel for the beach-goers and attracted many onlookers. I noticed that the begging bowl was now full of coins. I felt then that this young man was the greatest musician I had ever encountered. He did not see his music as a means to exhibit his virtuosity but as an instrument to be of help to someone else.

We all live in a complex world; the human mind has made it so. It is a restless world. You see so much strife and exploitation, with each one out to grab as much as he or she can, so you feel you are missing out on something vital if you don't do the same. Yet we are inspired by incidents such as the one above. Somewhere deep within us, we know that these actions represent a set of values in which lies our true salvation.

Modern scientific advances have made everything so easy, yet life is still so stressful. As our gadgets become more sophisticated, we need also to know their limitations: although they can make things more comfortable, by no means do they make us peaceful. Our wisdom needs to develop at least as rapidly as our technology. As a wit said, "This is a time of smart phones and stupid people!" To remedy this, we need to connect as much to our inner-net as we do to the Internet.

To find the way inward where peace and joy really abide, one needs to navigate the confusing maze of this alluring but ultimately unsatisfying world. The map (or GPS if you will) is to be found in the universal, indwelling wisdom that is brought to light in each one of us, step by step, often facilitated by certain people and situations. We need to learn, as Rudyard Kipling put it, to "Dream, yet let not dreams be your master." We have to learn to live and experience the dream of the outer world, yet know that it is "but a dream" and make the journey within.

Helping us rediscover our orientation, become centered in ourselves, are numerous situations and individuals in which and from whom we can find guidance. For many of us, the first guides in this journey are our parents, with their early role of nurturing and guiding us. The guidance component of either parent we can call the father component, and the nurturing one the mother component, irrespective of from whom it comes at a given time.

As we mature, we find other mothers and fathers, as it were, in various people. The fathers help us to develop various

parts of ourselves and to grow as humans and beyond. Their guidance often comes not in the form of sermons but through their example, through actions that register far louder than words. They channel a wisdom that has been passed on to them from their own fathers, or something that has come to them from a deeper presence within themselves: what people of the faith would call 'the heavenly father'. To silently pass on this legacy is the most valuable gift they give to their children.

I shared a very close bond with my own father and his early demise left a void that led me to search for and find other fathers, each of whom contributed another piece in the puzzle of my being. Individually each separate piece was different, but together they fit beautifully to form a picture of a complete human.

There are many facets to one's evolution. We must initially struggle with feelings of inadequacy. Then comes the need to achieve and be somebody, the need for love, the lure of money, the courage to stand up for what we believe in the face of adversity and opposition and finally become aware that we are threads in a single, large fabric.

At different stages of life when each of these aspects within needs resolution, the right person or situation comes our way to guide us. We merely need to be open to the occasion. Then the most unlikely people or unexpected situations, even a dog or a tree, can be that guide. Just as your first grade schoolteacher prepares you for the second, each guide in life lays the ground for the next one. While at the time we meet them it seems as if by chance, in hindsight we see that all the seemingly random meetings fall into a pattern, as if some greater power has organized a whole course on life from the first grade to post-graduation.

The guides who come do not instruct about what to do or not to do but rather create awareness. Unhealthy actions come

from unhealthy perceptions. When such a perception changes with awareness, the ensuing actions automatically change.

One such unexpected guide in my life was a taxi driver in Kashmir.

My friend and I had gotten into the taxi undecided which of the tourist places to visit that day. So we asked the driver, "Which is more beautiful, Gulmarg or Pahalgam?" He looked calmly at us for a brief moment and then, pointing to a tree in front of us, said, "Look at that tree, that is the most beautiful thing." He stopped speaking, but in my mind his talk continued: "Appreciate it, see how wonderfully each branch and each leaf is crafted, and how amazing is this creation! In our search for something more, something better, are we not losing touch with the wonder around us?"

The essence of Eckhart Tolle's insightful book, *The Power of Now*, was once beautifully exemplified by my then four-year old son Sahaj. We were returning from our trip to South Africa, having spent some days driving around Kruger National Park, up close and personal with lions and other magnificent animals. On the drive from the Park to the airport before our flight back home, I asked Sahaj, "How did you like South Africa?" Sahaj replied, "But, Papa, we are still here."

I somehow remember this sentence as much as, if not more than, our visit to the Park. Children often live in the moment. They are where they are at that time. They don't think too much ahead. And when they are not there, they do not dwell on it. To be in the moment, fully, this is the first step to going beyond the mind; it is the entry point of the spiritual journey.

For an eager student there is always more to learn and teachers are everywhere. Though each teacher in my life was as different from the other as a dog, a yogi or a tree and each

one taught a different lesson, the underlying essence seemed the same. Somehow, it felt as if it were the same teacher had come in a different disguise for each subject.

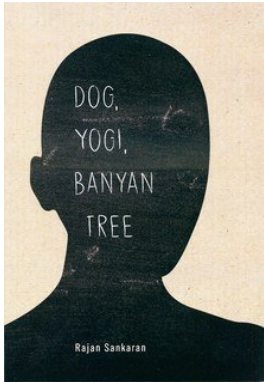
Just the other day there came to my clinic for treatment a sixty-year-old woman. During her history taking she told me that the real VIPs in our lives are the people who we deal with every day, the garbage man, the office staff, the delivery boy from the grocery store, the security guard at the gate of the building. She said that we should give them our attention and care. They are the ones who directly make a difference in our lives. She not only said this, but lived in this awareness every day of in her life. She had brought her cook along with her for his treatment and I could see how well she cared for him.

What the patient said had a deep impact on me, especially because I saw how she walked her talk.

This book is about those people and situations that have helped me on my journey and the gift of guidance that, in particular, these many fathers have given me. In time, I have felt the need to pass that gift on to others, especially to my children. Just as I use the word 'father' quite broadly, I shall use the term 'children' quite flexibly. As a teacher and a physician, I have found many other children besides my biological ones to whom I have felt I should pass on the legacy I so generously received. This book is born from that same gratitude and desire. Within its pages, I pen down a few incidents from my life that have brought me to a deeper place in the hope that acting as a mirror, they may help others to heal. It may also encourage others to open their hearts and minds to 'fathers' in various forms that they could meet in their own lives and learn as I continue to do.

Like a fledgling learning to fly under the supervision of the parent bird, these lessons in many ways helped me learn to fly and find freedom. However, a bird can enjoy its flight only

when she knows there is a nest to which to return. Whereas my father gave me the wings to fly, my mother provided a home to nest. This book, like my life's journey, begins with my mother, who I called *Amma*.



Rajan Sankaran

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222 Seiten, paperback
erschienen 2017



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