



## Dear Parents

I once read a story of a master and a disciple who lived with him. After years of training, one day the master told the disciple that he was now ready to go out in the world and make a mark of his own. On the day of parting, the master's wife kept delaying the disciple's departure, giving some excuse or the other. Finally, in the evening, after running out of excuses to keep him from leaving, she reluctantly handed the disciple a lantern and some of his favourite food for his travels. A long journey lay ahead for him, and part of it wove through dirt tracks and wilderness. The disciple had walked only a short distance when he heard the voice of his master calling him back. He turned around and dutifully walked back. Upon arriving, the master took away the lantern from the disciple and then said, 'Dear son, now you may go home. May you grow and grow.'

Why would the master take the lantern away? Did the disciple reach home safely? Why was the disciple allowed to leave while it was dark? Through these questions, the story encapsulates what every parent goes through while raising a child. In the story, the master is a metaphor for discipline, the





master's wife is a metaphor for love and taking back the lantern symbolizes children guided by their inner light.

As parents, we care for our children, love them, nurture them and a day comes when they step outside the protective bubble of home. *The Wisdom Bridge* will help parents guide their children on the path of wisdom as they grow up in life. When children are exposed to the good and the not-so-good of life, wisdom will help them in making the right decisions. My experience as a meditation teacher, concern as a grandfather, learnings as a father and observations as a student of life all came together in writing *The Wisdom Bridge*.

This book is for parents. I use the word 'parent' as an umbrella term to address anyone caring for a child in some capacity. It includes parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, teachers and caregivers. Also, I use the word 'family', to address the many flavours that families come in—large joint families, nuclear families, families with co-parents, single parents and so on.

In the past forty years, I've had the privilege of meeting thousands of families from all over the world. I have meditated with them, dined with them, travelled with them and counselled them. I have also done a fair bit of matchmaking and officiated at hundreds of weddings. Many of the children who grew up around me are now married and raising beautiful families of their own.

Daily I receive emails from parents who share their joys and sorrows. In their 'happily ever after' messages, parents send me pictures of their newborns. They tell me about their children's hobbies, graduations and college admissions. I also get a steady stream of 'we tried everything, but nothing changes' emails. Being a victim of bullying, struggling with gender identity, suffering from low self-esteem, relationship troubles and grappling with substance abuse are some of the challenges





parents say their children face. And when things go wrong, parents blame themselves. They blame themselves for not acting in time, for not having instilled the correct values and for not being available when they were needed.

How can families face challenges with more resilience? What can a family do to avoid some heartache? What can parents learn from wisdom and science? I have pondered over these questions for many years. I have meditated for answers. I have had enlightening conversations with psychologists and educators. And ever since I became a grandfather three years ago, the motivation to share what I have learned has only become stronger.

It all came to a head during the pandemic. As the virus hunted down humanity, families lost loved ones. Two adolescents I know were orphaned overnight. Their parents and elders succumbed to COVID-19 and died in different hospitals within days. The children now live with me and study at the Heartful learning centre.

During the early months of the pandemic, the question that kept coming up in my mind was, 'How do I help parents through this new normal?' While the COVID-19 pandemic will end, I am concerned about its after-effects on families, especially children. For the past many years, I have been speaking about the well-being of families, the nurturing of children and the need to take care of our elders. Against the backdrop of the pandemic, with an increased sense of urgency, I started writing this book.

## **Parents Are Doing Their Best and They Need Support**

For most parents today, the scene at home is different from when they grew up. If you are forty and older, you may have



spent more time enraptured by stories from grandparents and elders than your children did. Families today lack support and are somehow DIY-ing parenting. The DIY-ing starts well before the baby arrives. From breathing classes and setting up the nursery, to mind-numbing research on car seats, strollers and cribs, parents have to figure out everything on their own.

But most parents, especially mothers, have no help or prior experience in taking care of children. The first time they burp a baby or put one to bed is when their little one arrives. A few decades ago, the situation was different. In those days, families were large and lived together or in proximity. There were uncles and aunts to help them out. Elder siblings doubled up as caregivers and homemakers. Life skills flowed serenely from the elders to the children. In contrast to the past, today's parents are toiling to make up for the support many no longer have.

As a result, these days, parents are present in their children's lives with more attention and intensity than ever before. 'Tiger', 'helicopter', 'lawnmower', 'free-range' and 'dolphin' are some of the terms used to describe styles of parenting. All the attention of the parents are well-intentioned. It shows the eagerness of parents to prepare their children: prepare them for STEM; prepare them for change; prepare them for leadership; and prepare them for success.

*Prepare is the new care.*

The prepare frenzy has swapped carefree summers with advanced math and science classes. Soccer mothers and chess fathers shapeshift into schedule managers and chauffeurs driving children from one activity to another. Many children start computer programming as early as grade 5, but I wonder how many are taught about their emotional programming with the same enthusiasm. Parents strive to send their children to



leafy private schools that can cost their savings and then some to improve their chances of joining an IIT or IIM in the future.

Again, it's all well-intentioned, but I don't think it's working as planned. Data shows that pre-teens and teens from affluent, well-educated families are an *at-risk* group. They are identified with the *highest rates* of depression, substance abuse, anxiety disorders and other emotional issues such as unhappiness when compared with *any other group of children* across the USA.<sup>1</sup> While I don't have similar data for India and other countries, my conversations with parents from these countries give me a grim feeling that they're trending the same way. We are feeding our children a super-sized diet of desire and ambition. The question is, are we doing enough to nurture a child's inner growth?

Parents are doing what they can. Given their stress and the lack of support, parenting can at times feel like a hopeless effort. Not to mention expensive. The baby product industry in the USA alone is around \$30 billion, and it shows the eagerness of parents to do a good job. They enrol in parenting classes, read books (including this one), learn from other cultures and make personal sacrifices, because deep inside, they want to be the best parents they possibly can.

*The Wisdom Bridge* will channel the parents' energies away from anxiety to appreciation. It will give them a new appreciation of how to tap into their heart's wisdom and raise happy and resilient children. *The Wisdom Bridge* will take the focus away from *prepare* and put the spotlight back on *care*.

Preparing children is like teaching them the block and tackle of surviving in the world—don't talk to strangers, follow a routine, study hard, don't eat junk food and so on. One may call it the transactional side of parenting. No doubt it's essential, and it's a lot of work. But on its own, 'prepare' is an incomplete





idea. ‘Care’, on the other hand, includes nurturing the child spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. Prepare pushes the parents to ‘do more, do more’, while care guides the parents to ‘do what matters’. Prepare is a transaction, while care is a deep relationship. Care comes from a place of ‘What is good for my child’s development?’ Care is a long-term view of the child’s flourishing in life. Care is a sacred activity and it begins at home.

In its essence, caring is the *real* preparing.

### **Guided by Wisdom, Parenting Becomes Heartful**

To learn how wisdom helps in caring, we must first understand the heart. Across cultures, the heart is the seat of wisdom. It is a source of feeling and intuition. We have all experienced the heart’s inspiration. It cannot be contested, only heeded; for inspiration is the language of the heart. When parenting is guided by the heart, we actively channel inspiration to guide us in our role. In reassuring silence and timely vigilance, the heart speaks. When we heed the heart’s wisdom, there are only confident decisions instead of disabling doubt.

Does it mean that following the heart’s wisdom is the antidote for all parenting problems? Does it mean our children will always do the right thing? That’s not how it works. Children are affected by many things—the environment at home, the neighbourhood they live in, the school they attend, their friends, the books they read, the media they are exposed to and so on. Wisdom takes away the anxiety that comes from trying to control everything and helps the parents focus on laying a strong foundation for the child.

Parenting is many things, but the one thing it’s not is a perfection pageant. There are no perfect parents. *We all learn*





*on the job*. Children see their parents as the best in the world, not because they won the best parent competition. They are the best because they are *their* parents. The unconditional, innocent love from the children keeps the parents going. We all make mistakes. Each day we'll find something, no matter how tiny, that we might have handled differently. It's okay. Hug it out, resolve not to repeat it and move on.

Wisdom says the soul chooses the parents. We chose our parents, and our children chose us. In turn, as parents, we choose the best virtues and qualities that help our children design their destinies. *The Wisdom Bridge* is a guidebook for this noble journey.

## The Principles

*The Wisdom Bridge* offers a simple framework of principles that are easy to apply. When you're in the dark and you reach for a matchbox, it doesn't matter which match you choose to strike. They all give light. These principles are like those matches. They come from a place of wisdom, and it doesn't matter which one you pick; they light up the road ahead.

In all, there are nine principles. The book is divided into nine sections, each of which covers one principle. Here are the principles:

1. Raising a child still takes a village.
2. Be guided by wisdom. Seek it. Cultivate it. Share it.
3. Preparation begins long before the children arrive.
4. Happy mothers make happy families.
5. Early childhood is the foundation of wisdom.
6. Character builds personality.



7. Youth are the future. Guide them, don't break them.
8. Lifestyle is an expression of one's attitudes.
9. Discipline your love, not love your discipline.

Parents are busy and most of them don't get more than twenty minutes of uninterrupted time before a chore, a task or a notification pulls them away. That's why most chapters in this book will take twenty minutes or less to read. Each chapter is also divided into subsections to help parents better navigate this book.

Parents can read the book in one go or can read the parts relevant for them. I would encourage the parents to scribble notes and highlight the lines they like. When they revisit the book, the notes will enhance their reading experience.

Within each chapter, there are tips and suggestions. Best of all, we have built a website—[www.wisdombridge.in](http://www.wisdombridge.in). The QR code below takes you to the website. Here you can download the 'Readers Guide'. It will help you identify the parts of the book most relevant to you, saving you further time.

Thank you for choosing this book.

It comes straight from my heart, and I hope it touches yours. Sometimes when the journey seems tiring and the skies turn dark, when you find yourself at the crossroads of indecision and doubt, I pray this book lights the path towards 'happily ever after' and away from the dark lanes of 'we've tried everything, but nothing changes'.



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