

A Valuable Lesson for the Price of Two 25 Paisa Coins

When I began working with Dr. Goher, the Meher Free Dispensary was located at the end of the men's verandah where the cement benches are located at the end by the kitchen. We worked in a room that opened to a smaller back area which we used for treatments. This room was located by the privacy wall which separates the Meherazad Compound. When not giving injections or doing wound care, I sat next to Goher at her desk and observed her patient examinations. After a diagnosis was rendered and a treatment plan prescribed, the follow-up procedures were done for the patient by those of us who were volunteering pilgrims.

In the United States, I had been trained as an Open-Heart Surgery Technician and Inhalation Therapist. I was the ICU nurse who did the patient's follow-up care after surgery. Goher was kind enough to let me think my limited experience and a basic understanding of medicine were useful; best of all when I was deficient, she would patiently teach me after clinic time. We would open Dr. Donkin's and her medical books and explore charts of the human body and read about various diseases. Goher explained how to diagnose exotic diseases not seen in the West, telling me which clues to look for while listening to how patients described their symptoms. She taught me about the intricacies of diseases found in India and their treatment protocols; she even taught me suturing.

During clinic time, as she spoke Marathi with the patients, Goher would explain the questions she was asking and then go over the patient's responses with me. It was in this 'passive' manner, unbeknownst to me, I learned to speak Marathi. One day Goher was too ill to attend the Clinic and Mehera said she was to take rest, asking me to go do the best I could under the circumstance. As I sat with the first patient in her Goher's seat when the Dispensary opened, the Marathi language tumbled out of my mouth; to my surprise, I understood the patient's responses. It was a thrill I will always remember. After clinic, I could not wait to tell Mehera about it during lunch.

Although Meher Free Dispensary provided patient care without payment, they did pay 25 paise for a chit with their case number on it. The

case number assigned to each patient provided a way to keep a record of their medical history; placing a value on the chit reduced the case numbers that got 'lost'. Pendu managed to assign patient case numbers; he collected the fee, pulled case files, and recorded the names of the patients who were to be seen. He kept meticulous records, tallying the number of patients we treated in a ledger, tracking those who were repeatedly charged for losing their ticket while recording fees paid by new patients. The villagers loved Pendu. He was known to accept a couple of eggs, a liter of buffalo milk or some dahi, **what is this?** or a stack of chapattis for payment, noting the ledger for same.

Several times a year we experienced mass outbreaks of serious illnesses in wide swaths of the surrounding population. We treated people who came from great distances beyond the local villages. Sometimes, the staggering number of people suffering from acute stages of malaria, cases of flu, and other maladies would create a health crisis, doubling, tripling, and quadrupling the usual number of patients seen in a day. The increase resulted in waiting lines which wound around the outside to the kitchen, (where Aloba made tea) stretching down the Meherazad Driveway. Sometimes lines spilled out into the yard, winding back and forth in the yard. During alarming outbreaks, the number of patients waiting for care not only filled the yard but stretched beyond, flowing out to the rear parking area to the fields that touched the driveway boundary. Aloba took charge of long lines and helped manage those awaiting treatment; he kept order and saw to it that patients could sit in the shade when needed or in the sun if possible. Meher Free Dispensary treated everyone who came, only closing its doors after the last patient was seen by Dr. Goher.

When the Dispensary hours were over, Pendu would take the box of collected coins to his chair by the Blue Bus. He would reconcile the amount paid with the record of the day, stacking the 25 paisa coins 10 each to a pile, 10 stacks to a row, all laid out across the wooden slat of his chair. Each row of ten stacks equaled 25 Rupees. Piles of lesser denomination coins (5, 10, and the occasional 1 paisa coin) needed to be counted as well, creating complexity in the mathematical calculation. We usually averaged about 125 to 150 patients daily and about once a week upward of

200 patients were treated. Because Meher Free Dispensary had gained such a wonderful reputation for the level of treatment provided at no cost to anyone who came, it was natural the increase in patient count followed. Plus, not only was the medical care, medicine, and treatment exceptional in quality, the people were grateful for the loving care Dr. Goher provided in the name of the Avatar of the Age.

On the days we treated several hundred patients—many of them ~~of which so many~~ were new—I would help Pendu count the coins. I liked to sit with him to do this so the coin counting could be completed before lunch was sent over to the men's side. With a little help, he could eat his meal on time while it was hot. The times he faced a high-volume count of coins, I brought out a tray and positioned it on the wooden slats of his chair by forming an upside-down 'V' shape. By placing the tray across the slats, it could securely hold the coin stacks of various denominations on the tray. Pendu divided up the coins between us and we created rows of coins ready for the count.

I never realized that two 25 paisa coins—8 annas—would teach me an invaluable lesson about money and serving at the pleasure of the Master.

One day, hundreds and hundreds of patients came to Meher Free Dispensary during a health crisis; the volume of coins taken in was astronomical. I cleaned up after working and joined Pendu for the count. As I sat down, I could tell he was already irritated because he was swearing under his breath, grumbling because he was 50 paise off in the accounting. As I sat in the chair next to him, he took the top off the coin box and scooped half the coins into it. Placing the box top in my hands, he admonished me to count and to carefully count my half while he counted the other half. We stacked the various coins ten high to a pile, in rows of ten stacks each. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Eruch was sitting across from us on a bench in front of Mandali Hall, seemingly amused at what was going on.

For whatever reason, I found Eruch's interest in our coin counting to be irritating. I remember thinking when he would chuckle ~~when~~ as I let out

an exasperated sigh, when the count was again 2 coins short, that he would be of better use helping to count instead of mocking our exasperation. My annoyance grew as he continued chuckling and grinning, knowing since he knew quite well my sentiment. My mood became melodramatic as he just sat there enjoying our discomfort. His right leg was bent at the knee—lying ~~and~~ upon the seat of the bench, foot by his hip. The other leg was flat on the verandah stone floor. His left hand clutched his right knee as he rested his right elbow on the hand on his knee. In typical form, Eruch was holding his chin in his right hand. He was quite amused, his posture one of comfort even though our discomfort was obvious.

Again, we added up the totals, and again we were 2 coins short. Every time we counted, Pendu reviewed the ledger, recounted the number of patients and the fees collected, and with great irritation announced we were still 50 paise short. He took his hand and swept all the coins off the board into the box and began parceling them out between us. We repeated the count, starting over from the beginning. Each time the result was the same. Our frustration continued to grow as we fed on each other's upset. I found myself feeling piqued because Pendu was being so picky over such a small amount of money. Plus, we were both hungry and it was a hot summer afternoon, which was not helpful.

Adding to my exasperation, lunch had been served, yet there was Eruch still seated on the bench, watching and chuckling, ignoring that lunch had been brought over from the kitchen. Eruch was not shy about letting me know he was amused at what he was watching, and this pissed me off. Plus, even though I had sent word back to Mehera that I was delayed and would come soon, I started to feel pressure. One of the workers brought a message from Mehera asking how much longer I would be. I was concerned that she was waiting to eat and might even be holding up the start of the meal until I sat down to join them at the dining table.

Feeling vexed and hungry, the sun hot as it perched overhead, Eruch had become an unwelcome observer to the coin counting. He continued to grin at me when I looked over at him with a scowl. Shameless in the moment, annoyed with Eruch and feeling impatient with Pendu for being such a stickler over two 25 paise coins, I lost self-control. (For reference, in

1975 there were about Rs/7 to a dollar) After a quick calculation, I found it crazy that Pendu was making such a fuss over 15 cents! My feeling frustrated led to me becoming my frustration. No longer able to contain my annoyance, I reached into the little coin purse Mehera had stitched for me. I took out two 25 paisa coins and placed them on the tray. With annoyance, in a haughty voice with a snotty tone for good measure, I rudely said, "There! Here's 50 paisa. Please close the books on this, Pendu."

Of course, Pendu ignored my outburst. But Eruch? He burst out laughing. Now I had become chum to his shark, bait floating in the water awaiting his bite! He exclaimed, "I was wondering when you'd do that! You lasted much longer than I anticipated!" and then he continued laughing. With what I am sure was a look of extreme annoyance at him, I raised my voice to Eruch, stating, "All this fuss over 50 paise is a waste of time and energy!" Without looking up, Pendu reached over and patted my knee. But as soon as these words crossed my lips, Eruch got up and came over and grabbed my hand and led me to his room. We went over to his desk and he pulled out the chair and sat me in it. His voice took on a profoundly serious tone as he started to tell me a story.

While pressing my shoulders, Eruch began to explain that after Baba's programs or a trip with Baba and the Mandali, it was his duty to balance the books. It was the duty of Eruch to account for all the money received from Baba lovers for His work. It was Baba's habit to ask specific people to fund a particular program and He was fastidious in the accounting of the income and expenses and meticulous that every paisa is accounted for, including all the receipts. Eruch would keep records in a ledger and go through receipts and all the notes and entries. Balancing the ledger as to what monies had been given by His lovers, for which program and the line-item information of each expense were demanded of Eruch by Baba.

Still standing behind me as I sat in the chair, he continued telling me the story. One evening Baba remained in Mandali Hall, awaiting to retire until after the accounting had been reported to Him by Eruch. There was a delay because Eruch was out of balance by (I think) Rs/2. Just as Pendu had been struggling over 50 paise, Eruch was having the dickens of a time

finding the error that resulted in a Rs/2 miscalculation on the account. He had gone over the numbers numerous times, repeatedly matching up receipts and ledger entries, and was by now seeing double! Plus, the work was being done at the end of a long day, using a kerosene lantern for light. Eruch was not only distressed by the problem but had the added pressure of knowing Baba was sitting in the Hall waiting for him to complete the work and give his report.

I now realized why Eruch found it humorous I was irked at having to count coins over and over, each time coming up 50 paise short! Watching the drama play out with Pendu and me brought up the memory of his own experience with Baba when he, too, came up short in his accounting. He just sat there, watching us, patiently enjoying the unfolding, knowing the moment was nigh when I would break and give in to my annoyance. He knew he was going to impart a good Baba Story and offer an important lesson to me in short order. Taking delight in the prospect of sharing a moment he had with his Beloved, Eruch was charmed, in no small measure, by my chagrin, making no effort to hide the glee he was feeling.

It was in this moment of profundity I relaxed and readied myself to ~~usher~~ take in what I knew would be sage advice. Eruch gave my braid a gentle tug, and we sat in a pregnant pause while I regained my inner balance. I took a deep breath as my shoulders dropped and my chin lowered slightly toward my chest.

Still pressing my shoulders, he continued his narration of how he labored over the ledger while Baba waited in the Hall to return to the women's side. Unbeknownst to Eruch, Baba had become impatient at the delay and rose out of His chair and walked over to Eruch's room to find out what the delay in reporting was about. With Baba standing at his side, Eruch explained the reason for the hold-up. Baba was not amused, and He hammered Eruch for his inability to do 'simple math'. He gestured to Eruch that he was incompetent and could not add and subtract properly. Eruch recalled how Baba then took His Hand and started to slap the back of his head and pinch his ears. He pressed down on his shoulders, shaking him a bit. All of this made the duty harder and Eruch became more irritable. After a few minutes of this abuse from Baba Eruch angrily burst out, "Baba, so

much money was taken in! So much was spent! We are only Rs/2 short. Why to bother about such a small amount as Rs/2?"

At this outburst by Eruch Baba took His hand and gave a tight slap to the back of his head; He told Eruch to sit there all night if need be and to balance the account to a zeroed-out conclusion. "Find your error!" Baba gestured. "This money was collected in My Name and sent to Me for My work by My lovers." Baba continued berating Eruch, "Have you no shame? Is this how you treat the gift from My lovers who open their hearts to Me when asked? Are you a mad man to act like this with Me?" Baba continued to goad Eruch, questioning how his parents raised him. This pierced Eruch's heart as it reflected on his mother, Gaimai, "Who raised you?" Baba asked. "Have you no manners in how you treat the kindness of others? What kind of man are you to behave like this?"

Baba turned and went back to the women's side and retired. Eruch sat in his chair, stunned, shame overtaking his irritation. He grabbed the ledger and scraps of papers and started from the beginning. He went over the numbers, matching up receipts and reviewing his notes, a critical eye given to each line item. Hours later, after a meticulous reckoning, he found his error and made the correction. Finally, the books were balanced to perfection. In the morning when Baba returned to Mandali Hall, Eruch showed Baba the books, but never mentioned the error or the event of the last night. He just told Baba the books were balanced and every pai accounted for. Baba was pleased with his effort and nothing more was said about it.

Stunned, I turned in my chair and looked at Eruch, who by now was seated at the head of his bed. He took my hands in his, and gently pressed them both, "You see, my child, this is how we were trained by Him. Baba wanted us to properly account for everything, whether it be money, what we said and did, our moods, even our thoughts! Baba has the whole Universe weighing on Him at all times, yet nothing slipped His notice." He paused to let this sink in. Continuing, he chuckled a bit and said, "I got fed up with a 2 rupee imbalance and He was not having it." Another pause for my reflection. "It was not just that the money was a gift of love from His lovers to Him, it was about the Love He gave to them to return to Him! It

was all put into motion by His Grace. This is what mattered.” Just then the clock struck 1 and we both smiled in unison, acknowledging that the truth he had ~~been-just-spoken having~~ had been verified by the clock’s chime.

By now tears had welled up in my eyes as he continued explaining the lesson, “My focus was on a mere 2 rupees while His was on His lovers, their offering, and managing it all to perfection.” He put his hands on my cheeks, and taking his thumbs, he wiped the tears that had gathered. “We had to learn to live in balance while so much around us was out of balance, my child.”

At this moment Eruch had so simply explained a major theme in how to manage life at His pleasure! It became clear that I had tripped and fallen over 50 paise, landing flat on my face. Although I had stumbled and fallen, Eruch picked me up and dusted me off, graciously demonstrating that instead of focusing on pleasing the Master, I had focused on my irritation and impatience. It occurred to me that my irritation at coin-counting gave me a significant lesson as I began to understand the error of my behavior. I had chosen to tend to the conflict I felt from the focal point of my personal discomfort, ignoring whether my choice was pleasing to the Master!

My spiritual immaturity at the age of 25 quickly became obvious. Adopting a cavalier attitude regarding the true value of those two 25 paisa coins had bound me up in negative emotions, all of which I was more than willing to feed. I had not factored in the sacrifice those coins might have been to the patient or that they had been given to His Clinic so the patient could have access to the health care service being offered in His Name! I was willing to dismiss 8 annas as insignificant, an arrogant attitude on my part regarding the real ‘value’ of those missing paisa. Eruch showed me the profundity of the 25 paisa offering and the importance of poise and pleasing the Master. What a marvelous lesson to be given at fire-sale pricing! I had been so casual, so cavalier as I pulled out two 25 paisa coins from my little coin purse. 50 Paisa was a small price to pay for a lesson straight from the Divine Vault.

As Eruch again paused, I was transported back to the time of Jesus. I saw in my mind’s eye, the sweeper woman offering her only coin from her

coin purse to Jesus at the Temple where she labored for meager wages. He exclaimed how happy He was with her, praising her offering and expressing His gratitude. The wealthy merchants with Him grumbled and became upset that Jesus had not made such a fuss about the silk purses filled with gold they had just given to Him. Jesus turned to these wealthy merchants telling them that the sweeper woman had given Him everything while they had given only a small portion of their wealth. “Will you give me your all?” he asked these arrogant men. It was a deeply emotional and moving image to see in my mind.

The moment left me breathless—I had valued the two 25 paisa coins from a worldly perspective and not allowed for the Divine to have a place in the experience. With this realization, I smiled and felt a bit of a thrill that I was able to grasp the wisdom Eruch had just shared. A 50 paisa upset had given me a treasure trove of information that penetrated deeply into my being. I let the realization and inspiration that followed sink into my heart from my mind. My perspective and understanding of an entire experience, not only the small part I played, was irrevocably altered for the better. The lesson has reverberated throughout my life and reduced so much angst at what life tossed my way.

Eruch could tell by the look in my eyes that I understood. With a lighthearted voice he said, “Come on, now. Let’s go count coins with Pendu and help him.” He gave me a big hug and taking my hand again, we went out and sat with Pendu. The three of us began stacking 25 paisa coins in measures of 10 coins each stack, doing the same with the other, lesser value coins. It took only one time to discover the error, make the correction, and move on. The smile on Pendu’s face was so innocent as he announced a zero balance. Then he reached over and touched my arm and told me, “I’m starving. Run along now and eat your lunch.”