

Read the next two selections and answer the questions that follow.

## Helping Others to See

*by Ram Dass*

- 1 If you are at a point in your life where you are ready to grow, to push yourself a little, to open your heart to a deeper compassion, drop in at the Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai, India. Offer yourself up as a volunteer—for as long as you are comfortable. Even a week would work, as it did for me. Then watch with awe as Dr. V, or Thulasi, his second-in-command, finds a place just for you.
- 2 In your “free” time, don’t miss 6 A.M. in the waiting room of the hospital when Dr. V walks about in the river of humanity. Hundreds of village folk stand in lines, waiting patiently for inexpensive, often free, outpatient eye care. In an adjoining wing, long lines of the blind and the near-blind, guided by friends and relatives, await the 10-minute miracle of surgery that will give them back their sight.
- 3 Or join Dr. V’s sister, a brilliant eye surgeon in her own right, as she, after six hours of surgery, leads a class of nurses in meditation and song.
- 4 After you have wandered around enough to begin to understand what this hospital is really about, ask Dr. V if you could visit one of his Sunday morning family sessions with his brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, in-laws and all the children. Each week a different child presents something: it could be one of the holy stories of India through which the Hindu people contemplate their values and incorporate them into their lives. Or a political issue, a world public health issue, an environmental issue, a family issue. After the presentation, all three generations hang out together and discuss the way they can put into practice the values brought forth in the presentation.
- 5 Dr. V is a hero for these people for alleviating preventable and curable blindness in the world. He is a winner of the highest honors, and “chief” of this huge, world-class eye hospital complex. A strangely arresting man—with his gnarled arthritic hands and feet, his gray rumpled suit, his seventy-odd years and a perfect “poster man” at the same time—a brilliant mirror of compassion to all. His work is not only a response to the great need he sees every day. It is motivated by his belief that “intelligence and capability are not enough to solve our problems. There must be a joy of doing something beautiful.”
- 6 In the waiting room scene at sunrise, Dr. V is simultaneously the fellow villager that he once was, and continues to be, and the extraordinary healer he has become. For a moment, his hand rests reassuringly on the arm of a frightened elderly woman. He explains a surgical procedure to a man. He nods to people and keeps the line moving. He cautions the children to be careful of others in their play. He is both village elder and hospital chief. He

is also keeping an eye on the staff, insisting on their impeccability in service—guiding his superbly honed institution of compassion with a glance, a word, a silent presence, a smile. As Gandhi once said, “My life is my message.” So Dr. V’s blend of being and doing is his message. He continually seeks to be an instrument of imbuing the physical world with Living Spirit.

- 7 “India will enter the 21st century with 13 million of her people needlessly blind,” says Dr. V. “If you allow the divine force to flow through you, you will accomplish things far greater than you imagined.”
- 8 Dr. V and his staff perform 92,000 cataract surgeries a year and nearly 850,000 outpatient treatments. That’s over 300 surgeries a day and 2,800 outpatients registered and seen each day. At the Seva Foundation, hundreds of our members help support special people like Dr. V and their noble work in underprivileged communities around the world. The Aravind Clinic has become a factory of caring for human beings. Their tall building of cement and steel and large plate-glass windows is a shining monument to Western technology. But it is also, like Dr. V himself, a blend of being and doing.
- 9 From my experiences with Dr. V and the Aravind family, I have deepened my understanding of a basic tenet of the Seva Foundation—that one need not forgo doing for being, or being for doing. In Madurai I found myself immersed in a demonstration of the successful integration of these two aspects of life—actions involving the best skills and technology balanced with caring hearts rooted in a sweet spiritual presence that is embracing of all fellow souls. It is a great teaching.

“Helping Others to See” by Ram Dass, from *STONE SOUP FOR THE WORLD: LIFE-CHANGING STORIES OF EVERYDAY HEROES*, edited by Marianne Larned. Copyright © 1998 and 2002 by Marianne Larned. Published by Three Rivers Press. Reprinted by permission.

# The Aravind Eye-Care System

Dr. G. Venkataswamy, known as Dr. V, founded the Aravind Eye Hospital in 1976. What began as an 11-bed hospital is now the largest eye-care medical organization in the world, with 4,000 beds, seven hospitals, and 36 small satellite eye-care centers in remote regions.

Aravind's guiding philosophy is compassionate, self-sustaining care. One-third of the center's patients pay for their eye care. These funds pay for the other two-thirds, who receive their care at no cost.



Dr. V at His Desk

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Patients of Aravind After Their Surgeries, Waiting Aboard the Bus That Will Take Them Home

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# A Ball to Roll Around

by Robert Allman

This I Believe, *broadcast during the 1950s*

- 1 I lost my sight when I was 4 years old by falling off a boxcar in a freight yard in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and landing on my head. Now, I am 32. I can vaguely remember the brightness of sunshine and what color red is. It would be wonderful to see again. But a calamity can do strange things to people.
- 2 It occurred to me the other day that I might not have come to love life so, as I do, if I hadn't been blind. I believe in life now. I am not so sure that I would have believed in it so deeply, otherwise. I don't mean that I would prefer to go without my eyes. I simply mean that the loss of them made me more appreciate what I had left.
- 3 Life, I believe, asks a continuous series of adjustments to reality. The more readily a person is able to make these adjustments, the more meaningful his own private world becomes. The adjustment is never easy. I was bewildered and afraid, but I was lucky. My parents and my teachers saw something in me—oh, a potential to live you might call it—which I didn't see. And they made me want to fight it out with blindness.
- 4 The hardest lesson I had to learn was to believe in myself. That was basic. If I hadn't been able to do that, I would have collapsed and become a chair rocker on the front porch for the rest of my life. When I say believe in myself, I am not talking about simply the kind of self-confidence that helps me down an unfamiliar staircase alone. That is part of it, but I mean something bigger than that: an assurance that I am, despite imperfections, a real, positive person; that somewhere in the sweeping, intricate pattern of people, there is a special place where I can make myself fit. It took me years to discover and strengthen this assurance. It had to start with the most elementary things.
- 5 When I was a youngster, once a man gave me an indoor baseball. I thought he was mocking me, and I was hurt.
- 6 "I can't use this," I said.
- 7 "Take it with you," he urged me, "and roll it around."
- 8 The words stuck in my head: "Roll it around, roll it around." By rolling the ball, I could listen where it went. This gave me an idea—how to achieve a goal I had thought impossible: playing baseball. At Philadelphia's Overbrook School for the Blind, I invented a successful variation of baseball. We called it groundball.

- 9 All my life, I have set ahead of me a series of goals, and then tried to reach them one at a time. I had to learn my limitations. It was no good to try for something I knew at the start was wildly out of reach, because that only invited the bitterness of failure. I would fail sometimes anyway, but on the average, I made progress.
- 10 I believe I made progress more readily because of a pattern of life shaped by certain values. I find it easier to live with myself if I try to be honest. I find strength in the friendship and interdependence of people. I would be blind, indeed, without my sighted friends. And very humbly, I say that I have found purpose and comfort in a mortal's ambition toward godliness.
- 11 Perhaps a man without sight is blinded less by the importance of material things than other men are. All I know is that a belief in the higher existence of a nobility for men to strive for has been an inspiration that has helped me more than anything else to hold my life together.

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## Did You Know?



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### **Facts About Robert Allman (1918–1994):**

- At the University of Pennsylvania, Allman was an intercollegiate wrestling champion and captain of the Quaker wrestling squad during his senior year.
- He was the recipient of the Class of 1915 Award, bestowed annually on a member of the senior class who most closely approaches the ideal University of Pennsylvania student-athlete.
- He was believed to be the first blind athlete ever to compete with sighted athletes in any American sport and was the first blind athlete to be awarded a varsity letter at the University of Pennsylvania.
- In 1940 Allman was presented the Most Courageous Athlete Award by the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association.
- He once said, "I have done nothing more than the average American boy. . . . Courage is nothing more than doing the best you can in the good old American Way."
- After college he became a successful lawyer in the Philadelphia area and worked until his death at age 75.