



**'Let's Make A Difference' 24<sup>th</sup> Youth Conference  
Asia Plateau, 1 - 8 June, 2018**



The 24<sup>th</sup> edition of the Let's Make A Difference (LMAD) Youth Conference, experienced the largest number of participants, who arrived at Asia Plateau on the 1st of June, not quite knowing how their week will unfold. More than three hundred people took part in the conference. Participants travelled from 43 different cities and towns from all over India. After registering themselves, filling out a survey and bidding goodbye to their beloved phones, they gathered in the foyer and were given a short tour of Asia Plateau (AP).

Later that evening, all the participants gathered in the auditorium for the inauguration ceremony. A short skit enacted by the volunteers was presented to the participants which showed how sceptical people tend to get after hearing about the conference and what it has to offer. It also went on to show how most of these very same people do not feel like leaving AP even after the LMAD conference is over. After such an impactful skit, the host and the hostess took over the inauguration. The auspicious lighting of the lamp was jointly done by the youngest and eldest members of the volunteering team along with 3 participants.

The volunteering team, seated in different parts of the auditorium then danced down the aisles as the song *Give Me Some Sunshine* played over the speakers. The participants thoroughly enjoyed as the volunteers danced and sang to the upbeat song.

Five speakers who have attended the LMAD conference in the past shared with the larger crowd their journey and the change that they have experienced over the years. It was inspiring to see how one of them had travelled halfway across the world just to serve as a volunteer at LMAD. Each and every one of them through their unique story demonstrated how any challenge, no matter how complex, can be overcome and be left behind. Every story

T : (02168) 240241/2 | E : IOFC.LMAD@GMAIL.COM | W : WWW.LMAD.IN / WWW.IN.IOFC.ORG

ASIA PLATEAU, PANCHGANI - 412 805, DIST. SATARA, MAHARASHTRA

had elements that were very relatable which made it easier for the majority of the crowd to connect with what they were conveying. They also expressed how constantly staying in touch with the ideology of LMAD made their lives so much easier to live.

Everyone then rose for the silent national anthem, after which the entire gathering sang the national anthem. The course convener introduced a part of the volunteering team to the participants, who by now had a glimpse of what was awaiting them over the next few days. The Do's and Don'ts of LMAD were briefed to the participants, most of whom weren't used to the lifestyle that LMAD encourages. Everyone then dispersed with their respective groups where they got to know each other better. After the long day that the participants had had, they left for their rooms.

One of the most important things that LMAD encourages is Discipline. This value, being so important is not only talked about, but the participants are also made to adhere to a few rules like waking up at 5AM and going to sleep at 10PM. This is followed by everyone throughout the course of the conference. In our day to day lives, we tend to oversleep and generally spend time very loosely. At LMAD, time is taken very seriously. All participants assemble outside at 6AM for a short prayer followed by stretching and exercise. Everyone then moves to the auditorium where the course convener throws some light on 'quiet-time'. This session plays a very big impact on the participants as everyone is fresh and attentive. It also sets the tone for the following quiet-time session and guides one's mind in a particular direction.

On the first morning, the concept of quiet-time was introduced to the participants. The importance of spending time with oneself and listening to the inner conscience was put across. During this period of quiet-time, one sometimes tends to experience some very powerful thoughts and realizations. These are a product of a very focused period of time and are very profound, which makes it important for one to jot them down immediately. A quiet-time diary was then distributed to everyone present. This diary was purely to be used to note down quiet time thoughts. It wasn't a planner or a journal. This significance of the diary was made very clear. The participants then spread across the beautiful campus to experience their very first quiet-time.

***"There are a thousand thoughts lying within a man that he does not know till he takes up a pen to write."***

**- William Thackeray**



Everyone was instructed to assemble in the auditorium by 7:30AM for a brief session of sharing. Quite a few participants came up and shared about how they spent their time spent outside. Some expressed how they had completely random thoughts and couldn't focus on one thing. Many spoke how spending some time quietly actually made them conscious of their surrounding.

***“While I was hearing the chirping of the birds and reading the diary, I realized that there is a world outside our phones too. When I looked around, it was beautiful to see people having a book and a pen in their hands instead of a gadget.”***

Everyday, the session after breakfast began with the world news and the AP News, after which an inspirational video related to the day is shown to the participants. A MRA song sung by a few volunteers is followed. MRA songs are a very integral part of the conference.

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***“Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil.”***

**- CS Lewis**

The four values that lofC is based on - Purity, Honesty, Unselfishness and Love were then talked about by the course convener. Each value was spoken about in detail with real world examples being given so that it became easier for participants to connect to the essence of every value. The fact that living up to these standards in the real world where various other conditions and complexities come into play will not be an easy task was highlighted. People are taught everything in schools and colleges other than how to actually build their character based on these extremely important values, which makes it vital for us to lead our lives in a manner so as to adhere to these standards and set an example.

***“Long-term consistency beats short-term intensity”***

**- Bruce Lee**

The course convener in another pre quiet time talk emphasized how important it is to **consistently** follow the concept of quiet time especially after one leaves AP. Quiet time should not be followed only when there is a necessity for it in one's life, nor should it depend on any external factor. This point was driven very strongly to the participants.

A powerful session which focused on how one can not only acquire a job but also build a career was then conducted in the auditorium. A balanced combination of one's skill, passion, something that the world will pay one for and contributing towards what one thinks is the need of the world makes up for a satisfying long-lasting career. The participants were very responsive and the concept was well received.

***“Vision without action is a dream, action without vision is passing of time and action with vision will make the change happen.”***

**- Session convener**

The participants then assembled and got into buses according to their groups for a fun filled trip to Mahabaleshwar. Singing, playing games, eating food and generally having fun. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves as the day progressed.

For the very first time in LMAD, the 3rd of June was celebrated as womanhood day. Back in the day, women's place in most societies was not only dictated by male prejudice; it was also dictated by the needs of the society. This fact might have been diluted to quite an extent over the years but there is no denying that it still exists. The course convener spoke about how men take women for granted in today's world and pointed out how men usually only approach the women in our lives in times of need.

From being a mother, teacher, provider of the house, an employee to a business organization, to being an entrepreneur, women have donned various hats and made a difference in the lives of their families and to the lives of others around them. A house remains a house. But it takes a woman to make a house a home, educate the child and raise a family. They have fought through various obstacles, defied all the odds and achieved great things. Every woman is a role model for all of us. Thus, at LMAD 2018 and going forward, we will celebrate 3rd June to honor the women in our lives and of the world.

All the girls and women were welcomed into the auditorium in a grand manner. Red carpets were laid out for them and the men presented one rose with a note on it to all the ladies. The note contained a message that stated how very much they mean to everyone in their lives. Their faces lit up as they read the messages and this brought joy to all the men present there.

The first speaker of the day, **Mrs. Shital Mahajan** blew us all away when she spoke about the incredible way she had led her life up until then. The Padma Shri holder broke her first world record after she performed the *first parachute jump of her life without any practice, over the geographic North Pole Arctic Circle in a freezing temperature of minus 37 Degree Celsius*. The story of how she convinced her parents and relatives to attempt something of this sort was nothing short of inspiring. After she achieved this incredible feat, she did not stop there. She went ahead and did the same thing over the south pole. The crowd was surprised time and time again as she spoke about the various adventures that she had experienced. Adventures such as parachute jumping with a saree on, getting married mid-air in a hot air balloon and being the first Indian civilian woman to represent India in 79-way skydiving formation in the air at 18000 ft. She also spoke about how she continued living her dream after getting married and having twins.

The next speaker, **Dr. Ritu Biyani Joseph** through her talk, demonstrated how she faced an incredibly challenging phase of her life. She's a breast cancer survivor. During her treatment, she realized that majority of the people around her did not know the basic symptoms of breast cancer and how to prevent it. In 2006, with the goal of spreading awareness, *she travelled 30,220 kms with her daughter, conducting breast cancer awareness camps.* Her determination and will to continue working for the cause moved the audience.



**Mrs. Shital Mahajan on the left and Dr. Ritu Biyani Joseph on the right.**

Post dinner, the third speaker, **Amruta Alpesh Soni** stunned the audience as she spoke about her journey, about how she had to fight (and still continues to fight) every taboo associated with her community. *Instead of accepting that she was a victim of a larger problem, she decided to fight for herself and get what she deserved.* Being an HIV positive transgender woman in today's world and achieving what she has achieved is no small feat at all. Against all odds, with absolutely no support from her parents, she gave herself education and got a well paying job. And yet, it wasn't long before she was forced into dancing at a bar and later, sex work. It was at this juncture that life threw yet another stone at her. She tested positive for HIV. It was heartbreaking to listen to her talk about how she had lost all hope after everything she had been through. She realized much later that by disclosing her status and being more open about it, she was able to help hundreds of people in the process. She then worked under "Project Vihaan" targeted at improving the survival and quality of life of people living with HIV.

The last speaker of the day, **Madhuri Sarode Sharma** spoke about her childhood and how confused she was as to what her sexual orientation was and which community she belonged to. After a long internal struggle, she realized that she associated herself most with the transgender community. Her family not only disapproved of this but also tried changing what she felt by making her go through shock treatment and black magic. But she was strong in what she believed and did not budge. She became a dancer and this is when she started associating herself with the name 'Madhuri'. Later in life, she met Jay Rajnath Sharma and *for a change, someone loved her for exactly who she was*. She spoke about how challenging it was to convince both their parents and relatives to agree to their marriage; and, after 6 months of their families debating and digesting the situation, they agreed. *Madhuri married Jay in a temple, making them the first open transgender marriage in India*. Following her lead, a lot more transgender marriages have happened in India since then.



**Amruta Alpesh Soni on the left and Madhuri Sarode Sharma on the right.**

***"We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves."***

***- Buddha***

The course convener in the next pre-quiet time, spoke about how most of us make sure that we're beautiful and well-kept on the outside but are empty and unsatisfied on the inside by conducting a small experiment. He also showed us how by applying the four standards and following disciplined quiet time in our day-to-day lives, we can dilute this inner emptiness and bring in steady joy. The importance of keeping a balance between this inner and outer world was driven very strongly to the participants.



Every year, 4th of June is celebrated as Khadi day at LMAD. The participants all wear traditional Khadi clothes for this day. The importance of Khadi was explained to everyone as they assembled outside the foyer. We remembered how big an impact Khadi had in the Swadeshi movement and how Gandhiji believed that it was Khadi that made the Boycott of foreign goods a practical proposition. The importance of the Indian flag was explained after which everyone joined in for the National Anthem.



Everyone at the conference had led very different lives before the conference. Some were studying, the others working, some had a lot of problems, the others few, some were very close to their families, the others were not, some led lives of honesty, the others dishonesty, some could make quick decisions, the others could not. Time was given to them to think of their past and contemplate on their lives before LMAD and write it down in their diaries. Later in the day, the participants were asked to write down one positive commitment that they would fulfil or follow immediately after they got back home. The inspiration and will to do things that one experiences at AP during these eight days is immense and it is very critical that this inspiration carries on further in life. This task made the participants think and writing it down got this commitment etched in their minds which is the first step to fulfilling the commitment.

The survey that was conducted at the beginning of the conference mainly focused on gathering information of the mindset of the current youth and how they go about their lives. The results always turn out to be interesting and shocking at the same time. The participants gathered in the auditorium for a session which was dedicated to discussing the results of this survey. The session was very interactive as a lot of participants voiced out their opinions about the various questions and the results.



After four days of being at AP and having experienced quiet-time multiple times, the participants were much more comfortable with the concept. A lot of them were seen lost in their own world, minding only to themselves and writing in their diaries. The sharings at this point clearly reflected how much the participants were thinking and realizing their shortcomings.

***"I realized my mistake immediately when I sat down and listened to my inner self. I had broken my relation with a close friend because of my ego. I would like to fix this as soon as I get back."***

***"I tend to burn out in order to have a balanced life. Connecting to the outer world is easy, but connecting to myself is not."***

One person can make a difference. One may encounter a lot of barriers in the process, but in the end, if the will to achieve this change is strong enough, nothing can stop it from happening. This was asserted by the first speaker of the day, **Mr. Sri S. Sankara Raman**. He was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy at a young age and is bound to a wheelchair. He used to practice Chartered Accountancy but left the practice to join Amar Seva Sangam, a rehabilitation center for the disabled, by the disabled, in 1992. As a young professional, his dream was to build a "Valley for the Disabled". Everyone listened eagerly as Mr. Raman spoke about the various challenges that he went through in achieving what he has. *Thousands of people with mental and physical disabilities have a reason to smile primarily because of one man.* He spoke about how the organisation depended on donations and how the money that came in was never enough to provide what is needed for the people enrolled. The will and the bond that he shares with the people there has ensured that they power through tough times.

The next speaker of the day, **Mr. Raja Nayak** with his rags-to-riches story proved that financial instability, which no doubt can delay the process, is not something that can stop one from achieving his/her goal. It was the 1978 film, 'Trishul', where a penniless Amitabh Bachchan eventually goes on to become a real estate baron that brought that spark in his life. *"I was really taken up by the story. It felt so real to me. Suddenly, I believed that it was possible to make my dreams come true. I wanted to be a real estate baron too"*. He and his friend Deepak left for Tiruppur where they bought clothes for really cheap. They travelled to Bangalore with these clothes and sold them on the footpath, making a considerably good profit. That was the start to his beautiful journey forward. He cashed every opportunity he came across, he took risks and saw them pay off, he grew to be a successful man.



**Mr. Sri S. Sankara Raman and Mr. Raja Nayak**

That evening, the participants hiked up the hill to the table top, where everyone had a very nice time. The view from the top was absolutely mesmerizing. Post dinner, a movie called ***Tuesdays With Morrie*** was played in the auditorium. The movie examines the interactions and phenomena between the human experience of living and dying. The movie was well received by the participants.

*“So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they're busy doing things they think are important. This is because they're chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.”*

– Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*

*“Days slip away, months pass by, people come and go but your family stays with you forever.”*

*- Anonymous*

6th of June at LMAD is celebrated as Family day. Post breakfast, the course convener briefly spoke about how as we grow older, we start to take our family for granted. We not only fail to see how much they sacrifice for us, but also take offence and get irritated with them for the smallest of things.

The participants then used the platform to share personal experiences of their families and loved ones. One participant shared how at one point, she hadn't spent a lot of time with her father because her board exams were nearing and she wanted to fulfill his dream by getting good marks. She expressed her regret as not long after, her father had passed away. She cried her heart out. Many participants realized that their family members were giving their everything for them and yet, they weren't reciprocating their love.

On the other hand, some expressed sadness as some of their family members did not accept them for who they were. One individual spoke about how unfair her grandmother was to her only because she was a girl. Her grandmother somehow believed that the family went through tough times only because of her grandchild's presence; as a result, she became very hostile towards her granddaughter. The speaker shared how she found it extremely challenging to live in such an environment. She had moved to a different city to pursue her higher education. One day, her neighbor informed her that her father isn't doing well. Her family did not tell her the truth as they did not want to worry her. She took the first flight back home and rushed to the hospital where her grandmother did not let her see her father because her grandmother believed that his condition would somehow worsen if she saw him. She could not visit her very own father who was about to undergo a surgery. This shattered her spirit. She found herself to be helpless as every attempt that she made to get close to her grandmother went in vain. She then went on to say that she would continue to love her grandmother unconditionally despite all the differences that they had had in the past.

Another participant spoke about how her mother is the only support she has in her family. Her father never expressed love towards his daughter and she had this feeling of emptiness which she found very hard to cope with. It was especially hard because her brother was loved and cared for, while she was ignored. Other members of her family did not bother spending much time with her either. She did not give up on them even after all of what they had made her go through. She started spending a lot of time with her grandfather and taking care of him which created a special bond between them. The feeling of emptiness had reduced slightly and she expressed how she would make efforts to create this bond with her father and others in her family.

They then made phone calls to their loved ones, expressed their love and some apologized for their behavior. There were a lot of emotional outbreaks immediately after which, they were found smiling, happy to have let out their pent-up emotions.

***“To give and not expect return, that is what lies at the heart of love”***

***- Oscar Wilde***

After everyone ate their lunch in silence, they gathered in the foyer and lay on their backs, a posture of total relaxation (Savasana). Later that evening, an exercise was conducted based on relations and the participants thought about what they would do to bring these people in their life even closer. This made every individual rethink about their broken relations. Generally the only thing that causes a rift with a close one is ego. The course convener spoke about ego and the negative effects that it has had in his personal life. He spoke about how strong relations that take years to build can crumble and fall apart in front of you only because of ego. The participants were seen taking this exercise very seriously and many of them realized that most of the problems regarding relations would indeed go away if only they kept their ego aside.

The participants were now given time to contemplate on their respective journeys during LMAD and in what aspect had they decided to change when compared to the way they led their lives before LMAD. Everyone then gathered in the auditorium where everyone was asked to remain absolutely still and sincerely pray for their loved ones. A lamp was lit on the stage which was the only source of light in the auditorium.

***“In stillness, there’s awareness”***

**- Course convener**

Time and tide wait for none. In a young person’s life in this digital-age, so much of time is spent on social media and other things on the internet that are unimportant. Spending time everyday on the things that matter a lot in a person’s life is paramount. The session post breakfast on the 6th day was all about how an individual can spend his/her time in the most productive way possible. Consistently spending time and energy on things that matter, be it relations or work, will bring about the best possible outcomes. The participants were asked to think of their larger goals in life and draw a roadmap as to how they will achieve the same. Papers were distributed and the participants wrote down one negative quality that they did not want to take back into their daily lives. They then proceeded outside the auditorium to burn this piece of paper containing their negative quality. This exercise was all about focusing and being conscious about the negative qualities so that efforts can be made to get rid of them when in the real world.

Later that evening, all the participants danced to songs and had a great time at the DJ party that took place in the auditorium. The men looked dapper and the women, stylish as all of them were welcomed into the dining hall by the volunteers for dinner. They all then proceeded into the auditorium where a talent show took place. A few participants danced, a couple of them sang, one read out poetry, one mimicked cartoon characters, one participant actually did the different kinds of push ups on stage (one included him doing a push up as another participant sat on his back) while another performed magic! Everyone then gathered in the foyer for dessert and an informal photo session.



*"Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice."*

*- Steve Jobs*

On the last morning of the conference, all the participants gathered in the foyer for a multi-faith prayer, after which they spread out across the campus, spending time with themselves, writing in their diaries. Post breakfast, all the staff of AP were invited to the auditorium. The course convener thanked them from everyone's behalf and let them know that the conference wouldn't have happened as planned if not for them.

The participants were handed out a pledge to read which stated that the individual signing that pledge would consciously be aware and use natural resources like water with care. If the holder of the pledge fails to do so for some reason, he/she would punish oneself by fasting or satyagraha. Many of the participants signed it, while some weren't confident that they would be able to follow the pledge.

A very old associate of LMAD was seated in the audience that day. He came forward and spoke to everyone about how LMAD had changed his life for the better and how inspired he was to spread this ideology far and wide. The company he works at, a Fortune 500 company, granted LMAD a sum of eleven lakh from their Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR) fund to conduct such programs in various rural areas in India in the upcoming year. This was a big moment for the institution. Everyone was elated as this was a big opportunity to inspire and guide the youth in various rural parts of India.

One participant from each group came forward and spoke about their journey at LMAD. Most of the participants wanted more of LMAD just like the skit had predicted. The participants had had a lot of inputs from various people all through the conference. They felt a bit more confident about facing the world outside of AP. With a clear heart, post lunch, the participants bid goodbye and left AP.

Even with over three hundred people, the conference was conducted without any hiccups. There was no shortage of food for any meal, nor was there any medical emergency. Every session started and ended on time with full attendance which was remarkable considering that this was the first time LMAD experienced a full house in terms of housing. One of the biggest takeaways was how the participants stayed harmoniously with discipline for eight days in a completely gadget-free environment. Not one person complained regarding this aspect. This made the participants realize that not only is it possible to live a life without this silly toy in their hands, but it also brings out the best in them.

***"If you want to change the world, start with yourself"***

**- Mahatma Gandhi**



## ANNEXURE - I

During the conference, the participants were asked to make at least one commitment which they will follow henceforth. A list of some commitments by the participants is given below showing their top concerns.

Peace of mind.

I will not misbehave with my parents.

Be innocent, treat everyone kindly.

I will try to be more, expressive and less ignorant.

I will 'unconditionally' love the people that I don't know.

Share gifts of LMAD with my friends and family.

When I go back home I want to love my friends and family unconditionally.

To keep calm, to love myself and to understand others.

Will stop smoking.

I will apologize to my parents

I will ensure all lights are switched off before leave my home.

I won't be lazy anymore, and I'll make quiet time a part of my life.

Balancing career and relationship.

Be conscious, Be gentle, be connected.

Will bridge the gap between what I am and what I want to be.

Thank the ones who always stood by me and were my constant support.

Reduce phone usage.

Planning a proper Time Table and the follow up for it.

I will stop judging, grouping and avoiding people based on first impressions.

I am going to be more patient.

More seriousness towards work.

Not letting any negative thoughts to take root inside me.

Start pursuing my goal and passion.

Always be honest.

I will not waste food.

I will try my best to control my anger.

I will help needy people.

Accept mistakes, truth and stop telling lies.

I am not going to taunt people, accept them as they are.

Control your temper.

Plant a new plant every month.

Start reading books.

Stop smoking weed.

Exercise everyday.

Appreciate little things.

Be more open minded.

Spend more time listening to people.

To be more social.

Try to break my comfort zone.

I will respect and treat transgenders as equals.

I will overcome stage fear.

To be more empathetic and sympathetic.

I will follow a disciplined life.

Stop being rude.

Do something to uplift the society.

Stop drinking.

I will apologize to those I have hurt.

I will improve my relations with family and loved ones.

Improve my communication skills.

Follow disciplined quiet time.

Be more proactive and not be lazy.

Reuse paper.

Will not make fun of LGBT community.

Will wake up early.

Lose weight.

Will donate blood.

Regular quiet time.

Stop complaining and making excuses.

Will not spend more time on social media.

Yoga daily.

Hug my parents.

## ANNEXURE - II

During the conference, the participants were asked to describe what LMAD meant for them in one statement. A list of some one liner is given below.

A phenomenal journey where one goes deep inside to know oneself. "I am the master of my fate and I'm the captain of my soul. - Ghausia Naaz

Transition is difficult, balancing of two places before and after, most often has some casualties. MRA allowed me to minimise the same. - Mihir Vyas

We make a living by what we learn but we make a life by what we give. - Adnan A Harnesswala

This conference shows me what I am. - Nikhil Chelani

Heard my own inner voice in this world full of noises. - Naman Bhatt

What you give, finds a way of coming back to you. - Gauri Nadkarni Choudhary

Be the hope for someone. - Sarang Sai

Hard work always pays. - Vignesh Viswanathan

Just don't stop. Whatever happens in life is just good for us and believe in your inner self. - Nishtha Rindani

LMAD taught me, 'Be the change you want to see in the world'. A journey of introspection, realizations and to become a better version of yourself with every passing day. - Purva Madnani

Made me realize to count the blessings not the troubles. - Passang Penpa

The hope of believing in good. - Devyani Jachak

Self love is self discipline. - Sonu Arora

A peaceful nudge towards the path of realization and introspection with a resounding impact on oneself.  
- Pradnya Bolinjkar

Home away from home. - Atharva Hingwe

Journey from the illusion to reality of my being. - Haisha Ahuja

We all have the light within ourselves, this place gave me confidence to shine bright. - Parol Mohnani

You come here thinking you are always right, only to realize you were wrong the whole time.

- Naiya Shah

Don't wait for the change, be the change. - Nishant

LMAD is all about "celebration of silence within you", through deep introspection. - Uday Wasimkar

Disconnect to connect within. - Yash Gadiya

Family is not defined by blood, family are those whom we love." I realized the truth of this statement.

- Oishee Chakrabarti.

An experience like no other. Deeply moving and relevant in today's time. - Ananaya Singh

3 P's in Air over here. Passion towards Goodness, Purity of thoughts, Positive attitude. - Nancy Gupta

You'll fall in love with Asia Plateau because you give up your ego, your identity and transcend the boundaries of yourself. Asia Plateau is a mother to the world. - Manek Gupta

Acceptance of letting go for the betterment of oneself. - Apeksha Patel

Confronting reality, facing myself and accepting truths I will happily rush away from. That's what LMAD 2018 has been for me. - Mahima Pahwa

A journey to which if you surrender, leads to a content, fulfilled and compassionate life. - Sampada Adhyapak