

“No one wants to share my lunch. Even the teachers refuse to touch my notebooks.”

Dear Friends,

Have you ever stood on a beach and felt the sand and water rush through your toes? Have you held your baby close and felt her soft fingers against yours? Are you – even as we talk – holding this letter, touching the paper?

Touch. Something you and I take for granted. What would be our lives without touch?

But for thousands of people living with leprosy, living without touch is their way of life.

“Even the teachers refused to touch my notebook”

Rajesh lives in the village of Rajahmundry in South India with his parents and sister. He was an all-rounder at school, sought out by friends and praised by teachers. Thus, loved by one and all.

All that changed one day, when his father was diagnosed with leprosy and admitted for treatment to RISDT. His father lost his job; suddenly, there was no money to pay for food, clothes and school fees. Rajesh's friends started taking a different route to schools, leaving him to walk alone. No one wanted to share his lunch at school. In the evening, he found himself excluded from all the games. “Even the teachers refused to touch my notebooks.” says Rajesh. The brush-offs soon turned to open jibs. Rajesh was not allowed to touch anyone.



“My father is under treatment. I am perfectly fine. I love going to school, Why am I being treated like this?” said the 14-year-old, when we visited him. We helped him through his confusion, and enrolled him at the hospital school. That was three years ago.

Today, Rajesh studies mathematics at a well-known college in Chennai. “I want to be an engineer with the armed forces,” he says.

Leprosy is curable. But stigma sticks.

People suffering from leprosy undergo a loss of touch two times over.

First, when they lose sensation in their hands and toes due to leprosy. Second, when friends and family keep them at a distance, out of fear.

Stigma attached to leprosy keeps thousands of children like Rajesh away from school. Even if they do go to school, their performance drops due to taunts by classmates.

Rajesh found a supporter like you who helped him stay in school. He found the courage to fight stigma, and continued to study. But there are 1.5 million people with leprosy in our country who still live with stigma.

That is why we need your help.

We need your support so that people with leprosy and their children – can fight prejudice and stigma.

We need money to go into communities, villages, and schools and change attitudes on leprosy. We need money to pay for surgery, for ulcer care and footwear. But most of all we need money to send the children to school.

And we need it now.

Every day a child spends away from school they are pushed firmly into hard labour on construction sites, homes, and dangerous factories.

We need support and we need it now. You have the gift of touch. Touch a child's life this festive season!

Value Life. Support Life. Live Life.

Thank You,

Sincerely,



John Kurian George
CEO

PS: Children made vulnerable by leprosy – like Rajesh – need your support to fight stigma, go to school and make friends and feel wanted. Please send us your contribution now! Please do not delay!

PPS: The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted.
– Mother Teresa

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