

Akhil Chopra: A Noble Soul

By Ramesh Bhutada

Very rarely do you meet someone in your life who leaves an everlasting memory and impression in a very short period of time. Akhil is one of those rare individuals with these saintly qualities. After his tragic death we had met for bhajans in his apartment, and his cousin Pooja, who lives in New York, wondered, “You all talk about all these great qualities of Akhil, but there must have been some bad habits.” There were about twenty-five of us, but we couldn’t come up with anything, such was his personality. Later on, when we met and narrated our individual experiences with Akhil, we all realized what an ideal personality he had. It is difficult to imagine that someone could lead such an ideal and positive life while performing such a mundane job in this modern world.

Even though a year has passed by, his memory is still very vivid with me. It is not because he died a very tragic death, but his greatness in that he lived an ideal and balanced life. Even though he performed similar tasks in the same environment as most of us at Star Pipe in Houston, his balance was reflected in every aspect of his lifestyle.

For one, Akhil always maintained perfect health. He kept regular eating habits, exercised regularly, practiced yoga, and tried to be close to nature. He balanced this with work by always staying organized. He chalked out his schedule every day in his diary and was always punctual. Akhil was a great citizen as well. He was involved in many community activities and was dedicated to the environment as well. At the same time, Akhil maintained financial balance. He never went into debt, and he always looked out for his parents back in India. The most important thing about Akhil, however, was that he always entertained positive outlook in life with a cheerful smile on his face. He interacted with everyone and left a lasting impression on them all. He was definitely on the path of spiritual evolution.

Just the other day when we were discussing Akhil, my sister-in-law Sushma Pallod, recollected an incidence- somebody at a function was irritating her, and she happened to mention (just as most of us do) something negative about that person. Akhil happened to be sitting right next to her, and he very politely suggested, “Sushmaji, by making negative comments you are encouraging that person to further think negative about you. Just laugh it away.” What a profound universal truth he spoke in a very ordinary everyday situation.

I recollect an experience with Akhil that I will never forget. After his summer internship, he wanted to do his MS degree in MIS at the University of Saint Thomas. He didn’t have the money though to pay for the substantial tuition fees to attend that school. He didn’t want to earn money by being an illegal alien either. I came to know about his situation from Vijay Pallod. By that time he had made a very favorable impression, in a short span of 3 months. I met with him, and I must say, I have never come across such a situation in my life. It is always a prospective employee who’d be very eager to request the company to sponsor them

for an H1 visa. In this case it was totally reversed; I had to convince him to let Star Pipe sponsor him. I was totally perplexed. Then he told me why he was uncomfortable with Star Pipe sponsoring him for the visa. He felt that Star Pipe would expect him to work for them for a very long period of time. He didn't want to stay in the US for that long- he wanted to complete his degree, work for a few years, and go back to his parents in India. I mentioned to him "Akhil you are under no obligation, you can leave Star Pipe any day you want to go back to India. You are a wonderful person to have around and of course, you are professionally qualified, that's why we want to do this for you." At the end he still said he would talk to his parents, and only with their consent would he take me up on my offer. At the end of the meeting, I looked at my watch and realized it took me an hour and a half to convince him to take up an offer for Star Pipe to give him a permanent job and sponsor him for a visa so that he could finish his education. It was an unusual situation, and I realized then that Akhil was not a usual employee.

The best memorial to Akhil is not to wait for another Akhil to appear amongst us, but to look around, and see what good habits and traits we can take from the people around us. He lived a simple life, but meaningful and a true role model for people of all ages. Akhil ended up doing that and created an ever lasting memory amongst us. He was indeed a noble soul.



Accounts & Finance staff (Dec.2003) at Star Pipe Products, where Akhil worked during his study