

The Roots of My Porcelain and My Passion for Microentrepreneurs

BY JACQUELINE CAMBATA

Reprinted from the online article for the *Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit* — www.worldbenefit.cwru.edu

When I was a child of five, a colorful painting in my parents' bedroom took my breath away. It depicted a mountain that resembled a cloud with dozens of sweet faced animals cavorting between the hills. I could imagine all types of legends emanating from this magical image. It wasn't until many years later that I learned that storytelling through paintings was a dominant feature of the Mughal Empire and particularly by its Emperor Akbar.

As an adult, I have studied Akbar and his influence on visual storytelling. I modeled Jacqueline Cambata Designs' porcelain tableware on the distinctive Mughal style, creating a layered image on porcelain, with frame upon frame of the complex detail and rich color inspired by Mughal images. I find beauty in the animals in Mughal artwork, an extraordinary sweetness, kindness and peacefulness. I try to convey this in the images on my porcelain.

The Mughals reigned from 1556 to 1658. Their kingdom grew to include Hindustan in northern India and what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan. The empire's unifying language was Persian.

In 1556, the emperor Akbar ascended to the throne after his father's death; he was 13. This marked a turning point in Mughal history. No one predicted that this Padshah, or Emperor, would personally extend the Indian Empire from Kabul to Bengal and from Kashmir to Hyderabad. Tradition dictated that the emperor ruled

from Delhi or Agra, but Akbar wanted to make his mark by creating a city that integrated both Persian and Indian architecture. He ruled from his newly built capital city of Fatipur Sikri, which became a vibrant center for cultural and spiritual pursuits.

Akbar was called an "illiterate savant." He could neither read nor write but had a photographic memory and would have books read to him. He had a great appetite for knowledge and created a library of 24,000 volumes. Akbar believed in the power of paintings and illustration and brought together artists from all over India to synthesize Persian, Indian and European painting styles. To convey the notion of storytelling through art, he commissioned thousands of stories to be painted. He believed that writing was intellectual and that painting was a way to recognize a higher truth. Mughal artwork came to life during his reign.

The Story of the Dyed Jackal is a good example of Mughal painting under Akbar. It belongs to an illustrated book of Persian tales, the *Tutinama* (The Tales of the Parrot). The story opens:

A Jackal once on a time, as he was prowling about the suburbs of a town, slipped into an indigo-tank; and not being able to get out he laid himself down so as to be taken for dead. The dyer presently coming and finding what seemed a dead Jackal, carried him into the jungle and then flung him away. Left to himself, the Jackal found his natural color changed to a splendid blue. "Really," he reflected, "I am now of a most magnificent tint; why should I not make it conduce to my elevation? With this view, he assembled the other Jackals, and thus harangued them:—

'Good people, the Goddess of the Wood, with her own divine hand, and with every magical herb of the forest, has anointed me King. Behold the complexion of royalty!—and henceforward transact



nothing without my imperial permission.’

The Jackals, overcome by so distinguished a color, could do nothing but prostrate themselves and promise obedience. His reign, thus begun, extended in time to the lions and tigers.

Mughal art was on display at the San Diego Museum of Art from October 2005 through January 2006. Asian Art Curator Sonya Quintanilla described this style of painting, which combined the Persian and Indian aesthetic in an entirely new way:

The Tutinama was painted by a motley group of about one hundred Indian artists, all of whom had been working either in the traditional indigenous styles of devotional manuscript illumination or in the Indo-Persian hybrid styles of the Sultanate productions. These Indian painters were instructed by and worked together with the Iranian artists recently brought to Delhi by Akbar’s father Humayun. The works from Tutinama show remarkable assimilation of Persianate styles combined with a completely new sense of naturalism, volume, and spatial depth which accords with the taste of their patron, the young emperor Akbar.

Akbar had a penchant for the fantastic and dramatic, and the works are dynamic and exciting visual storytelling. Each piece, done in vivid hues of opaque watercolors and gold on paper, showed an increased depth and dimension, and a painstaking attention to detail.

For Jacqueline Cambata Designs, images of elephants, gazelles and birds grace coffeepots and trays, as well as five-piece place settings. Each piece is manufactured in Limoges, which has created porcelain for centuries.

My vision is not only about the paintings on Jacqueline Cambata tableware, but the sense of spirit the images convey. For example, the gazelle that adorns the series called Shangri La shows a sacred garden, a place where the soul can experience a sense of peace, tolerance and beauty. John O’Donohue, author of *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*, writes: “When we experience the Beautiful, there is a sense

of homecoming. We feel most alive in the presence of the Beautiful, for it meets the needs of our soul.” Shangri La – paradise – exists in each of us. When we see beauty externally, it reminds us of our true identity.

House of Adoration

During Akbar’s time, religious conflict led to uprisings in India. The young Akbar was deeply influenced by a Persian tutor, Mir Abdul Latif, a Sufi who introduced him to the principle of sulh-I-kull, a concept meaning “at peace with all.” Akbar decided to bring the Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Zoroastrians, Christians and Jews together in his city to discuss the nature of their conflict. Over time, Akbar became fascinated not only with bringing harmony to his kingdom but with creating a universal religious language of tolerance. In 1575 he built the Ibadat Khana or “House of Adoration,” a place where all religious thinkers could safely discuss their differences and similarities.

In 1577, at the age of 34, Akbar had a mystical experience. He was in the Punjab on the banks of a river along a hilly jungle terrain. He was on a hunt; Indian beaters had driven the animals into a tight circle ready for the Emperor to begin the slaughter. As Akbar slayed the animal with his sword, his body was rocked by a seizure. His aides brought him back to his tent where the best healers were unable to find the cause of his malaise. When he recovered days later he had gone through a mystical transformation. He had his hair cut, became a vegetarian and his desire for sulh-I-kull was even more pronounced.

This mystical experience launched Akbar passionately into finding a commonality among the different religions, which would bring people together in peace, tolerance and working for the common good. In a letter to Philip II of Spain in 1582, he wrote:

As most men are fettered by bonds of tradition, and by imitating

ways followed by their fathers, ancestors, relatives, and acquaintances, everyone continues, without investigating their arguments and reasons, to follow the religion in which he was born and educated, thus excluding himself from the possibility of ascertaining the truth, which is the noblest aim of the human intellect. ...

How do we metaphorically create a House of Adoration in business? In Akbar’s age, there was no separation between spirit and practical affairs. Today, we’ve lost that connection. How do we reconnect spirit and business in the 21st Century as an agent of change to benefit all humanity? I believe we can accomplish this through Social Entrepreneurship.

Social Entrepreneurship

The Schwab Foundation describes social entrepreneurs as applying practical, innovative and sustainable approaches to benefit society in general, with an emphasis on those who are marginalized and poor.

For years, innovative thinkers have been looking at practical and visionary long-term approaches to systemic change, exploring ways to ensure the survivability of the planet. After years of important dialogue with non-profit business organizations, I realized that I wanted to create an enterprise that would integrate the ideas of practical business sustainability. I am an entrepreneur at heart, and I wanted to create systemic change through a profitable enterprise, while incorporating the compassion and integrity of the nonprofit arena. From this vision grew Jacqueline Cambata Designs.

The education in my desire to serve the world has been a long journey, incorporating three continents – from Asia, through Europe and to the Americas. Along the way, I piloted multi-million dollar businesses and met and learned from a diverse group of innovative thinkers. But my path as a social entrepreneur always takes me back to India, where my first lesson came at the age of seven.

Rakhikol is not a place I can easily forget. I was visiting this isolated

village in a hilly jungle of central India. My father had a coal mine there, which was manned by the local villagers. Dad had organized the building of a little schoolhouse with the mine manager a Scottish chap named David Wightman, who lived in a bungalow on the property with his wife Jennie and a rather cheeky parakeet.

One afternoon, my mother took me to meet the children at the school. It was my function to greet each child and to pass out hard candy. They were dressed in their best attire and most of them were barefoot. Each child displayed gratitude for such a little offering. I remember being deeply moved by their generosity of spirit, their smiles and giggles of delight and deep bows while saying, “Namaste” – roughly translated, “The Spirit in me meets the same Spirit in you.” It was a poignant moment for me. Although these children were poor, their souls were the antithesis of poverty. The experience was a gift to me and the first defining moment in my desire to serve.

As an adult, I have been blessed with many opportunities in life to learn about serving and leadership. A mentor of mine was Willis Harman, with whom I served on the Board of the World Business Academy. We would talk about business being the most powerful institution on the planet. Willis said:

Built into the concept of capitalism and free enterprise from the beginning was the assumption that the actions of many units of individual enterprise, responding to market forces and guided by the ‘invisible hand’ of Adam Smith, would somehow add up to desirable outcomes. But in the last decade of the twentieth century it has become clear that the ‘invisible hand’ is faltering. It depended upon a consensus of overarching meanings and values that is no longer present. So business has to adopt a tradition it has never had throughout the entire history of capitalism: to share responsibility for the whole. Every decision that is made, every action that is taken, must be viewed in the light of that kind of responsibility.

Since Willis spoke those words 15 years ago, I have been pondering how I could integrate my vocation with service. Willis’ is a different

worldview of what business leadership implies – servant leadership. After spending years in dialogue with key business people, academics and religious leaders on how entrepreneurs can give back, I wanted to do more than simply talk about change. So I decided to create a business model where profits from sales go to finance loans for poor business owners in developing countries.

Today, of the more than six billion people who live on our planet, half live on less than \$2 and one-fifth on less than \$1 per day. Eleven million children die each year from poverty, over 200,000 a week – the equivalent of one 2004 tsunami every 10 days. Over 40 percent of these deaths are due to malnutrition and disease, which are both preventable. Also, nearly one billion young people and adults are illiterate, with 121 million children having no opportunity to attend primary school, including 65 million girls. One fifth of the world’s population does not have access to adequate, safe drinking water, causing disease or death.

This level of poverty is not acceptable. Developing countries are often destabilized by extreme poverty. It is no longer just a moral imperative to change leadership in business, but a strategic one as well. The more economic disparity we have on this precious planet of ours, the more unrest and disease we will experience.

Microfinance

In 1996, I met Muhammad Yunus, a visionary economist who created a pragmatic way to help the poorest of the poor. After a devastating famine in 1974 in Bangladesh, Dr. Yunus was deeply moved by the plight of women struggling to alleviate their poverty. These women made bamboo stools, and moneylenders were the only way to finance their purchase of bamboo. The moneylenders charged exorbitant interest rates that kept the women in a cycle of poverty.

Dr. Yunus began giving a few of the women small loans with low interest rates and a flexible, long-term payback schedule. Thus began

the Grameen Bank, an institution that has to date lent more than \$3 billion in uncollateralized microloans to village women throughout Bangladesh. The 90 percent repayment rate is one of the highest in the world. The Grameen Bank is more than just a bank; it considers a loan as a basic human right.

A portion of the profits from the sale of Jacqueline Cambata porcelain goes to such a microloan program. In this way, the tableware we create becomes a place where meaning, art, beauty and food intermingle. Dinnertime was always precious to me. My family had lived in four countries by the time I was 15, and dinner was a point of stability, a place where we all came together to discuss world events. As an adult, I love creating a nurturing, beautiful dining experience.

Each Jacqueline Cambata plate has a unique feel, look, and essence. Add the delight of good food, served on historical and artistic porcelain, with a portion of the dining experience going to nourish a woman and her family half way around the world, and dinner becomes a way to feed each soul. It nourishes those who buy my tableware and those who benefit from microloans. It brings dignity and connection to lives that are often so far apart.

I believe that we must question the way we do business. I’d like to encourage all corporations to take a broader look at the state of the world. How can we, in industrialized nations, change our limited three-month vision, an outlook that is driven by the stock market, by quarterly dividends? If the scope of our business vision is bigger, we may truly begin to understand the needs of each other and the planet. What we do now affects generations to come. The Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy understood our profound interconnectedness:

In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.

