

Message 295

Paris, France, December 10, 2014

A young disciple from Varanasi wrote to Shibendu. His sawdhyay and the questions he remains with are being shared with all.

I

On the occasion of "Kartik Purnima" or "Dev Deepawali"(as it is locally known) people from all over the world came to Varanasi to witness this spectacular event of lights. Hundreds and thousands of people descended on the famous ghats of Banaras and it was hardly recognisable. My fellow hostel mates insisted that I should also come along with them to witness this spectacle and so I went along with them.

There were so many people all gaily dressed with wide smiles on their faces. As we neared Assi ghat the crowd got thicker and it was almost impossible to move ahead. Somehow we managed to reach Assi ghat. We took up position at a good vantage point from where we could see the Ganga Aarti that was going on and could also see the sea of people that was moving like a mass and not as individuals moving about randomly. It was quite a sight!

After the aarti was over we merged with the crowd and started to slowly move toward Dasashwamedh ghat. Being a part of the crowd was quite different from looking at it. One moved on with the flow and one had to follow. One had to face immense resistance if one tried to move in any other direction than the flow. With so many people one felt almost suffocated and even though there was a slight chill in the air, amidst the crowd it felt rather hot. In spite of this terrible situation one looked at the beautifully decorated ghats with wonder. Hundreds of diyas adorned the ghats and in some places there were electric lights that gave off a magnificent glow. It really created a divine ambience!

As we moved and time passed the crowd started to thin a little as the aarti was over and many had begun to leave. Now that the excitement of rituals was over, the excitement of "devotional songs" replaced them. There were huge concert speakers installed and they were blaring in full volume. One had to strain to get the words as the heavy bass drowned them. One suspected if they were indeed devotional songs as they sounded more suitable to be played in discotheques. People reeking of alcohol danced excitedly and there were men clad in saffron robes who were playing the role of a disc jockey literally. One could see that the sadhus were also getting modern and one thing they have renounced was traditional bhajans and kirtans.

We all reached Harishchandra ghat where there is a cremation ground. There were four or five pyres still burning as death did not care for any special occasion. At a somewhat secluded part of the cremation ground a sadhu was sitting cross legged. He was clad in a loincloth and ashes, which were probably obtained from the burnt out pyres. Some westerners were clicking pictures of him but he made no special gesture or pose. He just sat there. His bearded face did not have a contrived smile and it seemed he was withdrawn inwardly. When they were finished clicking photographs he did not ask for donations and he sat silently there as before. Somebody from our group wanted to have a group picture with the sadhu and they all gathered around him, making poses and clicking

pictures. He neither objected nor did he seem very pleased with this group. After this photo session we all moved ahead leaving this sadhu behind.

By the time we reached Dasashwamedh ghat it was pretty late but there was still a thick crowd and suddenly I couldn't see anybody from my group. So I went up the stairs and entered an alley. One was amazed to see that only a few hundred feet away it was bustling with noise and excitement but here it was so quite with hardly anyone there. As one made his way down the alley he came across the sadhu from the cremation ground. He was sitting alone and then came a westerner who started clicking pictures of him. Here again he did not make any blessing gesture or any pose. As one passed by him, one took a look at his begging bowl and found a few coins with a ten rupee note. Perhaps he was not given too much donation as he didn't bless those who came to him or offer them a smile or any word on god. However, he didn't seem very bothered.

How very funny it is that we renounce in order to gain. Those who have found that no happiness lasts renounce all transient happiness to gain that happiness that is rumoured to be permanent. Does a happy person think about happiness? That person is then happiness personified. He is happiness and happiness is he. Can happiness feel itself? But we want to feel happiness as we see ourselves different from happiness or sadness. When our observation is illusory, how can reality come into being?

II

One has been staying at a place near the Ganga for a few days. This place is situated on the outskirts of the "holy city" and is of semi rural type. Here man has not been able to totally destroy nature and nature still thrives here. The room opens onto a terrace which has a lot of potted plants and a part of a guava tree leans over onto the terrace, heavy with the load of almost ripe guavas.

This morning, spring was announcing itself all over the place. One wouldn't call it spring this time of the year but this spring was untimely, it didn't care to follow the usual schedule of seasons and it was very much there! The sky was silvery blue and the sunshine soft and warm. A gentle breeze was blowing over the land and the leaves were waving in joy. Flowers pink, red, yellow and white in colour had blossomed and the colours looked so bright that it almost hurt the eyes.

Myriad birds usually gathered around the guava tree but today more of them had come. A pair of red tailed Bulbuls were picking insects, a group of Wrens noisily went about picking small red berries, doves with brown spots on their throat were walking all over the place in their bizarre walking style, tiny hummingbirds hovered in the air and drank nectar from the flowers and many more birds came whose names one didn't know - but who cares for names! On other days the Wrens drove out other birds that came near them but today they were willing to share this lovely morning with others. Even the doves were fearless today and came right inside the room and were standing so close.

A band of squirrels could always be found here. They are so nimble and graceful and full of energy and how beautifully they move! They run all over the place in short bursts and when they do their long tails stand up and then they are completely still for a moment and then again movement. One squirrel always nibbles at a particular guava in the morning. It is cautious and alert and stretches out to the guava without putting its weight on the fruit lest the branch should break. They playfully

chase each other and there is a certain innocence in them. Today against the morning light they looked especially beautiful.

A group of young boys were flying kites and laughing. They got very excited when another kite got close to their's and a battle ensued. Sometimes they won, sometimes they lost but they were always happy. To them flying kites was important not winning or losing. It is so strange that those boys understood this but we don't.

One was watching this beautiful morning but one was not separate from it. One was part of this spring too! But one didn't wish to hold onto this day by any means, be it through photographs, videos or as a "sweet memory"! What is held onto can be taken away! We hold onto our loved ones so much that when life leaves the body and it is dead, we grieve over the dead body. As if the grieving will bring life back to it. Our mistake is we want to capture life but life cannot be captured by the dead and mind is dead! Life is nobody's servant, it comes and goes as it pleases. Yet the dead wants to capture life and that gives rise to various techniques, assumptions and concepts. Where there is life there is no mind and where there is mind there is no life. Both can never co-exist!

The Shishya bows down with his head at the feet of the Guru.

Perceptions:

1. *Can we allow answers to questions to reveal themselves through the energy of understanding?*
2. *Is seeking an answer in matters spiritual not a pursuit of the ego that is trying to reinforce its existence?*
3. *Patience is indicative of Understanding.*
4. *Living without care is not living carelessly.*
5. *Peace is not the absence of conflict.*
6. *“Knowledge” and “Ignorance” are not different. “Knowing” and “Emptiness” are the same.*

JAI PATIENT WAITING