



mirror, mirror, on the wall, did anything happen here at all?

In the Blue Country Resort in Panchgani, there was a swimming pool in the garden with a small Japanese bridge, tiled dolphins on its floor, a deep area for more confident swimmers, and a children's pool at the back.

During the day its cool water was blue, reflecting the sky above. In the night, it was black and speckled with stars and images of the white moony lights along its edge. In the morning, the gardener fished out leaves and dust from its surface. In the evenings, it overheard songs and jokes told by its side or whispered secrets of lovers on the swings.

Sometimes, the wind would ripple its surface, but most of the time, it remained flat, calm, mirror-like. And if one dipped one's hand into its water, the smoothness, the coolness, the wetness would always be there – a constancy where the memory of all that had passed by was a mere glimmer, a faint suggestion...

And so Tanmayo finds herself comparing Gurudev's ten-day retreat to this pool. And like this pool, this watery mirror, she finds herself asking: During this ten-day camp, what was reflected? What passed by? What came and went? And what remained after all had come and gone? How to describe things that seemed so flimsy, a ripple on the surface of the pond, while those that seemed real cannot be put into words? How to depict something she can't quite grasp anymore, something slipping away like drops of water held through fingers?

Somewhere, in a distant memory, up there in Panchgani, so many things had happened... marigolds had been hung, lamps lit, oil poured, incense burnt... music had played, tears shed, laughter shared, friends made... films were filmed, food was served, dances were danced, screams were screamed... flower-petal-blessings were showered.

There were people, there was sky, there was food, there were stairs up, there were stairs down, there was hot, there was cold, there was tiredness, there was discomfort, there was joy, there was anger...there was fear, insecurity, jealousy, frustration... there was sadness, sickness, stuckness, silence... jolts, judders, shudders in the body... sudden crash landings back to earth... visions, images, desires, imaginings...

A whole kaleidoscope of sensations, feelings, thoughts, images... coming, going, coming, going...

Yet for what was it that we were all pulled up into the hills of Maharashtra: To arise with tea at 5:00 am before the promise of morning was even a flicker in the sky? To jump, to laugh, to dance and cry? Or was it for something else?

Behind it all was the mirroring pool... silent, watching, waiting. Waiting for us to remember, to dip our hearts and souls into its coolness, to dissolve in its pure reflecting...

Yes, beyond it all, for each one of us there, lay the mirror's own journey of forgetting and remembering. Of seeing, and then cleaning, the particles of dust that persistently stick on its surface – the particles that think they are one with its 'shyness' and forget that actually they were just passing by.

And from Gurudev's vast wisdom, the mirror received help to stay shiny, to let the passing dust slide over more easily, to not get stuck as it passed by... the window cleaner of 'I-am-not-the-body', the soft cloth of 'patience,' the squeezy mop of 'non-seriousness.' These helping hands, if remembered, slowly helped the mirror to remember who it was.

But the more the mirror remembered that it was a mirror and then forgot again, the more painful that forgetting became. The more intense the pain of life, the pain of existing at all... Yet at the same time, the more the mirror could remember that it was a mirror, the clearer the picture seemed to become – and the more could happen just by itself.

When the mirror remembered it was a mirror, then barriers seemed to disappear and there appeared in it moments of one-ness... out-of-controlness... divine-drunkenness... heavenly giggles... boundarylessness touching the sky...

Yet it was at the feet of the Master, beloved Gurudev, that the real transmission, the real reflection – without words, without actions, without anything – took place. For beyond all these tools of remembrance, it is the blinding light, the pure, pure love of Gurudev, that helped the mirror to remember its mirroring most of all. All hankerings for the small passing stories paled, and attention was carried away on the back of the His presence.

Then the mirror, for blessed moments, saw what it really was. For only in the shadow of the Master is nothing reflected. Yet, the reality of this nothingness was a shock, even for the mirror – the light just too bright, the vastness just too vast. Something so huge, so infinite, knocking on the door of something so small... the mirror itself begins to crack, it panics trying to hold on to the shards of glass still left behind. It cannot find its edges anymore, how can it possibly contain all this love, this space, this nothingness?

Tears of gratitude roll down its glassy surface, washing away the dust of centuries. It cannot bow its head low enough in His luminous presence. It wishes only to be pure enough to reflect Him, to accept Him, His love, His silence – fully and totally – for only then can it disappear.

Suddenly memory flickers into the empty screen once more... faint images upon the surface of the mirroring pool... remembrances of white-clad bodies huddled together, great outpourings of grief... a hand in the darkness, tears shared with a friend... precious moments at the feet of the Master... rose petals scattered... small birthday candles lit... tiny dancing flames among flowers and uncontrollable joy in the air... celebration in simplicity, where it happens by itself...

And yet, the mystery is, though memories are there, though happenings happened, when she looks back on these luminous ten days in her life, Tanmayo finds herself looking into the looking glass once more and asking: Dear mirror, mirror, on the wall, did anything happen... or nothing at all?

PREM TANMAYO (Karen Boyd)

lecturer, Academic English, Middlesex University, London
formerly professional storyteller, Scottish Arts Council