



the living flame

What could bring together a psychologist from America, a painter from Iran, a therapist from Germany, a dance choreographer from Norway, a student from Sweden, a teacher from Scotland, a farmer from India and a fashion journalist, a doctor, a poet, a software consultant, a traditional sannyasin, a book publisher and a stressed-out television executive?

Dhyandev plunged into the 40-day meditation intensive to find the answers and had so much fun, he forgot the question!

I was laughing as I danced with Swamijee last night. I was laughing because I couldn't find me. I was laughing because it felt like angels were tickling me. I was laughing because I wasn't even dancing! And yet... and yet it was happening: I was laughing as I danced with Swamijee last night.

Where was the stressed-out television executive who had arrived in Goa on Osho's birth-day? That was almost 40 days ago. Or was it another lifetime?

Little did he know what to expect when he made the final decision of that lifetime – to attend the 40-day intensive Meditation retreat with Swami Chaitanya Bharti, even if it meant losing his job.

It was not so much a decision of courage as it was a decision of desperation. He was dying in his plush, high-paying job. Working 14-hour days for weeks on end, eating one meal a day in between meetings, and staying awake in nightly fear of not having a job the next morning. Parts of his body were giving way one by one and a constant hacking cough was his best friend. Something, somewhere had to change. He did not know what. But when he held his flight tickets to Goa, he felt like freedom was at hand.

Swami Chaitanya Bharti, generally addressed as “Swamijee”, is an immensely lovable teddy-bear of a man. One of Osho's enlightened disciples, he now conducts Meditation camps – as this was his Master's final message for him. His ten-day camps in the last decade have developed a reputation for being a barrellful of fun. His use of music, especially his own Oorja music, to create deep states of Meditation is legendary. And equally famous is his mantra for the constant laughter in his camps: “Ho Jaaye!”

This was his first 40-day Meditation retreat, with 21-days of silence. It would begin on Osho's birthday, December 11, and end on the day Osho left the body, January 19. The 40 days and nights in between would be, as the brochure promised, a “feast of music, dance and devotion... love, laughter and celebration... silence, prayer and meditation.” Sounded like quite a tall advertising claim!

The participants were shown to their bamboo huts when they arrived at the

retreat site on Mandrem Beach. Set amidst groves of coconut palms, the huts looked out onto the isolated beach. And beyond, was the wide blue sea.

The opening ceremony was held in a thatched Meditation hall with chatai mat flooring. The only furniture in the long room was a chair for Swamijee, set before a giant portrait of his Master, Osho. Strings of orange-yellow flowers framed the portrait and below it was a lamp with a living flame. The fragrance of incense and notes of music wafted in the air as the participants filtered in.

Swami Chaitanya Bharti walked in and joined his hands in namaste to each of us. Our global fusion band – German sitarist Joshua, Scottish violinist Tanmayo and Indian tabla player Manish – set the mood for the evening. Some began to sway with the gentle sounds. But of course, the biggest cheer went up when Swamijee picked up his dafli and began warming its face over the flame. He picked up the rhythm of the music. Set it faster. Then slower. Then stopped. Then picked it up again. Faster. Then faster. And faster. And faster. And faster. A wild crescendo of clapping followed the beats. Beads of sweat flew around the hall. Laughter as Swamijee began comically dancing to his own beats. An air of breathless exultation was the first taste of the days to come.

Before he spoke, Swamijee stood facing the portrait of Osho with his hands folded for His blessings. A few silent seconds later, his body was shaking... a disciple crying before his Master.

Each participant lit a small earthen lamp from the living flame, symbolic of their own inner light. In his talk, Swami Chaitanya Bharti said, “For the next 40 days I ask for nothing from you except your co-operation. I will take care of the rest. Ho Jaaye!”

With the laughter that followed, the feast began.



If I were to ask you what you thought of this piece, you would say that it was well-written or poorly written, you could say that you agreed with the concepts or not, you may even say that you thought the lettering and printing were not good quality. But would ever talk about the blank paper on which it was printed? What could you say eloquently about it?

That is the problem in writing about a Meditation camp. To tell you about the events that happened is to lose focus of the really important part... the Silence. The moments when the words fell away or became too tiny to express what was happening. The moments when tears could say what words could not. Those were the moments that made these days so magical. A feast has to be tasted, the rest is just the reading of menu cards.



The day here begins at 5 am with an early morning meditation. After breakfast, there is another meditation and a question-answer session with Swamijee. The lunch break ends with a recorded Osho discourse and is followed by another talk by Swamijee and Kundalini Meditation. The evening session is the Sufi White Robe Brotherhood. Dinner is followed by a therapy session with Gyandev, one of

Swamijee's most loved disciples. The lights go out by 10 pm.

The days roll by one after the other, punctuated with magnificent sunrises and glorious sunsets. A timelessness descends upon everyone as they gradually forget individual life-stories and come to this present moment of Life.

Before we know it, ten days pass, and one day during the talk, Swamijee asks: "How many of you would like to go into silence?" Without a moment's delay, almost everyone enthusiastically raised their hands in the air. Swamijee seemed amused, if not impressed. "Ho Jaaye!" he said, and we all laughed at ourselves. And in this rather unimpressive way, from 21st December 2002, we all went into a 21-day silence for the first time in our lives.

It was scary, of course. No talking, no gesturing or communicating in any form except with Swamijee. Living as if we were all alone for three weeks was not a comforting idea for most.

And the following day, the last day of talking, was like a scene from a war movie – the scene before the soldiers leave for the battlefield. Everyone was telephoning relatives back home or sending e-mails across the Atlantic to tell their folks not to assume the worst if they didn't hear from them till early January 2003. Some were stockpiling toilet paper and washing powder. Others were talking non-stop at breakfast, lunch, and dinner about the grave situation: How would they survive without talking?

And then came the hour of reckoning, D-Day. At night, we said our final good nights, for we would wake up in silence... and alone. When the sun filtered through the palm trees behind the breakfast area next morning, the only sounds that greeted it were the cawing of crows, the swish of the leaves and the distant roar of the ocean.

The schedule was modified slightly to give space to the silence. A new meditation on the beach was devised by Swamijee for the session after breakfast every morning. A yoga session was introduced to keep the body fit through the long hours of sitting. The talks with Swamijee continued as before with only written questions. In all the spaces between the sessions, there was only silence.

It was difficult initially. At times, saying just a few words seemed so much more convenient and logical. At times, silence seemed like the most beautiful, natural thing in the world. And then there were times of deep Meditation when it would have been difficult to speak even if we were asked to.

Swamijee's daily talks kept the flow of silence increasing. His insistence remained unchanged: Remain passive. Don't interfere with the mind. When you fight with it, you give it your energy. It is only a thought; you give it reality. Just remain passive. Soon it will lose its power.

As the days passed, the mind became quieter and the intensity of silence deepened. This new silence felt like coming out of a long, dark tunnel into a rush of open sunlight. As the body unclenched itself, the personality dissolved. Silence became our identity.

Picture this as a newspaper headline: **Silence claims 40 lives in Goa!**



Devotion is a strange flower. Watered by tears, it grows in pain under a sun of love. The mind cannot understand it, the heart cannot explain it. The Master says he does nothing, the disciple cries that he is incapable of doing anything. And yet, in these impossible conditions, a tiny bud pokes its head from the dry ground...

The sun will shine relentlessly and severely at times, the wind will beat it to the ground time and again. At times, it would rather perish than bloom. But slowly, ever so slowly, its petals begin to unfold. Others will see its beauty, others will appreciate its fragrance, for itself it will know only an ache that kills but does not allow it to die. For itself, it will live in a burning moment between a past which has fallen away and a future which does not exist. Naked but for the painful reminder every hour that it knows nothing at all.



Please don't let me convince you that the Meditation camp is a joyride into Nirvana. When the heart is broken and the tears won't stop, all you will want is to run far away. This may last for hours and days. But then one day, when the tears dry stickily on your face, you will feel the hand of the Master on your shoulder. He picks up your fallen hand and gives you the courage to walk again.

Through much laughter and tears, he brings you back again into his sunlit garden and watches over you. When the past pain surfaces, he shows you the patience you need to have towards yourself. When the Meditations make the ego subtly arrogant, he shows you the ruthlessness you need to develop towards the ego. And when you get overwhelmed by the journey, he says, "Ho Jaaye!" and bursts you into laughter. He loves you more than you love yourself. And takes care of you at every step. And then he says, he does nothing at all.

This is the mysterious inner aspect of the camp. Each one is on a different stage of the journey. There are newborn babies who need to be patted and praised, there are mature egos which need to be constantly broken. But somehow, everyone finds the Master just beside them, individually guiding and chiding them. Many find that Swamijee answers questions even before they ask them. Complex dramas synchronize perfectly to teach a lesson to the worthy disciple. And yet, the Master says he does nothing at all.

By the second week into silence the retreat gets the atmosphere of a Mystery School. One old-time sannyasin falls time and again into a state beyond the conscious mind. Another writes that he has begun seeing an image of Swamijee in his Third Eye chakra. Another constantly hears the sound of "Om" within.

The Meditation hall becomes the focus of our lives. The living flame is kept burning below the portrait of Osho. It sees before it helpless tears, often at Swamijee's feet, sudden outbursts of self-hatred and anger, bouts of depression and aloofness, much hearty laughter and a God-intoxicated abandonment in dance.

In this atmosphere of juicy devotion, Meditation happens spontaneously. Serious

effort is not only **not** demanded like in other Meditation retreats, but positively discouraged. Remain passive and unfocused, Swamijee constantly hammers... Don't become a doer... Just be as you are, beyond the mind... You are not the body, you are not the mind, not the emotions.

To aid this deceptively simple journey, Gyandev, who is a healer, gives us all Bach Flower medicines. He also initiates us into the unbelievably effective Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) to heal the emotional body.

By the final week of silence, sessions of silent satsang with Swamijee are introduced and the silence reaches a peak. Gratitude begins pouring in through letters to Swamijee. Many don't really understand this rainfall of Grace but feel cleansed nevertheless.

In the smoky loban-filled atmosphere of the Sufi White Robe brotherhood, there is an exquisite ambience. As the music peaks, there is that uncontrollable laughter, those divine tears and explosions of energy awakenings. A frenzy of joy lights up the dimly-lit room.

The high-voltage energy of dancing gives way to a silent sitting with Indian classical music. As the moon rises, the silence expands until it is tangible. And as the darkness deepens, the silence becomes so real that we seem unreal. It exists, we don't. Until the husky, faraway voice says on the microphone: "Take a deep breath. Come back slowly. Come back..."



This morning, before dawn, Gyandev took me for a walk on the beach. The moon was still high, casting a silver pillar of light on the water. We walked awhile in this dark world of silhouettes and sea. We spoke about the suggestion of some Indian disciples yesterday that we should find a more respectful way to address Swamijee since every Osho sannyasin is called "Swamijee". One option suggested was "Gurudev". When this suggestion had been put to Swamijee he said he was quite content with being called "Swamijee" – he perceived no lack of respect in it. But, he said, he was happy that we wanted to define our relationship with him. This urge to become a disciple, he said, is a beautiful sign – the biggest gift of this retreat.

As we walked crunching tiny shells on the sand, Gyandev said the idea of addressing Swamijee as "Gurudev" appealed to him. "When you call someone Gurudev," he said, "it carries with it a sense of responsibility, a commitment, which is beautiful."

Gyandev pointed out the last morning star, hanging like a solitary bulb in the sky. "It is said to be auspicious to see it," he said. As if reading my mind, he continued, "Today is the final day of the retreat. There will be a heavy atmosphere, sadness in the air as people have to go back to the grind. When you go back home, don't start trying to force your life in any direction – just let events unfold. Otherwise, in the name of spiritual growth, the doer will once again enter through the back door. Be true to whatever happens spontaneously in the moment. It is only when you are not afraid of whatever the future holds that you can truly enjoy this moment."

The sky was now cotton-swept with fiery pink clouds on one side. The shell-pink

waves caught the reflection. On the other side, the moon was still visible, growing fainter.

“This is just like Consciousness and the ego,” Gyandev said with a faraway smile. “When the sun of Consciousness begins to emerge, the moon of the ego begins to disappear.”

We continued walking as he showed me a comical bird which ran along the waves. From behind the palm trees, the sun grandly emerged. I turned around. The moon had disappeared completely, merging into the blue sky. When I pointed this out to him, he laughed: “Ah! Enlightenment.”



On January 19, 1990, at around 5.30 in the evening, Osho left his body. On the final day of our retreat, we relived the experience in the presence of a living Master. Gurudev lifted the glass case of the living flame and snuffed it out with a single clap. “Friends,” he said on the microphone, “Osho has left the body.” There was an air of solemnity and grace. Each movement of Swamijee seemed deeply symbolic and significant. The strings of flowers that had framed Osho’s image for the 40 days were taken to represent Osho’s body. They were carefully gathered into a large basket.

When Gurudev lifted the heavy basket with Gyandev’s help onto his own head, there were loud cries in the tear-drenched atmosphere. Slowly, Gurudev walked with his Master’s remains for the final journey to the sea. Even the Western disciples who didn’t understand Indian rituals sensed the magnitude of the moment and were crying helpless tears as we all walked behind him. On the beach, for a few moments we all helped to carry the basket. At the sea, he gave us each a few strings from the basket. And against the setting sun, we cast the flowers into the ocean. The waves tossed the flowers back to Gurudev’s feet as he stood facing the copper-streaked sky.

As we sat for our final Meditation on the beach with Gurudev, I was internally struggling with the remnants of tiredness from working all day. I was fighting with my situation when it struck me that my tiring day was only a thought now. Not just my day, even these 40 days were just a thought now. If there is not a single thought, what has actually happened? Perhaps nothing has ever happened!

Gurudev’s final talk was brief: “Friends, whatsoever begins must come to an end. A seeker is one who searches for that which does not begin and does not end. I hope you will continue your journey after you leave. When you return home, you will find all that you have gained here will keep growing. You will go on becoming more peaceful, more joyous, more silent. Please take two flowers from the Meditation hall with you to remember these days...”

There were no tears in my eyes. For me, it was not the end of Swami Chaitanya Bharti’s 40-day Meditation intensive. For me, it was the beginning of a new journey with Gurudev.

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