

THREE PHASES OF SILENCE

“Consciousness is such a mystery,” my brother Gyandev said to me on the beach last night, “When you sit here, relaxed, unfocused, it contains the entire horizon and your own body within it also. But in a hundredth of a second, if there is a thought of fear or desire, it can become narrowed down to a speck; the thought covers the entire screen of consciousness. Most people spend their entire lives with their consciousness stuck inside their head – thinking, planning, desiring, hoping, fearing... They never come to know that the same consciousness can also contain the universe.”

Far away on the right, the twinkling lights of Diu city gleamed along the coast. Our own lives in the city were farther still. We had only been here for 40 days, but there was no bridge left that connected that world with this. A silent humming joy within floated through the day, which was filled with meditation sessions, dancing, celebration and music. And yet when we closed our eyes, there was nothing left of that either.

How did we reach a place so far removed from our marketplaces and railway stations, and offices that it was not even on the map. How did we discover that the person we called ourselves was nothing but a wave in the ocean we glimpsed we could be. How did we have the courage to drop our entire lives to spend 40 days in Diu with a man who promised us only ‘Nothingness.’ We must be, as he had called us affectionately in the opening ceremony: ‘crackpots.’

The opening ceremony took place on December 11, 2004. The sheer diversity of the participants was mind-boggling. There was Kika, a former Economics teacher from Belgium; Madhukar, a professional pianist from Germany; Tanmayo, a young violinist from Scotland; Latifa, a former photographer from Sweden; Osho Dhan, a farmer from Haryana; Manish, a fusion musician from Pune; Bhola, a young jeweler from Delhi; Joshua, a sitar player who lived in France; Devopam, a creative director in television; Sherry & Aditi, both young marketing executives from Mumbai - coming for the first time for a meditation retreat, let alone a 40-day retreat. Little did they know that in a few weeks they would all belong to each other more than they ever did to their own families.

Gurudev himself is difficult to capture in words. His story is that he was one of Osho’s earliest disciples who was later appointed by Osho to conduct meditation camps on his behalf. In September 1990, a series of incidents occurred to him at the end of which ‘he’ disappeared. He hesitates to talk about this incident and to anyone who asks if he is enlightened, he would just say, **I am what I am.**

His outward life continued after the event. In the decade that followed, Gurudev continued to conduct meditation camps throughout India. Having been Osho’s personal photographer in the early days, he created an exhibition titled ‘Forgotten Faces of Osho.’ Around the age of 58, he began a small music company called ‘Oorja Music’ to create music for meditation based on Osho’s vision.

Today, at 62, there is no trace of his past in him.

He is neither proud of it, nor regretful. An overflowing joy and mischief radiates from him whenever He speaks, sometimes conveyed just in a little sideways glance and up-turned corner of his lips.

Almost uneducated, he can amaze with His eloquence and oratory. And yet it is not only an empty dazzle of concepts – His words do not change your thoughts, they change you, as we discovered. And even more powerful than His words was His silence.

Phase I : PREPARING FOR SILENCE

Overlooking the ocean, facing the sunrise, was our ‘meditation hall.’ The meditation hall was actually a large cloth tent with a thatched roof. On the wall towards the ocean was a large photo of Osho laughing, below which Gurudev sat during his talks. The coir flooring started showing signs of life as the camp progressed with little shoots of grass coming through the weave. And then there were the flies. The flies of Diu were really a class apart and they seemed to have a calculated plan to invade my nostrils.

If you were a visitor from Mars, you would hear one of two sounds coming from the meditation hall during these days: One, loud laughter. And two, an astonishing diversity of music: Baul folk songs, Sufi qawwalis, Hindu mantras, shlokas from the Bhagavad Gita, kirtans, bhajans, fusion and pure Indian classical artistes all float through this meditation hall at different times of the day.

The first ten days were devoted to cleaning the psyche, what is called chit-shuddhi in Hindu terminology. We had come from our worldly lives with such pressing emotional issues and burning problems that quietening them was the first requirement before we could grasp the subtleties of consciousness.

There was a time-bound regimen of active meditations beginning at 6:00 am and ending around 8:30 pm. But this retreat was not just about doing meditations and getting results. It was also about the magical, mysterious moments when the seemingly solid inner world disappeared in a flash leaving a frozen stillness that cannot be done’.

Gurudev’s teaching is synthesis of Osho and Nisargadatta Maharaj, a fusion of Sufi devotion and Advaita. It is a strange paradox – on one path the Guru is ultimately considered God himself, in the other, ultimately neither the Guru nor the disciple exist! On one path, everything is God’s will, on the other, nothing has ever happened!

Gurudev stirs the mixture with a whole lot of laughter and makes even arcane words like ‘Absolute Consciousness’ palatable for us who may think it is a brand of Vodka.

His laughter mantra is “Ho Jaaye!” and the many loving and mischievous nuances with which he says it evokes laughter from even the most serious soul.

Gurudev reminds us in his talks...

“Forget everything else, continuously remember your sense-of-Presence. I call it am-ness,

being-ness. Try to identify not with the body but with the sense-of-Presence.”

Slowly, meditation began to deepen even in those who had never attempted it before the previous week. A few days into the camp, first-timer Aditi wrote to Gurudev...

Dear Gurudev, The experience of not feeling the body (during meditation) has begun happening often. The initial excitement has now turned to worry as even when I come out of meditation there is a failure to know what to do to move my hands and legs! Although I am looking down at my body, I cannot recollect what to do to move my limbs!

Phase II : LIVING IN SILENCE

Contrary to popular belief, no talking, no gesturing, no eye-contact for 21 days was actually the easy part. Remaining passive with all that is happening within oneself was the tough cookie.

Gurudev gave us only two ‘commandments’ for the 40 days: One, **remain passive and unfocused**. Two, **don’t be serious**.

Initially, boredom and restlessness surfaced strongly. Gurudev had discontinued his talks in silence, but after four days, he spoke in response to the following letter:

Beloved Gurudev, whole day, sitting in my room either I am thinking continuously or falling asleep. I am not speaking outside but inside everything is the same. Am I missing something. ...Yours Sincerely, Harshit.

Those who were spared the boredom were grappling with intense feelings of sexuality, anger, fear, sadness, guilt and other ‘furniture’ as Gurudev jokingly called it...

“All your life you have been dumping your unwanted stuff into the basement of your house. Now when you go within you have to encounter this furniture. But don’t start fighting with it. Just allow it to come. Treat it like a guest – maybe it is an uninvited guest! So just be with it. Remain passive. It will disappear in its own time.”

Other traumas awaited those who were encountering the depths of silence. Bhola, a young jeweler from Delhi, had been meditating regularly for many years with Gurudev. But this camp clearly held something else in store for him.

For the silence, he opted to stay in complete isolation in his room, but a few days into the silence he wrote a letter to Gurudev...

Beloved Gurudev, today, after White Robe Meditation I went and sat silently in my room. After that when I went to change my clothes for dinner, while standing in front of the mirror I saw after 10-15

seconds that my reflection was not in the mirror. I thought that this is my imagination but this happened a second time too. Now I am very scared. Please send someone to my room to stay with me or advise me on what I should do. (translated from Hindi)

Gurudev first made light of his fear. He joked with all of us that maybe the reflection had gone to meet his girlfriend or maybe the mirror was off-duty. Then he added, almost as an afterthought so as not to boost his ego, that what had happened was very valuable, a rare glimpse into his real nature, which was beyond the body.

In the final week of silence, Gurudev began Mystic Rose: laughing for forty minutes, crying for forty minutes, and then sitting silently for forty minutes. The depth (and painfulness) of the inner surgery increased. And there were some casualties too. One evening, Gurudev read out a hurriedly scrawled note written by a young actress...

Beloved Gurudev, I feel absolutely torn and broken... Things are surfacing and I cannot believe what I see, and find it so difficult to disidentify. Please kill me! ...Saakshi.

In reply, once again Gurudev reminded us that whatever we could see was not us: "If you can see something, it simply means you are not it. You can say at the most that it is yours, but not that it is 'you'. You are separate from it. If I see a flower, does it mean that I am the flower? So just remain passive and remember that whatsoever is happening on the inner screen is also not you. The movie is changing all the time, the screen remains constant. That screen which never changes is the real you."

Another young girl was dealing with the abrupt end of a romantic relationship. And even though meditation was happening, sometimes facing her emotions got too much. She wrote one night...

Beloved Gurudev, It's amazing how much anger and hurt this little body holds. Gurudev, why is it so difficult to forgive? I understand that it is only a thought that causes me pain. And that it will only take one thought in one moment to let it all go, but forgiveness does not happen. Where do I go wrong? What do I fail to see? ...Yours truly, Devopam.

Gurudev answered her beautifully and advised her not to condemn the anger, just to be with it.

"...Forgiveness will happen sooner or later," he said, "don't try to do it, otherwise it will be fake. Just be with your anger as long as it takes. And you are doing beautifully. I am watching you. Don't worry. I love you."

There seemed to be tears glimmering in his eyes as he spoke.

Every night, at the end of the final meditation, he would keep reminding us of Krishna's lines from the Bhagavad Gita: *Jo hua, accha hua, Jo ho raha hai, accha ho raha hai, Jo hoga woh bhi accha hi hoga*. Whatsoever happened was perfect, whatsoever is happening is perfect, whatsoever will happen that to will be perfect.

Clichéd as they may seem, in that vast, looming spectre of complete silence and emotional turmoil, it was a life-saver.

It became clear as days passed that there were 36 meditation camps happening simultaneously. Each one was experiencing their own hills and valleys through the 40 days. Someone was learning how to let-go of a loved one, another was learning how to live with love; someone was seeing his ego for the first time, someone was erasing the final shadows of the old personality. The magic was that when Gurudev spoke during his talks, each person felt that Gurudev was speaking directly to them about their situation.

It was a journey we were walking together. And the Guru had come down from his Himalayan heights to walk with the disciples. He coaxed, cajoled, joked, warned, roared and taught us along the way like a wise friend would... and sometimes he cried with us too.

Take away the modern clothes and the settings and you can see the ancient Guru-Shishya Parampara, Master-disciple tradition in session. In Sufism, they call it a circle of friends, who sit around an enlightened Master and learn the subtle secrets of the Soul. In other cultures it is called a 'mystery school' – where the alchemy of self-transformation is not just taught but lived.

That is why people from around the world had come to be with Gurudev, some literally putting their jobs and family lives at stake. These were ordinary people – if you passed them on the street you would not give them a second glance. The only thing extraordinary about them was their longing to know the truth about themselves and, over time, a certain inexplicably intense love for Gurudev.

As young Aseema wrote in a poem to Gurudev these lines of Faiz Ahmed Faiz: *Ishq mein tere kaahe gam sar pe liya, ab Jo ho so ho*, now I have fallen in your love, now whatsoever will happen will happen.

The intensity of the silence grew day after day. During the evening meditations in the hall with Gurudev, nothing stirred for almost half an hour – no rustle of clothes, no cough, no movement. Just the chirrup of crickets, the wind shuffling through the hay on the roof and the waves timelessly crashing into the surf. For some moments during this silence, it seemed certain that there was absolutely no one in the meditation hall. Just an emptiness where we had been.

Gurudev also devised a Beach-meditation for us in the mornings, so that we could meditatively experience the natural world outside us too. It consisted of 4 stages... **seeing, listening, feeling and being**? each sensitizing one sense organ: gazing unfocused into the ocean, listening to the sound of the waves, feeling the touch of the breeze and the sand, and finally just being. This opened many doors to feel the same sense of oneness and unity with the outer world as we had experienced in the inner world.

For most of the day, what prevailed however was miles and miles of silence. We sat in our rooms or in the meditation hall, tasting the real flavour of ourselves. And not surprisingly, digging so deep into ourselves, some did strike gold. Out of the blue, the most unobtrusive person in the entire camp, a Haryanvi farmer named Osho Dhan, wrote to Gurudev one day...

Beloved Gurudev, The thought of fear and fear itself have both disappeared. Can both these be reborn? Can you please speak on these thoughts? Thank you! ...Osho Dhan (translated from Hindi)

Latifa, the tall Swedish photographer, wrote no questions, only letters of gratitude to Gurudev throughout the silence. And she always wrote of herself in third person without using the word 'I'.

Beloved Gurudev, It is a delight to silently witness Latifa being around in an unfocused, timeless nothingness. Sometimes stumbling around like a drunkard alone at the beach at night with all the giggling stars. Sometimes with a wave of something arising inside for a moment and then another wave coming and taking it all back into the ocean. A few things have been snatched away by a loving, caring, invisible hand. Nothing has been added. So much fragrance coming through the air. Thank You! Thank You!! ...Latifa.

But perhaps no one encapsulated the general feeling of gratitude that flowed in the final week as well as Sherry, a 23-year-old girl from Mumbai who had come for the first time. When Gurudev asked about our experiences of the silence, Sherry wrote the following (while sitting in the bathroom at 5:00 am she later revealed with her wonderful loud laugh)...

Dearest and Most Beloved Gurudev, I love you. These words I have used so many times in the past that, as words they do not express what I feel for you. There is an emotion that stirs right from my being, from the little child that you have nurtured so beautifully and lovingly – even more than a mother could ever imagine.

A feeling of overwhelm comes over me and I remember your most precious words to be 'passive.' I came like an empty bucket, not even aware that it needs to be filled with the elixir of life. Now sometimes in deep meditation even the cleaned bucket disappears.

I thank you for being, for your presence and for your unconditional love. I feel like a new born baby with no past and no future either, no present and no-thing ever. There are also times when the mind wanders and then remembrance occurs to be passive, to be patient, and to love and accept everything as it is. Things just are. Thank you for destroying 'me'- the 'me' that I carried around with so much pride. Always in your love and blessings ...Sherry.

Phase III : SHARING THE SILENCE

The silence swept away many identities. Clean, fresh faces emerged from the silence to greet the world of hellos and good-mornings and how-are-yous again. There was much to share, much to discuss and much to laugh about. Gratitude flowed in tears. Love shone in laughter.

There was a new learning here too. To different degrees we had all learned to shut our eyes and be with ourselves in peace. Now we had to carry this peace outside too. To go placidly amidst noise and haste.

"Just sitting with closed eyes is not meditation," Gurudev reminded us... "Meditation has to be lived

from moment to moment. There are some who only keep sitting with closed eyes and cultivating their meditation. That is like a rich man who does not know how to spend his money.”

For over a month now, we had not seen a newspaper or watched television. Many of us had developed diarrhea and bouts of fever through the silence and only much later we discovered that an epidemic had been plaguing Diu and the newspaper headlines had been writing daily about it. But the laughter in the camp continued undiminished. The days flew past in a dream-like haze of dancing, celebration, crying and meditation. At their request, Gurudev initiated six of the participants into sannyas – a commitment to walk the path.

The young Sherry, a marketing executive, who had taken to meditation like a fish to water, was given the name **Ma Dhyan Shiri**.

“Shiri means the essence of meditation,” Gurudev explained. “It also means the sweetness of meditation.”

Aditi, also a marketing executive from Mumbai, who found herself inexplicably drawn to Gurudev, was given the name **Ma Prem Oorja**, the cosmic energy of love. “It is also the name of my music company,” he joked.

Kuntal, a software engineer from Bangalore, who had shown a capacity for working tirelessly, was reborn as **Swami Nishkam Bharti**.

“Nishkam means the one who is free from desires and wishes; The one who is unselfish,” Gurudev explained.

There was clapping and laughter and music to welcome every new arrival into the world of meditation. As Gurudev put his thumb on their third eye to transmit his energy into each one, the silence in the hall noticeably intensified. And finally, there were so many tears when they bowed down to touch Gurudev’s feet in gratitude and reverence that the hall was bathed in the petal-soft energy of love.

In a flash, the final day of the camp arrived. The date was 19th January, the date on which Osho left his body. On the final day, we were called to the meditation hall at 9:30 am in white robes instead of the usual maroon. Gurudev arrived and after a small talk, stood up to face the photograph of Osho. He folded his hands and bowed to his Master in silence. Then, with a single loud clap he extinguished the lamp below it, which had been burning since the start of the camp.

“Friends,” he said with a heavy voice, “Osho has left the body. We will now symbolically cast the flowers into the ocean.”

There were tears and cries in the hall. He picked up the basket filled with the orange flowers that had decorated Osho’s photo since the past few weeks and walked to the beach. Everyone followed with tears in their eyes. The gravity of the situation hung heavy in the air.

At the ocean, Gurudev gave each one a few flowers and he himself cast the first garland into the Arabian Sea. Others followed, each reliving their own inner farewell. The flowers flowed with the tide and some floated back to curl around Gurudev’s feet.

Gyandev had a quiet surprise in store for Gurudev. He had organized a basket of garlands so that we could garland Gurudev to thank him for something for which we would never be able to repay him. Without a word, one by one, each person garlanded Gurudev and fell to His feet. Some with tears of gratitude, some with prayers, some with the sorrow of parting – all with a love that went far beyond words.

Guruji thaari kaise mahima gaaon, Kaise suraj ko deep dikhaaon.

O beloved master! your praise is not possible, it is like showing a candle to the Sun! ...Bhaktibhav

EPILOGUE

The atmosphere of sadness was evident in the camp as everyone began packing their bags to head back to their old lives. In groups, they dropped in to Gurudev's cottage, who lightened them up with his unflappable cheery presence and home-made humour. Even after they – reluctantly – left, the sense of missing continued even amidst the newfound peace and gratitude. An SMS sent by Swami Venu Gopal Bharti (a famous south Indian Lawyer, who had recently fought sandalwood don Veerappan's case!) to one of the volunteers the following day from Mysore said it all...

His Presence made me absent.

His eyes gave me vision.

His voice taught me silence.

I now understand why a Guru is first and God is next.

My hugs to that which can't be hugged.

...Swami Dhyandev