

Ma Anand Savita

## ESSTACY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE BUDDHAS

I was always a reluctant rebel. The kind of child with a whiplash energy who would frequently slump onto the sofa to soften life's blows with dreams of holocausts and heroism. It was easier to dream about danger than go into it. And by my teens I was excusing myself from dreaming by calling myself a writer.

Slowly I began to see that the licence to fantasise was a fantasy itself. My real encounters never conformed to my imaginary ones. Novels I thought I could write turned into reams of scribbles. Shining knights became drivelling doormats; macho men tramped all over me. I was quick to get out from under, swerving from one bad scenario to another and audaciously clinging to the good ones, all the time dreaming of the man who would see through the Amazon I was turning out to be, or the editor who would discover the genius poet.

The pain of this contradictory life took me to the analytic couch. I was now twenty-one, a student of design and a closet short-story writer. The analysis was a write-off but without it I would never have moved onto the next with the resolve I did. It was there that things really began to move. Psychotherapy, that peculiar brand of love and healing, patience and push, when it eventually reached my soul, amputated the drama and chaos from my life and plonked me into a pool of plainness.

At least that's how it seemed at first. My fairy tales and phantasma receded; life appeared vacant and scary. Yet between the fear and my day-to-day world came experiences of enraptured wonder. I was glimpsing a wee bit of that truth mystics talk about which is accompanied by a soothing bath of serenity. God, Tao, love or bliss - call it what you will - was making infrequent but sure visits.

Nothing so terrifying as plain reality. But the serenity . . . **that** I liked!

It was Blake who said, "He who catches the joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise". And it was Blake who added, "But he who binds to himself a joy, doth the winged life destroy".

My ego, not content with the flying joy, chose to go in for a bit of binding: I decided to train as a psychotherapist and redistribute some of the good done to me.

All was going well. The little house in Chalk Farm I shared with an ex-boyfriend was sizzling with life and macrobiotic fry-ups. My clients traipsed in and out of my Swiss Cottage office nourishing me with joy and confusion and humility. My bank account registered an increase in zeros and my little car took me and my mates on continental tours every time the colleges closed up shop.

Life was beautiful.

Until one day my closest woman friend returned from a trip to India. She wore clothes the colour of Suncrush and had a new name as long as the M1. It was unpronounceable and its meaning, she reassured me, was 'Lily of the Mud'. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh had given it to her. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was now her 'master' and she was soon going to live in his ashram in Poona.

I felt a bit like a surgical glove whipped off in a hurry. What was my pragmatic, busy, energetic novelist friend doing toying with the spiritual life? Hadn't that always been my domain, however secret? And how dare she leave her kids with their dad - though they had actually asked to be left - when my life's work was spent patching up the psyches of those whose mothers had done the same to them.

But then came her shower of books and newsletters. I began reading the transcripts of Bhagwan's lectures the way a starved kid gobbles toast. Here was my old glimpse of 'plain reality' communicated in simple words, spiced with simple good humour and somehow reaching both below and above the long-winded, high-fallutin' conundrums of Freud and Merleau-Ponty, of Heidegger and Lacan that had been my reading matter up till then.

Thank God - who else to thank - that God itself turns out to be simple after all. For I recognised that the voice that spoke through wise-cracks and house-and-garden philosophy touched on streams of my own truth that no verbal explication had ever touched before.

The journey East to see for myself took the form of a summer vacation. I suspected by then that I would, as my friend had done, 'take sannyas' (the initiation by which one agrees to wear the colours of sunrise, a mala - a necklace of wooden beads with a locket holding a photo of Bhagwan - and to use the new name that he gives his disciples).

But I was not in the least prepared to be swept off my feet by the conviction that I had stumbled upon a community in which I would want to live forever.

Things happened quickly at the Poona ashram. I was at once involved from dawn till dusk in a succession of gruelling and exalting 'meditation techniques' devised by the master himself for the repressed and burdened mind peculiar to the hyperactive West. They included rapid breathing, shaking, 'going berserk' and dance.

Dance, dance, wonderful dance. I rediscovered the fluidity of my adolescent body expanding and flowing in endless dark space - we wore blindfolds for most of the meditations. I would wobble out of the hall through an undergrowth of luminescent greenery, with ecstasy packed where my bra used to be. I was surrounded by people whose laughter was as honest and as open as their tears, whose eyes glowed with joy and who caringly left one to do one's own emotional thing without threats of fear or anger. My inner flower that in the cool climate of my London life had been closed but poised, now opened and blossomed.

After the meditations, encounter groups were on the agenda. Unlike the majority of western psychotherapies - from Freud to Reich - the ashram began its therapeutic techniques from the position of health: it assumed an already crystallized ego of its participants.

Starting from the raw material of our basic animal energy the ashram encounter groups created a space where the emotional battleaxes and fantasies could express themselves. Through five to seven days of psychodrama and bioenergetics, of provocation and reassurance from profoundly sensitive group leaders, energies would break through body blockages and primal barriers, to gel into states of exalted love and peacefulness. And though many people went through hard and hurtful moments, the outcome was always positive and life-enhancing.

I participated in two groups. One involved three long days sitting face to face with anonymous friends answering the question: who am I? Food and sleep were in short supply, the silent inward-looking atmosphere, monastic. On my third day I met with a triumphant aha! and the outcome was inwardly beautiful.

The second group was an encounter group with the ashram's celebrated Swami Anand Teertha, whose reputation prior to sannyas had stretched from London to California. I fought, danced, screamed and laughed, was shredded with mimicry, soothed with love, and shared in all of this with others. There I confronted my longing to stay and my deep reluctance to

leave the London work that I loved, and abandon the patients who were with me in ongoing therapy.

And yet I knew I had arrived home. My meeting with Bhagwan had deeply moved me; and he had invited me to stay 'for one or two years'.

The commune was what I knew I had always been searching for without knowing that I had been searching for anything. And Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh was evidently master enough to contain the contradictory world in which true inner growth could flourish.

I did not know what an 'enlightened being' was at the time. Nor perhaps will I ever know until I am myself one. But my major reservation had been blown sky-high by my experience of Bhagwan in the flesh.

Through all my impassioned reading in London, through all the Yes-yes-yeses that had come up as I soaked in every word, one contradiction had niggled my mind. How could a so-called enlightened being, a man who had gone beyond all barriers, who was free, liberated, who had ultimately transcended the attachments of the world that keep most of us fettered one way or another . . . How could such a being allow his picture to flop against the chests of his thousands of followers? How could a man beyond ego seem so egotistic as to have his ashram adorned with his image, and allow his books to be splattered with his sage-like visage. Surely this was a demagogue, propagating a cult of the personality that would stink of Hitler youth?

First of all, though I've never met Hitler youth, there was no hint of any suggestion of it in the community. Though people all wore the orange 'uniform', their uniformity was as thin as the Indian cotton their clothes were made of. Underneath was as variegated a group of personalities you could find anywhere. Revolutionaries mingled with monks; Africans nudged with Norwegians. Psychology professors hung out with hydraulic engineers; eleven-year olds played with pensioners. Former catholic nuns went arm in arm with former rabbis. Typists and teachers, psychiatrists and songwriters, doctors of medicine and doctors of theology, labourers and layabouts, they all moved about together with a peculiar unspoken love of the master that bound them beyond all the social divisions normally applicable in our world.

And as for him. Well, if you have never sniffed the delicious aroma of wolamogung yet, its picture tells you it looks like an acacia leaf, how can you know any better?

Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, dressed in the white robe with the flowing beard of the traditional mystic, was clearly to me a being without ego. He could

have worn a pin-stripe suit and a silk tie, that same incommunicable essence of non-attachment I would have recognised anywhere. Clearly the apparent arch-egoist had no ego. And if I had cared about the industry built around the image of one man, it slowly dawned on me, that this was the only man around whom such an image could safely be built. Since he did not exist as we exist - as ambitious, jealous, competitive, violent egos - it did not matter what you built around him.

Therefore the question of **why** such an industry was built around him became a question separate from whether he was an authentic Buddha or not, and one I was only to grow to understand as time passed and as I lived in his commune amongst his people.

The fact was that once I knew in my heart that **he** was the real McCoy, I could suspend my critical judgements in the trust that the things around him that I did not understand would one day make sense to me.

That 'sense' that things sometimes make even though you cannot formulate them into arguments, I knew would be of the same nature that he himself made 'sense' to me.

Love does not make sense. And yet most of us have experienced the peculiar sense-of-the-senses that love makes in our hearts. It is personal, experiential and incommunicable.

Though I had largely been raised as an atheist and a rationalist, I had come to know that life itself was not necessarily governed by reason. Bhagwan himself has said that he contradicts himself because - what can he do about it? - life **is** contradictory. And he is concerned not with being consistent but with speaking the truth about life.

It is the same unfortunate truth physicists confessed when they discovered that electrons jumped from one place to another without ever appearing anywhere in between. Illogical - but there it was. What could they do about it but state it as they found it?

After a short stay at the Poona ashram, I returned to London to finish off my practice and vacate my house so that I could go back there to live.

It was a shift that was painful for all concerned; I went through it as wholeheartedly and as sensitively as I was able. Through my years at his commune working often for seven days a week, sometimes at things that bored and irritated me, living thigh-to-thigh with people whose life-habits were strange or maddening, buffeted by a high concentrate of contradictory directives in my work and in my personal life, I never for a

moment believed I had come to the wrong place. Life was hard and ecstatic, easy and ordinary, at once. My own sense of freedom flourished. The promises that had once been merely words in Bhagwan's lectures became realities in my life.

Why had I acted out the dream that most people merely think about?

I had always hungered for freedom. Not freedom to buy or freedom to move - I was fortunate enough never to have lacked what I needed in those areas. But freedom on more subtle levels: to act wholeheartedly without regret, to feel fully, to love deeply, to give generously without holding back, to head totally for what I wanted without fear of rejection, to be open and passionate or serene and relaxed whatever the occasion demanded. I wanted to be free of guilt, of jealousy and envy, of wanting things I didn't really need, of holding onto things I could as easily let go of. And I wanted this from within with the full cooperation of the unfettered flow of energy that my body-entity contained. I had been a vulnerable, angry manic depressive who devoured her own pain in a compulsive addiction to writing. But I had also spent much of my life laughing loudly, loving ecstatically and lying serenely in meadows listening to the birds. I wanted more of the joy and less of the weight, more of the peace and less of the pain. And for that I had to be prepared to go more deeply into the valleys of my suffering in order to rise to the mountaintops of bliss available to me.

One day perhaps I may go beyond both. Through the place where meditation is the key to consciousness and consciousness is the key to peace and creativity, I might just reach the nonstop serene blissfulness of Bhagwan himself.

But before I reach there, I will have to have long stopped wanting to. The last barrier, I am told, is the desire to break through the last barrier.

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Some comments on **Ecstasy and the Psychology of the Buddhas** by Ma Anand Savita.

This reminds me of a lot of other essays I have seen by Bhagwan followers - there is one in the current issue of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, for example - and I'm beginning to get some critical feelings about them.

It is all very well to talk about one's own personal experience, but at some point I want to know what it means. Simply having and describing an experience is not enough - I want to make sense of my experience.