

The Master Director

EXCERPT No. 2

Crazy Wisdom

(from Chapters 10 & 11)

The second time I meet Gurudev is in the town of Namchi in southern Sikkim, where he comes to perform a three day ritual for world peace. This time upwards of four thousand people come to see him, hear him speak, and receive his blessings. The following excerpt takes place the morning after the ritual is through.

The next morning, Gurudev is leaving for Tukvar in Darjeeling. He is ushered into the jeep. There is a crowd to see him off. He calls me to his window and has me take out my pocket notebook. He has me write down the Nepali word for car, road, and tree. ‘It is funny,’ I say, ‘to come to the feet of a master to learn Nepali.’ He laughs. ‘What to do?’ he says. I tell him I am beginning to write about my experiences with him, and he laughs again. He hands me an orange and gives me a thumbs up. Then he invites me to come with them to his home village. I would want nothing more than to prolong my time with him; yet having escaped Darjeeling twice, I decline. Gurudev seems to understand.

The driver starts the engine. Everybody presses their palms, bows their heads, and amid a loud call of ‘Jai Gurudev!’ they drive off.

The moment he is gone, it is as if the lid has been taken off a pressure cooker. Everything is so concentrated in his presence that it is actually an incredible relief to see him drive off, and to know one can experience normal life again. Tharbu is there, the monk I knew from Timi, the one who said, ‘Life is a flower, and death is death.’

He turns to me.

‘Life is a show,’ he says.

He gets it.

Tharbu walks me into town so that I can book a seat on a shared jeep to Gangtok.

‘Gurudev,’ he says as we jostle through the crowd in the market, ‘he’s the real lama. For me, being a lama is sometimes like a job.’

And I suppose it is true. Performing rituals is Tharbu's profession; it's how he makes money. There is a conflict in Tharbu, which I appreciate very much. Later, I visit Tharbu in his home village in west Sikkim and find out he has a wife and kids.

We are approaching the jeep stand when a jeep comes screeching to a halt beside us. It is a man I recognize from the community centre. 'Thomas! Jump in,' he says, throwing the door open, 'Gurudev has sent me to find you. I've been searching for you for over half an hour. You must hurry, Gurudev is waiting!'

I can hardly believe it. 'I thought the show was over,' I say to Tharbu. And it had been a relief.

'For the true show master,' Tharbu says, 'the show is *never* over.'

I jump into the jeep and pull Tharbu in after me.

We speed to the edge of town and the man leads us running up a footpath to a large house in the middle of terraced fields. An elderly couple I've never seen before are standing outside the house, calling out as we draw close, 'Thomas! Hurry, hurry! He is waiting!'

I am ushered to the end of a long hall and into a room. I hear the door close behind me and I find myself alone with Gurudev. He is sitting cross-legged in the centre of a bed upon which has been laid a Tibetan rug.

A few minutes pass in what for me is a perplexing silence. Then others slip in. It is Gurudev's inner circle—his attendants, a few monks, the couple from the house. We all stand in a semicircle around the bed.

Gurudev picks up a *damaru*, a small hourglass-shaped drum with beads at the ends of leather chords that act as strikers. With a flick of his wrist he starts sounding it. Then he begins chanting in Tibetan; the monks join in with their low, sonorous voices. Gurudev is capable of projecting a presence that is so deep and elemental that one is sure one is partaking in something infused with the ancient powers that set the first dawn in motion. One realizes the power of the oral transmission of the ancient sages of the East. To be in that room, present at that moment, feels like the greatest privilege I have ever had. Everybody is gazing at Gurudev with looks of both awe and tremendous love. The energy he is expressing is the love that he speaks of, the universal binding force. You can feel it, and practically hear the hum.

Gurudev lifts a bowl of rice with two hands above his forehead and blesses it. He puts some into each of our open palms. Then he hands us each a flower. A ritual commences in which we throw rice to the four directions, to the Above and to the Below for the good of all sentient beings. By means of this ritual, all the energy that the thousands who attended the three-day puja centred on this one man is discharged; it is given back. All that was accumulated is given to all beings in the six directions for their benefit. That is blessing. It is a moment to swell your heart. The love we feel is not for him; rather, it is the gratitude for the presence and expression of love itself.

Gurudev ends with a sonorous Sanskrit chant that returns us to the very same moment first evoked by the ancient sages that composed the chant in the dim beginnings of time. And when he finishes, a deep silence descends on us, which is then broken by Gurudev, who waves his arm towards the corner of the room and says, ‘Bring that.’

He is referring to a *chamor*, a stick with the long hairs of a yak’s tail attached to its end, which is used in rituals. They wave them before things of the highest sacred order, like gods and sacred statues, to show great respect, like the fanfare before a king.

Dawa hands it to him and he takes it and flops it on his bald head as if it were an unruly wig. He puts his hand on his puffed out chest, bursts out laughing, and says in an exaggerated, boastful way, ‘Me Sai Baba,’ drawing an obvious parallel to the big hair of one of the most famous Indian gurus of the twentieth century.

The room breaks into laughter at the shattering of the sacred moment, this act of consummate absurdity.

It is Gurudev’s ultimate statement: to create an atmosphere so packed with a single significance, to create a reality both rarefied and precious, and then to turn it all on its head. It is as if a crack formed in each of our heads that let in a beam of light, a beam that tickled us into a thigh-slapping laughter.

I have somebody translate ‘Crazy Wisdom’ for him. Crazy wisdom is the wisdom that is so high it seems crazy to the conventional mind.

Gurudev runs his hand over his head and gathers some of the yak hairs that have stuck to his shaved stubble. He rolls the hairs into a ball and gives it to me to keep as a holy relic.

‘Yes,’ he says, his eyes twinkling, ‘Crazy Wisdom.’

