

Cancer: a call to bring forth the Psychic

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Abstract: Cancer is an illness that is becoming quite commonplace. A few years ago only rarely one heard of people having this illness, but a few years hence we encounter it pretty frequently. I got the privilege to know this illness through my own experience with it at a young age. And what it revealed to me was what is not its usually publicised image. For me, it turned out to be the biggest gift in this life, without which I would have just roamed around wandering and clueless. Can Cancer or any other illness be a friend? A true friend who mentors you and does not let you stray from your path, your *raison d'être*?

Introduction

As I close my eyes and sit in the Delhi Metro, so as to be guided on what is the most relevant material of my story that I would like to present in this article, I am shown that it would be a shift from 'ordinary consciousness.' I open my eyes and find my hand going inside the bag hanging on my shoulders. There is a small welcome booklet in it, which was given to me when I became a member of the Sri Aurobindo Society Gurugram recently. I open the first page and what I read told me that I was guided to do this. This is what the first page reads:

Change of consciousness

The ordinary life is that of the average human consciousness separated from its own true self and from the Divine and led by the common habits of the mind, life and the body which are the laws of the Ignorance....

The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by the change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine.

For the spiritual seeker this change of consciousness is the one thing he seeks and nothing else matters.

Sri Aurobindo

Indeed, this sums up the whole story of my transformation through cancer: a shift from the ordinary consciousness to one which is not the ordinary. I don't know that if not for the cancer, whether I would ever have had this much of wisdom myself to seek for something higher, something which must be my only purpose in this human life.

PhD in Neuro-Immunology

In the year 2005 I began my PhD at the University of Zurich, in collaboration with the University Hospital. By 2009, I had written my thesis but it was a bit difficult to wind it up as it all appeared so meaningless. I had been working with patients' blood samples from the Hospital and towards the end of my thesis I felt as if I was cheating those patients. I had done almost nothing that could be of help to them, and had just played around with their blood and cerebrospinal fluid samples. Something in me told me strongly that objective science alone could not result in a cure for any illness. What about the emotions, what about the day-to-day life of the patient? What was happening there? I was studying **autoimmune** diseases and it was well known that those are most common in females. Why? Is it because women let themselves, their inner sanctuaries, be violated in order to serve without being yet guided by the Psychic? I had no proof but I had a feeling.

So, with that feeling, by the end of writing my thesis, I felt a certain disillusionment about science itself. But still the burden of finishing the PhD and getting the degree was lifted off my shoulders. As if something in me was asking me to get rid of this burden and move on to newer horizons. I felt guided to consult a hypnotherapist who I believed might help me understand my subconscious. I booked an appointment with him and landed up in his studio one fine bright morning. I told him my issue, that I was feeling obliged to finish my PhD and get the degree for my Dad, and as things were getting revealed to me, I just could not continue to fool myself anymore. What must I do? The nice therapist, who is now a good friend, relaxed me into a meditative state, and then posed four questions from a book titled *The Work* by Byron Katie, which is based on self-enquiry. After the session the burden was shed off my shoulders. I was free to go ahead for what I really wanted to do. It was my life and I was not obliged to make it into anything for anyone else.

I still remember the brightness of the day, as I headed on my path after that session. Something in me had got liberated, had become free. Maybe this was the first time I was learning to say 'No' to anything that bounds me. Maybe!

As I planned my itinerary to visit places offering alternative and holistic education and letting go of the PhD degree, I decided to at least inform my father in India before I set out to do all of this. My father was not very happy about the decision and although I knew it, yet being in such a catch-22 situation, I was telling myself, "If I am no one, if I am really free, then I am under no obligation even to oblige my own self." So, I just put my foot down and got the Degree. I think that was the first time ever in my conscious knowing, that I got to know of this thing called volition or will. I can clearly remember that I exercised my will there as I had been called to do. After that point, it was not a burden to finish my PhD viva and thesis

anymore. I knew that I could do my best, and then move onto the new vision I had gained through my readings of alternative and holistic education philosophies. At that time, I had not even heard of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Integral Education. Maybe because I was not yet ready **still** for the treasure **still** to be revealed. I had been enchanted by thinkers like Bertrand Russell, Abraham Maslow and some mystical texts regarding stillness of the being; along with a deep impression of Jiddu Krishnamurti's works. And that was what I had decided to devote my time to from now on: alternative/**h**olistic education, the tip of an iceberg of which I had just become aware. So I got my PhD Degree and it still rests inside my closet to this day.

Coming back to India

There was a deep urge to come back to India, which even the overseas lures and attractions could not mellow down. My heart was yearning for some connect and my mind looking for challenges to grow and progress. At that time I knew that I was attracted to the dirt and dust of India, the challenges of India with which I could connect and then put my hands into. I think it felt as if I had found my calling, as if I had found my vision for life! The field of holistic education enchanted me and made so much of sense. I was really passionate about it.

After travelling to quite a few of the Krishnamurti Foundation schools and seeing how they worked, I was almost settling on working in a small school in Bangalore, run by alumni of the Krishnamurti schools. It gave me a very intimate feeling to be there, so I chose that.

When I came back home to my parents place near Delhi, and discussed this opportunity, it came about that with such a meagre stipend I would be barely able to survive in another city. Now, I would have fought to be there no matter what! But I didn't, I used my volition again. I said to myself, if I can find holistic education there, I can find it here as well and engage with

it in some way. So, for a few months as I relaxed and let things simmer, something came up. There was a possibility of involving myself with college students if I worked with an organisation that worked on Life-Education itself.

I went for the interview and felt that it was the place for me to be. It would offer evolution for myself as it was really challenging! Thus I joined Advait Life Education in 2009 and have never felt like dissociating myself from it even to this day. Initially I worked on site, in college classrooms with students, invoking them to live an intelligent life, full of awareness and attention to themselves and stuff around. At the moment I have offered myself for voluntary work that I can do from my home itself.

Marriage and other beginnings

In 2010, I met my future husband, my partner Lokesh. We just met online and connected deeply through our inner silences that we both had touched upon in our times of studying outside of India. He had done his PhD in Data Analysis from *University of Freiburg* in Germany, and now was back in India with his parents. It did not take me long to realise that we were both going to be together in this journey ahead, for whatever it entailed. We revealed the news to our parents after a few months of courtship and then got married in Delhi in mid-2010.

I did not know that marriage brings with itself bonus gifts for the wife. There were new connections in the families, new expectations and new people to live with. For the first year I was able to maintain the so-called free state that I was living in prior to getting married. Gradually however, the expectations of the family began to weigh heavy on me. **They were nice and kind people, nevertheless had worldly expectations from me-** like for me to dress like a newly-wed and to bear a child so that they could enjoy grandchildren. All that was okay

for them, but this was not **what I wanted**. I had a different vision for myself and this life. But maybe my vision needed strength and further clarity, and more importantly, I believe my life needed the Psychic to be brought to the front.

As I look back on my life after marriage, I see that gradually I had dipped further down in consciousness. I was allowing myself to get engaged in things that I would not like to do or go to such places to which my heart could not connect. I saw that I had started suppressing the call of my Psychic in order to be approved or accepted in the eyes of others, while I always waited for the final and the ultimate approval of my being, my Psychic was in oblivion. As I succumbed to the pressures of the family, only because of a lost connection with my inmost being, I saw that life had become monotonous, rather than the adventure it had used to be, full of exploration. In retrospect, I can say with certitude that all this was happening to prepare me for union with the Psychic, my true Guide, without which my life was empty and meaningless.

Lokesh and I decided to have a child and I gave birth to Chinmay in the month of January 2013, about three years into my marriage. My relations with my partner were always good, we loved each other from our deepest silences, and I could envision him well around the kids. As we enjoyed the newborn child at home, I started to become aware of my shadows, of the pulls of my tendencies, of jealousy, of possessiveness regarding my child, of my own judgmental attitude! I could see all that in me, I did not know what to do with them, so I endured.

Beginning of pink urine

In 2014 when pregnant with our second child, Anand, I started having intermittent episodes of a pink tissue through my urethra and then the urine becoming pink in colour. This pink

urine was painless and it cleared on its own after a couple of **urines**. In the beginning I thought there was a urinary tract infection. I got the diagnosis done but it was not that. I left it on hold for another episode to happen, and another, and yet another. These episodes would first happen, say at a gap of about 3 months, and slowly they increased in their appearance.

I delivered Anand towards the end of August 2014. Then after about 6 months the frequency became so high that there was no option left to me but to see a doctor. I consulted a sonologist and as she scanned the bladder, her face appeared anxious and unhappy, unlike how it had appeared all the while during the two pregnancies. Her face during the scan confirmed my worst fears, that all I had read on the Internet might come true. She suggested I meet a urologist immediately, as it could be cancer of the bladder.

Beginning of a new life

The urologist confirmed this. Something in me did not move, as if it already knew what it was and also knew how to take care of it.

I was guided to begin intense inner work, to work on my emotions, on my suppressed anger along with a therapist I had found. Through him, gradually I came back to this body that I had abandoned years ago. Through meditative practices, I developed a certain intimacy with my being, with my thoughts, with my emotions, with the cells of my body. It was during such sessions that one day I had a strong visceral experience of being in touch with something that was more *real* than everything else, something which, if allowed to come in front, had the capacity to lead my life.

After that, my life became more continuous *sadhana*. I knew where I was supposed to be, at my centre, in my heart, in my Psychic. All the rest was just auxiliary, everything else was secondary. I had a faith that all would fall naturally into place once I united with my Psychic.

After a phase of inner inner work I underwent two surgeries of the bladder along with a short period of treatment of the bladder with BCG vaccine. It was a painful time but the newfound centre of my being grounded me so well that with it I felt I could actually move mountains, let alone conquer an illness.

The gift of cancer

I have remained cancer-free from 2016. Life has become more an offering now, more and more each day. I got connected to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in a strong manner only during the online course of New Creation of the Self, run by the *Gnostic* Centre (where fortunately my kids went to pre-school). It was only through this course with Ameeta Didi, that I connected and started to embed myself more deeply in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's vision of Integral Education and Integral Health. I have just begun. My journey has just started, as if in infancy in my mid-30s! I feel really excited to now offer myself for Their work, and I see surroundings and people around me in unison with all that as well. In the sense that once I became sincere in my own Sadhana, things changed, circumstances changed, people began to appear who are connected with Sri Aurobindo. I am given more opportunities to work for Their vision, and to be deeply united with my Psychic forever. Cancer has thus been the biggest gift ever received in my life, without which I could never have put myself into this fire of longing.