



*When They Leave*

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*By James Kozlik*

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## Introduction

It was back in 2022 that a major transition occurred in my life. I realized I was getting old.

At least older than many of the people I did business with, recreated with, drank with and laughed with.

My wife had gone to India for an awakening of sorts. Inner work, that's what we've been doing for over 44 years, but this was different. More "enlightening" is what I was told. She really wanted me to go with, but I was not ready. "I don't think I am ready yet." Is what I said. "This is the height of the real estate season. This is the peak time when I make my money" was my excuse. So I wished her well on her journey of self discovery and I stayed home. How much more is there to know when I felt like I "knew my truth"? After all we were doing a radio show then, "Meditation to Self-Realization". We were on a path of inner work and already involved with "Oneness". And

so I spent the month, while she was away selling real estate and having fun in-between.

But while she was on her journey, I had a self discovery of my own. I was feeling old. One thing that was instilled into our relationship at an early time, came out of a failed business venture. The lesson from the endeavor that I considered as prevalent to a healthy relationship was that both partners needed to be passionately involved or one would not understand what the other was going through. So why was I resisting to join my wife on a mutual journey. I realized that over time I had resistance towards our growth together as a married couple. Oh, I would make attempts gain more insight. But for whatever reason my passion to evolve to a higher state of consciousness would wane at some point. Then when she left to go to India, I returned to an empty home. The children were long gone and the idea of enjoying some space from my mate seemed un-motivating. The personal inner work that was promised during her stay meant one phone call a

week. That was so one could stay focused on the task at hand. The first week passed with no call. The second week I waited in anticipation, still no call. Finally the third week I heard her voice, briefly. So briefly that I had to laugh at the whole idea. At least she called, and told me she'd fill me in on the details when she got home! I did get some calls from our adult children checking in on me. But what struck me most is wondering how it was for my parents as they aged alone, together. How many times did I promise them that one of us children would be around to help them when they aged.

As with most of my generation we not only moved out of the house we moved to another town, state, or country. So when they advised me that they were too old to travel anymore, and visit me, I made sure I would visit them once or twice a year. Ten days, or two weeks at a time. They were so happy when I would come and so sad to see me leave. They didn't try to persuade me to stay. But I felt their preference to want me close. At least in the

same city. And the last several years when my dad was caretaking for my mom it was me who felt sad that I did not stay or move back. It wasn't feasible. I felt incapable of changing my lifestyle.

Trying to replace me with in home care did not work. My visits became such a strong anticipation by my parents, it became harder psychologically for me not to be there for them. And I became a witness to how aging parents are cared for, considering the cultural of America. Growing up our family and relatives lived close in the same district, or neighborhood. We did things together, some of us relatives grew up with each other. But then an entire generation changed the cultural family structure of America.

I finally made it to India, but almost died before getting there. But that's a whole other story. I arrived late January about six months after my wife had returned. I went through my awakening, but that story is for another time. This story is based on what impact spending four months in India, with my wife has had on my being and

soul. "When They Leave", is a personal inquiry of aging. It's not just the generational differences that has had an impact. It's what I felt culturally. What struck me when I thought of pursuing this topic was an Instagram message of how many older people are left behind in rural India as the children move out to pursue their life. Sound familiar? It happens globally, and each culture handles it differently. The Instagram message was to generate funding to feed the elderly.

This is a novel, and the characters come together to face the inevitable fact that eventually everyone wonders what will it be like "When They Leave".

## Prologue

My motor bike broke down quite a ways back. Seems like the clutch froze or maybe the engine seized up. I don't know but I do know I have been walking on the mountain pathway long enough in this muggy heat. It's getting near sunset in this southern India location. Wherever I am. I don't have a phone, no Google map. I decided to do this trip in a spontaneous manner. Why not, it's whom I have become. An adventurer with no destination in mind. So here I am with minimal gear but a good sense of survival. "You're living like an animal", that was my mom's observation. It was the last comment she made when I called her from Bangalore. I saw a glimpse of the ocean in the far distance when I was at the crest of the mountain ridge I crossed. And I know I am going east in the direction of Chennai. There is an opening off the trail. Looks like a place to set up camp. It's quiet, just birds chirping or crowing. Some breeze rustling tree leaves and bamboo

trunks talking with crackling sounds. I start setting up camp.

I see the perfect place to set up my light weight hammock. I get that set up first. Then I pull out my camp shovel dig a small vertical hole, then check the wind direction and dig another hole on a slight angle to intersect the vertical hole. I find a two inch tree limb on the ground and whittle a point on one end. I jab it into the end of the angled hole until it pokes through the vertical hole. There, now I have a rocket stove dug into the earth.

Just needs some fuel. Ah, but I think I will make myself a chair. I start scouting around for some straight tree limbs while I gather twigs for the fire.

I dig in my pack and find the small foldable hand saw with an aggressive double toothed blade. I lay the twigs in a pile next to the hole. I look for two inch straight tree branches and saw them

from the main trunk of some trees. I notice a couple of trees with what appears to be a curved fruit. I pick one and break into the husk. I am rewarded with a cashew nut! Now I become a gatherer of nuts, twigs and tree branches. And this is how I keep myself busy just like an animal who's existence is a constant effort for survival. Every moment becomes a very present moment. Getting a fire started to cook my dinner. Husking cashews, trimming tree branches and sawing them to specific sizes. My mind is focused on creating a way to fasten together a camp chair with a back rest.

As dusk turns to night I lay in my hammock and admire the twinkle of stars in the nighttime sky and listen for the movement of nocturnal animals. And I sleep to the sound of silence.

Night is turning into dawn as I awaken and I see the slight color change as I peer skyward. I hear a grunt and a rustling coming from my left side. I am on alert, and watch as a small boar comes out from under some brush. It is sniffing the ground

and finds a pile of cashew nut husk that I left near my chair. I watch as it eats some and then moves through my camp searching for food. I take a mental inventory of what I might have left for food in my pack that I had hung from a tree. I am so used to camping in bear territory back home in Montana that it has become a habit to sleep away from my food source and always hang it up high.

The boar continues out of the clearing and disappears into the under brush that surrounds my camp sight. I decide to get up and climb a small ridge to watch the sun rise and get my bearings. I like greeting the sun and acknowledge the God I know to be the creator of all. And the giver of my soul spirit. My Holy Spirit. My connection to pure consciousness. And so I climb between the brush and over boulders until I come to a spot where I can see the sunrise in all its color. I see a horizon in the distance where the mountain slope turns into flat plain. I am sitting on a large boulder, being one with this magnificent universe as the stars give way to a gray blue sky with various cloud schemes and a canvas of color.

# Chapter 1

It's early morning, I feel the humidity in the air left over from the slight night time change in temperature. The sun is up, it didn't take long to break camp and I am on the trail. Still not sure where I am but at least going down the mountain towards the lower foothills. It is flattening out and heavily wooded. I see more cashew trees and some Neem trees that I had identified in my earlier travels, when an English speaking Indi pointed one out to me. He said the bitter leaf was good for digestion prior to eating. It apparently aids most of the systems for a healthy constitution. I continue for a short way and come upon an interaction of trails. There is what appears to be an area resembling a small gravel pit. The trail I am on widens into a narrow road way. There is a small meadow and then a thickly wooded area that seems like it was once reforested. I now hear a faint chant as it coming over a loud speaker. I know from my time spent elsewhere the early morning Japas are playing from a small temple.

The sound is louder and as I come out of the forest, I am not far from the back of a small colorful temple, adorned with carvings of deities. I have stumbled upon a small village. I stop and briefly gaze at the site of small plots and homes, some are grass huts, others are made of brick and mortar. Colorful murals are painted on some walls others are solid pastel colors with contrasting trim colors. On some of the buildings I can see that the paint has peeled. The bottom of the walls have a reddish tint from the dusty earth.

I lay my backpack down and sit on it in the middle of the roadway. I am absorbing the moment, the early morning sky, the quiet solitude of the village setting, the Japas and chants with their various rhythms. There is a slight breeze blowing the stand of bamboo on my left. I close my eyes and drop into a meditative state. I have this sensation of just being part of this entire scene that is etched in my conscious mind. I am drifting into a transcendental state when I feel a tapping on my shoulder. I slowly open my eyes and turn slightly to my left and

look over my shoulder. It's a young boy looking at me with his big dark brown eyes. He looks to be about 12 or 13 years old. We are just staring at each other. I feel a smile starting to crease my face and his smile comes quickly. His eyes light up and his pearly white teeth are wholly visible. My smile broadens.

"What is your name?"

"Harry. What is your name?"

"Jagadeesh"

"You speak English?"

"A little."

Behind Jagadeesh, there are about a dozen children of various ages and sizes that start to come out of the bamboo forest. They surround Harry, all with smiling faces. There are some giggles from the girls, talk amongst some of the boys and questions in broken English.

"Harry, why you here?"

Harry points back up towards the mountains.

"I came from up there. Over the top of the mountain."

"That is far away, you live there?"

"No, I was camping."

There is a quizzical look from Jagadeesh. "What is camping?"

"I was living in forest."

"Why?"

Harry sees a motor bike parked near by. He points, "My bike broken. I walk here."

"Oh."

"What is this town called?"

Jagadeesh has another look of not understanding.

"What is town?"

"Village"

"Purusha"

A tallish man peers around the backside of the small temple. He starts walking towards the children crowded around Harry. He gestures and the children back away from Harry. The man jesters for Jagadeesh to stay next to Harry. He comes up to them and looks at Harry from toe to head. He scratches his head and looks at the backpack. Then he looks over his shoulder towards

the village and over Harry's shoulder towards the mountains. He looks at Jayadeesh and says something to Jayadeesh.

Jagadeesh replies, "Harry."

Jagadeesh looks at Harry, "His name is Aditya."

"Harry knows to give the Namaste sign for a greeting. His hands are in prayer form over his heart and he says, "Namaste."

Aditya places his right hand just below his throat as a response. He jesters with a nod to Harry and Jagadeesh to follow him. The children are told to go back to play. Except for Jayadeesh.

Harry picks up his pack and follows the man and Jayadeesh into the village. The man stops at the recorder that has Japas playing and ends the Japas. The village is quiet again. But unbeknownst to Harry there are eyes on him. Peering from door openings, behind trees, from a group of men huddled around a motor bike. Eyes of women brushing leaves in courtyards of houses. Aditya leads them to his house next to the temple. There is a young girl sweeping his courtyard. She does not gaze in their direction.

Aditya takes Harry and Jayadesh inside. It's a humble interior with a bed, two chairs a small alter and writing table. They sit and Jayadeesh remains standing.

Aditya mumbles, "humph." He says something to Jayadeesh who looks at Harry, "Aditya is one of the village chieftains. He is one of the Raddis's.

He wants to know why you are here."

"Jayadeesh, is that right? Your name is Jayadeesh?"

"Yes, Harry."

"Tell Aditya that I am traveling in India and my motor bike broke. So I was hiking over the mountains and the path took me here."

He tells Aditya what Harry said. Aditya looks at Harry and says something in a language that Harry does not understand. Harry looks at Jayadeesh.

"He says, our village is small. Young people go to Chennai and Bangalore. They make money and have a new life."

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A note to the readers; Purusha in Hinduism means the soul of the universe. The universal spirit present everywhere, in everything and everyone, all the time. wikipedia

Jagadeesh is Sanskrit for "King of the universe", "Light of the world", or the Lord provider of the world."

Aditya is masculine name of Sanskrit origin and refers to the goddess representing infinity. It also means sun god Surya.

To address any girl or woman in Telugu you can say Amma. Not Ma...

Someone who is "randee" (randy) is sexually excited and eager to have sex. Collins Dictionary

The sentence structure in Telugu is subject, object, verb. In English it is Subject, verb, object.

<https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu> > freshman

Greet people saying namaskaram or namaste.

Father is nAnna - Mother is Madar - Single  
mother is OKe Talli

This story takes place in the region known as  
Andhra Pradesh located in south eastern India.  
Telugu is the 14th most spoken language in the  
world. It is one of the most difficult languages to  
speak in the world.

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Harry considers what Aditya has indicated. He  
looks at Jagadeesh and says, "ask Aditya whose  
children are these?"

Jagadeesh looks at him with a cocked head and  
furrowed brow, "Aditya my nAnna and unique  
is Madar, child is me. Other's parents are in  
village."

"Sorry, thank you for telling me."

"Ask Aditya when do older children leave?"

"nAnna, Harry ask, when do older children leave  
home?"

"nAnna, Harry says, when do children go away?"

"Tell him Saashini left at twenty-seven."

"nAnna, why Saashini?"

"Tell him."

Jagadeesh is contemplating, then he talks, "Harry, my sister leave when she was twenty-seven old."

Harry looks around, a bit befuddled by this conversation and how it started.

What now? Thank God that Jagadeesh speaks pretty good English. nAnna must mean father, and Madar must be mother. So I seem to have met a family. Well, at least father son. I wonder where the next closest town is. A place to get a bus or taxi.

"Jagadeesh, ask your father, nAnna? Where can I find a bus or taxi."

"nAnna, Harry wants bus or taxi."

"Tell, him bus comes seven days."

"Bus comes in seven days." My father knows it's not the right bus for Harry.

Harry looks around, he is a little anxious wondering what to do. Keep walking or set up a camp back in the woods. He looks in that direction. The direction he came from. When he turns back to look at Aditya, he notices some other eyeballs on him. Three women gathered together under a tree. They smile at him. One waves. He sees some girls looking around a big tractor, hiding behind it's big wheel. There is another man approaching, with a serious look. He joins them and while looking at Harry says something to Aditya. Harry gives him a Namaste sign. The man returns the jester with a nod and an, "humph".

"Jagadeesh, tell your father I will camp in the woods until the bus comes. Ask, if I can buy some rice and beans."

Jagadeesh poses Harry's statement and question.

Aditya shakes his head slowly side to side. He speaks to Jagadeesh, "Have Harry, follow me." And then he starts to walk away with the other man.

"Come Harry, follow my father."

Dumbfounded, Harry gets his backpack, and slowly follows Aditya. He acknowledges passerby's and get's warm responses. The morning is still rather young, but villagers are starting their day. There's some activities in the little court yards, women tending to fire pits with grates over the tops with pots and pans. Some children walking in the distance towards the east end of the village. Harry notices an occasional cow tied to a tree with a pile of hay in the yard. He sees a goat herder taking his small herd out towards the mountains. A rooster crows - he must have woke up late, ha ha. Harry chuckles to himself. Jagadeesh looks up at Harry and smiles. Then he points to some monkeys perched on a stair well

that goes to the top of a building. The small entourage stops at a house with a faded green paint job that has worn in some places and shows the brick and mortar underneath. There is a fenced in courtyard with a fire pit that has not been lit yet. Harry notices that there are two openings either side of the structure. It looks like a small duplex - village style. There's a tree in the courtyard and some shrubs along the waist high fence made of block and painted with the same faded pastel green.

Aditya shouts a greeting, "Amma unike, subhodayam."

Harry looks at Jagadeesh, "a Nana say good morning".

## Chapter 2

An older woman in a stunning orange sari with gold trim, appears at the entrance to a room. There seems to be no door. The woman's hair is braided behind her head as she looks in the direction of the children heading out of the village, Harry sees a beautiful bouquet of white and yellow flowers arranged along side of her long braid. Her hair is grey with streaks of black that remains from a head that once adorned a plush black mane. The woman looks back at the group of men and she responds in a quiet, small voice, "subhodayam Aditya, miku emi kavalí?"

"I manísíkí gedí kavalí mí kuturu poyíndí."

The woman shakes her head side to side. She looks over at the other opening at the far end of the building. Then she looks directly at Harry, who stands there in all of his innocence.

“Nenu tinaledu. Atanu sasini intlo undagaladu.”

Harry looks at Jagadeesh who says, “you are going to stay in Saashini’s room. The madar is unique. She has not eaten and her daughter is gone.”

“Dhan’yavadalu, am’ma” Aditya turns and he leaves, followed by the other gentleman.

Jagadeesh remains. Harry is not sure what to do and is frozen in place. Jagadeesh pulls on Harry’s shirttail. Harry looks down at him. “Harry, you are invited to stay here. I will stay for a little time then I have to go to school.”

Jagadeesh nods his head in the direction of Unique who is standing outside her door opening now and gesturing towards the other entry. Jagadeesh is smiling broadly. Like this is the best thing happening at this moment in Jagadeesh’s world.

Jagadeesh leads the way and they meet Unique at Saashini's "house". She shows Harry the small room with one window that has bars on it. The light filtering through reveals a single bed in the far corner. A small writing table and chair and some hooks on the wall near the bed. He turns and notices a small amore in the opposite corner of the bed near the entry. There is a mat next to the door with some sandals on it. There is another small table with a pitcher and water basin on it. The floor is harden clay. Smooth and worn. Unique and Jagadeesh are looking at Harry waiting for some acknowledgement. Harry smiles.

"Jagadeesh tell Amma I am grateful for the room."

Jagadeesh turns to her, "Am'ma nenu gadiki krtajnudanu."

Unique nods her head side to side.

"Harry, Amma needs to eat. I must go now."

"Harry, you will stay here until the bus?" Harry looks at Unique. She points over by the amore, and then Harry's backpack. Harry notices that her fingers are severely bent at almost ninety degree angles from arthritis? He take off his pack and places it down. Looks at the room and gives a bow and a smile towards Unique. She smiles and rubs her belly then motions a hand towards her mouth as a sign that it is time to eat.

Harry nods his head, "okay, Amma. Do you want me to make you breakfast?"

She has a quizzical look with a furrowed brow.

"Hum," she turns and motions for Harry to follow. They stop by the fire pit where there is a stack of twigs and small pieces of wood. He sees a match book near the pile. She raises her hands for Harry to look at. Then points at the fire pit.

"Ah, okay, I'll get a fire going."

As Harry is stacking the twigs and wood there is a round, dried, cow dung tossed next to the wood pile. He notices a small set of bare feet and follows his gaze up until he is looking at a young girl.

"Use, to start fire."

"You speak English?"

"Some."

"What is your name?"

"Saadhana, you are Harry."

"How do you know my name?"

"Jagadeesh, we take turns watching Ammagaru."

"Who is Ammagaru?"

Saadhana laughs, "Unique. Amma is for woman, Garu shows respect. In Hindu you can say Ji. It does not matter. If you forget someone's name just say Ji. That is easy for you to remember, no?"

Harry smiles broadly. Saadhana goes into Unique's room while Harry gets a flame going. There is a grate to put over the edge of the fire pit.

He studies the pit and has an idea for a more efficient rocket stove. He looks around there are leaves in the court yard and he see what appears to be rake. There are rake lines in the dirt under the leaves. He notices a hand broom made out of long stiff bristles tied at one end. The bristles flare out at the other end like a hand fan. He sits on his heels and takes in the surroundings. He sees a shed with some bikes and other stuff.

I wonder what is in there? Oh, that must be an outhouse in the far corner of the yard. Hummm, looks like a farmers field over the back fence. In fact it almost looks like a small community garden with large agricultural fields in the distance. He stands and walks over to the front wall. He looks up and down the street. He sees an intersection and as he is starting to get a sense of the village, he hears an "Uh, hum."

It's Saadhana motioning to him. "Harry, you cook, no?"

"No, I mean yes. I cook."

"Good, I show you how to cook Indian way. No?"

Saadhana walks towards Unique who is still standing at the door opening. She goes inside as they approach. She motions over towards a table with shelves above the table. On the shelves are all sorts of cooking ingredients. There is a large bowl on the table. Along one side of the table hangs two pots and pans, one small, one large. There is a box with spoons, a knife, a spatula and other cooking utensils.

"Harry, we will make a quick meal for Ammaji. I show you."

Saadhana reaches for some dried red pepper (looks like cayenne pepper, chickpeas, green gram, fenugreek seeds, garlic, ginger cumin seeds and Asafoetida. She gets out a couple of eggs and a handful of coriander seeds. She points to a small box and ask Harry, "you get the onion."

"Harry, take the bowl and place it on the table, here. Then see the grinder?"

Harry is looking for something electrical, but his eyes rest on a mortar and pestle. She points to it.

"This?"

"Yes, grind the green gram, fenugreek seeds with these too." Then put them in the bowl. Mix and add the two eggs."

"Okay"

Saadhana makes a chutney in a pan. She looks at Harry's bowl and adds just a touch of water.

"Okay - what does that mean Harry?"

"It's all good, same thing when I watch you Indie's respond with tilting your head left to right."

"Tilting - like this?"

Saadhana does the motion with a smile and then laughs.

"Yes. Is it okay to call you an indie?"

She tilts her head and laughs, "Okay, Harry."

"We need fire. Ammaji is waiting."

Harry looks over his shoulder, but Unique has left.

He goes to the door and watches as Unique is fumbling with the broom. He goes over to her and places his hand over hers on the broom handle. He points to himself. "I will sweep," as he motions with a sweeping arm in the direction of the yard. Then takes the broom and does a couple of swipes to indicate that he will sweep the yard.

Unique does the "okay tilt", rubs her belly and smiles.

Saadhana is watching all of this, amused and grateful. Now Harry is leading Unique toward the fire pit and a log stump motioning for her to sit.

He kneels by the stack of twigs and wood and builds a fire. He places the grate over the flames.

Saadhana comes with a mat and places pans and an oil bottle on the mat. Then goes back to get the bowls and utensils. She returns and kneels beside Harry. She points to the pot and Harry hands her the pot. She pours the concoction of sauce and chickpeas in the pot and places it on the fire. She takes the pan and places it on the grate. There's not a lot of room for both pot and pan but it will have to do. Harry feeds the fire and spreads it out so that the pan can get equal heat. "Harry you will stay here until the bus comes?" She knows it's not the bus that Harry anticipates.

"Yes, if that's okay with Ammaji."

"She is grateful to have someone here, with her."

Harry contemplates this statement, and a thought surfaces as he visualizes what it might be like for his parents back home, alone.

"How old are you Saadhana?"

"I am thirteen."

"And you go to school?"

"Yes, and English school to learn your language and ways. The same as Jagadeesh."

"Your English is very good. Will you help me with some words in your language?"

"I will, but ours is one of the fourteen hardest languages to learn in the world! And if you are here for a short time you will forget."

"I can try."

She looks at him, gives him a brief smile and nods towards the other bowl with the batter. Harry hands it to her. She takes the ladle and pours some of the batter in the oiled pan. Then she spreads it using the back side of the ladle. Harry watches as it bubbles and fries. "This is Dosa. We eat with it."

You will see a lot of Dosa while you are here. Please get water bowl. We will wash hands then eat."

Harry disappears into the house. Saadhana contemplates her role doing sava. Should I talk to Harry about service? Serving others is good action. Hummm, Aditya has a plan, maybe? He knows that Jagadish and me will be gone someday, just like Ammaji's daughter, Saashini.

Harry returns with a bowl of water, and three round metal plates that have a raised rim. "I did not find any forks or spoons. I have watched Indies eat with their fingers. In the city many eat with forks and spoons."

"Do you know Ayurvedic wellness?"

"It's a preventative medicine?"

"And more than that, it is how do you say it...a lifestyle? We use fingers to eat. They get all of the chakra systems in the body working."

"You mean stimulate the endocrine systems?"

"You sound like scientist. I learn, stimulate an endocrine. So we use five fingers to gather the food, then two fingers like a fork. Today we use this dosa." And she plops the first dosa on a platter folds it over and scoops the warmed chutney onto the other side of the platter and hands it to Unique.

Unique smiles, nods and then quietly blesses her food. She breaks off a piece of dosa and scoops some chutney on it. Harry watches as she is relishing the first bite.

"Harry, I leave now. You will take care of Ammaji? Okay?" Saadhana gives him a million dollar smile with her pearly white teeth. Harry bobs his head left to right several times and returns the smile. Saadhana leaves but looks over her left shoulder as she passes the gate to get one last glimpse.

What am I to do now. I might as well join Unique and eat breakfast. Then I will sweep the courtyard.

And settle into my room.

"Harry, marína dayacesí," Unique nods towards the chutney and batter."

"More?"

"Yes."

He puts together another helping of food for Unique. I wonder if she said more please? "Marína dayacesí, more please?"

Unique bobs her head. Harry serves himself and they finish eating. Unique is smiling at him and observes as Harry gathers things to clean up. He looks at Ammaji. She points to a small trough with a water faucet. It's on the outside between both rooms. There's a shelf with cleaning rags, soap, and scouring pads. He finishes the task and looks around. Unique is gone. He looks in her room, nobody there. He goes to the front gate and looks down the street. He sees her walking in the direction of the small temple.

The village has woken up. Now I think I will unpack and get my room comfortable. I wonder what is expected of me? This reminds me of the time in Germany, when I spent a week with a mother and her two daughters. The one daughter was an exchange student in New York and wanted to live in the U.S. The mother tried to get me to court and sleep with her daughter. The food, and ambience was so comforting at the time I went along with the scenario under false pretense.

Knowing I would not marry. Hell, I was too young and the girl was not my style. Not that the previous experience has anything to do with what is going on now. But maybe it does? In a way? Am I here for a purpose. I better pay attention, because the sense I have right now is that there is an underlying expectation of me. And how do I say no, I don't want to be a caregiver? And can I? My attitudes are so different now. After all these years of maturity, I see life unfold differently. Isn't that why I chose to come to India? Discover a new personal identity? What am I seeking anyway. To

be a kinder person? Maybe become more  
compassionate?

Harry opens the amore, there are two beautiful  
sarís hanging up inside.

Oh, who's sarís are these? The daughter's?  
Probably. I wonder if she comes to visit. I wonder  
where she is now. Why she left the village and her  
mother. Who's the father and why isn't he here?

Harry, is done unpacking. He has his journal and  
writing pens on the table with a small Buddha  
and quartz crystal. He has some candles and  
matches set off to the side. He is looking at the  
bars on the window. He senses someone near and  
turns.

"Monkeys," it's unique. She motions to him to  
follow her. They go to the shed and she tries to grab  
some garden tools?

Harry reaches for them, "here, let me get that. This  
one?"

Ammaji nods. She points to another that looks like a hoe with a two foot handle. Harry takes that along with a piece of rebar that has been shortened to about six inches and formed with a spoon like flange at one end. Amma smiles and walks towards a back gate. Harry's eyes fix on what appears to be a community garden. Beyond that is a forest, and a big lake. He see's fields of what appear to be a mono crop. They walk over to a plot unique looks at her arthritic hands, then at Harry. She squats and points to the hoe and makes a motion as if she is cultivating the ground. She points to a plant and attempts to pull it out. She points to the piece of rebar and makes a digging motion around the weed/plant that she wants removed from the plot. She looks at Harry and says in broken English, "we grow." Then she stands up and walks a rectangular perimeter and by shuffling her feet she marks off an area.

"You want me to work this soil?" Harry motions with the hoe and other tool as if he is digging and hoeing."

unique gives him the customary nod. Looks at Harry with pleading eyes. Then she walks off in the direction of the small temple.

Okay, so I will cook, farm and maintain the courtyard for a week. Fair enough, what else is there to do? I wonder if Ammaji is going to the Temple to pray so that I'll get the job done? Ha, maybe she went to get seeds? I wonder what they do to keep this soil replenished. Is the compost put

back into the soil? I'll finish this project then I think I'll walk around the village a little. Maybe find Saadhana or someone else that speaks some

English. Umm, there's a couple of other ladies digging in their plots, over yonder. This hoe has some weight to it. It looks like the other ladies are kind of scraping the weeds out. Yeah, this thing

really works well but some of the weed roots remain in the ground. That's what she meant about using this rebar with the tiny shovel like

end. Similar to a tool we used in my mom's garden to get the roots out. Alright, a little manual labor. I wonder if the lake ever dries up or

where the water source is coming from. Is it just a huge catchment pond that catches run off from monsoons? Oh, what is that way out there. Looks like the start of a temple. A mini Parathion with pillars. I'll check it out later. Looks like this big area is fenced to keep cows and goats out. I wonder where the children go to school. I wonder if Saadhana was able to go since I am here taking care of Ammají. Ammají is easier to pronounce than unique. I can say unique as in unique. But I'm not sure it's pronounced like the English term. And what a name for someone. Ammají must be a unique woman! Okay, this is pretty much done. I wonder what's next. Will there be some new soil added? When will planting begin? Can seedlings withstand the heat from direct sunlight? I might be around for the next stage of unique gardening, pun intended. I sure am talking a lot to my self. Maybe I'll go meditate at the temple. Quiet my mind.

Harry takes the tools back to the shed. He takes the broom and starts to sweep the leaves that cover the ground in the courtyard. The task is done and he

admires the clean look and the pile of leaves in the corner where he ended.

Maybe we can use these leaves in the garden. This yard looks good. The patterns I created with the broom looks like a Japanese Zen garden after it's been raked. I lean the broom next to the low wall and look up and down the street. Looks like a few of the ladies are grinding some seeds into flour. Right there in the center of town on some concrete slab. I step out of the yard and into the street. I walk in their direction, curious of the task they are doing. Oh, they are looking at me. "Namaste!" Wow they all smiled and greeted me back. Lovely smiles, what a nice acknowledgement. Oh, here comes a gentleman, "Namaste, where is the temple?"

He greets me then gives me a look like he didn't understand the question. I close my eyes and touch my index finger and thumb in a mudra as if I am meditating. He nods and motions me to follow. We go to the next street over, and he points to the west end of the street. There is the temple.

"Thank you," I utter. I get the nod. We smile and are on our separate ways. As I walk towards the temple. I see a grass hut. I am taking it all in, like a scene in a book that I create in my mind's eye. A hut, walls made of woven branches with a palm leaf domed roof. The yard is fenced with tree limbs and more branches. There's a cow with a rope loosely fitted around its neck and staked to a tree trunk. There is a large pile of hay in the back of the yard. Next I pass a structure painted in an earth tone with a stairwell leading to the roof. This must be the back of the house. Ha, there's four monkeys sitting on the top of the wall. Just minding their business. I continue onward and just see a huge pile of bricks. Two piles, one has a reddish hue the larger pile a beige hue, like the hardened soil I am walking on with my bare feet! It appears to be a construction yard. There's a sort of press. I go over and examine it. Hummm, this must be how they make the brick. There's piles of sandy coarse material, some straw, some broken bricks. I look across the yard and there is the back of three structures, two with beautiful murals one

is a tree with hand prints for leaves. There are a couple of young children looking and pointing at the hand prints. They turn to look at me, smile and go back to what they were doing.

I leave the yard and walk over to the temple. It is similar to others I have seen in other villages and towns during my journey. I look towards the south across the open field and towards the distant mountains where I had come from. I step out of the temple and walk to the edge of the surrounding path. The path that took me here. I find a large

boulder to sit on. And decide that I need to contemplate on...on what? What I plan to do? And exactly what is my plan? Whenever, I do this I start thinking about my future. When I get back home to America? I left wanting to see the world and get a perspective for what I want to do in the future which will always be there! And what about now that will very soon become then...the past moment. Seems like I am always trying to hang onto a moment that pleases me. As if I just want to remember the good vibe I feel from a past feeling?

Okay, Harry, you're getting way out there,

talking to yourself again? Talking to who? My soul? Is my physical form separate from my soul?

Shut up, just be still now. I close my eyes and let the sun warm them, warm my body. I feel the hardness of the rock under my butt. I am merging with it, the sun, the breeze and slowly letting go of all that chatter. Ahhhh....

There is a tap on my shoulder. I slowly put my palms over my eyes, let a little light filter in, then open them as I remove my palms and just take a second to look at the view. There's another tap, I come back to my senses, and turn. It's a little boy, he smiles. "What's your name?"

"Harry, you speak English?"

He ponders for a second, "Harry." And continues to look at me.

"What's your name?"

"Karan"

"Karen?" He smiles and shakes his head. He grabs my hand and points in direction of the grass hut. He wants me to go there with him? "Am'mam'ma" It must mean mother? But what do I know, not the language, that's for sure. We arrive at the hut.

Karan motions me towards the entrance. He announces himself by calling out "Am'mam'ma" na snehitudiní kalustundi" (grandma meet my friend). It takes awhile but an older woman finally comes to the entry. Her hair is gray and there are a few teeth missing when she smiles. She

is slightly hunched over. Her sari is a magnificent gold with embroidered white flowers sewn on the sari which has purple trim. I give a prayer pose and say, "Namaste Am'mam'ma," with a smile. She gives a nod and looks at Karan.

They briefly chat and look at Harry. She says, "Harry." Then points at the cow, uses her fingers to mimic walking, then points out at the grassy field on the other side of the fence. Karan looks at Harry. Okay, I am guessing that they are asking me to walk the cow to pasture. I repeat the hand sign signals to Am'mam'ma and point to the

field. She nods. I motion using fingers and a mouth with a chewing motion. With my other hand I pat my belly and extend it out. She smiles and Karan laughs and they both seem pleased. We untie the sacred cow that produces protein in way of milk curds a delicacy, is what I found out later. Karan and I are going through the village towards the pasture and anybody who is watching gives a smiling approval.

I have a peaceful feeling about me right now. I am not judging about doing a good deed or anything like that. Rather I am just being a steward of a single cow taking her to the best pasture with the best grass to feed. I am enjoying Karan walking on the other side of the cow with his hiking stick. I look over and say, "cow name?" I point at the cow, and he responds, "Avu...Kamadhenu." cow of plenty I notice Karan carrying a shoulder bag. We get to the pasture and open a gate and take Kamadhenu a ways from the gate. She's in an open grassy field and starts chumping on the grass. I notice a flat boulder near a mango tree and retreat to it. I

have a desire to meditate. Maybe just sit and lean against the boulder. Meanwhile, Karan is busy stuffing his bag with dry dung. I am sure it's for a fire starter. I close my eyes and immediately I hear my inner voice say "now what". Now what? Gosh I would like to get that reaction out of my mind. Now what? I am here, relax Harry, jeez, I have a roof over my head, food and am keeping busy, watching a cow and enjoying this mysterious unfolding of events. Besides the bus will be here in a few days. I crack open my eyes and the cow is still feasting and Karan is still finding dry dung pies. All is good. I start to drift with no more thought in mind. Nothing but enjoying the feel of the rock that I lay up against. I hear a breeze rustle the leaves on the tree. And it becomes so peaceful. Time passes and I feel a presence near me. I open my eyes, Kamadhenu is not to be seen and neither is Karan. He must have taken her back home. I look up and Aditya is standing beside me with his arms folded and looking in the distance. I follow his gaze and there is a temple at the opposite side of the field. He looks down at me and jesters for me to follow him.

I do not speak the English, how can I say what I want to this man Harry? I want to ask for his help. With the older women, with this festival. The young man is what we need. So many of our men are working or gone to. Will he understand. "Mi sahayam kosam, Harry." "for your help"  
He does not understand. "Harry, temp(e)l".

Harry, looks over at Aditya and points, "temple?"  
They get near, Aditya nods and points at a stacked pile of large and small rock. The same as the larger temple. There are some smaller pillars too. They arrive and with his hands and arms flailing he says, "nirmincadaniki temp(e)l" build up temple and manages to pantomime his meaning.

Ah, he does not understand. A stick, I will draw in dirt. "Harry," Aditya points to his eyes, then motions to the ground and draws two crude temples, one small one large, that looks similar to the one standing. Aditya connects the two with a floor that attaches them together.

He points to the large granite slabs that have been cut and shaped like puzzle pieces. Aditya poses his right arm into a right angle, clinches his fist and flexes his bicep. He points to it then to Harry and then to the stacked rock.

Harry laughs, "you want help?" He flexes his bicep and points to his chest. "Me help build?" Harry attempts to say "Nirmincadaniki" and points to the large temple and the the pile of granite.

Aditya's jaw is slack, but he shakes his head, "avunu!"

Humm, that must mean yes. I'll give him a thumbs up.

"Ammaji et," as Aditya pats his belly and nods his head towards the village.

## Chapter 3

I am feeling pretty good about being here and the fact that there is some communication going on and that I am being asked to help. After being solo for so long on this trip, there is something to be said about being accepted into a community so spontaneously. Aditya must be trying to get as much help out of me as he can. He knows that I will be taking a bus out of here to my next destination. What is my next destination anyway. And what is it I am looking for. I came to India for travel and adventure. I have had plenty of that. But even though I have been to ancient temples, and listened to Japas, and the sounds of India watched yogis and generally have had a good time. There is something missing. I have read so much about the mysteries, and spirituality of India, and yet I haven't found it. Not that I know what to expect, or when and how I will experience it, if I ever do. Oh, there's unique, waiting for me, waving as if I am coming home. As if I was her child. That smile is so beckoning.

She ducks into the house and returns with a glass of water as I come through the gate. "Namaste, Ammaji."

She smiles again, and says, "Namaste Ji."

"Name Harry."

She bobs her head, "Harry, et?"

I point to the fire pit and respond, "Yes"

The sun has set over the mountains to the west. And there is still a small flame in the pit. We have finished dinner and are sitting cross legged on a mat next to the fire. I have started a pot of hot water and we have two cups for some tea of Tulsi leaves and ginger. It's quiet, except for some distant voices and child laughter in the distance. I was hoping to see Karan or Saadhana. But they must be with their families.

As I start to put some more wood on the fire, Unique Motions no. But I hold up my hand and say "more water, I get water."

“ Nítí? Woder?”

“Yes,” I get up and go to my room and come back with a basin, a hand towel and my pillow. She is looking at me with a furrowed brow. I place the pillow behind her at the end of the mat and motion for her to lay down. I am not sure how she might be taking this jester, and I do not know the culture of how a man might treat a woman. Caregiver, that's what I am now. Anyway, I grab my foot and start massaging it. Then point at her foot, then my chest and then point to her. Does she understand? Sure doesn't look like it.

“Shavasana,” I point to her. She nods and lays down. I fill the bowl with the rest of the hot water and soak the hand towel. I gently start washing her feet. She gets up on her elbows and looks at me. I smile and motion for her to lay down. She smiles and lays down. I start giving her a foot massage.

I am feeling so much gratitude and not really knowing why. Of course I'm grateful that I have been offered a room to stay, and I am grateful for the day, for finding this village and meeting

some children that speak English. Maybe I am feeling love. Love towards a human being. Her eyes are closed and I am loving the sweet smile and noticing her facial muscles relaxing. And I feel the love of her presence and the atmosphere of being by this fire as the stars start to appear overhead. I am feeling love radiating from my hands to her feet up her calf muscle and then over her tibia back towards the feet and I massage each foot and every stroke I give, I feel love for this old woman in a beautiful sari, that I don't even know. I finish and just sit in silence for awhile. Unique is not moving either. I take in my surroundings now. It is dark out. The village is totally quiet. I am feeling at peace. I gently nudge Unique and she opens her eyes, gives me a smile and takes my hand as I pull her to an upright position. We stand and I walk her to her room. She points to a small table on the outside of her entry and there is a "torch" (flashlight) so I turn it on and she gives me a look, "Namaste, Harry." She shuts the door. I get my pillow and go to my room. I have the matches and light one to give me just enough light to find and light a candle. I light two

candles, and I wash my feet with the damp towel. I sit cross legged on my bed. I contemplate on what I just experienced. I realize that I was free from thought and that all my actions came from the state of gratitude. I felt more gratitude to be able to give this foot massage to Ammaji than I did for anything else. The depth of my gratitude was when it came from a heart felt connection. Not just the thought of gratitude for...rather the actual feeling of gratitude. Which turned into a feeling of love. And so I sit now and I just want to still the mind and be with this feeling of causeless love.

The roosters are crowing now, and it's the crack of dawn. I had noticed a shower head along side the east wall of the building. There is a slab of concrete about four foot by four foot to stand on and some hooks on the wall to hang a towel and clothes. I meander out under the remaining stars as dawn is awakening. There is still a sliver of moon in the western sky. The eastern sky is just starting to change color. I am standing under the shower head and turn my attention to the knob for turning on the shower. Ahhh, a nice cool flow

of water to clear my mind and wake up this body of mine. I hear some dogs barking in the distance now. It's coming from the direction of the open fields. Maybe they are spooking some boars who are minding their own business. I am done wiping off and slip into my pants and T-shirt. I go over to the fire pit and as I am constructing a little Teepee of twigs it dawns on me how I can improve this fire pit into a rocket stove. I will be sure to ask Aditya if I can use some of the bricks I saw yesterday. I hope I see Karan or Saadhana so they can translate for me. I feel a presence behind me and peek as I grab the next bunch of twigs. I see toes, feet and ankles. "Namaste Ammaji."

"Namaste, Harry." She sets a pot of water next to me. "Nenu vetunnanu, temp(e)l" I am going to the temple.

I look up and she is smiling, and pointing towards the Temple in the village. So I am guessing she is going there. I nod and point to the pot of water and then make a motion as if I am drinking. I point to her. She nods, then she turns and leaves the courtyard.

It's about ten minutes later, I have a nice fire started and am warming the pot of water, when I hear the Japas blaring over the loud speakers. I stand and stretch and look at the eastern sky that is a brilliant red and clouds bursting in multi colors of purple, reds and orange. I do a yoga sun salutation, holding each pose with a couple of breaths. I get some chickpeas, onion, garlic, red pepper, potato and some flour...

Harry gets breakfast started and places the skillet on the flame with the hot water. He is waiting for Unique and goes out to the gate to have a look around. The village is starting to wake up. He sees some of the women getting water by the community well. There are some farmers out in the fields, the men are irrigating and the women appear to be weeding. Then he sees Unique approaching. She smiles as he greets her.

"Namaste" she returns the greeting with her right hand, arthritic fingers pressed just below her throat where the right and left clavicle meets.

Harry points at the mat near the fire where a couple of plates wait to be filled. She picks up the

plates and takes them over to the water bib and outdoor kitchen sink and washes them along with her hands. Now they are ready to eat. They eat in silence for a while then Harry asks, "Karan?" She looks beyond the low fence and points in the direction of the grass hut. "Am'mam'ma"

"Saadhana?"

Unique shrugs her shoulders, "et Harry."

## Chapter 4

Breakfast is finished. Unique is walking out of the yard and goes in a direction opposite the temple. Harry finishes cleaning up and decides to go find Aditya. He heads for the temple. On his way he notices that there are some children with short sticks doing some sort of dance as they follow the instruction of a woman. They are circling around, tapping the sticks over their heads and doing a dance step. There's some laughter and a joyous mood. He continues on and

sees several women grinding seeds to make flour.

They smile, Harry gives a slight bow and raises his right hand just below his throat. They return the jester. He passes Am'mam'ma's hut. The cow is feeding on some dry grass that was piled under the tree. There is no sign of Karan so Harry

decides to check in on Am'mam'ma. An automatic reaction as if it's a daily chore. He goes through the gate and stands next to the hut entrance, but does not look inside. Instead he calls

her, "Am'mam'ma, Avu...Kamadhenu, et?" There is a pause and with a surprised look on her face, Am'mam'ma comes out from behind the hut and faces Harry, she looks rather astonished to see

him. "Am'mam'ma, Avu...Kamadhenu, et?"

She smiles and nods, points to the pasture and walks over to the the cow and unties her from the tree. With a broad smile on her face she hands Harry the end of the rope, then hugs the cow's neck and gives it a loving rub along it's cheek with her cheek. It's the closest thing to a kiss! She gives the Namaste prayer sign for gratitude. At least that's what Harry's feeling. He nods and starts walking

Avu Kamadhenu to the pasture. He passes by the garden area and see's unique fumbling with a packet of seeds. It looks like she has managed to scratch out some furrows with her arthritic hands. The fingers in an almost ninety degree direction.

Harry softly shouts, "Ammaji, I help!"

Startled she looks up and smiles. Harry jesters with a finger in the air, "wait, I will be there soon."

Of course Ammaji looks at him with a furrowed brow. So Harry gets Kamadhenu through the gate and a ways out into the fenced pasture. And turns to come back to the garden. Unique is still kneeling just observing Harry. He comes over with a gentle smile on his face and looks at Unique who has peaceful loving eyes.

"Kosam?" Harry thinks that means help.

Ammaji responds, "woder."

"Niti? Woder?"

Ammaji nods hoping that they understand each other. She points to an empty bucket.

I must say, just being able to communicate with so little words is not as frustrating as I thought it

might be. I do wish Saadhana was here. And it sure looks like Ammaji is enjoying getting her hands into the soil. I wonder how she will be able to thin out the plants when it's time. She surely must have some helpers. The children? I wonder what the dance lesson was for. Or is it a school activity for the younger children. And the two ladies teaching them the dance and song. I would like to meet them and get to know more of the village people, but how will I accomplish that? Anyway, I will be leaving soon when the bus gets here in a couple more days. Oh, is that Saadhana? In the courtyard? I'll give her a shout, "Halo, Saadhana." Good she sees me, nice smile too. I sure do get a lot of smiles.

"Harry, hello. How are you?" says Saadhana.  
"I am good, thank you. Ammaji and I are at the garden."

"You get woder?"

"Yes. No school today?"

"Finished, I am home now. I look for you."

"Good I need your help. I will get woder. That is water in Telegu?"

"Yes, Ji. You are with Ammaji?"

"In the garden. She is planting some seeds. Can you come with me?"

"Yes, Harry."

Harry and Saadhana walk back to the garden and see unique busy furrowing more rows. There is the sound of heavy equipment. Harry looks out towards the field and notices some men near the new temple. There is a back hoe with a front loader moving dirt. Clearing out a section of grass and weeds. Pushing the pile towards a back fence. He looks at Saadhana and she remarks, "there will be a festival soon to honor Shiva. They are clearing a place for the ceremony."

"I think Aditya asked me to help build the small temple. What will that be for?"

"There will be an Avu, a sacred cow facing Shiva. Aditya is there now."

"When we finish helping Ammaji, can you come with me and translate?"

"Yes."

They water the rows that Ammají has planted seed. She talks to Saadhana. Saadhana looks at Harry, "she likes you Harry. She wants us to sit and bless this garden."

And that is what we do. There is now space in time. At first when I watched the back hoe and saw the men by the temple, I wanted to be there with them. It was a distraction from the task at hand and spending this time with unique. And she has requested my attention, to be with her. Right now and the impression I get is that it's not to just be with her but to also to be with mother earth. To slow down enough to visualize the garden. Share a vision and see it grow in our minds eye. I realize that with most of the tasks I do, I am doing them in an efficient way so I can get to the next task. I lose sight of the task at hand. To take the time and just be still and appreciate what we are doing right now. It slows down the mind from thought. I feel a different kind of connection to the earth, and with Ammají and Saadhana. To be sharing this

moment with them. In a quiet way, with this request by Ammají, I am witnessing what it feels like to be present with the forcefield that I have entered. To feel each of our energies and how we all merged here at this moment. I look out at the field and Kamadhenu is sitting just grooving like cows do when they're not grazing. And I see how checking in with Am'mam'ma was the start of this vary moment. How it just flowed. And now I just want to be still during this time. The meeting of the men at the temple can wait. No rush, not now.

We complete our meditation. Unique and Saadhana did some mantra chants. I tried to follow along "Om Name Shivaya" dedicated to Lord Shiva to attract positive energy and "Om Hreem Shreem Kleem Maha Lakshmi Namaha" A Lakshmi mantra to call upon abundance at first I was so focused on pronunciation that I kind of mumbled incoherently. Then I just mimicked the sound and next thing I knew we started to sound like one voice. It was beautiful and melodic. Saadhana and I walked unique

back home. We left the cow to graze since we were going to come back and visit with Aditya and the men. Unique said something to Saadhana and then went into her room... "to take a rest". Next we walked back towards the new Temple being built.

"Saadhana, how do you know Unique?"

"How do you mean?"

"You come to visit her. Is she your grandmother? Do you take care for her? Do you ever cook for her?"

"She is an elder in the village. Everybody knows Ammaji, we all help her when we can. She teaches us dances, and chanting. Some of the other ladies bring her food. Now you help, you cook and sweep. We see you, there is a ceremony coming. Others are getting ready for festival. Aditya maybe thinks you can help while you wait for bus."

"Yes, I wait for bus and I am grateful to be able to sleep in Ammaji's home. So I help."

"Is that why you help, to sleep?" Saadhana looks up at Harry. There is a silence.

Harry thinks... So what was Aditya's motive finding a place for me to sleep. How did he know that I would consider to help Ammaji? Saadhana is looking at me and I am not sure what to say.

"Saadhana, you ask a question that I have to think about truthfully. Do you understand?"

"What is understand?"

"It means, do you know what I am talking about."

"You haven't told me anything yet, so how do I understand?"

We stop walking, I look at her directly.

"Sometimes I help just because it is the right action to do. Kindness. Sometimes I help because I have been given a place to sleep. Sometimes I help, because I have compassion when I look at Ammaji's fingers and see how hard it is for her to

do certain things. And sometimes I help and wonder what happened to her daughter."

"I understand. You think about a lot."

I have to laugh at that comment. She laughs too. We continue walking in silence. We are close to the temple. The men are still there. Then she says, "Harry, what are you thinking now?"

"Nothing."

"Good, you funny man."

We arrive at the temple. Aditya greets me and I return the greeting with hands folded over my heart and greet the other two men. Aditya says something to Saadhana. She looks at me, "two days we must build the temple. Bus comes. He wants you to help. Okay?"

"Yes, of course." I notice that the area has been leveled. And the entire field has been scraped bare of grass. It's all piled along the fence. I see a pile of poles and a grass hut with three walls completed.

One of the guys starts up the backhoe. Aditya and the other man fasten a chain around the rock and when the back hoe comes they hook it onto the bucket and then it is dragged into place. We do this with the four big blocks. The four of us have to finagle the blocks so they touch, forming the base of the temple. Next we put four small columns into place. They are measured and form a square. The temple roof comes in pieces, all stone, and we help place the blocks into a roof.

The cow figure is lifted using the backhoe, we push it into the center under the roof. It's head is facing directly at the Shiva symbol across the way, on the other temple. We are done and Aditya thanks me and says something to Saadhana. "Aditya ask if you will stay for the festival."

"Tell him yes, Saadhana."

## Chapter 5

We silently walk back to the village. I take in the setting sun and how it filters through the village. Half of it in a shadow that keeps growing. As we get closer there are some monkeys playing in the tree near the garden. We walk through the gate and as we approach the street Saadhana stops and looks up at me. She gives me a beautiful smile, "I go home now. You feed Ammaji?"

"Yes, I will. Tomorrow will you ask Aditya if I can have some bricks." I point to one of the stacks in the brickyard."

"What for Harry?"

"I want to build a new stove for Ammaji."

"Better than fire pit? She likes fire pit. That is how she cooked for many years. Maybe your new stove she doesn't want."

"Okay, but since I am cooking for her, I want a new stove."

"So you will stay after the bus leaves?"

Now that throws me for a loop. If I make something that Ammaji might not want for whatever the reason, then what kind of foot print am I leaving behind? And what am I feeling about that comment? "...stay after the bus leaves?" I haven't thought of a timeline. And whatever I do while I am here, isn't that good enough?

"Saadhana, will you miss me when I leave?"

"Yes!"

"But you don't know me. Who I am in here." I point to my head.

"I know you here," Saadhana points to her heart.

Her beautiful brown eyes are piercing my being. I can feel something, love? Pure Love? And what does that feel like. Maybe I don't need to describe it. I feel fear of what I might say or how should I react? Hug her? Can a man hug a girl who is not related? "I have to go fix Ammaji's dinner. Thank you Saadhana." I break the spell of our eye contact. I turn to leave, but I give her a Namaste and bow my head in appreciation. Then I am walking and I don't want to look back. Why do I

get scared when I look into someone's eyes. Am I afraid that they will see me for what I am? And who am I? Maybe I have a perception of who I am.

I reach the courtyard and there is no sign of Unique. I gather some fire material and get a flame going. I walk into Unique's room and get some lentils, and onion, I see she has pulled some carrots from the garden. That must have been an awkward feat, considering her grip being compromised as it is. I reach for garlic and a few chili peppers, rice, and some curd from Kamadhenu. I get a pan, knife, big spoon and cutting board. I add more fuel to the fire. I go to my room for some spices. There is a suitcase next to the amore. Oh, now will I meet the daughter? How is this night going to turn out? I sure hope the daughter likes me. I go back out to the fire and add more wood getting the coals nice and hot for the pan and pot. I start the water for the rice.

As I am prepping for dinner, I hear voices coming from the direction of the gate. There is some

laughter that does not sound like Ammaji. I'm feeling a little anxious. I wonder who it is. Must be Saashini. I peek out the door. At first they don't see me. Then Saashini lifts her head with a smile on her face, lingering after the laughter.

"Harry, you are Harry." They come close and Unique is also smiling at me. "I am Saashini, the daughter of Ammaji and Aditya."

Aditya?! So that's where Unique goes when she disappears.

"Halo, I'm Harry, you have that right. But I did not know that Ammaji is married to Aditya. Well it is good to meet you. I saw your bag in the room."

"You will stay there, I will get it later after dinner. Let me help you."

We continue the preparations for dinner. Lots of chopping and spice mixing. It's quiet for awhile. "Saashini, you speak very fluent English. Where did you learn the language?"

"Thank you Harry. My parents sent me to St. Annes Catholic English school. I know enough to get by. How are you finding using English to communicate in the village."

"Somehow, body language and facial expression is working. Also, I have Karan, and Saadhana they speak pretty good English."

"Saadhana really loves you. She thinks you are doing a very nice service and are very kind to my mother. Karan is very glad that you take Kamadhenu for walk. And Jayadeesh wants to see you at the festival. He will be dancing with the other school children."

There is a silence. A monkey screeches in the evening air and gets responses. Birds are chirping high up in the courtyard tree. A tractor is heard in the distance in the direction of the new temple.

"Saashini, will you return to the village after your studies?"

"That is too far in the future for me to think about what I will be doing. I want a better life than this village life. I am young and want a different future."

"And why does your. Mother and father live separately from each other?"

"There was something missing in their relationship. They want a better connection. And I think my father fears that he may have to be a caregiver for my mother."

"But isn't one of the wedding vows to take care of each other, for better or for worse?"

"Mother tells me you wash her feet, cook for her, take care of the court yard and garden with her. Papa did not do this. Maybe when he brought you here to stay with Ammaji, he was hoping that you would do all of his caregiving. Maybe you are a gift from Papa to mother?"

"That's his way of connecting with unique? To use me as his surrogate?"

"Well that's an unusual way of describing your situation. I watched an international man one day, take a person who was laying in the garbage along side a road and stand him up. Then he sat him on a stool and trimmed his hair and beard. He had water and soap and he washed the man. Then he put new clothes on the man and funny sun glasses. He happened to have pizza. I don't know where he got it from, but they ate. Then hugged and the man was walking down the road with a grateful smile. So why do you take care of my mother. Are you just waiting for your bus? Or are your actions a form of pay back? For the room, my room that you are sleeping in? Why?"

"Saashini, you speak such good English. Your words pierce my soul. You question my motive. Until you just mentioned how you think your father is using me, I was just contributing, being a villager."

"But you don't live here. You are just passing through. And now you have friends, Saadhana, Jayadeesh, Karan, and grandma. Least I forget the cow."

We are done prepping for dinner. There is a silence as we combine our chopped vegetables into the skillet with oil. We add spices and take it out to the fire. Ammaji is in meditation waiting patiently to "et".

We have finished our dinner, in silence. Saashini's poignant words have a lasting affect on my disposition. Should I offer her room back to her?

I stoke the fire while Saashini is removing her suitcase from her room. I fill two large pots with water add some ginger and set them on the flame. A larger pit would be nice especially for this. But I get them to fit as I spread out the flame. The ladies are talking and gesturing in my direction. I am a bit uncomfortable, what was Saashini's motive for asking me those questions. Questions I was

not ready to answer. I get up and walk over to the entry of Unique's room. I wait outside the door hoping that my presence is felt. With her head down, Saashini is briskly coming through the drape that covers the opening. She stops short of running me over. I place my arm out just in time. She is startled and looks up. Her eyes have tears.

"What is it Harry? Time for mother's foot massage?"

"Yes, and I have two pots of ginger water for you both to soak your feet."

"Me? You want to give me a massage too? Who are you Harry? How did you get sent here?"

"Saashini, for whatever reason I am feeling a lot of resentment from you. And I do not know how to respond. For your mother I do her feet as an act of kindness for allowing me to stay here. As for the bus and my future decision all I can say is right now I want to do your feet as a way to befriend you. To get to know you, to extend my gratitude

for giving up your room. I have a tent, I can camp in the courtyard, or go back to the mountain forest."

"Stop, Harry, stop. I am so sorry. Here I am questioning your motive and you talk with gratitude. I am sorry for my behavior."

Unique is about three feet behind and to the left of Saashini. She has her head bowed and her hands over her heart.

"Saashini, I don't know the woman, man custom, but can we all have a comforting hug. A three way hug right now? I need something to settle the energy. Can we just do that and receive the grace of the Lord?"

She swings around and Ammaji looks up. Saashini's long arms gather both of us to her. She is crying now and I too am emotional. Our foreheads bow slightly and touch. It is feeling so comforting as we stay this way until we all look into each others eyes. Is this a soul connection?

"Okay, ladies, water is hot, feet need rest. Let's sit in silence?" I look at Saashini since Unique probably does not understand what I am saying.

She takes my hand and her mothers and we slowly walk to the fire pit. I have a couple of stools placed around the fire and the buckets of hot ginger water. They sit and place their feet in the buckets. It is a real pleasure to soak one's feet. I get some mats so that there is an option to lay restfully while I massage the feet.

I completed Ammaji's foot massage. She is laying comfortably on the mat with a pleasant smile on her face. I start with Saashini's right foot. I wipe it with a towel and begin. It is surprisingly soft and doesn't have the creases, and cracked skin of Ammaji's aged foot. They are beautiful as if she has recently gotten them manicured in a big city salon. I look up and Saashini is staring at me.

"Harry, please forgive my terse comments. I was full of shame and guilt that you are caring for my mother when it should be me. Even if it is for a

short time I thank you on my behalf as well as my papa's behalf."

"There is no reason to ask for forgiveness. I am glad that you have been honest with me. That you have expressed and acknowledged your feelings now. It has lifted a sense that I don't belong here. That maybe you felt I was taking advantage of the situation and invitation to stay here for now."

"Ummm, that feels so good, your stroke and pressure is just what I needed. Look how Ammají has fallen asleep. I will be joining her soon."

"How long will you stay?"

"Until after the festival and Temple ceremony. Krishnají will be consecrating the new temple."

"And who is Krishnají? A guru of some sort?"

"A guru? I guess you can call him a guru. We call them Mutkí Gurus. Enlightened beings. He and his wife Preethají's main focus is to lead people

towards self realization and liberation from all forms of suffering. Their emphasis is on two states of consciousness. You are either in a stressful state because of your own inner conflicts. Or you become liberated and free of old patterns to live in a beautiful state of joy, calm and occasionally a blissfulness might ensue. You may have enlightened experiences or become consistent in an unperturbed calm state. When you are just a pure witness to your state of being, then you are living in an enlightened state."

I look up at Saashini and see the beauty of her being. There is a presence about her now. A softness and humbleness that is just radiating. A field of beautiful energy and I happen to be in the force field. "Saashini, you look blissful right now, transcendent! Why don't you lay down on the mat, it will be easier for me to work on your feet."

"I'll fall asleep!"

"Under the stars, the endless sky. I wonder what lies beyond, or is it like a roof over our heads."

Saashini giggles as she gets on her mat. "Can I ask for you to bring blankets from Mama's room. You will find two."

"I will get them, then finish the other foot."

The massages are done, the ladies are tucked in. I put a log on the fire. I'm not sure it needs to be kept alive, but there's an ambiance that has come over me as I observe the entirety of the evening and night. How it has affected me. I am curious now of the gurus. Gosh, I came to India searching for something. Must be similar to when my mother found her Buddhist path. When she "dried out". I was so glad when she finally took care of herself. I wonder how she is doing on that big Montana ranch. And I wonder if she has realized an enlightened state of being. When I take the bus back to Chennai I'll call her. We will have much to talk about. It has been awhile since we last touched

base. This festival is sounding like a big ordeal and Krishnaji... I guess I will get to see him and experience an Indian ceremony. Consecrating a temple, I wonder how much I will understand maybe Saashini or Saadhana will be able to explain the meaning of the ceremony to me.

I go to my room and light a match to ignite the oil lamp. I see a book, the Bhagavad Gita. It is well worn, I am guessing it's Saashini's. I flip through it and land on a page. My eyes adjust to the light and I start to read.

"A truly Krishna conscious person, always absorbed in transcendence, in constant undisturbed meditation on his worship-able Lord, is as steady as a lamp in a windless place."

That is enough to contemplate on for me right now. A thought to go to sleep with.

## Chapter 6

I wake up to the rooster screeching. I lay awake waiting for the Japas to begin. The spirituality of India. I haven't been to a town or village where the morning did not start this way. Just the big cities, but even there plenty of neighborhoods had the small temples. I slip out of bed, somewhat groggy thinking of what I read last night, before going to bed. I see my mom in her steadfast daily meditation sitting in front of her Buddha. I step out into the very early morning dawn. I look over at the fire pit. Saashini is sitting upright in a meditative pose. Unique is gone. She must have gone to her room in the night. The Japas start. I wonder what is being said. I sense it's worshipping the Lord, Krishna in this part of the world. I am just absorbing this scene. And I am acknowledging to my self Saashini's beauty. There seems to be a radiant glow about her, just sitting there meditating. It looks like a pot on the griddle of the fire pit. I notice the small fire going and slowly make my way over there. The other

mat is still there. So I quietly sit, trying not to disturb Saashini. I just sit and visually take in the surroundings of the courtyard. I close my eyes now and just feel this moment... roosters, Japas, sun getting ready to rise, changing the color of the sky. I feel the air and the warmth of the fire.

It's a hot climate but the fire pit is the way of cookery. Suddenly Saashini rises, looks over at me and says, "do you want to do the sun salutation with me?"

"To bring in the new day?"

"Yes, and to greet Krishna, the Lord Supreme."

"Is the Lord Supreme like God? Or The Great Creator? What do you mean?"

"What you said, God, The Great Creator. Yes to both. Sunrise and sunset the best way to greet Krishna. Give gratitude for the day to come and in the evening praise and gratitude for what has transpired."

I watch her do the first salutation. Then I follow, about nine or ten positions. Bending backwards and then forward, touching toes, standing straight up, then bending knee then prostrating and curving the spine upward and raising the butt up into the air while the body is folded downward and touch toes again and stand up straight bend back, forward and stand at attention with hands folded in prayer. I look over at her, seriously gazing at the sun rise. Still in the prayer pose. What goes on in her mind? Right now I would like to know. Me?, whew I have all sorts of thoughts going on. But one thought that stands out is that I want to get to know this woman. Even if it is just until my bus gets here.

I wait and quietly sit wondering if she will do the salutation again. I close my eyes and grok her image deep in my subconscious. I am intrigued what is the attraction. Maybe to just understand more about the culture? But she is beautiful in my minds eye. Physically, at least to me. How do I shut down all this thought?

"Good morning Harry. What are you thinking?"

I am startled and open my eyes to a big smile of curiosity. "Oh, namaste Saashini." She returns my greeting with the same. She is seated next to me now. I look at her and her eyes are eagerly waiting for my response. "What am I thinking? Well, I was, to be honest, I was wondering about you." She blinks and cocks her head slightly to the right. The smile turns into a look of curiosity.

"What are you wondering?"

"I found a worn Bhagavad Gita on the table in your room where I am staying. I read a small verse before going to sleep. When I came and sat here you were in deep meditation, undisturbed by my presence. I was wondering, where your mind went too. Were you thinking of Krishna? Did you still feel my presence sitting here? After the sun salutation? You stood in the prayer pose for a long time. Steady as a lamp in a windless place."

"I was appreciating that you have been giving my mother a foot massage. Did you know that in our culture touching an elders feet is a sign of reverence. It shows respect for their wisdom. It means you are seeking their wisdom to help guide you on your path."

"I did not know that. What came to me was the image in western religions of Jesus washing the feet of the apostles at the last supper. The famous painting I have seen in some dining rooms of homes, world wide."

"You see how Ammaji smiles at you? She would like to share her wisdom with you. She told me about the moment you spent in the garden with her and Saadhana. And she watches you as you take the cow to pasture with Karan. Even though your communication is limited, she blesses you for playing the role of father."

"So, why does Unique and Aditya live separately?"

"Karan is my child. The man I thought I was to marry left the village for another woman. We were young and not careful. It brought me shame you might say it is a sin to bear a child out of wedlock. Karan can only inherit my property. I will inherit my mother's property and then give it to Karan. Jayadeesh is my brother. He will inherit my father's property. Aditya blamed my mother for my dalliance. They had a falling out and my father moved away since his honor as an elder in the village was tarnished. Jayadeesh stays with Aditya. We are all repairing a broken family situation."

"Forgive me, it was probably none of my business to ask. I am sorry."

"Harry, you are a westerner, maybe I trust that you will look at me differently being from a more liberal culture?"

"Thank you for having that trust...that I will not judge you? That's not to say I have no judgements about what you just told me, or about Aditya or

anything else that I don't understand. It is so easy to judge what I perceive to be true in my mind without knowing the circumstance of someone's situation."

"This house became my mother's property. Since I am a mother out of wedlock I can only inherit my mother's property, not my father's. Karan stays with my grandmother, whom you have met. When I am here he stays with us. Jayadesh is his cousin."

"And who is Saadhana?"

"She is a girl of the village. A friend of Jayadeesh."

"And why did you leave the village?"

"I felt bad for my mother and father. I dishonored them. I wanted to make reconciliation. I think that is the right word? Reconciliation for my actions. So I pay for Jayadeesh, Saadhana and Karan to

attend an English school. I go to Bangalore to work and pay for it."

"Do you still feel the guilt and shame from other villagers? They seem to like Aditya and unique."

"Several years ago this village was different. Many people did not get along. It was not a community of good will. Also, most rural villages have poor education and have a high rate of illiteracy. We were approached by a group of people the Lokaa Foundation and Lokaa the daughter of Preethaji and Krishnaji, who you will see at the temple consecration. They promised to build new homes, and help garden, even start up a small business. The young people danced and played with the village children. They showed us how to build new houses using native soil and turning it into brick. You will see some of them at the consecration ceremony in one more day. But the most important thing is that they focused on our inner being. Our personal thoughts that lead to inner conflict."

“What was that like, I mean, what kind of thoughts?”

“Comparing, judgements, anger, all the different thoughts that we have and don't know how to be aware of them. You came here, I don't even need to hear about your story. You are helping my mother and what did I think of? Instead of being grateful I questioned your motive. I was jealous, how mother was loving you like a son. And my old thoughts of shame and guilt for my past actions came up feeding into my envy of you and how the children love you, how my father appreciates your help. And how you seemingly are fitting into this village and you don't even know the language and culture. Or the history of this village.”

“What kind of history, is that why the new temple is being built?”

“The British would go to villages and vandalize the temples. There was a piece of the original temple found and it is being sent to the Historical Archeological Society. That is not what you want

to know. What is important history is that India is a caste system. So if you are born into a family of laborers, that is what is expected of you.

Children weren't getting educated, there was no inspiration to aspire. Illiteracy leads to low self worth, no ambition to succeed. Alcohol becomes a means of escape. What the Lokaa Foundation did is help our village heal. First with our inner self, then within our community. Then physically, building a sustainable environment. Improving houses, building some new ones. Gardening and agriculture and even a small business venture.

We started celebrating together. Now I don't feel the dread of what others think of me because of my past. I know that there is compassion for the other that has been instilled in each of us. Our spiritual morals have been revived. You will see that at the ceremony. We can go together, you, mother and I.

There is a porridge simmering on the flame. I look over at it to make sure it is not over cooking.

When I return my gaze there is Saashini still staring at me, a slight smile on her beautiful features. I feel a bit unnerved. The fact that as a

westerner I could afford to travel to another country. I am self judging, and I feel a thing of guilt. How fluently she speaks English, and I'm thinking what mountains she had to climb to be in the position she is in. How courageous that must be, to know one's truth and live it.

"Saashini, you are an inspiration to me. Here I wander through India wondering what it is I want to do with my life. In America I have so many choices, no matter what class I was born in. My mother did well and I am considered upper class. I had a lot just given to me. I haven't talked to my mother for a couple of months. My father still lives for money. That is his God. They are divorced, I'm the only son."

"Thank you for sharing some of yourself. But you don't need to right now. I want to know you as the man who is taking care of Ammaji. The man who is engaged with the children. The man who helps in the garden and who helps build the temple."

There is the squeaky sound of a single axle wheel burrow. We turn to look and it is Jayadeesh with a pile of bricks coming through the gate. Karan is with him. He smiles and beckons us with a nod and a Namaste sign. The wheel burrow comes to a halt. We stand and I remark, "Thank you Jayadeesh, now I have something to do today."

"Funny Harry, what will you do with these?"

"Build Ammaji a new fire pit. I will build a stove."

"Me, too?"

"You want to help, after breakfast. Did you et?"

He bobs his head to and fro. I can't help but smile.

"Okay, you et with us."

"Okay, I et."

The boys sit down. Karan gets a hug from his mom. I can feel her compassion for her son. Especially after what she just shared with me. And

I am happy that Jayadeesh wants to help. My guess is that Karan will help too. I feel a sense of fatherhood. It feels kind of weird to think that I can have that kind of influence, but maybe every child needs to be acknowledged especially when they want to be included in a project. The porridge is served. I look over at the boys and they are eating as if they haven't been fed. Then I look over at Saashini, she is beaming. She winks at me.

"I will go find Ammaji and Saadhana and help with the flower arrangement for the ceremony."

Breakfast is finished and we all take care of our own dishes. Saashini makes up a bowl for her mother and one for her father too!

It is time to be a "big brother", a teacher of practical sustainability. And a father figure.

And so we begin. We unload the brick near the fire pit. I show the boys how to scrape the dirt with the brick so we have relatively flat work space. Then we place the first layer of brick for our base. We go

four across with the width of the brick and four length wise. So we have a base that is about sixteen inches wide and twenty four inches long. The bricks are clay which will withstand the heat better than cinderblock. Now we stack vertically. I show the boys and then let them start stacking. We have a nice perimeter with an open space of eight inches by twenty inches. I ask Jayadeesh, "do you know where we can get some grated wire?"

He looks at me, "Harry I not know what you mean."

I take a stick and draw the pattern in the dirt. He shakes his head and runs out of the courtyard before I can tell him the size we need. I remove two of the bricks from the middle of one end of the base.

"Why you take out, Harry?"

"This will be for air to flow and oxygenate the fire."

"What is oxygenate?"

"Fire needs oxygen, breath, to help it burn."

Jayadeesh returns rather quickly with a piece of wire mesh. I don't ask where he got it from. All I know is it will work for all of our intent purposes. There are no cutting sheers so I fold it in half and keep bending it back and forth until it breaks in two. The boys watch intently. I draw phase two in the dirt. They watch, "we will put this wire mesh here and it is what will hold the sticks for the fire. "You see how we will stack three bricks high in the back and two bricks high in the front."

They give me the Indi nod and start stacking while I bend the wire in half again for the cooking grates. The fire will pass under the first grate then up the second higher grate like fire that flows through a chimney. We complete the design.

"Harry we are hungry," remarks Jayadeesh, with a smile. "Can we cook on it?"

I laugh and Karan laughs too. "Okay lets make some beans and chapati bread."

Karan corrects me, "rotí."

"Okay, Karan, please get two pans one for the chick peas..."

"Bengal Gram, it is called, Harry," remarks Jayadeesh. "And you make chana masala."

"How? Will you show me?"

"Yes, we will need onion, tomato, chili pepper, garlic and oil."

And so we make dinner together. Jayadeesh gets busy with the chana, Karan makes the chapati and I boil some red rice. It is a late lunch, and by the time it is ready, Saashini, Unique and Saadhana arrive and join us. I watch as they all wash their hands and dishes, that have an upturned rim. I do the same. I have seen people eat with their fingers. As everybody, including me mix the rice with the chana and squeeze the mixture together, I ask why they do not eat with a fork. Saashini responds, "we use our right hand

and all five fingers to massage the food. This gets all the systems of the body making contact with the food. You know about the meridians in Chinese medicine? Well we call them nadis or pathways of prana in the body's system. Kind of like the nerves, but not the nerves. They are the three pathways of spiritual existence in our body."

"Well, this is a new way of eating for me. Especially with that explanation. My hands make direct contact with the food. It's like cutting garlic, you handle enough of it one's breath reeks of garlic even though one may not have eaten it."

Saashini laughs, Ammaji looks at Saashini to ask something, then laughs too. Everybody is laughing. Jayadeesh, smells his fingers then blows out his mouth as if he is filling the air with scents of garlic. More laughter and smiles and good tasting food. I say, "Jayadeesh is a good cook."

He likes that comment and we all "et" in joy. A great delight and comfort is what I feel, as if I am part of this family.

"Can I go look at the place where the ceremony will be held tomorrow after dinner?"

Saashini responds rather quickly, "I will take you. We can walk there together."

I notice a smile on Saadhana's face as she bows her head, as if I might not notice. I look at Saashini and see an expression of anticipation. It reminds me of a first date meeting with a girl.

And I feel the nervousness from long ago. Why am I feeling this way? "That will be nice Saashini. I will enjoy the walk and maybe you can explain the ceremony to me."

We are walking in a part of the village I haven't seen yet. It's along the eastern edge of the village. We are passing a house and a man waves from a door across their court yard. Saashini waves back.

"That's the parents of the boy, well he's a man now, who is Karan's father."

I sure don't know how to respond to that statement. They are friendly? Does that mean all is forgiven? "Where is the dad? Does he live in the village?"

"No, that was eleven years ago. When I became pregnant. His family was also dishonored. All you need to know is that he went into self exile?" She laughs, "I guess that is how you might say it. He left the village."

Saadhana peeks from another doorway on the south side of the house. She waves and shouts, "I will see you at the ceremony!"

I look quizzically at Saashini, "Okay, now you are going to tell me that she is the sister of the father of Karan, your son."

She nods her head to and fro.

"He abandoned you, and you pay for Saadhana to go to an English school?"

"Yes, of course. We call it Tapas. You call it penance. For us it is a liberation from our past sin, if you want to call it that. But it's more than that, we consider our own well being and that of others. Let me just say that what I learned very quickly was that forgiveness becomes a habitual behavior. I asked for forgiveness ideally, I thought that would make everything right. What I realized is that instead of forgiving me for my sin, there were some people who prepared me to become a young mother. They were more concerned about my well being. That impressed upon me to be more concerned with the baby's well being. And fortunately I was able to love Karan, and my Tapas experience showed me how to be witness to my behavior and not dwell on suffering for deeds done. I knew that I had a long life to live and I wanted to live it in joy." Saashini is smiling now.

We walk on in silence. I am contemplating on my life up until now. I want to compare it to Saashini's but there is nothing to compare it too. I admire her resilience and her fortitude. I look and she is still smiling and glances at me, then points

ahead. "We are almost at the tents. Look how beautiful they look, all those colors and decorations floating in the breeze. Soon there will be hundreds of people under the cover shielded from the hot sun."

As we approach we seem to be walking through what I would consider a parking lot. "Will there be cars parked here?"

"Yes the buses over there," she points.

I interrupt, "buses? More than one?"

"Yes probably three or four."

"What cities or towns are they from?"

"Harry, these buses are for the dasas, and people taking the Tapas at Ekam."

"So there is no bus that I can take to Chennai?"

We are standing at the edge of the grounds where this event is taking place. There are women hanging long flower strings. There are some men dressed in robes like yogis one might see in films about monks. They are in a grass hut made especially for the occasion. There is a fire pit with urns of oil and candles, and bundles of sticks I am assuming will be for the fire. I see food stuff being placed on an altar. There are containers filled with flower petals. All for this special occasion. Sashimi gently takes my hand and I look over at her soft features with some concern written across her face. "Come Harry, let us sit over here." She takes me alongside the smaller temple that has a cow statue in it. Women are putting flowers around it's neck and swiping it's forehead with colored chalk. "Harry, I think you expected to be bused from the village after the ceremony. Am I right?"

"Yes, I feel like I was lead to believe a bus was coming in a couple of weeks. Nobody told me it was not a bus that takes people to the city."

"I am sure you are eager to be on your way."

I remain silent for a moment. What I am feeling is her disappointment. So why am I here? How did I land in this village and become part of a family?

How rude of me to be so abrupt about my departure. I am just considering my circumstance. And where exactly am I going anyway? "Saashini, I sense some disappointment from you. Am I right?"

"Yes, as much as I realize you're just a traveler who happened to be passing through and decided to stay for a couple of weeks, I am having a hard time letting go of the thought that you are desiring to leave."

I look at the scene in front of me. And I recall the time spent in the garden, and pasturing the cow and then helping with the placement of the rock blocks to form this new temple.

"So, Saashini, explain what is going on here today. What is the monolithic sculpture in the middle of the big temple? And the cow?"

He does not want to respond to my cautious observation about leaving. Does he sense my desire to want to get to know more about him? Does Karan being my child shock him? Of course my dark skin and cultural differences are a possible barrier, too. And what am I doing getting so attracted to him anyway! Our lives are so different. "The monolithic structure signifies. The formless universe. The bottom base is the supreme power of the universe. The monolith is a symbol of the Linga of Shiva. The cow is very beneficial in our culture. It represents wealth and good fortune. This area is an agricultural area so this temple is built for prosperity and fertility of the earth."

Harry is staring at the whole scene. I wish I knew what was on his mind. "Harry, are you disappointed about the bus not being able to take you to Chennai? I can drive you there myself." He is looking off in the distance with a blank

expression. Oh, maybe he heard me. My offer maybe gave him hope.

"Saashini, I am wanting to observe this event. It is special for the village, I can tell. Your offer to drive me is generous. Did you mind me taking your room? I don't think I ever asked you that directly."

"No, it is alright. I am happy that you are taking care of Ammaji. But I know that you want to go on with your travels."

"What started out as travels in India has now become my journey to seek something but I can't quite grasp what it is. I am so fortunate to be able to speak English with you. You have given me perspective with our conversations. And you have shared some of who you are with me. Do you think we are forming a friendship? I am starting to feel at home in the village. I am starting to connect with people in a different way. It seems like they accept me."

"They admire you taking care of an elderly woman. They see you with the children and how the children have fun being with you. People like you here, Harry. And I like you here too." I witness myself placing my hand over my heart. I feel a tenderness towards Harry right now. Love just pure love right now. I wonder if he feels my sincerity?

"Thank you for your straight forward talk. Thank you for accepting me and acknowledging my time spent here." There's a rumbling and I look in the direction of the dusty parking area. Here come the buses.

There is a crowd forming, seemingly appearing from everywhere. My mind plays with me - are they coming from the forest? The village, maybe there are other villages close by? The fields that these people farm? Are the farmers gathered here for this consecration of the new temple that will usher in abundance? Maybe they want to see the Guru? Saashini has left to get her mother and Karan. The dust from the parking area gives off enough

of an effect that makes people appear as if they are coming through a sand storm in the Sahara.

Suddenly I see people in white, from the buses. I look over at the hut and the monks are putting the finishing touches on the Homa area where the initial prayers and offerings will be recited. My gaze gathers in the people picking seats and acknowledging old friends. All dressed in their best garments. It is filling up quickly. There is an eclectic energy floating in the air. The people in white mingle with the villagers, some stand in one area off to the side. Big smiles on their faces. Now a group of men roll out a green carpet a couple of hundred feet from a special seat that is in front of the Homa hut. It is off to the side so as not to block anybody's view. Then a black Mercedes arrives and parks just shy of the carpet. There are several men in white circling the car. Bowing and giving the Namaste sign. The individual in the back of the car is waving, he gets out and the throng of people rush along both sides of the carpet. He must be the Guru. He has a natural big smile on his face. His demeanor seems humbled to have all this

attention and at the same time you can see the fun and joy radiating from Krishnaji, isn't that the name Saashini mentioned... Krishnaji. He walks towards the ceremony I lose site of him as the people surround him. The energy has risen several notches. Next thing I know Krishnaji is seated and people are getting back in their seated position and the monks start the homa. There are chants and things like flowers, and food are burning in the fire. There is the sent of incense. I close my eyes for awhile just listening to chants that I do not understand but know that they are sacred. So I want to honor this space. And I feel special that I had a hand at helping build the little temple where the cow presides. The chanting is complete. I open my eyes and Krishnaji is talking to the villagers. He is acknowledging the beautiful restoration of the temple that had been destroyed decades ago.

Then he gives a blessing and a Deeksha. Everybody is asked to close their eyes and feel the blessing from Krishnaji. Once the blessing is complete Krishnaji prepares to depart. People gather

and form a corridor for Krishnaji to depart. Then they gather around the newly consecrated temple.

While all the commotion was happening Ladies had brought in kettles of food. The ceremony begins similar to the homa but not as long. The monolithic symbol of Shiva is getting bathed in colored chalk. Holy water is getting poured on it and flowers are being tossed at it. The cow is not forgotten and it too is receiving gifts and having its face painted. The food is being brought in next to the "alter" where it will be blessed and the morsels will be eaten by all. Eating blessed food is a special part of the ceremony celebration. The consecration of the new Temple continues with mantras, and prayers to Shiva. We all watch and during the blessings get a colored dot pressed into our third eye. Finally the blessing ceremony ends and food is served. I am thrilled to have been able to be a participant. I lost track of Saashini, Karan and her mother. I get a plate of blessed food, served on picnic plates made of broad leaves. The serving ladies have big smiles on their faces. The energy is flowing with excitement and joy. As I am eating

one of the people in white linens approaches me.

"Halo, you are American?"

"Yes, my name is Harry. Do you speak English?"

"Of course, Maadhav is my name. I saw you earlier, you are not with our group. How did you come to ceremony?"

I have been staying at the village with Unique and her family. Do you know her?"

"Yes, we have met. She is one of the elder women of the village. She is married to Aditya the elder male who is head of village. Saashini is the daughter. Do you know her?"

"Yes, I have been talking with her. What's the story with all of you dressed in white? Are you monks?"

"The story? You mean who are we?"

"Yes, Saashini has told me a little bit about a Lokaa Foundation that has helped the village become more of a community united together. She mentioned a bit about some gurus..."

"I am from that group and I am a monk that lives on the main campus. I want to invite you to come and meet some of the people who you saw here today. Ask Saashini if she will bring you. I must go now, on the bus." Maadhav rises and gives me the Namaste greeting. I do the same and watch his humble departure. Some of the children follow him to the bus. They are laughing and seem so joyful to be with Maadhav. I finish my plate of food and start going back to the village. It has been quite a day.

## Chapter 7

Two days later is a festival honoring the full moon and harvest. The entire village boarded buses, jumped in the big trailer of the tractor. Somebody used Saashini's car. The village was quiet. Harry had been helping some men make bricks for a new building being built. The men spoke and gestured. Harry could tell it was time to quit and go home. He took a hike behind the village. He looked for the cashew trees that he once saw when he was hiking toward the village that has taken him in like a son. When he returned with pockets full of cashews, he decided to take a shower. He put the cashews in his room and grabbed a towel. There was a shower stall built with corrugated galvanized metal. Hooks on each side of the entrance to hang clothes and a towel. There was a curtain as a privacy door. The water came

from a catchment tank that caught rain water. It was piped to an over head shower fixture that dumped water like a monsoon rain. Harry is whistling a happy tune. "Gosh, that's what I call honest work. Man I feel like a gorilla, shoveling the sand, soil and cement. Forming those blocks and moving the dried ones to the job site. Oh, I feel ripped!" And he continues to whistle the tune "Popeye the Sailor Man" from the Popeye cartoon character.

Saashini enters the courtyard and walks toward the shower, listening to Harry.

She smiles, thinking Harry is happy. Happy people whistle.

She is standing outside the entrance, enthralled and feeling some emotional desire. Slowly she starts to take off her sari.

What am I doing? This is not what I should be doing. But I want to join Harry in that shower. What is my attraction to this carefree man? Oh,

what the heck, nobody is around and it's not like I want to have sex with him. But I desire a relationship with him. Is this a seduction to get his attention. I already am considered a sinner. Of what am I a sinner? And in who's eye's? Human eyes who gives us instruction on how to live? What am I doing?

The curtain opens and Saashini enters. Harry wipes the soap from his face and opens his eyes. He is startled, blinks and all that comes from his lips as he purses them is, "WHAT! Saashini!!"

She breaks into laughter, doubling over. She looks up and laughs some more. With tears caused by humor she says, "Harry, you should see the shock on your face. And your color is not too good either." She laughs again, "Harry just look at my eyes. Nothing is going to happen."

"Well, well, I, ah, what? Isn't there something in your culture that says this is wrong? I mean I won't get my head chopped off or anything like that, will I?"

Saashini is laughing again, "no they'll hang me first."

"Huh?"

"Stop it Harry, just look at my eyes. What color are they?"

"Brown."

"Now I don't know why I did this. I am attracted to you as a person. I want to get to know you better. I see, no pun intended, your child like curiosity. And well here we are naked as if we are two souls getting to know each other, not two human bodies. Actually, I'm not sure what point I'm trying to make, but..."

"Saashini, I like what you said, two formless souls. It's pretty cool when you think of it. Bodiless, just spirit. No physical desire. I wonder if that is how people practicing celibacy think."

"You think they overcome the desire body and see others as if looking at their souls. Just wanting to get to know or feel their presence?"

"I'm not sure, you ever talk to a monk or somebody practicing celibacy?"

"No. So where you at right now?"

"Harry looks down, then back up at Saashini's eyes with a wry smile on his face. I'm feeling free of thought. Free from the desire body. I am feeling relieved that this nakedness isn't a seduction. And since you set the rules to just look into each others eyes. Yeah, this is feeling kind of transcendental in a way. Like I briefly saw your physical beauty but honored or should I say respected your choice and decided to let you take the lead. So I am honored that your blind faith trusted that I would not take advantage of the situation. You are giving me a chance to enter you through the Third Eye? Is that the all seeing eye of God?"

Saashini laughs again, "Oh Harry, yeah I don't know but I like what you just said. Enter one another through the Third Eye. Gosh you do have some mysticism. I was observing you as you observed the rituals of the ceremony. And what I felt was that even though you didn't understand what everything meant you seemed to appreciate the cultural significance of the ceremony."

"Yes, you are right. I did enjoy the whole event even though it was foreign to me, I felt the energy."

"Just as this whole scene is foreign to me. I was out of my mind to even consider doing what I did. I feel this joy between us. Nothing more than that right now."

"Thank you Saashini, we best get dressed before anyone shows up. I am not ready for the guillotine."

Saashini giggles. There is a man standing at the courtyard gate, just looking in the direction of

Saashini's childhood room. The house she grew up in. He sees a brown skinned arm reach out of the shower for a towel. Then he sees a tanned, lighter colored skin come out from behind the curtain and grab another towel. He slowly walks towards the shower and stops near the fire pit in the center of the court yard. He waits. The sari is grabbed and in a short while a woman emerges from the shower stall and hands a pair of pants and shirt to the tanned, light skinned arm of a man. Saashini turns and looks towards the man at the fire pit. With an expression of shock she says, in Telugu Ravi ikkada em cestunnavu (Ravi what are you doing here)?!"

"Miku kotta manisi unnara? (Do you have a new man?)" Ravi shouts as Harry comes out fully dressed. He stands behind and off to the right of Saashini forming an obtuse triangle. The voices of Saashini and Ravi are high pitched and a lot is being said when Saadhana appears from Unique's room with tears in her eyes. She looks at Harry, disappointed in seeing him here. Like a

time warp Harry should not be in this scene. It is very personal but he is frozen in place not understanding what is being said. There is a shuffling sound and Ammaji emerges from her room and places her hands on Saadhana's shoulders. She speaks, "Ippudu na intlo santi nelakondam!" (Let's have peace in my home, now!)

Ravi says, "Nenu na kodukuni cudataniki vaccanu. (I have come to see my son.)"

"He is at the festival. You can see him when he comes back. I will tell him 'your father wants to meet you'. Ravi he does not know you. It has been ten years since you left. You never even received him from my womb. You left the village in fear."

Saadhana translates Saashini's words spoken in English. Ravi nods his head, turns and walks out of the court yard in the direction of his parents home. Saadhana looks at Saashini and then Harry. With tears streaming down she runs after

her long lost brother. There is a quietness as Harry, Saashini and Unique stand in their place. Each one in deep contemplation of what has just transpired.

The sound of a bus and a beeping horn can be heard in the distance, near the entrance of the village. A tractor's engine is roaring like a tiger. Joyous voices can be heard. Harry walks with head down, to his room. Saashini walks in defiance to her mother's room and Unique stands still, waiting for Karan to arrive. An innocent boy is about to have his life changed.

## Chapter 8

It will be interesting to see what happens between Saashini, Ravi and Karan. I wonder if Saashini will confide in me? Karan is sure in a rough position. At ten years old he knows enough to be confused and uneasy about knowing his biological father. After all, he has only known the men and women in this village who have guided him thus far in his life. What's it like for a child to be raised by others? I wonder if Saashini will take me to the ashram? I guess that's what one calls the monastery that Maadhav comes from. Anyway, maybe I can call my mother from there. Right now I can use some kind of influence from my blood line. Even at my age. I feel like I am finally on the journey part of my travels. It feels mystical not knowing what is next. Where am I supposed to be and with whom? Mom and dad were so busy with their careers. Most of the time I was left with someone or alone, as I grew older. I didn't have a village to raise me. I have a personality that

I know from being around my peer group of friends. We all seemed to develop our own way of living life. Any contact with parents was minimal and communication became difficult. I felt as if their effort to raise me, instill a moral standard or code to live by was minimal. What they gave me was physical security. What was lacking was a real sense of nurturing. I can sense Unique's love and hurt. Does it hurt her to see the situation of her daughter? And Karan? She is the one who waited for Karan. How many times did I want to be in my mother's arms or have my dad read me a story. I wanted so bad to get to know them more. Not just providers of my physical well being. I needed their moral and conscious support as I was discovering the world around me. I was so unsure of how to behave. I learned my behavior from being around my friends many of whom were in the same situations. What were we labeled as? Latch key kids? Coming home to an empty home. Creating our own set of rules and behavior.

Patterns that lead me further from connection with my parents. And here I am as a grown man still trying to figure out who I am.

It's late at night, maybe even early morning. I light a candle in my room. I put on my pants and a T-shirt. I walk outside and stand in the middle of the court yard looking up at the starry night sky. I see a shooting star. Definitely some constellations, but I don't know which ones they are. I know the Little Dipper! I feel like some tea, so I make a small fire in the new rocket stove. I put on a pan of water and go get some tea bags and a cup. I hope I don't wake anybody. I am enjoying this private time. To think about my past and future. What do I want to do next. I don't feel that I belong in or want to get involved in this situation.

Saashini has her eyes wide open, not able to sleep. How could I not have been at the bus waiting for Karan like all the other mothers. My emotions and anger lead me astray. I was wrapped up in myself that I never considered my son's anticipation to see his mom waiting for him. He went to the festival with his friends and other adults. Everybody but his mom. Because I had the desire to stay back here and get to know Harry. A

complete stranger. How selfish of me. And look at what happened. I am so embarrassed and what is my mom feeling? I never considered her feelings. She is so compassionate, to wait for Karan. Her silence and request for peace in her home was so powerful. What must she think of me as her daughter? Getting involved with Harry? And my estranged dad? Am I the cause of their separation? Where is that soft flickering light coming from? The fire pit? At this time of night?

Saashini dresses into a pair of pants and a T-shirt. She looks at Karan, sound asleep in his bed next to Ammaji. She quietly sighs and walks out the door of the room. She sees the fire in the new stove that Karan helped to build. There is water boiling and as she looks over at Harry's room she sees him start to approach, turn around, go back in his room then come back out again and that's when she notices that he has two cups in his hand.

How thoughtful to consider me? She whispers, "Halo Harry, what are you doing up this time of night?"

"Maybe the same as you, I could not sleep too many thoughts. I find solace in the night sky and just being up and active. Sometimes I like to write, journal. Do you journal?"

"I have not journaled, does it help you? With your thoughts?"

"Yes, but tonight a hot cup of tea, and now that you are sitting here too, maybe we can give each other company."

Saashini giggles, "company sounds like my work, maybe we give each other companionship?"

"Yes, I like that, companionship. I am glad to know an Indi that speaks English. I do get lonely sometimes not knowing the language and just hoping that whomever I meet knows some English. So what is keeping you from sleep?"

Harry takes the pot off of the flame and drops in two tea bags to simmer. He adds a few more sticks to the fire and looks over at Saashini.

"I could not sleep, I was thinking about what happened this afternoon and evening. I should have gone to the festival with Karan like a good mother, who hasn't seen her son, would have done. I am working through resentment towards Ravi, my mother and father, this whole village and you. When in fact, I resent my own actions at the same time. Blame, I am blaming the circumstance of what is and not accepting the consequences. Does that make sense Harry?"

"Yeah, sort of, like blaming all the external elements of what was, and not taking responsibility for your own actions?"

"Yes, you understand. The other thoughts I am having is why I do not have Karan with me when I live in the city doing my work. My fear for him to be exposed to the urban environment and me not spending the quality time a mother should be

having with her child. So I leave him at the village with my parents and family and part of his family becomes other children and adults. And I return as somewhat of a stranger to him since we have to start a new relationship every time we meet again. Is that being possessive or am I obsessing over what a good mother should be doing?"

"Are you asking me to respond or are you just sharing your thoughts.?"

"I think I am doing both. Hoping that you might have some wisdom concerning my dilemma."

"Well, truthfully, I could not sleep because I was recalling my time growing up at home. Mostly on my own since my parents were so busy working. Getting rich, that was their focus. I was like a secondary thought, 'Oh Harry, how are you doing? In school? With your friends?' And there wasn't much that I wanted to share, what comes up for me is resentment that they could have spent more time asking about my emotional world. So you asking me to shed some wisdom on your

dilemma reminds me of growing up within the structure of peer group pressure. And the result was making that we made our own rules since we didn't have parents around to guide us."

I wasn't expecting that as an answer. So I wonder what it is like for Karan. Maybe I should talk to him as if he is an adult. Communicate with him in an honest, open way. Hopefully, he will participate and not feel overwhelmed that he has to share what he thinks about his mother.

"I am thinking, Harry, what it is like for Karan.

His situation is similar to what you just described. I blame Ravi, whom I haven't seen in 10 years. He abandoned me when I needed him. And now I have to look at how I abandon Karan every two weeks, sometimes for a month, depending on my work. His position is much like an orphan's.

His personality is being formed by other's, certainly not his mother's. And his biological father, who suddenly shows up. How is he understanding that? Someone who claims to be a father that he never even knew existed."

"You never talked to him about how he came into this world? Has he ever asked?"

"No, I told him once that his father went to work one day and never came back. I feel so guilty."

"I think you need to talk to him and Ravi. I missed out on really getting to know my parents. So much so that probably what I am seeking is some kind of a family connection. Maybe that is why I like being here. In a way I am experiencing a family dynamic that I did not have as a child. It is ironic that the ones who speak English are the children that I have befriended. They are my new peer group in a way. I hope I give them a good impression as an adult."

There is a silence. Harry places more wood on the slow burning fire that he had started in the fire pit. He adds hot water to both tea mugs. Saashini smiles. Harry scrambles back into his seated position. Saashini self consciously slides next to him and with an arm around his back she rest her

head on his shoulder. She feels a slight movement from Harry and then realizes his head is cocked as it rest on her head.

Hmmm, I wonder what Harry is thinking about now? I wonder if he recognizes this as a sign of affection. I don't want to be another one of his peer group friends. But I also want to proceed with caution if he has any romantic feelings for me. So why did I just do this action? And what am I doing clinging to this man of another culture. I don't want to push him aside, like I made a mistake to show him my affection. I feel his hand resting on my knee in a nonchalant way.

There is a rustling in the background and before they could turn their heads to see whom it is, Karan is standing on the other side of the fire pit staring directly at them as if they are frozen like a sculpture of two lovers.

Harry readjusts his head and removes his hand from Saashini's knee. He straightens up, "halo

Karan, you can not sleep?" Oh man what a crazy thing to ask. But what else am I going to say?

Karan speaks in Telegu, "mother what are you doing out here. I missed you sleeping next to me."

Saashini responds in their native language, "Karan, I could not sleep. I was thinking about you not growing up with a father, like the other children."

"Ravi says he is my father," Karan looks over at Harry then back at his mother. "Harry is not my father. Why do you sit like you did next to Harry?"

Saashini switches to English, "Harry is a nice man. He takes care of Ammaji. He is your friend.

I don't know why I sit like you saw us. I was showing Harry my gratitude." She looks over at

Harry. He has a reserved smile that seems so authentic. She smiles at this and nods her head.

Karan - I think my mother likes this man. They teach in school to love others. But what does love mean? How do I show Harry my love?

"I love you Harry and thank you for taking care of Kamadhenu. Am'mam'ma is happy to see you help me."

Harry gives them the Namaste sign and bows his head. He looks up, "I thank the both of you for being part of my life. I will always think of you when I leave."

The expression on Karan's face is confusion. And on Saashini it is confusion mixed with disappointment.

Karan looks at his mother and says in Telegu, "mother can we go sleep now?"

Saashini shakes her head, "yes." She looks at Harry and in English she says, "after tomorrow I

can drive you to the village where you can find a bus or taxi to take you where you want to go."

Karan and Saashini stand up. She takes his hand and without further ado, mother and son walk back to their room.

Harry sits, staring at the dwindling fire. He is contemplating...what is my fate now? I wonder what the dialog was between mother and son. I wonder now, since Ravi has returned to the village, what does that signify in the Hindu tradition? Does it mean that Saashini must take him as her husband?

## Chapter 9

We are on our way to Chennai. Saashini has included Karan on this hiatus. There was a mix of tears, happiness, disdain, concern and so much emotion I went from gratitude to devastation. I was so grateful for the time spent. I was mortified by the energy that Saashini was receiving. She was so determined to stand her truth and take care of herself first. With the return of Ravi everything changed. The dynamics of my relationship with Saadhana changed drastically. All of a sudden her perfect English was a mix of simple words I could understand in Telegu with signs that she did not understand what I was talking about.

Unique just looked at me with no emotion not even a smile when I would give the Namaste sign. Jayadesh was still a friend I could count on. He tearfully asked if I would ever return.

Am'mam'ma was sad to see me go. She told Karan to tell me how much Kamadhenu loved me and that I will miss the delicious curd from Kamadhenu's milk. Aditya seemed indifferent.

He was gracious enough to give me a hug as if I was his son that he never had. Saashini was with me and he placed a hand on Saashini's head, looked up at the heavens and said some sort of mantra. Saashini later told me it was for her protection, "Om Name Shivaay". Her tears flowed. Ravi presented Saashini some papers. They had something to do with a father's duty or maintenance to pay alimony for the child. But since he was out of work he could ask Saashini to pay him maintenance? I don't know, what I do know was it upset Saashini to the point that she did not want to leave Karan with her parents. The beauty part of it was that they would be together. And this made Karan very happy. So there were some bittersweet moments. For me, I am in a state of a pleasurable recent past and an unpleasant present with confusion about my future. We start the drive in total silence. So what is the beautiful Indian woman thinking? And where does she plan to drop me off to continue my "journey". I glance over at her and see the seriousness etched all over her face. I look behind me and see Karan sleeping.

But is he really? That's when I notice an ever so slight movement of one eyelid...opening then shutting right away. I turn around. Saashini has her right hand off the shifter and placed in the space, between us. I unconsciously gently place my hand over hers. But she slowly moves it on the shifter. I look at the traffic, then to the side window at the countryside rushing by.

"Saashini, where will you drop me off? Will there be a bus or train station nearby?"

I turn to look at her. With her eyes looking straight ahead, I notice some tears flowing. "I am taking you to my home, Harry. I need more time with you."

"What do you mean you need more time with me?"

"I am loving you. You a white American who seems to know no color, no culture, no knowledge. You who has somehow regarded me as an equal.

You, who has a peer group of children. She laughs at that comment. She's briefly looking at me (and it is brief because the driving is crazy in India). She smiles and licks at a tear that found the corner of her lips. You who sat with me under the moon, by the fire and came with two tea cups. You who wants to know about India, and me? Do you want to know me?"

I am flabbergasted! Woah, okay Harry talk from your heart. Haven't you been experiencing everything out of mind and from the heart. What is it that I have cherished from this time spent in the village. "To be honest with you, I have not thought of anything but friendship with you. I ask my self what I have cherished with this time spent in the village. The pace of life, the simple sustainable way it survives. The way I was accepted, until Ravi arrived." Saashini is looking straight ahead again. Is that a tear? "I cherish your resolve, and your beauty. You carry it so well. It's not your outer beauty that attracts me to you. What is it? It's your inner strength, your courage and your commitment towards Karan."

I feel a warm breath over my left shoulder. I look and Karan's chin is resting on the top of the seat. He has a big smile. Saashini looks at the mirror and we all laugh. And this feels so different for me. Is it what I missed in my childhood? Witnessing the love between my mother and father. And what did I observe between Unique and Aditya? I never saw them together, but I did notice her sojourns to Aditya's house. And Saashini said they were working on their relationship. We are all silent again. Soaking in the pleasurable moment. I wonder how can this feeling always be present. With whomever I am with. Gosh, now what is next. I am feeling a little awkward. After all we just met, it's been what, a couple of weeks. But it seems like we have known each other from a long time ago.

"Saashini, you said that you are taking me to your house. Are you taking me as a hostage?"

She gives me a not so friendly look, "I am taking you as a captive until you tell me that you want to free me of my chaotic life."

There is a silence. I sure wasn't expecting this relationship to continue beyond the time spent at the village.

Karan finally says something, "Harry, we can find a cow to take to pasture and feed, when mother works."

"You are a funny boy Karan. Okay, we'll see if we can find one walking the streets who needs a home."

"There is a pasture near my home," Saashini gives me a look of hope and then winks.

We approach Chennai, it is massive with cars, people and wandering cows.

## Chapter 10

Unique is at Aditya's house. She speaks, "Aditya, our girl is confused. And Ravi is wanting to be Karan's father. How can this be when he is not married to Saashini. And he wants Saashini to pay him maintenance since she makes money and he has no job."

"Unique, we are caste as elders, leaders, spiritual teachers. There is not a possibility for Ravi to marry our daughter. His caste is to farm like his parents. He abandoned his responsibility as a father to Karan, whom he never cast an eye on. It is he who is confused. As for Saashini, may she choose carefully how she continues her life."

"She chooses the life of pleasure now. Her career seems more important to her. She has feelings for Harry, an American who does not understand our system."

"Things have changed with many of our young ones. Saashini knows that she is not following our caste system. You seem to allow her to live the life she lives. I disapprove you should show her to obey our way of life."

"Aditya, you are my husband and elder. Our marriage in separation shows me you lack compassion. You are the one to take care of me. Yet you find others to care for my physical handicap.

Am I an embarrassment for you? Does my daughter's actions have such an impact on you that you blame me for the way she leads her life? We should be living together. Our relationship has an impact on Saashini and Jayadeesh. And so she choose another way of life, away from this village and away from us and our caste. Who and how are we to dictate who she loves?"

"We choose her husband. That is the way of our system. When we agree on how to raise our daughter the proper way, the we will live together once more. I have spoken unique."

"I will leave and go to my house. And who will cook for me today? How will I use my hands? Like a beggar? I am not of a beggar's caste."

"I will send Jayadeesh."

Aditya turns and walks away to another room of his house. Unique is left standing in her place. She gives Aditya the Namaste sign...I bow to the light within you. She has tears, she is humble to the higher consciousness. She knows that there is a universal intelligence that will put all in place. Including her marriage. She vows that she will not abandon her daughter no matter what Saashini does with her life. She will always be her nurturing compassionate mother.

Saashini, Harry and Karan arrive at Saashini's beautiful house surrounded by acres of banana, coconut, and almond trees. The neighborhood is upscale and is an indication of Saashini's position in this material world. But there is something that strikes Harry's indifference to

Saashini's home compared to the village where she was raised. It is the simple layout of the home.

There aren't many decorations, the walls are almost barren with just a few pictures. There is a fire pit in the back yard with a view of the ocean.

Pillows and carpets adorn the floors. No couch, just a small table with chairs near the kitchen. Karan and Harry just stand near the entrance and stare with no comment.

Saashini walks into the kitchen and opens a cabinet. She looks over at the "boys", she smiles, giggles and says, "we are here, at my house, come in and have some tea."

"Saashini, this is a beautiful place and location."

Comments Harry. "I feel like I am still at the village, but in a more modern home." There is a rather large painting of Krishna in his mother's lap sitting on a log. Surrounded by nature and animals. There is a tipped over honey vessel and Krishna's honey soaked hand is reaching for his open mouth. Harry is staring at the picture.

"Do you like the picture Harry?"

"Yes, it feels so innocent and so connected to the natural environment. It looks original. Did you paint it, Saashini?"

"Yes Harry, I need something to ground me and remind me of the natural place where I grew up."

"Mother, will I be able to stay here with you now? I like it here."

"I hope so Karan. I hope so, I want us to be together. It is time for me to be a mother. Harry, can you please unload the car? I want to talk with Karan."

"Yes, of course Saashini. Where shall I place things?"

"Go through the back door, you will be in the hallway. My things go in the room on the right. Your's and Karan's go in the room to the left. You two can sleep together, right?"

I go out to unpack the car.

Aditya (in thought) - Harry is different than most men I know white or brown skinned. He seems to be so innocent. He helped my wife in a special way. He had a desire to help in the village and understand our customs. The children loved him. And he spoke without words. Maybe I should not be so indifferent to my wife. Maybe I need to change my ways as a man. Treat Unique as if I am not her master. Treat her like the queen she is, a woman who speaks her mind. As an elder I follow tradition and discipline. I need to know my heart. That is what I saw in Harry. And Saashini saw Harry's big heart, too. I hope we see Harry again. He left us and all we can be is grateful for the time he spent. I wish I could have showed him my appreciation more. It is time to bring Unique back in my bed, our bed, our house. It is time I care for her and show my love.

Harry (in contemplation) - I have traveled looking for some kind of teaching. Some kind of experience that connects me to something that I can't quite grasp yet. But the village scene was so serene and eventful. I felt useful serving in a way I never thought I would. Most of my time in India has been adventure into an unknown. Now I am in the drama of life. How do I deal with this new feeling that I have towards the village, and friends I made. And Saashini, I think she likes me. She drove me here even though she knows I was willing to be dropped off at a bus or train station. "Get a good sleep before you travel." Is what she said.

Saashini (in desire of relationship) - Does Harry feel my desire for something more than a passing friendship? I don't want to be an acquaintance, just someone he met for a short time. I sense that this man has a heart of gold. I need to know someone who let's his heart guide him. Maybe I am just fooling myself to think romance can be had with this foreigner who happened to walk into my

home village. Someone is hearing my silent prayer. There is a universal law that I believe in. How can I convince him to stay, even if it's just a few days. Enough time to know me more, outside of the village scene. Now here I am in all this chatter. Maybe I need to meditate and find that quiet space that leads to surrender.

Morning comes fast. Harry wakes, it's pre dawn the sky is changing into early morning. He quietly looks over at Karan's bed. Karan is not there. He slips out of bed and puts on his pants and shirt. He goes out into the hall, Saashini's bedroom door is still closed. He walks out towards the small patio that has a view of the farm fields and distant hills. He sees Karan's back. Karan is just sitting there, looking out at the fields. Harry opens the door and Karan turns to look.

"Namaste, Harry."

"Namaste, Karan. Can I sit here with you?"

"Yes, Harry, please sit with me."

I sit and we both are looking at the horizon waiting for the sun to appear.

"Harry, in our tradition the sun can represent Krsna. The creator of all that is. We like to greet Krsna in the morning and say good night when the sun sets. What do you do when you watch the sun?"

"Sometimes I give gratitude for a brand new day. There is a song I sing called "It's A Beautiful Day". Sometimes I do nothing, I just stare at it or I should say just below it and quickly glance directly at it. It makes me see dots."

Maybe you can teach me the song, "It's a Beautiful Day". Will you stay here with us?"

There is an awkward silence. They both look back at the horizon. The abrupt question seems to startle Harry. He turns his head to look at Karan. He sees the boy in a different way. He senses the

need that Karan desires a father. And he recalls his past, how he felt cheated by his father, who was a father figuratively speaking. But one who was not fulfilling the needs that he had growing up. He knew his father as a working dad who had no time for real connection. His dad once asked him, during the divorce, "Harry, why don't you want to live with me? Did I do something wrong?" And the only response he could give his dad was a shrug of his shoulders, not knowing what to say. And conversation ceased, with his father showing his pain. As if he knew that he was never really there for Harry. That he had a false pretense of his role as a father. "I am sorry Harry. Can you forgive me?", was all his dad could say.

Harry places his arm around Karan's shoulder.

Karan's head tilts into Harry's shoulder.

"Look, Karan, there it is, the first part of the sun is peeking at us."

"I am glad that you are sitting with me Harry. In the village, I have nobody that watches the sun come up, with me, in the morning."

"It is so much better to share this with a friend, is that what you are thinking Karan?"

"I am friends with Jayadeesh, and Saadhana. You Harry, are more than a friend. I will miss you when you leave. Will you stay another day to watch the sunrise with me?"

Harry squeezes Karan, "let us enjoy this moment together. You have asked me a question I can not answer right now. Please feel my love for you and this moment we share together."

Karan gently shakes his head, still on Harry's shoulder. He leaves it there and feels tears well up in his eyes. The rising sun has a glistening effect through his tears. He feels a sensation that he can not describe to himself. He feels that something is missing in his life.

Quietly, with hardly a disturbance, a body slowly sits on the other side of Karan, and an arm is extended over his other shoulder, it also grasp Harry's arm. Karan looks at his mother, who is staring at the rising sun.

"I will watch the rising sun with you my son."

## Chapter 11

Jayadeesh along with most of the community went to a locale festival to celebrate the harvest season. The eldest seniors were left behind. Am'mam'ma is sensing something, a calling of some sort. A feeling deep in her soul. She slowly moves out of her abode, squints at the late afternoon sun and looks over at Kamadhenu. "How are you, my wonderful friend who has given me so much. Come let's take a walk." She takes the loose rope off of Kamadhenu's neck, leaves it tied to the tree and drops it onto the bed of hay. Kamadhenu slowly gets up. The cow gives a questionable look, and moos, "Where will we go Am'mam'ma?"

"We will go to the new temple. The grass is starting to grow back since the consecration. Let us go." And with that gentle command they start their procession through the empty village that has a handful of elderly who were left behind. When they arrive at the new temple Am'mam'ma sits in

the shaded side of the sacred cow. "Go Kamadhenu, you will find me here after you graze."

Kamadhenu looks at her and he sits beside her.

Kamadhenu gives a snort, "You are resting here.

Why have you chosen the cow deity and not Shiva?"

"My friend I am ready to leave this plane. And it is you I want to honor this day. You have stayed with me all of these years and supplied me with your sweet milk. My curd and yogurt was the best in the village. The ghee, and cheese was a sought after treat. It was you who provided. You have been my connector to the next life."

Kamadhenu huffs then makes a licking sound,

"How so Am'mam'ma? I am caste as a cow you where once an elder statesman."

"You, oh docile one, showed me many ways to be generous and remain calm and you have helped to purify my soul."

"Am'mam'ma, it is said that I carry the souls of dead people."

"I am ready to be with those souls who went before me. We are considered all one in a collective consciousness. I am glad you are with me this day. Now I will prepare myself for my final breaths on this earthly plane. And I will honor the Mother Goddess right here as my last ceremony for the abundance of this village, my daughter and her husband and their son, Jayadeesh and their daughter, Saashini. May the family dynamics of the collective village be well intended for the good of all. And may this earth always prosper with nature's abundance."

Am'mam'ma gently closes her eyes. Kamadhenu does the same, her long eyelashes rest on her lower eyelid. There is a peaceful stillness in this place.

The villagers return from their day of celebration. Dusk is in the sky and the land is losing light. Unique returns to her empty home and sees a big figure under the tree in her courtyard.

“Kamadhenu, what are you doing here? Did Jayadeesh not tie you to the tree?”

Kamadhenu rises, she meanders over to where Unique is standing and places her warm nose on Unique's heart and with a gentle shove brushes past Unique. She takes two strides stops and looks back at her. Unique understands that Kamadhenu wants her to take her (the cow) home. She follows the cow, but instead of turning to go to Am'mam'ma's place, Kamadhenu turns towards the pasture. They come to the new temple and Kamadhenu circles to the back of the sacred cow deity. She settles her cumbersome body down to the ground next to Am'mam'ma's limp body.

Unique crouches down then sits next to Am'mam'ma. She takes a hand and feels the cold skin. Then she presses Am'mam'ma's head to her breast. And that is how Aditya and Jayadeesh find the three of them early in the morning just before the sun rises.

Jayadeesh is first to speak, "Am'mam'ma!"

That startles unique awake. She looks at the scene as if waking from a dream. She turns to Aditya, "Aditya, I traveled with Am'mam'ma to her place with other souls. She is at peace and leaves us in a state of causeless love. Her death is an act of causeless love for all who are part of this collective village."

Kamadhenu stirs, rises and heads out towards the lake where she submerges into the water. The three of them watch in silence.

Slowly they take Am'mam'ma's limp body and place it on the alter at the base of the Shiva Lingam.

Aditya gives an instruction, "The body will rest here, we will gather the village and have a cremation the next day. Jayadeesh, tell your sister of your grandmother's passing into the next realm."

Jayadeesh places a kiss on Am'mam'ma's forehead and leaves for home.

"Unique, it is time for you to return to our bed. I have been harsh about Saashini's dalliance. It has been too long ago. It is time for me to forgive. It is time for me to know compassion."

Unique raises her gnarly, arthritic hands and cradles Aditya's face. She draws it to her lips and places a warm kiss on her man's lips. They look in each others eyes and know that their souls were not meant to leave the other. They walk back to the village to spread the news.

## Epilogue

Death seems far away for me. Yet my age is an indicator that it could be near. You never know. My contemplation these days concerns the impact that I leave behind. I started this story with the intention to address the aging people in our lives. A plea to the generations that we will leave behind to not leave us behind. As my thoughts progressed during this writing I ceased desiring to be taken care of. That thought became a fear of what the future might bring. Old, crippled, the body losing its strength and ability to manage. The mind forgetting things, the loss of hearing and hair and beauty. And as I recognize these patterns of what it may feel like "When They Leave" I realize that I do not want to give that fear any power.

There is so much more to aging. There is the wisdom to continue to be a vessel for life to flow. I have such an appreciation to stay connected with younger generations. To observe and be with their various energies. And to gain wisdom from them, too. It is so refreshing to know that there is so much more to experience in this lifetime.

## Acknowledgements

All of life. Yeah, acknowledging all of life is huge for me. It's not just a handful of people to give credit to, it's all of life. And even when I didn't know the language of the tongue I learned the language of the heart. And the smile, and the frown, and the anger, and the language of the body. I appreciated the color of the garments people wore, and the rings on the toes. I saw the cracked skin on the bare heels that walk the earth. And the mannerisms of people. I discovered what the caste system meant in India. India is where this story poured from my heart. That's another acknowledgement that I have for my Mukti Guru's. Their wisdom has shown me the way that the heart talks to the mind. They have shown me how the energy flows. They have shown me the way to tap into the Divine Intelligence. And when I surrender to the present "flow" then I am living life at it's fullest free from limitations.

Author's books:

Circumstance and Consequences

The Essence of Existence

Tapas

The Sawtooth Community

The Gorge of the Mango Tree

What the Seashore Left Behind

When They Leave

Purgatory

Next Novels to be written;

The Ski Journals

The Journals of India

