

THE SHADOW
THAT SEEKS
THE SUN

ALSO BY RAY BROOKS

Blowing Zen: Finding an Authentic Life

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THE SHADOW THAT SEEKS THE SUN

FINDING LOVE, JOY AND ANSWERS ON THE
SACRED RIVER GANGES

RAY BROOKS



WATKINS

Sharing Wisdom Since
1893

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*Dedicated to
Rudra,
Usha Devi &
Jiddu Krishnamurti*



Dianne Brooks, co-writer
The Shadow That Seeks the Sun

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Links of interest at www.raybrooks.org



This is a small section of the Muni Ki Reti ghats on the banks of the River Ganges in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India. “Ghats” is a recurring word used throughout the book and describes a series of steps leading down to a river, particularly a holy river that is used for ritual bathing. In the distance is Ram Jhula, a suspension bridge.

Yogis and Bhogis

Rishikesh, 2007

“I am God. Give me one hundred rupees!”
An ash-smeared *sadhu* stood in front of me, his brass pot thrust under my nose.
“You must be kidding, *baba*.”*

“Yes, sir,” he said, wobbling his head, “I am not kidding.”

With a dismissive flick of my hand, I stepped out of his way and walked on.

“Fifty rupees, sir!”

I kept walking.

“Ten rupees!” God yelled his final offer.

The fruit seller, delighted with the show, called after me: “One rupee days are over, sir.”

The local street vendors in Rishikesh call men like God “money *babas*” or “*bhogis*”. They claim that they

* *baba* is a term of respect or endearment used for an ascetic who has given up the material world

are not true holy men, just beggars or even criminals on the run. With so many foreigners visiting this small pilgrimage town, it has become a very lucrative area for *babas* who like to prey on the naiveté of “spiritual” tourists. If you spent any time on the ghats, it’s easy to identify true *sadhus* by the way they conduct themselves. “True *sadhus*” live by the will of God, never beg, and accept money or food only if it is offered. They tend to stay away from the busy tourist areas during the day, preferring to spend their time in contemplation and meditation. And those renunciates who live in the forest will come down to the river before sunrise to perform their *pūjā** rituals. You would never see a *bhogi* taking a holy dip in the Ganga at 4 a.m.

As the clock tower at Parmarth Ashram solemnly struck nine, the morning sun was burning off the last of the river mist. Hundreds of cormorants sat on the boulders in the shallow part of the river and more were landing. As the birds settled, they spread their wings and warmed their bodies.

Another ashram decided it was nine o’clock and manually banged out an irregular beat. In the distance, I could hear more bells counting out the time. There wasn’t a clock in India that was right.

The “Monkey Punky Gang,” as Dianne has named a small group of the local children, trotted towards me grinning playfully and chattering away with one

* *pūjā* is the act of making a spiritual connection with the “divine,” and it can be performed through invocation, prayer, song, or ritual

another. They wore woolen hats that looked like tea cozies, ill-fitting sweaters full of holes, long ragged skirts and baggy trousers that covered their skinny legs. Some wore flip-flops; others, plastic shoes two sizes too big. There would be no school for them today. Today, and most days, they were the flower sellers responsible for the small flower bowls that people floated down the river as offerings to Mother Ganga.

“*Sachin!*” they screamed when they spotted me and rushed over to see if I had anything for them.

“Flaaawar Sachin?”

“No flower,” I said.

“Please, Sachin,” they begged, jostling one another for my business.

The secret to a peaceful life on the ghats, especially if staying a long time, is to avoid buying offerings from the children. If you bought from one, you had to buy from all. I often saw Westerners realizing their dream of meditating on the banks of the sacred Ganga, only to be swamped by children who insisted that they buy an offering. Unless you were firm and told them to clear off, they would never leave you alone.

One of the children spotted the ferry coming. The gang waved goodbye and dashed off to terrorize the passengers.

“Good morning!”

I looked in the direction of the greeting and recognized a man I’d met on the ferry the previous day. He was on the early morning crossing, and the

small boat that went between Muni Ki Reti and Swag Ashram was just pulling out. He'd seen me running to the dock and had called out to the helmsman, who, in turn, yelled to me to wait as he maneuvered the boat back to the rickety jetty. With an outstretched arm the ticket collector managed to grab my hand as I jumped across the rapidly widening gap between dry land and the boat. The passengers commented on my safe landing, and I thanked the crew for letting me on board. I'd just spent weeks searching for a flute teacher who could show me some of the classical India *raga* on my *shakuhachi*,* and was grateful I wouldn't be late for my first lesson.

Among the few people making the short journey, most were wrapped in ragged cloth and blankets, hunched against the cold wind blowing down from the Himalayas. The man who had shouted for the boat to stop was sitting across from me, and he acknowledged my thanks with a nod and a smile. He was distinguished-looking and conspicuously free of the religious paraphernalia so ubiquitous around here. I guessed that he must be of Anglo-Indian descent because of his light skin and unusual blue eyes. He was remarkably well dressed and I couldn't help but admire his style. He wore a well-cut, collarless navy-blue jacket – the type made popular by India's post-independence Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in the late 1940s – and a beautifully made burgundy pashmina scarf. Despite

* Japanese bamboo flute

his silver-grey hair, it was hard to say how old he was – sixty, perhaps, or a well-preserved seventy.

As is the custom when crossing this sacred river, the *sadhu* sitting on my right, dressed in a faded saffron robe, brought his palms together at his forehead and bellowed a blessing to Mother Ganga: “*Om Namah Shivaya!*” He then leaned over the side of the boat, scooped a handful of water, and threw it over his head, with most of it splashing on mine.

“Thanks *baba!*” I said, wiping the water from my face. “That should bring me good health in the New Year.” The distinguished man laughed and said, “Not if it goes in your mouth it won’t.”

The *sadhu* grinned at me and then uttered more prayers before he took another scoop and drank it.

A *sadhu* sitting to my left yelled “*Jai Sri Ram!*” and then tossed a palmful of the purifying elixir over his head, drenching me once again.

“It’s wise to keep one’s mouth tightly shut when crossing this river,” the distinguished man said with an accent that was more British than Indian. He seemed to be finding it all very amusing.

“Yes, sacred or not, that’s good advice. Works quite well on land, too.”

“All rivers are sacred,” he said, “but sadly this one is not sacred enough to drink from these days.”

The old Rajasthani pilgrim next to him leaned over the side of the boat and began filling a large plastic container. His tiny wife, withered from a life of hardship

in the desert, was talking incessantly about the sacred “*paani*,” as her husband stretched farther and farther toward the water. Within a second he screamed as the weight of the bottle pulled his skinny body from his seat and wrenched the half-full container from his hand. The Anglo-Indian man instantly reached out and grabbed a handful of his clothes to keep the poor man from falling overboard.

“That was close,” I said, noting his quick reactions.

The ferry landed with a bump. I said goodbye to my travel companion and hurried off to my music lesson.

“Ah, good morning,” I said, surprised to see him again. “That was quite an eventful crossing yesterday, wasn’t it? How are you?”

“Very well. Good to see you again.”

“I see you’ve found the best bench in all of Northern India.” The view across the river encompassed many prestigious ashrams and small hermitages. The giant Shiva* statue at Parmarth tilted, half submerged in the blue-green, glacial-melt water.

“The monsoon flooding dragged poor Shiva off his pedestal again this year,” I said, admiring the impact the great “creator and destroyer” made.

“Yes, indeed it did. Lord Shiva is not having much luck at Parmarth. Maybe he should find himself a new ashram.”

* Hindu god: Shiva, the destroyer, is one of three powerful mythological deities. He is responsible for the destruction of our imperfections to ensure our spiritual progress. (Brahma is the creator and Vishnu, the preserver.)



Giant statue of Lord Shiva at Parmarth Ashram before the monsoon destroyed it

“It’s true. This must be the third time he’s tried to leave in as many years.”

“Your name is Sachin?” he asked, apparently surprised that a foreigner would have an Indian name.

“No, only the children call me Sachin, after the

cricketer. I sometimes play cricket with them on the ghats, though they don't let me bat any more. I've hit a couple of lucky sixes into the river, which means they have to go all the way to the Bay of Bengal to get their ball back."

"Ah, the great Sachin Tendulkar!"

"Yes. Not so bad being named after an Indian cricket god, wouldn't you say? My real name is Ray, by the way."

"Nice to meet you, Ray. I'm Rudra." We shook hands.

"Are you visiting Rishikesh, Rudra?"

"No, I sometimes stay here during the winter months. But my home is up in Mussoorie."

"Oh, whereabouts?"

"A little village to the east of the mall, called Sisters Bazaar. Do you know it?"

"Yes, I know it well. My wife and I had hoped to make that area home base during the winter, but we discovered that it was much too cold for us."

"Yes, February in particular can be quite bitter. I'd ask you to sit, Ray, but it's getting a little warm here. I usually move closer to the water at this time of day."

He stood and asked which way I was going. I was going to Dayananda Ashram. He was heading in the same direction and invited me to walk with him.

"I can tell by your accent that you're from England," he said. "What part are you from?"

"I was born in Newcastle but moved to London when I was 16."

“I’ve never been to Newcastle but I lived in London in my twenties, in a place called Holborn.”

“I know Holborn. What were you doing there?”

“My parents packed me off to university after I graduated from school.”

As we walked along the ghats, I noticed Om Prakash, the owner of Shanti’s Restaurant, and waved. He was standing at the water’s edge and had just finished his morning *pūjā*, offering Mother Ganga her daily glass of milk.

“How long have you been coming here, Ray?”

“To Rishikesh? For quite a few years. And to India, probably for more than twenty-five years by now. I return with my wife nearly every winter.”

“How marvelous.”

“Yes, we love it, but I must say it gets harder and harder to cope with all the traffic and motorbikes these days. We’re always on the lookout for a new base. Somewhere quieter. India feels like it’s becoming a little crazier every year.”

“Yes, it’s certainly changing fast.”

“Mostly for the better, though. I was in and out of the bank yesterday in ten minutes!”

“Yes, I know what you mean. I just booked a train ticket to Delhi online. Marvelous stuff.”

“Back in the eighties, my record for waiting in a bank was two hours. I remember one time, in Almora, I was trying to persuade the clerk to cash my traveler’s checks when the fuse board on the wall burst into flames.

All the lights went out, the room filled with smoke, and the place broke into pandemonium. The security guard rushed over with a bucket of sand in one hand and his shotgun in the other. I thought he was going to give me the bucket, but instead he handed me the gun and started throwing the sand onto the fuse box. The good ol' days."

"The gun probably wasn't loaded anyway," Rudra said, laughing.

We reached the spot where he liked to sit. I was familiar with this section of the ghats, which had been partially damaged by floods last year.

"This is probably the quietest spot along this side of the river," he said, as he removed his jacket. "Please, feel free to join me, if you're not in a hurry."

I was enjoying his company and decided to accept his invitation.

We made ourselves comfortable a couple of steps up from the water's edge. The bottom flagstone step was submerged in the river and had turned a deep pinkish-red color. The sound of rushing water filled my ears, demanding a few moments of silence. A garland of marigolds and red rose petals floated by, followed by another garland, a plastic bag and a lone flip-flop.

"May I ask, Ray? Why the fascination with India for so many years?"

I stalled for a moment and smiled, remembering my childhood. I couldn't tell him it all began with a knock on my grandmother's front door...

"I'll be there in a minute, Terry!"

Another knock came, much louder.

"Jesus, Terry, you're early!" I shouted as I pulled open the door. "Oh, sorry mister!" I stared in amazement. The man standing there was not Terry and he was certainly not from around here; miners never wore clothes like his unless they were going to a fancy dress party. Wrapped around his head was a canary-yellow length of cloth, framing a shining brown face, a thick black beard and a moustache that curled at its edges. He was wearing a tweed blazer, a lime-green shirt and a bright purple tie, and, in his arms, he held an open suitcase full of more colorful ties.

"Is your mother in, sonny boy?" he asked, speaking with the strangest accent I had ever heard. I didn't respond. I was hypnotized by the sight of him and his ties.

"Is your mother at home, son?"

I shook my head. "I live with my granma." Unable to resist, I reached out and touched a tomato-red tie, rubbing it between my fingers.

"They're a bit bright for my granddad, mister."

"That's pure Indian silk, sonny boy, the finest money can buy. Tell your grandmother I'll call again."

Off he went to the next house. I grabbed my football, slammed the door, and followed him, remaining at a distance all the way along the row of terraced houses. Each time he glanced back at me, I turned the other way and dribbled my ball. When a neighbor's door

opened, I had a good stare at him. One woman asked where he was from.

“Newcastle, madam,” he said.

“No man, yer silly bugga. Where yer really from?”

“India, madam.”

“India! Eee, you’re a long way from home, pet.”

I followed him all the way to the bus stop and stood next to him while he waited. When the bus arrived, he turned to me and said, “I’m very glad to have met you today, sonny boy.” Then he shook my hand and said goodbye.

That night, when Grandad returned from his shift at the pit. I blurted out every detail about my new friend in the strange yellow hat. He was in a good mood and laughed at my enthusiasm. “Hold your horses will yer, Kemosabe. I’ve just come through the bloody door.” Granma handed him a mug of tea and said there was a bucket of hot water waiting for him in the scullery.

Later that evening Grandad showed me a map in our old world atlas. “That’s India, lad.” It was exactly the same shape as the damp patch on my bedroom ceiling. He told me that India was once part of the great British Empire. The way Grandad pronounced the word “India” carried me to a faraway land, teeming with mysterious people who wore colorful hats and neckties. I decided then and there that I wanted to go to India when I grew up.

“Well, my fascination with India goes back a long way, Rudra. What brings my wife, Dianne, and me back every year is our love of the mountains and

the rural areas of Northern India, and – the old British Raj connection has always intrigued us. I’m also very interested in Indian philosophy, which is a big part of the attraction for me. It’s a funny relationship, I feel so frustrated here at times, but the beauty and chaos of India offer incredible magic moments that I haven’t experienced anywhere else.”

“Yes, I’ve heard this said about India. The contrasts can be quite intense here, can’t they?”

There was a long pause and again the sound of water filled my ears.

“Ray, you mentioned that you were on your way to Dayananda Ashram.”

“Yes. I go most days. At this time of year Swami Dayananda is away in Southern India, so the ashram is virtually empty. It’s a quiet place to sit without being disturbed. I like the library there too, so I often go and read in the afternoon.”

“Are you interested in any particular teachings, Ray, or just Indian philosophy in general?”

“Well, at first, I studied Zen philosophy, but over the years my studies have led me to the traditional *Advaita** non-duality teachings. I’ve also studied some of the lesser known Indian teachers as well.”

He began to laugh. “There are certainly plenty of those to choose from here. Is Swami Dayananda your teacher?”

* A vedantic doctrine that identifies the individual self (Atman) with the ground of reality (Brahman)

“No. But I’ve read several of his books. I would say the nearest I’ve ever come to having a teacher was Jiddu Krishnamurti. Are you familiar with his work?”

“Yes. I’ve read a couple of his books and I saw him speak once in Chennai – of course, it was Madras in those days. He liked to put the cat amongst the pigeons, didn’t he?”

“That’s what I liked about him. I attended his talks in California many years ago and managed to get a private meeting with him just before he died.”

“You met him? How wonderful. I always liked the way he challenged organized religion and our Indian *gurus*.”

“Yes, me too. I heard that the CIA investigated him at one point during the sixties but found he was ‘only talking’, so he wasn’t seen as a threat to the US. I also read somewhere that he was called ‘the *guru’s guru*’.”

“The *guru’s guru*. You couldn’t get a better title than that, could you? Krishnamurti might have been seen as a threat if they had understood what he was trying to convey. He spoke of a revolution, but not the kind that would interest the CIA.”

“He definitely challenged our beliefs, didn’t he? He seemed to speak without any fear.”

“Yes, that’s exactly right. He spoke from direct experience, and in that, there is no fear.” He paused for a moment and held my gaze.

“So, did you find Krishnamurti’s teachings helpful, Ray?”

“Yes, to some degree. He became an important influence in my life, and his teachings have made a difference to how I see things. I discovered him at a time when I was starting to question the way I was living. Even though I didn’t fully understand everything he was saying, I felt he was speaking the truth, and I stuck with him for many years. But, I’m still trying to understand the deeper meaning of what he said, and grasp his ‘observer is the observed’ teaching.”

“So you haven’t finished searching, Ray?”

“Are we ever finished searching, Rudra? It seems like everyone is searching for some sort of meaning. Don’t you think?”

“Well, it certainly appears that way. Everyone longs and looks for happiness. You see this fellow coming towards us. He longs for freedom, which is really just another word for peace and happiness.”

His gaze was directed towards a man walking along the water’s edge. He had long silver hair and was dressed in white all except for a pair of bright purple gloves.

“In the Hindu religion he is what we call a Muni. He has taken a vow of silence. It’s his method of finding liberation.”

Rudra waved to him and a purple hand waved back.

We sat quietly and watched an osprey circle and swoop over the river. This is what I loved about being in India - the vibrancy, the unexpected, the chance encounters, the conversations that quickly moved from small talk into the question of life and death.

Talk One

“It’s funny, I feel such an exquisite sense of freedom just sitting here next to the Ganga talking with you, Rudra. This qualifies as one of those magic moments I was telling you about. If there was nothing more than this, it would be enough.”

“You know, Ray,” - he hesitated, perhaps unsure whether to carry on - “heightened experiences only have significance if they point to what is already here.”

“Well, I’ve always felt that they point to something beyond the ordinary. I doubt if I’d be sitting here with you today if it weren’t for these experiences. More than likely, I’d be caught up in the system, living the ‘whole catastrophe’. They’ve motivated me to make changes, to keep going, to keep discovering more about myself.”

Rudra nodded unconvincingly and looked out across the river. Undeterred, I carried on.

“I’d like to think these experiences have brought me to this point, Rudra. It was a heightened experience that changed the direction of my life, many years ago.”

“Ray,” - he hesitated again, this time there was a long pause before he spoke - “Ray, is any of what you’ve just said true?”

I was startled by the directness of his question.

“You see, there are no ‘experiences’. There is *only*

TALK ONE

experience, *this* that is happening now. For there to be experiences there would have to be a separation between the observer and that which is being observed. In reality there is no such condition. This is the very heart of the matter. Ray, if you're really interested in the truth you have to see this."

"I know what you're referring to, but that has never been my experience. I'm certain that what I'm looking for is connected to these experiences. They've shown me that there's more to life than the mundane and that there is the possibility of freedom."

"Whether you recognize it or not, you have never been apart from experience. Have you ever experienced a time when there wasn't experience? Ray, what you're looking for is not found in experiences. What you're looking for is beyond the very idea of freedom itself and not in future 'experiences'. If we don't remain open and aware of what these 'experiences' are directly pointing to, it's easy to be carried away by them and to make the mistake of believing yourself to be something perceived - something separate from that which is already present. Without seeing this clearly, and based on what you've said, you will always be searching for freedom in some future experience and missing the obvious."

"The obvious? What is the obvious that I'm missing, Rudra?"

"*This*, Ray. The last place you look - your *actual experience*, which is right here. This changeless experience is so familiar, so obvious that it goes unnoticed.

As for ‘experiences’ bringing you to this point, how could anything bring you to where you have never left, or could ever leave? No matter how sublime the experience, it only ever points to *this*, where you already are.”

I looked away, unable to stand the scrutiny of his gaze any longer.

“Stop resisting what you’re hearing for a moment, Ray, and look at your experience right now. What do you find?”

“What I find is you and I talking together sitting by the river.”

“I wasn’t asking you for a story about what is apparently going on. Close your eyes and look. What do you find?”

Without giving a description, I was unsure how to answer.

“Well, just me.”

“Yes, just the experience of what you normally refer to as you? So you find only experience, right?”

“I just want to be clear what you mean by the word ‘experience’, Rudra.”

“What it feels like to be you – beingness.”

“Okay. Yes, then just experience.”

“You can find only being, yes?”

“Yes, just being.”

“Irrefutable *being* that needs no proof – aware-beingness, that proves all else. Is there any effort required to know this beingness?”

“Well, no. None at all.”

“Right, there’s no effort or special conditions for it to *be*. It is so obvious that it is disregarded and believed to be a by-product of the brain or some kind of higher power. When I used the word ‘obvious’, Ray, I wasn’t being condescending in any way. I’m referring to that which you have just seen clearly without any effort. That which is closer than close, yet totally overlooked. Just beingness, as you are, and not what thought says that you are, or should be.”

“So you’re suggesting that these heightened experiences that I’ve had get in the way of finding the obvious?”

“You don’t have to find the obvious. You *are* the obvious. And what is stopping you from discovering this is the idea that being is not present and is found in some future experience. You’re only a glance away from seeing this for yourself. Why not trust your actual experience instead of trusting your beliefs?”

“But Rudra, the freedom during these experiences is unmistakable. If the clue to this freedom isn’t in our experiences, where else could it possibly be?”

“Ray, you’ve just seen where it is. Where else could it be? All that keeps you from seeing this is the common belief that you are a ‘person’, in a ‘body’, experiencing a world outside. You and experience are not two things. There is only ever experience. Sorry, I’m already making it sound too complicated. It’s much simpler than words can express.”

I could hardly believe the direction our

conversation was taking. Apart from Krishnamurti, I had never met anyone who spoke with such insight and certainty. He was so open and at ease, and there was not a trace of preaching in his voice. I felt exhilarated in his company and was definitely in no hurry to leave.

“I can see you’re very interested in all of this, Ray. But as long as you believe that you are separate and independent from experience – that there is an inside self and an outside world – I can assure you that you’ll be like a dog chasing its own tail.”

“Ever since meeting Krishnamurti, intellectually, I have always known that the separation between the ‘experiencer’ and the ‘experience’ is the very root of the problem, but, in actuality, this has never become clear to me.”

“And it will never become clear as long as you believe you are looking from the point of view of an experiencer – a separate self.”

“Who or what knows that the experiencer and the experience are not separate?”

“That which is hearing this voice; the simple knowing of this current experience, without interpretation. All that you know of yourself, beyond any doubt, is that you are self-aware.”

I’d been sitting for almost an hour and the stone step was beginning to feel uncomfortably hard. I took off my jacket and sat on it. Rudra seemed to realize that I needed time to digest what he was saying and paused for several minutes.

“When you see clearly that there is only one

‘knowing’, one timeless experience of *this*, what problems could there possibly be?” He paused. “Ray, we’re entering territory that will take more than a few minutes to explore. Do you have time to continue?”

“Yes, I have plenty of time.”

“All right. If I may ask, Ray, where do you find yourself when these magic moments come to an end?”

“Good question. Well, it’s as if I have one foot in the past and one foot in the future. Longing for something – ‘becoming’ might be a good word to describe it. A feeling of being unsettled might sum it up.”

“Unsettled, yes. Wanting things to be different. Is that sense of not being complete with you now?”

“Now? No. Not at all. I’m really enjoying our talk and there’s an experience of wellbeing. I’m just here. I’m present and I’m aware. I couldn’t think of a better place to be.”

“Be careful here. Present and aware are not two separate things. Presence-awareness is the experience of beingness itself. So, yes, there is just experience – the indescribable certainty that you exist. When I use the word ‘experience’, I am not referring to experiences in time, but only the awareness of ‘now’, which are one and the same.”

“I’m more familiar with using the word ‘awareness’ in these types of conversations. Are you using ‘experience’ as a synonym for ‘awareness’?”

“Yes. Awareness is just another name for experience. The meaning of awareness can be misunderstood and

abstract, where experience is known by all. So, Ray, when you look now, there is only the certainty of experience – this aware-beingness. There’s not a sense of becoming or wanting a more pleasurable experience.”

“Yes, that’s right. There’s just aware-beingness.”

“Have you ever known a time when you were not this aware-beingness?”

“Well, there are moments when I’m busy and I forget that I’m aware, or when I’m lost in thought and off in a dream world.”

“For thought to be at all, surely awareness must be there. You would have to be present for thought to arise, wouldn’t you? If not – if something has existence outside of awareness – it would have to be a belief, wouldn’t it?”

Although somewhat mystified, I was fully absorbed by his words. Rudra could see that I was grappling with his statements and kept quiet again for a moment.

“Ray, ‘experience’ or ‘awareness’ or whatever you want to call it, are just other names for ‘you’. That is, the simple sense of ‘I’.”

“I’ve always thought ‘I’ was the problem.”

“We are not talking about the ‘I’ belief that comes with a story of past and future. I’m referring to the simple experience of ‘I’ that is complete and perfect. Beingness itself.”

“If beingness is already complete, why does it leave perfection and go in search of a better state? That seems to be all it ever does.”

“You never leave perfection to go on a search. There’s not two of you; one looking for another. Thought appears unauthored, just like any other appearance, creating the illusion of separation. Once this seamless oneness divides into entities – mind, objects and world – the divisions seem very real. Then thought goes on an endless path, searching for a self that has never been lost. It’s a futile path.”

Rudra paused and stared across the river.

“Ray, there is only ever *this* – this present moment – and it is all you, all awareness. Without you, nothing could possibly be.”

I looked at the scene around me. The sun illuminated the pink walls of the ashram across the river. About one hundred yards to my left, a pack of dogs were barking and fighting over something snatched from the remains of a smoldering funeral pyre. A songbird alighted on a nearby rock, shook its feathers, bobbed its tiny body and began to sing with startling volume and beauty.

“As I said, Rudra, apart from a few glimpses, I understand what you’re saying only conceptually. I’ve tried so hard, for so long, to see this. In truth, there’s something I’m just not getting.”

“Something *thought* is not getting – thought cannot get this. Thought cannot know peace. It can only know *about* peace. Ray, it sounds as if you simply want to move from where you are to where you want to be. That new place is peace and happiness. Is this true?”

For a moment, the beauty of the bird’s song

overpowered his question. I looked at Rudra and then back at the bird, but it was gone.

“Yes,” I said, a little disappointed with my answer. “As you’ve said, Rudra, everyone is looking for peace and happiness.”

“Ray, peace is not somewhere else. Peace is no other than the absence of resistance to what ‘is’. It is your ever-present nature, the light of aware-presence. It could never cease to shine. The difficulty lies in explaining its utter simplicity.”

Rudra’s words were firm but the timbre of his voice never changed and his expression remained calm. The Muni paraded past us again on what must have been his fifth lap. We didn’t speak for a few minutes.

“Ray, I’m sorry, I’d really like to stay longer, but I must attend to some business in town.”

“Yes, of course, Rudra. I hope I haven’t kept you?”

“No, I have enough time to get there. Such a pleasure talking to you this morning. I hope our conversation has been helpful in some way.”

“It has. Would it be possible to meet again?”

“Yes, of course. I can’t tomorrow, but how about on Wednesday at the same time?”

“I’ll be here.”

We stood up and Rudra placed his palms together.

“Ray, these magic moments are quite wonderful, but words cannot describe the beauty and the love of simply being. To be here, in this presence, is easy. All else is effort. *Namaste.*”