

# OnlyNess

By Santosh Jha

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## CHAPTER 1

The singularities of life have elemental eccentricities of happening and un-happening; almost as weird and randomized as love. The elements of one's own life and that of the equally precarious milieus are both patterned as well as un-patterned. The juxtaposition of symmetrical possibilities amid the larger probabilistic asymmetry of arbitrary milieus engender such beautiful marvels of life-living experiences, which people can accept only in one way – the destiny.

A resplendently beautiful woman, the empress of eclectic endowments of extremities of name, fame and flair, the reigning royalty of Hollywood's dream factory, the Oscar winner and highest paid actor is currently the subject of destiny. Like in love, she is unaware of the cryptic conspiracies of cosmic causalities, which has landed her in a sleepy small town of Rishikesh in India, the Yoga capital of the world; thousands of miles away from the colossal clutters of the Los Angeles, California in United States of America, where she belongs.

Destiny is much like love. Both happen and un-happen and neither way, one is sure whether it is good or bad. People always search for their destinies as well as love. Both are wired and wielded within as randomized probabilities. The co-incident and favorability of elements, somehow present themselves as pretext for something, which is not an external situation, rather an internal positioning. The moment, one accepts, love happens and destiny is signed in. Until then, possibilities hang in balance as un-happening.

Melissa Knowles is also out on a journey, unconsciously in search of her destiny. She and her resolve has already energized a patterning of causality, which she is innocently unaware of. However, what destiny has in store for her shall be decided not by factors outside in her near and far milieus, rather by what she finally accepts as something, which is her own internal positioning of consciousness.

An empress itself is neither a title nor a person. It is a positioning of consciousness, which is so much overwhelmed by endowments, both within and outside, that it invariably lands at the eye of the storm of life probabilities. Most women are born empress. It is an archetypal conspiracy of cosmic causalities to put women in a conscious positioning of empress. It is only natural that all

elemental probabilities shall look up to the empress for taking commands from her. The empress therefore is always in tumult. All empires are in turmoil, so is the empress.

It is only a yogi, who can see the patterns, which destinies unravel in the storm as, he is standing far away from it and happily detached to the cyclicity of cosmic conspiracies of elements. An empress and yogi together create a brilliant singularity, which holds the potential of unleashing beautiful probabilities of destinies. The cosmic conspiracy has almost taken a pattern. The empress has arrived and, the yogi is about to enter the scenario.

The time, space and circumstances have presented a bizarre coincidence. There however is no element of favorability, which people usually associate coincidence with, for beneficial destiny. As it is the rule; destinies are situationed one way and an empress has her own elements positioned the other way. The third dimension of the yogi can add its own causality.

In ancient Indian traditions of Hindu religion, there is said to be a general prohibition of any good work in a time-space situation, which is referred as '*sandhi-kaal*'. It is a time and space where one is about to end and other is yet to start. This period of transition is considered inauspicious and unproductive, as all elements of nature are weak and bendable. The weaknesses of elements aggravate the randomization of probabilities and it is believed, anything getting a start during the '*sandhi kaal*' shall have calamitous future.

Melissa is innocently unaware that she is starting a new phase of her life in the '*sandhi kaal*'. The wall clock shows 5.30 pm as she waits in an old wooden chair in the corner of a large hall of the yoga *ashram* (hermitage) for the *Acharya* (chief teacher) to arrive. The day has heralded its departure and night has not yet arrived. There is still enough humidity in the air as it is September. Rainy season is retreating but the winter has not yet showed up its pink comfort. The place itself is a junctional situation, as Rishikesh town is situated on the foothills of Himalayan mountain ranges. The Gangetic plains vanish here but the mountains start beyond the township.

Melissa too is in '*sandhi kaal*' of her life. She left her home in USA after a favorable phase of life seemed to have ended for her but even in India, she is not yet sure, what new turn she wants in her life. Sometimes back, she had read about yoga meditation and India seemed not so unfamiliar to her as once, while she was only six, her father had taken her to Rishikesh and

beyond. She had been fascinated by Himalayas and as her now estranged father, suggested that she visited Rishikesh and lived in a yoga *ashram* for some time, she accepted it.

The yoga *ashram* and the ambience are much beyond the description and pictures her father had sent her. The serpentine narrow road, which leads to the *ashram*, has bushes and trees laden with flowers on both sides, which she does not recognize. The fragrance of the wild flowers and rain-soaked soil has mixed to give a very earthy aroma, which feels like musk but is more pungent. The road opens into a slight slope, leading to an undulating valley like terrain, in the middle of which the *ashram* is situated.

From three sides of the *ashram*, the first series of Himalayan mountains rise like ramparts of a castle. The mountains are not very high and steep and are heavily clad with green trees and shrubs. Few scattered houses on them look like flags hanging on the trees. There are few openings between the mountains, making the air gush in. Melissa feels, the wind was not whispering, rather saying something loudly but amiably. The fourth side of the ashram opens on the southern side of the Himalayan mountain, where the mighty river Ganges flows with great force, as it readies itself to touch the plains. The sounds of gushing Ganges waters and mountain winds create a mesmerizing symphony.

Melissa instantly likes the milieu and settings. For the first time in so many days, she feels calm and light. Nature's own structural symmetry is so full of elemental bounties and multidimensionality that it offers refuge and reassurance to all emotions and consciousnesses of all lives. The wide and open vista of landscape, which further extends the limits of horizon, engenders a feeling of instant wellness to Melissa. The constricted consciousness of Melissa desperately needs larger and wider space for her emotions to get a free flight of escape. The synchronous sounds of wind and water penetrate her heart, where silence has started to suffocate her. She feels filled and free. Something touches her and she just responds by allowing her smile to get unburdened by her conscious resolve. Destinies do not barge in. They pass by and touch you by their soft elemental scent. As you do not resist and simply remain positively neutral, destinies start to unleash their causalities. Melissa has stopped resisting.

As she is received at the ashram gate, ushered in to the main hall and asked to wait for a while as *Acharya* was in *puja* (prayers), Melissa is beginning to feel slightly thrilled with expectations of

something good finally coming her way. Elements of destinies weave a wanton web of probabilistic causalities. What ends the web connects and what pattern it engenders may be precarious, however, the subject of destiny always provides the first will, consciously or unconsciously. Melissa is not only not resisting, she is now expecting!

The local police officer and one staff from the American Embassy, who accompanies Melissa from Delhi, are busy talking something. The police official is trying to assure the Embassy man that everything is fine here and there is nothing to worry. He is not even listening and moving swiftly to assess everything here. He makes some notes on his iPad and then turns to the police officer making queries. Melissa watches them arguing for a while and then turns her attention to better things.

She walks up to the other side of the hall, where a large window offers a spectacular view of the entire *ashram* few steps below and the mountains beyond. There are several small huts, some slightly bigger. All of them made of mud and wood, having thatched roofs. There is a small pond on one side of the huts, in which some ducks are swimming. Many rabbits of different colors are freely jumping all around. What amazes Melissa is the variety of birds everywhere in the ashram. There are many pitchers placed on trees beyond the pond and every now and then, some pigeons either enter them or leave out of the large hole of the pitchers. On all the walls of every hut, there are many small wooden boxes with small holes on the front side. As Melissa wonders about what they are, a sparrow comes flying, sits on the box and swiftly sneaks into the hole. Seconds later, another sparrow follows suit. Melissa thinks, the second one must have been the husband sparrow, who joined his wife as evening was approaching. She feels something tweaking in her heart and she begins to look away. A boy enters the hall with three small earthen pots. The police officer requests her to come and have tea. The embassy man takes two pots and moves towards Melissa, waiving his hand, gesturing her to stay there. The police officer understood the situation and moved out of the hall, taking his pot of tea. Melissa has no choice. She cannot avoid the man as her mother insisted that she would follow the instructions on her safety, as prescribed by the American Embassy officials.

Her mother calls her up often, even when she is busy campaigning for her election to Governorship. Her Senator friend, who is rumored to be more than just a good friend, has ensured that Melissa is under constant security cover of Embassy people. Melissa dislikes him

and would have refused all this but she knows, her mother would do what the Senator would say. He moved all his official advantages to woo Melissa. The Senator had offered his pad in Paris for Melissa as alternative to India but she had refused. Melissa has been away from her father, a university Professor, who lives in London but she knows, she would never wish to have the senator step in.

In the adjacent room, a 75-year old man is sitting on an elevated platform in *dhyanaashna* (meditative posture), his eyes closed. He looks very thin and frail but his face radiates calmness and childlike innocence. The thick and completely white hair and beard too cannot eclipse his smiling wheatish face. The *Acharya* rarely meets anyone from outside his *ashram* but he agrees to meet Melissa, as she is someone special for him.

A young man, named Shiv, dressed in long white robe is sitting beneath him. He keeps looking at the face of the old man, as if he is trying to read something from his facial expressions. This 34-year old man is the favorite disciple of the old *Acharya* and an accomplished yoga master. He is tall, bright skinned and manly. However, his body has the softness and malleability, which matches his seemingly boyish face and large feminine eyes. Like a perfect yogi, he has his heart, mind and body in singular linearity of compassionate being, which makes the body-mind consciousness a beautifully poised fusion of best of both feminine and masculine elements. This is in the ideal tradition of *Shiva*, the transcendental yogi, the ultimate metaphor of *ardhnareeshwar* (half male and female).

The *Acharya* opens his eyes and looks affectionately at the young man, who moves close to him in anticipation of something precious that the old man may say. The *Acharya* however picks up a piece of paper and writes something on it. He extends the paper to the young man. Two lines are written in Sanskrit, which are essentially a *shloka* (couplet) from the holy book *Geeta*. The *Krishna* saying the lines to *Arjuna*, which means – ‘he who seeks me in whichever disposition, I meet him in the same facilitative consciousness’. The young yogi folds the paper and puts it in his pocket. He accepts the orders of his guru and shall always obey his command enshrined in the *shloka*. He touches the feet of the old guru and both rise up to move to the hall, where Melissa awaits them.

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## CHAPTER 2

Melissa's mother is relieved and happy. The early morning call from Melissa extended her the reasons for it. Melissa talked well and seemed reasonably pleased with her start in India. She told her about how she liked the place and was satisfied with the beautiful small mud and wooden hut she was provided for her stay in the *ashram*. She assured her that she was feeling better and looked forward to making the best out of the change in her life. She sounded a bit irritated that the *Acharya* had excused himself from teaching her because of his poor health and instead delegated a young man to be with her for any help or, if she wishes, guide her in her learning. However, the way she described every detail about the *ashram* and its ambience, Melissa's mother felt sure that she had at least come out of the groove she had plunged herself into, after her failed suicide attempt, a month back.

She is relieved that the new milieu shall help Melissa come out of her messy past and lead her to redeem her life back to the tracks. She is happy because now she can afford to take her mind away from Melissa's woes and concentrate on her election campaign. Years back, she had accepted that Melissa had charted her life good bit away from her and she was just like a confession box to her. Melissa would never fail to post her of all her wrongs. That surely saved her life a month back.

They had never talked about it. She learnt it from tabloids that Melissa was dating this billionaire guy and was growing serious about him. She knew little about the man as she knew, America, like anywhere else, was having a deluge of young billionaires, who made it by some sudden and favorable turn of precarious markets, or the public mood for lapping up novelty, or simply inheriting a business empire. The mother and daughter had sort of, made an unwritten covenant; Melissa never talked to her about the Senator, the new man in her life and they never talked about her dad, whom her mother divorced when Melissa was only 12. She in turn never questioned any of her decisions, personal or professional. Anyway, since her teen days, Melissa would tell her straightaway, if she did something wrong or terrible. On that terrible night too,

when Melissa swallowed the sleeping pills, she instinctively typed her mother a message on her mobile phone, before she slipped away. This saved her.

Once again, she discovered all facts and fiction about her daughter's current situation from the morning newspapers. She was out of danger but still sleeping in her hospital bed. She did not have the occasion to know what made her do it. The front-page tabloid cover stories at least made it clear that the billionaire guy had dumped her for a younger girl, who was an upcoming model. Reports quoted Melissa's unnamed friend divulging it all and alleging that Melissa had no inkling about all this and as the guy dumped her on phone late evening, Melissa could not take the sudden abandonment and the way it was handed over to her, taking the extreme step.

She had asked the doctor, who supervised Melissa in the emergency, about her condition and state of mind and what the doctor told, had made her a bit confident. The doctor was a specialist and he assured her that Melissa had not done it to end her life. It was more of an angry reaction and could have been avoided, if she had people around her at the time of the impact of the suddenness of the news. He assured her that Melissa had not lost it, she was probably more angry than deeply hurt. "She is a brilliant girl, an accomplished performer. All good actors instinctively know how to enter into the skin of a role and then come out of it clean, after the end of the shot", the doctor said with a touch of professional tone in his voice, leaving her relaxed.

The worst was however yet to come. The crowd became unmanageable outside the hospital and the media people growingly pushed limits. The police guards inside the hospital intercepted a nurse, suspiciously moving around the special room, where Melissa was kept. She was a journalist and wanted an exclusive picture of Melissa on hospital bed. The police had tough time cordoning off the hospital gate for other patients. By evening, the tabloids had all sorts of stories to tell and suddenly, it looked like Melissa had so many friends, which the tabloids quoted as close ones, about whom even Melissa's mother had no idea. On television, breaking news had been replaced by panel discussions on all aspects of the event; from the trend of suicide in America to the history of Hollywood splits. Everyone, from media, average people, fellow celebrities or politicians seemed to know much more about Melissa and her inside stories than her own mother.



The media had a double dose of entertainment to dish out to gossip bazaar. Melissa was still in hospital and stories about her state of being and future were top stories. However, every story had a second lead story of how Melissa's mother was having a tough time as her daughter is doomed and her political career had received a jolt, before it could even take off. Stories carried her opposition leaders questioning the credibility of her as mother, who could not care her only daughter and was not even available at the time when her daughter needed her the most. They questioned the credibility of her abilities as leader.

Melissa's mother was not at all worried about media and possible troubles on her political career. She was a fighter and even loved and relished her warrior attitude. Like most women, who have to face the tough world full of hypocrisies and conflicts all alone, she felt rather thrilled and happy fighting it out. Winning becomes pleasantly intoxicating and struggle to win extends the much-needed nourishment and replenishment to the subconscious pride of egoistic consciousness. The media barrage and political onslaughts had surely filled her up with excitement and she had already sketched her counter-plans in her mind. What held her back was her bewilderment with Melissa factor. She was at loss how to face Melissa and how to strike a conversation with her on the entire mess up.

She and Melissa had never been in such a situation of unsettled emotions. Melissa erred even earlier and often landed herself in some trouble but Melissa simply informed her and it was perfectly understood between them that Melissa would herself handle it. She just had to tell her that she understood and appreciated. There never was the need for either of them being emotional and in need of intimate conversation. She understood that this time around, Melissa would probably need her as a mother and not just a 'friend', who only received unilaterally. The later arrangement was something she was always more comfortable with, rather than being happy about it, in all these years.

Intimacy and emotional oneness with someone is toughest in relationships when it suddenly comes up as a 'need' and the required linkages and past precedents, to make it happen, is missing for years. She needed some quiet moments alone and space to mull over how she would perform and present herself, when Melissa would gain consciousness and she would have to face her. She weighed her words but kept shuffling with them as they failed to satisfy her. Probably silence would be a better choice, she thought but even this option looked insufficient. The trouble was

that she was not sure, how Melissa would take her words, in her current state of mind. When life occasions the larger and real utility of words, their futility is the first realization. But, it is too late then. People seldom practice communication and expressions beyond the convenience of words in daily life. Words make good business; however has little utility, as carriers of deep and true emotions. Somehow, people are always happy with business of life and care a little about good utility and value of life.

Such is the cosmic construction that what one seeks desperately is what one usually gets. The nature meets him or her in a similar facilitative and catalytic consciousness. The subject's disposition and conscious positioning creates a 'gravitational pull', which draws synchronous and symmetrical elements of cosmos for facilitation. However, by the time attainments and endowments happen; there usually being a time lag; the subject's disposition & consciousness shifts to different plane. Usually, what initiates desire as expression of utility of attainment, ends up as futility, when endowment attains finality. This conflict is cosmic construction. It authors all stories of different 'protagonists', 'plots', 'preface' and 'progression'. People being theatres of the enactment of stories, are bound to have a false belief of 'pride of possession'. However, life itself has the last story.

Melissa's mother felt low and even irritated at her predicament. Her political career had lots of credit to her fine oratory skills. Her pride possession was her spontaneous and melodramatic speeches, which even her adversaries admitted, connected her audience with her magical charm. She knew where it touched people and spared no words to do it often, while she rattled her words in stupendously inter-woven series. However, sitting outside the ICU of the hospital, waiting for her daughter to come to senses, she had no choice to be honest to herself and admit that she had missed the natural touch of being a mother, even when she proved herself to be a brilliant politician. As time ticked away, she prayed for a miracle to show her a way.

Melissa's father finally managed to get past the crowd in front of the hospital gate and convinced a police officer to take him to her inside. Melissa's mother could not believe, he was standing in front of her. She could not understand what to say and how to react. Finally, she broke down and wept like a child. He kept assuring her that the worst was over and everything would take a new

and good beginning. He took charge of everything within minutes. He arranged a room for her, asked her to sleep, advising the doctors to administer a mild sedative to her. He took it on to himself to see that he is there when Melissa opens her eyes, asking her to relax and try to sleep. Melissa's mother was relaxed. She knew, he was meticulously systematic and brilliant at handling tough situations. She also felt, Melissa too would be better off seeing her father first up. The element of unexpectedness would probably help her be at ease, not seeing her mother but her father instead. She was not sure, whether she should say sorry first or thanks to Melissa's father. She dozed off thinking about it as the sedative took her in.

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### CHAPTER 3

Melissa wakes up at 5.30 in the morning and gets ready for her first day of yoga session. The night conversation with the young yogi is still in her mind. The *Acharya* assigned him to her for all her training and anything she wished to know and learn. The old man could not speak much in English but said to her that her father was a benefactor of the yoga *ashram*, therefore, she would be provided with special facilities. The young yogi was assigned for her personal and exclusive training and help.

The young yogi had come to her cottage the previous night and asked her if she was interested in learning yoga meditation. He had asked her to tell him why she had thought of coming here, what she wished to learn and anything particular she wanted to know about. She had no ready answer and seeing her baffled, the yogi had asked her to tell him next morning. She thought about it. She was not sure whether he knew about her or her recent past. She could not make up her mind whether to tell him everything or not. She thought, if she told her that she was feeling very low and her father sent her here to redeem and rejuvenate in a completely unknown milieu, he might think very poorly of her. As she readies to leave her cottage to see the yogi, she makes up her mind.

Two large mats are laid under a huge mango tree, around two hundred meters away from the *ashram*. In the backdrop, light red shade has appeared in the sky atop the mountains. The

morning light is sufficient to see the meandering narrow pathway, cleared of grass, leading to the mango tree. Melissa can see the young yogi is sitting in a meditative body posture and facing him, good ten feet away is a mat meant for her. She sits on it and feels the sensation in her heart. The breeze was comfortably cool and there was a mix of aromas around. It was a new experience for her. The elements of nature have started to nudge her senses and the resultant shades of consciousness make her happily baffled, as she has not met these elements in such raw and close proximity earlier.

“What should I call you?”, Melissa starts the conversation.

“Call me Shiv”.

“No, I mean, if there is a particular norm or way to call teachers here, I shall do it. I wish to follow all norms here.”

“Shiv is okay”, he says in a low but deep voice. “There are no norms and rules. You have to follow what makes you have improved and deeper audience with yourself. You should also accept that I am not your teacher; I am just a facilitator. As I had asked you earlier, you must be sure, what made you come here, what you wish to know and attain. I shall simply facilitate.”

Melissa keeps looking at his calm face. He has large eyes and Melissa had noticed that they had a feminine appearance. He always talked in low but deep resonating voice. His tall and well-toned body had soft looks and his long sleek hands always gestured, while he said something. What amazed Melissa most about him was his lips, which moved very little, when he spoke. As Melissa had rehearsed, she tells him that she came here because her father wished her to spend time in a place near nature and learn good things about yoga.

“You know Shiv”, she says, trying her best to match his tone and style. “I am happy with this place but I really do not know what I can learn about yoga and anything else, which could be of benefit for me. I think, you have to be more than just a facilitator to me and actually be my teacher.”

“Melissa, there is an old proverb, which says; nobody can teach anything to anyone, however, anyone can learn anything. The idea is, learning is a receptive mechanism of consciousness and this reception is in the part of the receiver, not the dispenser. Knowledge, wisdom or ideas are

scattered all around. What becomes your learning is what sinks in within your consciousness and that happens when you accept and happily receive something as utility.”

“You mean to say that I must have the clarity of notion about what has utility and benefit for me as this alone can make me learn something? But what about kids, who do not know what is good for them. At the start, someone must decide for them what is good or bad. The parents and teachers do it for them.”

“I agree. Being a child is considered the most suitable state of consciousness for learning. They have the innocence of objective faith and that makes reception as something very natural and spontaneous. From mind perspective, they do not have anything to unlearn and that is why anything, which is there for them, becomes their automatic learning. This too is not ideal but beautifully facilitative. A child has no option but to accept everything he or she is doled out as learning. However, when maturity comes at a later stage of life, they have more difficult task of unlearning a lot many things, which they made a part of their knowledge pool. You are not a child, though innocence of faith still holds out as a good useful facility for you. You already have evolved and matured in a particular way. For you, there are sets of utility and ideas of beneficiality, which may be subjective to you but they are very much part of your consciousness. Even when you put in an innocent faith of a child, a new learning, which does not work out to be in linearity with your already accepted domains of utility and beneficiality, cannot be accepted by your subconscious mind.”

Melissa looks deep into his eyes. She is not sure. The man is a mystery to her. His voice and mannerisms are very assuring and the way he puts in his words, seems very honest and sincere. However, what he said, she could not clearly understand and that is why, there is a sense of confusion in her about how she should take him. For a woman, judging comes natural. She has to be very sure of the deep intent of a man she would rest her faith on. It is her instinct. Nature designed her this way. Here, she is not even sure what this man is actually wanting from her. Does he want her to have faith in him? Does he intend to lead her to a trap situation, where she could drop her guard and get influenced by his ways? Is he scheming something? What is he up to?

He accepts her silence. He of course has a scheme for her; surely wants something out of her. He smiles and this makes her more suspicious. She finds it hard to hide her emotions. He is reading them all, as morning light is now good enough to make her face gleam.

“Melissa, this is the difference. A child is an option-less receptor. We as grownups are used to relying more on our intelligence than our innocence. We are adept at option building. Intelligence is all about option building over probable shades of a meaning, which a set of words install. That is why I said, you already have a wisdom in your consciousness, which has been useful and beneficial to you so far. May be, somewhere, it could not be helpful to you, in protecting and prolonging your interests; I cannot say with surety as I do know nothing about your life and past. However, I believe, utilities are neither created nor dumped overnight. If you could decide, what you think is in your extended utility, I shall have the ease in facilitating them to you.”

Melissa feels relieved that he does not know anything about her and her past. She can now make her moves better. However, she is still not sure, what she wants new in her life. She thinks, she can take a chance with him. May be, she should let him take her where he wishes to and then have a judgment later, whether she can trust him or not.

“You do not need to stress yourself over what I have been saying. This surely is not my purpose. You need to trust me on that. I must tell you that your father has been a very special person for this *ashram* and *Acharya*. We all just wish to make your stay here very meaningful and useful for you. It is good that you have liked this place and happy about your stay here so far. So, you can take your time to decide what you wish to attain out of your sojourn here.”

“Thanks Shiv, I appreciate your words. May be you are right, I need some time to think.”

“I wish to tell you something, which I request you listen with innocence and not intelligence. I told you I could not be your teacher, not because of any ego or negativity. For humanity, wisdom is not yet a finality; probably it can never be. I have been trained in many things, including yoga but I know that everything is evolving and new insights into all wisdoms are being added. Being a teacher means; I know and can give you that. This however is not true. Learning is always on for me. As I said, I can just be a facilitator. You can know so many things here and from me. However, what utility they could be is what you make of. That is why I have been insisting that

you decide everything. Life learning is no curriculum and cannot be institutionalized. You frame your questions and I shall attempt to give you answers to the best of my abilities. Then again, you have to come up with more questions to settle down to the utility and fruition of the answers, which you may accept as beneficial to you.”

“What if I do not have questions? Why can’t answers be accepted as surety of utility?”

“Then it shall fall in some different domain, which shall be more difficult for you and probably, this shall lead you to more confusion. It shall be the domain of complete trust and faith. You shall start accepting what I tell or extend to you as knowledge. Your mind already has lot many referrals for good and bad, right and wrong, utility and futility. The new knowledge may stand in conflict and contradiction to your referral-pool, resulting in confusion and more conflicts. This approach is amenable only for kids, who do not have previous referrals in their mind. They accept what is given. Only when they grow and mature, they prune it and unlearn as per their rationality of subjective utility. You have already matured in a particular way. You are not a blank mind.”

“Okay, but you will help me with questions too?”

“I told you, I am a facilitator. I shall facilitate everything for you but you have to be the finality on the utility of the ultimate beneficiality of anything you accept as learning.”

“Why you insist on me having to be the finality? I think, if you have acquired knowledge after years of training and persevered learning, you can confidently extend to me as good thing?”

“Melissa, what stays with you as wisdom is what your mind accepts and internalizes as utility for your larger wellness. Old wisdom says, nothing external to you actually exists and what you internalize is the only reality. We shall talk about it later. Let me say that you can start on this hypothesis of mine, to build a theory, which you can challenge later, if you do not find it useful for you.”

“Okay, I accept. So, what is next for the day?”

“Yes. Close your eyes, sit in a way you feel comfortable, keep your body perfectly erect and still like a rock. Try to switch off your mind, concentrate on your breath, feel it going deep down

your body and going away. Gradually, let the feeling sink in that you are one with the nature around. If you start feeling any pain, stop and go for a walk.”

She follows the instructions. As she closes her eyes, her mind starts racing up thoughts after thoughts. She gets mired into them, completely forgetting to focus on her breathing. In a few minutes, her back starts aching. She opens one of her eyes to see what he is doing. She sees her walking towards the *ashram*. She rises and starts to walk away from him. She needs to address to her thoughts. Too many issues on a single day and she has to make up her mind.

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#### CHAPTER 4

Melissa spends good part of the day meeting different people of the *ashram*, asking them what brought them here and what they were learning. She finds a strange commonality. Most came here after they had trouble in their lives. Their focus was taking to yoga meditation and spiritual way of life to come out of their sadness and emotional instability. They felt, their worldly troubles would be settled, if they gave themselves in to spiritual ways. They were given a regimen and they followed it, without asking anything.

Melissa feels bad that she is also part of the crowd. She also came here after a mishap in her life. She consoles herself that she came here just to escape from the chaos back home. She did not need a cure but just peace of mind and a place where people could not recognize her and her past. She however realizes that she is being given a special status and that is why, she was provided an exclusive trainer and he is not making her follow a fixed regime. Rather, he is being good enough to leave it on her discretion as what and how she wishes to get benefit out of the available resources. She feels more assured of Shiv and his persistence as she begins to understand that he is treating her differently and in some special way.

Late evening, she calls her mother and as expected, her mother has nothing assuring to tell her. She rather asks her to enjoy the nature and peace. She tells her that learning is always optional. If she feels unsure about it, she should tell Shiv that she does not wish to learn anything specific



and she would pick up on her own, if she thinks there is something she can learn there. She even suggested that she should ask her father about it, as he knew the place and people.

Melissa calls her father and tells him about her predicament. She asks him to help her. She tells him that she is very comfortable here and as her mother said, she also thinks, learning is optional for her as what she wants is peace and anonymous life for some time, which she has already attained here. She tells him that she thinks, she can spend a month here and get back to her best self as the natural environment and plenty of time with herself shall make it happen. He assures her that he would give it a thought and would share his views, sending her an e-mail within an hour. An hour later, she reads the mail:

Dear Melissa,

I am not averse to endorsing your views, as what matters is your peace and wellness. It is good that you have liked the place. I talked a short while ago to both *Acharya* and Shiv and they too feel, you should focus on what makes you feel good and in touch with your inner wellness. That is why Shiv has been insisting that you decide it.

However, I must tell you what I would do if I were in your place and as I have been visiting this place, I have actually done it there.

Melissa, you have been born and brought up in America and this country has been a great model of modernity and scientific ideas. However, many in America feel, everything is not fine with this exclusivity of worldview. They feel, it is a case of too much too soon for America. In the history of civilizations, America is relatively a new nation. It has a history and culture of modernity but does not have ancient ones. You as an American have little idea of what precious things ancient cultures and civilizations have given to humanity. The place you are, India, had thriving and very intelligent civilization dating back 5000 years. Indian culture, philosophies, religion, spiritualism, social ideas etc are well documented and they have immense utility now. Even contemporary and modern science has now become highly assimilative and integrative of all these ideas.

For example, what most Americans and western world understands of Yoga is just a set of physical postures (*asanas*) and meditation techniques. However, Yoga is one of the most

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