

Part of This Infinite Love

Rupda

I remember being cold, impatient, and very bored as I followed my mum out of the London underground station at Chalk Farm, heading to some alleyway off the main street. She walked ahead of me, beckoning for me to hurry. I believe she was a little nervous and perhaps a little lost. We entered what seemed to be an old abandoned building. My mum took the first step in and brought me straight to the base of an elevator shaft.

I remember asking myself what on earth could be lurking above and why we were even there. We reached the top floor, the doors opened, and I stood shocked as I gazed out of the elevator: people, so many people, roaming around as if they had been living there for years and had made this their world away from the world.

Everyone was dressed in bright orange clothes, some in robes, others had even managed to find orange socks. All we wearing a beaded necklace with a photograph attached to the end of it, which I soon found out was called a mala. I was in awe at how warm and friendly the place felt. As a 9 or 10-year-old girl living in London, I was not used to getting so much warmth from kids or adults. You could see something in their eyes—this certain kind of knowingness and understanding, and a harmony about their presence. You could see something in the way they moved and the way they touched each other.

I was lucky, though, this was not a completely foreign experience for me. I had already spent two or three years going back and forth to Samye Ling, a Tibetan center/commune in Scotland. Samye Ling was a very special place for me; I have so many fond and profound memories kept tucked inside my heart since my experiences there. I remember the place was drenched in as much love, peace, and serenity as one could possibly imagine, and the monks, in all their grace, made it a point to take me, a small child, for walks and showed me a side of human nature that a classroom has never explored.

The year was 1979, and my life was about to change for good. The top floor of the abandoned building was known as Kalptaru, one of many Osho centers around the world. Mum and I would visit the place as much as possible. I even took trips there on my own, so that I could get another taste of that warmth I so loved in myself and in others. I remember we had visited another Osho center in America a year before, but it



just didn't click for us at that time. We ended up staying at a Zen Buddhist center instead. Funny how things go, but who would have known that the path ahead of my was about to transform my world?

It was a Kundalini meditation that made it clear to me that I was in love with the work and with the man responsible for it all: Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, also known as Osho. I think I was the only kid in that group, but I had completely forgotten that I was any age. I felt so much a part of everyone in that group, that I had lost the boundaries of where I began and other around me ended. That's when I knew I had found my home, and I was going to pursue and protect it at all cost.

I was 9 or 10 when I decided to take sannyas. My mum was in her normal indecisive state, trying to weigh out all the paths of spirituality: Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, Krishna, Osho, and many others I never managed to encounter. She was the kind of woman who needed to be sure, whereas I had this overwhelming sensation that I had found my long-lost family. Taking the next step into sannyas raised no question in my mind whatsoever.

My mala came along with my new name, Ma Prem Rupda, which meant Love Beautiful. I can remember how excited I was; my heart was pounding in my chest as I struggled to pronounce my new name correctly. My mum chuckled at the name Rupda and thought it might be best to change it to something more soft. At first, I considered the idea, but as the name grew on me, I accepted it just as I did the family, with a warm embrace. I remember having to remind my mum to call me Rupda and not Limor. "I'm Rupda now, mum, so stop calling me Limi." It took my mum another six months to finally realize that she too wanted to take sannyas.

I think the hardest part for me was wearing the mala out, displayed for the world to see. Wearing all orange clothes was easy, but the mala, well... I just tucked it inside, so I wouldn't have to deal with all those pointless fingers and staring eyes on the tube or at the bus stop. I knew better than to look different when I was in England. If you looked funny, people would just stare at you and giggle, and I couldn't bear people making fun of me, or of my mum, for that matter. School was easy, because we had to wear uniforms, but if any of the kids knew what a nut I was, I would have had to change schools for sure.

At some point after the 1981 March Event—a massive weekend event with sannyas group leaders such as Poonam, Teertha, Veeresh, Sudha, Somendra and Rajen—someone told my mum about an Osho commune in Devon called Prempantha. Apparently the place was loaded with sannyas kids like me. My mum was fine with me going there. She had an English sannyasin lover at the time, who was occupying all her



free time. I was more than excited, because I would no longer have to watch their abusive relationship—this was no place for child rearing. So, when the question arose if I wanted to go, my suitcase was packed and at the door. It was not my first time away from my mum, but it was the first time that it was my choice. I was eager to get there and soon!

I was in for a surprise, as I might have expected. Prempantha was in Exeter, Devon, located in the Southern-most part of England. The commune was this huge mansion with 20 to 30 rooms, set on an enormous property. As a kid with heaps of energy, I was about to enter the biggest playground ever. How good life had become!

The time was summer, and the meeting of all the sannyas kids was a little awkward at first. Although I displayed a lot of audacity and confidence in myself, inside I was shy and scared about whether I would be accepted in the new place. This phase passed very quickly, however, and I soon found myself the tyrant and the jester of the pack. It wasn't hard to take on this role, because I was one of the oldest of 17 kids, who ranged from ages four to ten. My character was still taking shape, and it didn't take long to realize I was a little rebel tomboy with only one mission in life: to have fun.

Part of being in Prempantha was to get an education. At that time, the commune didn't have its own school, so we had to attend school in the local town. This was very hard for me to endure, and the local kids made it even worse. We were called names and laughed at frequently. The funny thing was we never stuck together. We were commune kids by night and behaved as local kids by day, mainly out of fear and the need to feel accepted. I often found myself hiding under the staircase avoiding the school bus as it rolled by our driveway. I would do whatever it took to stay home and escape those morning hymns at those horrible assembly gatherings. This, of course, got me in plenty of trouble. I just didn't fit in at the school, and it really affected me emotionally. It was almost traumatic for me in a silly kind of way, but I would rather have stayed under the staircase in the dark than face another day at that school.

Prempantha became this awesome kingdom in the countryside, and the more people knew about it, the more people came. We had wonderful festivals that covered the fields with orange people wearing wooden malas, dancing back and forth from hug to hug in that very stereotypical sannyas way. The kids put on plays, danced, sang, and ran around until their shoes wore out. The festival days were so magical for me. I felt so free to be a child and so loved by those I'd never even met before. I could truly say I had found my home, and I had no intention of ever going back to live in London again. The space inside of me had never been filled quite as much. I mean, I was living in the center of this land of love, rejoicing in it, and fully in love with that content feeling inside of me.



About a year later, we were all told that we would be relocating to a new place that had no name yet, but was soon to be called Medina. When the white van, carrying four kids, two adults, and my goldfish, turned off its engine in the courtyard of Medina, the place was dark and damp and felt like a ghost town. It didn't take long for us to notice we were the only people there. I don't remember if I felt scared or lonely, but I marveled at my surroundings. How small I must have felt in the cradle of such big hands. Medina, located somewhere in Suffolk, a few hours north of London, was huge and filled with unfamiliar territory. It was tucked away amidst the trees, down a very long and winding driveway. Two, maybe three times as big as Prempantha, Medina was magnificent and grand. I can remember making it a point to jump out of the van first so I could be the first kid to arrive in Medina, and I was.

Sadly, not all my memories are as vivid as the memories of other commune kids, and I often rely on them to tell the tale of my upbringing, but the feeling in whole never escapes me. I do remember some parts of my experience in Medina, such as school, my first sexual encounters, and, of course, getting up to no good. I shall begin with school.

Out school was called Ko Hsuan, and was conveniently located smack in the center of the commune in a very large, elongated building. This was where all the kids lived as well as attended classes. Ko Hsuan had two classrooms, one for the "big kids" and one for the "little kids." Between them was the "middle room," our sort of recreation room, where we would eventually watch movies, roller-skate, have meetings, dance, sing, and pass time. We slept upstairs above the classrooms, where the rooms were also divided into different age groups, from small to big kids, and each room had at least four to six of us snuggled in it. I, and three of the other kids who had arrived earlier, helped to set up the rooms and create a home for many others to come to. The process of making this our beautiful space was very comforting to me. This strong sense of union was so unfamiliar to me, that I almost dismissed it as unreal.

I was one of the big kids, and, for us, school was much like a circus. The ring leader was our teacher, and we, of course, were the clowns. I'm convinced that we all had ADD (attention deficit disorder), because keeping us focused seemed to be the biggest challenge in the world. Imagine 12 to 15 kids, ranging from 9 to 12, with mouths like an 18-year-old punk kid from South London, in your classroom. It will make you crazy just to think of it. The words and attitude that we somehow acquired and our attempts to portray ourselves as cool, tough adults were more damaging to us and our opportunity to learn than we cared to consider. I mean, we did whatever we could to deter the teacher from teaching us Math, English, French, and somehow the teachers had



the patience to follow through each day, regardless of our foul mouths and out attitudes toward one another.

This was my home, Medina was a kid's paradise, and even more so for me, because I was away from London and free from parental guidance. But as wild and free as I may have acted, I took the spiritual side of my life quite seriously. Under a facade of gang leader or one who life to get up to all sorts of mischief, I was very much into the softer side of human beings and wanted to find that place inside myself.

Some of my first sexual experiences began over the next year and a half, and as I look back, I can chuckled at the innocence we all had sharing those moments together. These memories you don't forget, because they continue to have an impact on your life. Besides, the kids who were living in Medina won't let you forget, even if you tried. Ah, what are friends for?

In 1983, the Ranch was happening. By then, I was ready to leave the UK for good, and see what the Ranch had in store for us. So, off we went, 12 suitcases in hand, just me and mum leaving England forever... Yippee!

Many things happened for me on the Ranch, but in a really small nutshell, I had an amazing time. All the celebrations made me so joyous and happy to be alive! The Ranch finally came to an end, something I never foresaw, and by November 1985, at the sweet age of 16, I left the Ranch with \$20 dollars in my pocket. The plan was to go to San Diego to meet up with a bunch of other Ranch kids, and see what happened next. We had this feeling of clinging on to each other, like mice do to keep warm together, but we also had this feeling of taking off, and seeing what the world "outside" is really like. For the next 10 years, I spend most of my time traveling the world, Europe, Asia, America, again, and again, and again, avoiding holding down a job, and simply living life day to day. You know, the sannyas way.

When I was a child, I swore that if Osho should ever leave His body, I would be there! And, when that day came in 1990, I was right there by His side at the burning ghats. I sat there for hours, watching the moment, wondering if and how my life was to change now that He is no longer physically present. Singing to Him with tears rolling down my cheek, that painful letting-go, that gratefulness of being part of this magical experience, how does on ever express in words...?

Since then, I have become closer to those that I love. It seems that as we "kids" get older, we are more appreciative of those in our lives who have shared so much with us in the last 22 years and more! And I have met new friends who have joined this growing family, and have felt so blessed to be a part of this infinite love.

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