

Dropping Off (2)

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When I was in the corporate world in the USA, the dress code was quite simple, suit and tie every day. For formal get together, client dinners, banquets and other similar occasions, it was black tie, i.e. tuxedo. I hated it. With the IT boom, things became a bit more relaxed with casual Fridays when one could drop the suit and tie, and short of jeans and t shirt, one could wear anything. What a relief. At least for one of the five work days, one could breathe! There was some hope for the vishudhi chakra to open up.

When I dropped out and returned to India, I was looking forward to a gradual migration to the blissful, comfortable world of kurta pyjama. However, I was in for a shock. As we say in Hindi, 'Angrez chale gaye lekin angreziyat chod gaye'! In the hot, humid climate of Bombay and most of India, I saw the Indian men dressed to the hilt in exactly the same attire I had yearned to drop off for years in the USA. At least the cool climate of the USA provided some justification and necessity for that attire. Not just the vishudhi chakra, but I did not see any hope for any of the chakras to open up here.

Fortunately, I had embarked on a journey where there are many unknowns along the way. One does not know what will come next. One keeps going along with the flow that is both sublime and subtle. There are no dramatic changes that happen on the spiritual path. As I got deeper into Advaitya and Zen, the common theme that emerged clearly was the inevitable need for the self to break free from all shackles and years of hardened conditioning, and to soar like a free bird. As the consciousness rose higher, the dropping off of the unnecessary, irrelevant, burdensome habits was bound to happen. Man is born without a stitch on his body and that is the only time in his life when he is at his pristine, pure self, born out of consciousness and

connected to consciousness. It is downhill all the way after that. In tribal societies all over the world, children remain without clothes well into adulthood, and in many of these societies even through their entire life. Certain tribal societies have been corrupted by the mores of so called 'civilized' people who have insisted that it is immoral to reveal certain parts of your body to others, no matter how uncomfortable or unhealthy it may be to cover up. One has to look at our sadhus, monks, ascetics and others who have either renounced the world or, live lives fully rooted to Mother Earth, and see their almost naked self. They have nothing to hide. One has to look at the many realized individuals who have walked the lands of India and elsewhere almost threadbare, Ramana Maharshi, Mahavira, Buddha, Jesus Christ and many more, and wonder why.

While I was not quite ready to shed it all yet, the changes were happening. As the chakras start opening up and getting charged and energized, they need to breathe. And they cannot breathe when one is covered in tight clothing day and night. The body, the skin, the hair, the bones, they all need sun and fresh air to recharge all the cells and keep them fully vibrant and charged. They need to connect with the moon and the planets and the stars and imbibe all the energy that radiates from them. Tight and layered clothing inhibits this. Why is it that during yoga and pranayama and meditation and other healing exercises we are asked to wear loose, comfortable clothing? Why is it that when we come back from a party all clothed and laden up, the first thing we do is 'take it all off'? It is human nature. It wants to breathe. So why should we not want to breathe 24/7? Why only for a few hours in a day? And specially why not in the night when sleeping, when our body is busy rejuvenating and recharging all its cells?

My suit and tie had long given way to simple trousers and open necked shirt. Kurta and pyjama had gradually made their inroad into my wardrobe, and not just as nightwear. Conventional trousers with zipper and belts gave way to drawstring pants with loose bottoms. Collared shirts gave way to collarless shirts, tunics, kurtis with short sleeves or long flowing sleeves with no cuffs. Dress shoes were a history long time back. I had discovered the pleasures of sandals and chappals, perfect for India where one needed to take them off frequently. For

the cooler climates, I discovered the beauty of the shawl, resplendently available in a multitude of designs, fabrics and colors in different parts of India. Very soon I had an enviable collection. Soon I discovered stores like Fabindia, Bandhej and many others. It did not take very long for the pant and shirt to totally become extinct from my wardrobe. The kurta pyjama (in its many variations) became the attire of choice for me almost everywhere, whether it was at home, at a party, a wedding, formal occasion, business meeting, workshops, satsangs, travel, almost everywhere. I did get denied access to certain clubs, and I was glad for the same, since I had no desire to hobnob with the leftover angrezis in India. Formal dress code invitations were declined, and very soon became a trickle. Again, a silver lining in the clouds! I started breathing easier and deeper. Sleeping in the buff became normal and with that came peaceful sleep.

It was not too difficult to establish a correlation between our clothing and our health and wellness.

First of all, since our body is a product of Mother Nature and made up of the five elements, any alien element like synthetic, nylon, rayon or chemically treated fabric will have an adverse effect on us, no different than any toxic or inorganic substance entering our food chain and blood stream. The impact is rarely immediate, except in the case of allergies of certain kinds, but happens nonetheless. Once I realized this, it was only cotton and linen for me. I discovered the natural, organic beauty of khadi and the way it allowed my body to breathe. Along the way I discovered fabrics made from bamboo and hemp, and I started breathing even deeper and easier. Once I saw for myself how silk was being woven, by boiling the live cocoons in hot water, silk dropped out of my wardrobe. Even in the coolest climate, I found wool to be unnecessary. Layered cotton clothing of various textures was sufficient.

Secondly, those of us who belong to a certain generation may remember or know that our parents never wore any underwear, including no bras for women. My father always wore a dhoti and my mother always wore a saree, two of the most practical and comfortable pieces of attire in the world. Underwear and bras (corsets and the like

from the Victorian era were the origins of this) were yet another gift given to the 'uncivilized world' by the 'civilized English' along with the chair, the potty, the heels and many others. It did not take very long for the mooldhara, the swadisthana, the manipur and the anahata chakras to be imprisoned. The long term results were inevitable. While this article is not focused on an in depth analysis of the correlation between various life style diseases (in particular breast cancer and other cancers of the organs around the lower chakras) that originated in the 20th century and the wearing of certain pieces of clothing, suffice to say for now that the correlation exists. As it does between the use of the western potty and constipation and other intestinal diseases.

All of these dropped off for me, layer by layer, one by one. I felt a sense of freedom, once again soaring like a free bird, ever higher and higher. The spiritual journey continued.

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