



Ramesh Balsekar

“A Happening”

Pradeep Darooka

When Mahatma Gandhi passed away, Albert Einstein wrote, “Generations to come will scarcely believe that such a man in flesh and blood ever walked on the Earth.”

When seekers and students of advaita read about Ramesh Balsekar in the years to come, they will scarcely believe that a man such as him was one of the last living masters of the 20th century, during the peak of kalayuga.

And I still find it difficult to believe that I was one of the privileged few to have been touched by him, in flesh and blood, during the past six years. Most of the spiritual knowledge is usually obtained second hand, from books, hearsay, interpretations. I got my teaching first hand.

During my twenty-five years long search for the answer to the question, ‘Who Am I’, Ramesh Balsekar’s name popped up time and again, but it never stuck. I travelled around the world, meeting gurus, teachers, masters; attending discourses, lectures, workshops; visiting ashrams, monasteries, retreats; devouring scriptures, books, articles. But the answer eluded me. Upon my return to India in 2004, one day I found myself in the Philosophy section of Oxford Book Store. Ramesh Balsekar’s ‘Sin & Guilt’ was staring at me. Instinctively my hand pulled it out, and before I knew it, I had read the book cover to cover, over numerous cups of tea at the Cha Bar in Oxford. I went back to the bookshelf, and emptied it out of every title by Ramesh Balsekar. I

contacted Zen Publications, got the telephone number for Ramesh, spoke with him right away, and found myself on the hot seat in Sindhula on Gamadia Road off Peddar Road in South Bombay, the next morning at 9AM!

That was the end of my long search.
That was the beginning of a new life for me.

I lived on Peddar Road before I went to the USA in 1982. How was I to know that the answer to my question, that took me around the world, was right around the corner from where I lived! It was not meant to happen a day earlier than that hot, sunny day in April 2004 when I found myself at Ramesh's feet. The happening happens when it is meant to happen.

Ramesh was a happening.
Blessed are we who experienced this happening.
That itself was a happening for each of us.

One of the first things that struck me from the time I called Zen Publications to get his contact details was the ease and informality with which almost everyone was addressing him by his first name. Even though I had lived in the USA for 22 years, where first name is the norm for almost everyone except one's parents, I had retained my Indian ethos and identity that disallows the use of first name for anyone except someone younger to oneself. And here was this guru, teacher, and master in his mid 80s being addressed by his first name! But instead of revolting, I found it endearing, with no barriers of formality. The story goes that during the early years of Ramesh's daily morning satsangs, a gentleman from abroad asked Ramesh how should he address him? Ramesh replied, "Why, my name is Ramesh"!

Adi Sankaracharya wrote thousands of verses explaining advaita. The Upanishads runs into hundreds of pages. Lord Krishna himself took

eighteen chapters to get it across to Arjun. Osho, the last living master and advaita teacher of our times along with Ramesh, was prolific to the point of being obsessive about explaining “You are the witness”. Ramesh needed just 45 minutes each morning to explain, “You are not the doer”.

A teaching so simple, that it completely floors you the first time. This cannot possibly be the answer to the question, “Who Am I”. But how could it not be? The question itself is so simple. How could the answer not be so! Simplicity begets simplicity. This frail, small built man in his simple white kurta pajama was simplicity personified himself. From his simple mind and self came this simple answer. And when it did, it resonated with the only words Buddha actually uttered after his nirvana, “Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer.” Zen at its simplest, profound best!

Whenever I mentioned Ramesh and the daily morning satsang and my own awakening to any one, they would refer to him as my Guru. I felt strange. Does one address one’s Guru by his first name? Does one feel like embracing one’s Guru instead of touching his feet? Can one think of enjoying a beer or a shot of whiskey with one’s Guru instead of accepting panchamrut? Does a Guru crack jokes and laugh heartily like a child? Does one walk into a Guru’s bedroom unabashedly and have a quick chat? Ramesh turned the concept of guru on its head. No saffron robes, no beads, no ash, no mantras, no miracles, no prasad (only cold coffee sometimes!), no assistants surrounding him, no donation box at the entrance, no airs. He was like RK Laxman’s common man, like any of us. He still shed away the darkness for me as the word guru implies. He still showed me the path and lit it with his simple teaching. No, he was not a guru to me; he was a friend, guide and philosopher. he was like a child, playful, innocent, and funny; anyone could access him, in person, on the phone, in writing. There were no expectations. There was just unconditional love and compassion. He was faithful to his wife

for 60 plus years, to his employer for 40 plus years and to his teaching for 30 plus years.

People attending his satsang from all parts of the world asked him questions on family, relationships, sex, business, money. He talked about art, culture, politics, sports, finance, and religion. No topic was taboo. There were intense discussions on consciousness, rebirth, and free will. There were the typical inane questions, "Ramesh, I do not get along with what should I do? He brought it all down to the highest common denominator in five simple words, "You are not the doer"! It resonated and echoed constantly, until it became a mantra, like 'Om', part of one's breath. And there it sits with me too.

Ramesh Balsekar, in his physical body, is no more, – who cares!
Ramesh, the Teaching, will always be there – I care!

Dear Ramesh,

True to your teaching, there was pain in the moment, followed by pleasure from the bliss of your teaching.

With love and gratitude,

Pradeep Darooka

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