

## Karma

by Janie Reynolds

A gigantic ember-red moon lowered itself humbly through the indigo sky. The evening was silent but for the shrill cicadas, which, by now, I had become accustomed to during my three months travelling in India. The warm night air was heavy with the scent of Honeysuckle and Rhododendra.

As I made my way cautiously down the hillside, via narrow, primordial steps, I could feel the love in my feet, that had been cut into the soil by strangers, to support my feet as they trod. About half way down, while absorbing the overwhelming wonder of the moon, I came upon a spectacular sight: A gigantic temple, like no building I had seen before. Except, perhaps, in some fantasy film like Lord of the Rings.

The ancient structure must have been purposely crafted from pearlescent stone to reflect on Earth the celestial bodies that glowed above. From my place on the hillside, its roof glistened with silver streaks of light that resembled the peaks of a moonlit ocean at night that nobody ever sees.

Spherical, pointed domes thrust achingly from the temple's roof, straining to soar to the heavens. As I continued my descent, my ears caught the sound of a man talking. I followed and stopped because, to my surprise, the language being spoken was English. The voice drew me further, until I was on the ground. And there I saw, in the foreground, a pair of towering doors, as red as blood and as golden as sunshine and adorned with tassels the colours of the rainbow.

I took a deep breath and pulled one door very slightly open towards me, so I could peer through the gap. And there I saw hundreds...maybe thousands... of men, women and children, cross-legged on the ground of an enormous hall, wearing multicoloured peaked hats and ceremonial dress, their spines rod-straight as lemmings'. They were listening to the man whose voice I had heard from the hillside; a solitary, majestic figure, sitting in a tall, ornate chair and robed in dazzling cherry-red. With one ear and one eye through the door, I could see and hear him clearly as he addressed the crowd.

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that when one part of life starts going okay, another falls spectacularly to pieces. The nature of existence is, always has always been and always will be, one of suffering. But now that over-population of the human race has reached intolerable proportions and our planet is cracking under our weight, there is even less joy and less peace to go round and re-incarnation is the single greatest threat to life on Earth. She is withering from man’s weight, his wants and his waste, and his endless physical incarnations show no signs of bowing to the grace of non-being. We, the spiritually liberated, also bound by the sacred laws of the Divine, are therefore ordered to relinquish our attempts to educate and unfetter. We are commanded to abandon all ignorant souls to Karma, which must now be man’s only guide. It is time to lighten the Earth by leaving.”

After a long pause, every one of the thousands of members of the congregation, even further lifted and straightened their spines, like rising beanstalks to the skies. Even the backs of the old women sprung upwards, like fishing rods ready to be cast, clicking and cracking as they did.

The master in the cherry-red robes stood and spoke again, his voice now fuelled with further passion. “As instruments of the Supreme, Sages take your bowls. May the ceremony begin!”

Everyone broke into a chant, not loud but with a powerful resonance that I felt throughout my own body. Then what looked like maybe a hundred people stood from their places and walked towards a long table where, lined up, were countless shining bowls. Each person took a bowl between their hands and proceeded to pass it to another on the floor, who took a sip before handing it to the next, and so on and so forth, until all in the hall had drunk from a bowl.

“We rise again in selfless devotion,” announced the man in the cherry-red robes. “We are hereby commanded to abandon I this karmic cycle in the name of an Earth too heavily bearing our burden.”

Gradually I watched as, one by one, all of the elaborately costumed men, the women and the children, slumped silently to the ground, not a breath left in their chests. They had poisoned their bodies in a final act of love.

All except one of them. The priest in the cherry-red robes. He hadn’t drunk from the bowl. Instead, he tip-toed lightly amongst the dead bodies, sometimes stopping to gently lower the eyelids of a child. And then I noticed he was walking towards me. He must have known I was there all along.

“Welcome, guest!” he called in my direction. “Come in and drink with me.”