

Cauliflower Curry

A conversation with
Sangharakshita



By

Harry Jivenmukta

First published 2015 by Loosewords Publishing Company

www.loosewords.org

Copyright © Harry Jivenmukta 2015

The right of Harry Jivenmukta to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights are reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

Dedication:

The old man who cooked our food.

For information on Sangharakshita, search on the Internet. There is lots of information.

Cauliflower Curry

walking with Sangharakshita
between the fields of wheat
on the one side
and rice paddies
on the other, he said:

you see, the illusion
of a rice paddy?
all you need is lots of water
and you can make any field
look like a rice paddy,
or

he said pointing to the wheat field

it can be just as the
climate intended
and wheat can grow like
it has for thousands
of years.

we came next to a field
of cauliflowers,
the purpose of our journey,
and I cut one from the earth
with my knife
and tidied it up
as we walked
tearing off the outer leaves
one by one
until we had a
cauliflower just like
anyone can buy in a shop.

and look at it now
just like a person
who has woken up with
sleepy eyes
and untidy hair
has a wash and looks presentable
ready for the day.

Sangharakshita: Why does it take so long to get to the point of a matter? I know you want to talk about Alice, and it has taken these many steps and the cutting and cleaning up of a cauliflower for us to get to the point where we can turn our attention to the topic you wanted to talk about; Alice. So, let's talk about Alice.

Sangharakshita was very lucid today, I thought. Personally, the pain was too much for me to speak and so, he was the doctor called to ease my distress. He continued, as we turned to the side of the path and sat down on a low crumbling stone wall that bravely held our weight although it crumbled a bit more as we sat down.

I know you loved playing with her earrings, putting them on her and then running your fingers through her hair to get a better view of the swing and flash of colour. And when she left them behind, you held them in your hands and caressed them and imagined them, imagined her, wearing them.

You were so impatient. You wanted her to return so you could kiss her and play with her hair. But the more impatient you are the quicker the cycle of the relationship completes itself. That is the paradox of love; you want everything now but you want it to last forever as well.

I know you loved... but never mind.

You know what you loved. But do you know that she will get old? And you will get old as well. Do you know that she doesn't remember anything of her past lives and no matter how hard you try she will never remember, well not in this life? And do you know that you don't only love her for who she is in this life?

Oh yes, you do love her this time as well, but you love her as well because you know who she was before, when you admired her from a long way away. You could not even talk to her much then, and now you have been with her so many times.

And she is like a little princess. The child knows she is a girl but cannot conceive of being a princess. It is only when she grows up and takes on the mantle of adulthood that she will realise who she is. You can say whatever you want to the three year old girl but she will not understand that she is a princess until later, no matter how frustrating it is to you.

We need onions, he said.

And so we got up and walked back towards the house and the kitchen garden.

You see, he continued, without onions, the cauliflower will not taste right. The onion is not from the same family as the cauliflower, not even a distant cousin, but without the onion the cauliflower will not be complete. And of course all the spices and herbs.

If you don't pick the cauliflower, it will rot and die in the earth. But when you pick it, it cannot be complete without all the other ingredients. And so it is for the onion. On its own, what is it worth?

It's like a woman. She is so pretty, beautiful. It is a shame to deflower her. But if she doesn't know love, she will get old and die unfulfilled. And a man, on his own can shout and make the world tremble, but without the woman, what is he?

Just like our cauliflower and onions. He smiled and then burst into a huge laugh that frightened the birds in a nearby tree that suddenly panicked into the air, a cacophony of noise. That made him laugh even more.

And so, we walked on.

But she is going to get old and die. And you want to know how. And you want to know if she will ever remember her past lives, her real inheritance. I know you dismiss her spirituality because she has passed that milestone hundreds of years ago. It is like the three year old princess who only knows she is a child and then grows up to realise her position, and then in old age, she reverts to being like a child, playing but not aware of what she once was. But old age does that to all of us. So, you want to know how she will die and what will happen to her then.

We got to the kitchen garden, and stopped. He heaved a big breath as if the task ahead was going to be very difficult. We both looked down at the vegetables, spices and herbs.

You see, he said, there are the things we need. Now, if we had someone here who was a good cook, these ingredients would make something we would remember for years, but if we picked and cooked them ourselves, we would remember the food for a long time but probably for the wrong reasons.

We looked at each other.

Why don't you fall in love with someone else? There are lots of lovely ladies all over the place. It is because Alice is like a lock to which you have the key. It is very frustrating when you try to open a locked door with the wrong key. But it can be even more frustrating when you find a locked door to which your key fits perfectly.

You put the key in and feel the satisfaction of having found the correct locked door and you imagine all the things you might find on opening it. And so, on hearing the click of unlocking, your heart soars. Then, you confidently reach for the door knob and it turns easily but will not permit entry.

The person behind the door, fearing intrusion, has fitted seven bolts all around the door in case someone opens the lock. You hammer on the door in frustration and the person inside nods sagely and pats herself on the back because she knew the bolts would come in useful. It never strikes her that she might actually enjoy the experience of seeing who it might be. Or that he brings something good, or is frustrated rather than angry.

Whilst we were ruminating over all this and continuing to look at the contents of the kitchen garden, a small man of about 80 came up. He was bent over and had a very unshaven look about him and his clothes looked like they had not been washed for several lifetimes. He stopped and, after looking us both up and down, turned his attention, like us, to the kitchen garden. So then there were three of us, and a cauliflower.

Can you cook? Asked Sangharakshita

Can I cook? Replied the old man.

Can you cook? Repeated Sangharakshita

Can I cook? Replied the old man.

Before this became a farce, the old man clarified the matter.

The question is; Can I eat? If I can eat, then I can cook.

You can eat, said Sangharakshita.

Then, I can cook.

The old man put out his hand. We both studied it. Obviously this man had had a hard life. His hands were small but really hardened with thick fingers and a very strong life line. Then I realised that he had put his hand out for the cauliflower. So I gave it to him.

You see, said Sangharakshita, Alice and you are just like that. It is a case of multiple misunderstandings. I said nothing and then we wandered to a nearby bench and sat down, having now a very good view of the old man and the kitchen garden one on side, and the fields of crops stretching into the distance on the other.

Close your eyes, Sangharakshita said, and I will pass the dream to you. This is what you wanted to see, and I think it is time. After a few minutes he asked me to tell him what I could see in my mind's eye.

I said:

Alice is 88 (age changed because Alice is a real person living right now). She is in a double bed. It is higher than a normal bed. I don't know why. She lays facing a large window opposite, divided into 12 panes with the wood frame painted white (six panes make up the top part of the window and six the bottom part). There is also a smaller window in the wall to her right (9 panes, I think, 3 on top part). The room is about 20 foot square. The door is by her right side as well as on the same wall where the head of her bed is.

Sangharakshita stands in the corner, in between the two windows. He is dressed in a long white kurta-pyjama suit, (not Buddhist attire) in the Indian style. No-one else can see him but Alice can.

Pronunciation: the correct pronunciation of his name is:

Sang harak sheeta

There is a woman (Buddhist) standing to Alice's right, sometimes hiding Sangharakshita from Alice's view. I don't know her name but it has 'Bodhi' in it. She is a lot younger than Alice, in her thirties.

There is a nurse on the other side of Alice. White uniform with a blue strip running across her cap.



Alice is dying. She looks ordinary; no great weight loss or pale skin. It is about 11.15am. A Wednesday.

Sangharakshita is there to tell her what she should remember and repeat quietly to herself. He tells her to remember the Devi.

You will remember the Devi as you were, as you fall into sleep, the walls of your mind will fall away and you will see everything. Just repeat Devi, Devi, Devi, and visualise, think of, the Green Tara.

As you fall asleep I will be with you. There is nothing to fear. I will hold your hand. Relax now. You are ready. Can you see the green hills, stretching in front and the beginnings of a forest to our right?

Let us walk then.

I opened my eyes and we both sat there silently, watching the old man slicing and chopping, stirring and cooking. The sun was getting stronger and there were no clouds in the sky.

You see, the food is excellent. I don't think I have ever tasted better cauliflower curry, said Sangharakshita.

It was made with love, said the old man, swallowing a bite, and when you're hungry, there is always more love, and desperation.

And so, where is your desperation? Asked the old man of me.

I just sat there and picked at the cauliflower curry, my insides crunched up turned inside-out with the loss of my Alice, both in this world and in the future dream I had just had.

Sangharakshita saw my distress and said: but you will also have to leave this life and then you will be on your own anyway. I know you want to be with her right now at least, if not be able to do so later. So why don't you?

I looked up at him with a query in my eyes.

I will tell you how to do it, said Sangharakshita, even though you promised her you wouldn't wander around inside her or change her without her permission.

The old man stopped his eating and looked at Sangharakshita, then at me, and then back at Sangharakshita. he had no idea what we were talking about.

The old man produced some yoghurt from somewhere and that was nice and cooling for me. I had left the suggestion Sangharakshita had made, hanging in the air.

There was a huge burp from the old man, as he rose from the table and collected all our plates.

Sangharakshita began his explanation:

You see, there are so many of all of us. Our past life, our present life, our future life, lives to this side and that, above and below. So pick one, just not the one she is in now. After all, that is the one you promised not to interfere in, wasn't it?

It was all making sense to me. Why was I being one dimensional when I could be multi-dimensional? After all, I had done it with other people in the past. We walked along the path, back towards the cauliflower field where we had picked our vegetable from. When we got there, Sangharakshita spread his hands out wide and asked: why did you pick the one you did?

I realised could have picked any cauliflower. I could pick any Alice.

After all, he said, life is just an illusion.

Then we both laughed.

END