

A Lesson In Unlocking The Story Of A Spiritual Locksmith

MR: "Swamiji, why are you always happy?"

Swamiji: "Because I have learnt to unlock myself."

The Man With The Key



Swamiji started on his path at age 29, as a freelance journalist in Chennai (formerly Madras) in South India, when he followed his heart and the advice of his guru and became a renunciate who would wander in the sacred foothills of the Himalayas for the next 20 years. Becoming a renunciate is no easy feat – it means giving up all your worldly possessions, even the connections to your friends and family.

So how does one unlock oneself and find the eternal peace that most religions offer either by way of salvation or by following the paths as laid out by the great sages?

During a recent trip to Mysore, South India, I was incredibly fortunate to spend some time with a truly amazing human being – Swami Jamanagiri, a real Indian sadhu (monk).

A very simple man, Swamiji is very reluctant to reveal any information on his life before or even after he became a sadhu. In fact, he is only really keen on giving advice on helping you find the key that will help you unlock yourself. Eventually, as I spent more time just hanging out with Swamiji, I learned that his 20 years in the Himalayas allowed him to wander in meditation as a free spirit and

Without Swamiji these kids would still be living on the street



enjoy the simple things in life, like nature and a fresh breath of air.

The unlocking process started to happen, and Swamiji realised that one of the most important goals in life was to be a good, moral human being – simple in principle yet perhaps a lifelong practice of inner work which could stop at any time by an act of greed, selfishness, and the like.

Summing up this process with a beautiful metaphor (something Swamiji would do many times during our time together), "It takes many years for a tree to grow but only minutes to chop that tree down."

After a series of bouts of ill-health and heart problems, Swamiji was advised to seek out warmer climes. Carrying nothing but the clothes on his back and a deep-rooted faith in the divine, Swamiji set out from the Himalayas on his annual Shivaratri trip



to Nepal. It was here that the universe provided him with the answer to his health problems and a new place to live. To some, it would appear a pure coincidence. But to Swamiji, the result of his prayers were the fellow-travelers to Shivaratri who made him aware of a Shiva temple in the city of Mysore,

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South India that was in need of a sadhu to run it after the recent passing of its inhabitant.

Swamiji arrived in the warm ambience of Mysore in 1983 to be the resident sadhu of the Cave Shiva Temple – “cave” being the operative word. It was in these very cramped living conditions that Swamiji would do puja (the act of showing reverence to a god, a spirit, or another aspect of the divine through invocations, prayers, songs, and rituals) and give the cave devotees prasada – a gracious gift, usually edible, given by a saint to their followers.

The prasada has the deity’s blessing and darshan – a practice which helps the devotee connect with their chosen deity via the saint – within it. Swami has lived and worked in these conditions for the last 15 years or so.

He only very recently had larger living quarters made available to him – another cave, in fact. And larger by the way he can actually stand up straight and not walk around bent over like everyone has to in the Cave Shiva Temple.

In 2004 a western cave devotee asked Swamiji what she should do with her life. He said: “Just do good things.” In 2005, Operation Shanti was set up as an organization “to spread peace, goodwill, and hope throughout our world by helping the poorest and neediest gain status and their rightful place in their societies.”

With its first programs in Mysore, the charity appointed Swamiji as its spiritual director to help and advise. The charity’s first work was to help destitute children living on the streets of Mysore (with their mothers and grandmothers) with the basic needs – food, medicine, education, and shelter, and to deliver food to a local leper colony. Today the charity has a proper orphanage on the outskirts of the city which houses 32 children, 6 adults, and three staff members – not bad work for a man who lives in a cave!

I visited Swamiji a number of times when I was in Mysore – sometimes I would complain about the many problems

that life throws at you, and Swamiji always had the perfect riposte: “Forget your own unhappiness by creating a little happiness for others, because when you are good to others, you are best to yourself.”

Another beautiful piece of anecdotal advice came when I told him that I wasn’t making the most of my life and he said to me, “People struggle through the tasteless coffee till the last sip only to discover sugar crystals lying at the bottom; that’s life – sweetened, just not stirred well!”

Even though Swamiji’s living conditions are slightly out of the ordinary, his devotees have helped him to a modicum of western comfort in the form of cable TV so he can watch

cricket. He also carries a mobile phone (“mobile blessings, Matthew”) to help him maintain contact with many of his western devotees. In fact, when I arrived back home, I turned on my phone to discover a text message from him that read, “Every single second gives you an opportunity to live, every hour has the power to change your fate, so don’t kill the time by worrying about yourself.” Wise words indeed, as I stood waiting for my lift, worrying about something insignificant like whether I had remembered to cancel the milk whilst I was away!

When I was processing my notes from interviewing Swami onto my computer a few weeks later, I was searching through my notes to find another pearl of wisdom from him to finish the article with when my phone beeped and a text had appeared. It was from Swami. I had asked about karma when I was with him as I didn’t really understand what karma was or how it worked. Swami said he would think about it and let me know – and I had left before he had given me an answer. Finally he had an answer for me and here it was on my cell.

“Even though there is only one divine, our universe works on the basis of moral dualism. There is progressive and regressive mentality. Having given us the ability to choose, the divine leaves us alone and allows us to make our choices. And if we choose good, we will bring about good, and if we choose evil we will cause evil. This is how the moral universe operates.”

For more information on Swami Jamanagiri’s charity, please go to the website www.operation-shanti.org

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www.yoga-manchester.co.uk