

Driving On I-84

Maharaj Kaul

I am driving on I-84 from Suffern, N.Y. to Andover, Mass.,
The 230 miles journey I often take to see my friends:
Bhans, Qazis, Tikkus, and several Kauls.
I feel troubled by the fear I may have missed some,
But the thought that many KPs don't read poetry comforts me.
They spend their leisure time in katha-batha -
A searing and raucous communication,
Heavily spiced with gossip - not a conversation.
KPs basically believe in only in two things:
Survival and naniya-batha*.
Cultural activities are only an excuse for socializing.

Shortly after the start we pass over panoramic River Hudson,
While crossing the three mile Tappan Zee Bridge,
A idyllic body of water reminiscent of the great lakes in Adirondack.
Twenty-five miles down we surf on boulevard-like I-684.
We pass by Greenwich, the oasis of the rich.
At fifty-three miles we leave N.Y. and set foot on I-84, in Conn. -
The diminutive state known for its day-time raiders of Wall St.
And artists using it as a tax shelter.

I-84 is not as renowned as some of its flamboyant siblings.
It is short, un-grand, narrow, tortuous,
And passes through un-famous towns and villages.
Everything around it seems small-scale.
But it is its common humanity that binds us to it.
In Conn. it passes through a string of towns suffixed by "bury:"
Danbury, Southbury, Middlebury, Waterbury.

Passing Danbury, on Exit 7, we are reminded of
The huge reservoir, Candlewood Lake.
Waterbury rooftops, shopping mall, and church spire
Stretch zoom on horizon due to its skewed terrain.

Here we often stop at McDonald's.
In another twenty minutes we reach Hartford,
The mid-point of our journey.
We zip bypass the commercial center.
Just before it we see an exit for Asylum St.
And never fail to be reminded of George Bernard Shaw's saying:
If there were men living on moon,
They would be using earth as their asylum.

Seeing the small places off the highway
One feels the footprints of God.
Here live people who say what they mean,
And mean what they say,
Though it may not come out right.
In big cities we see the big ego at work,
The vanity of vanities.

Moving from villages to big industrial centers,
Man became wealthier, worked more, and smarter,
But all at a substantial loss to his inner imperturbability and
Connection to the great unknown.
Today's man can go to moon
But will not walk across the street to help his neighbor.

Driving is tranquilizing.
As we drive we are lulled into our past,
Even when the senses are on the road and the machine.
We go to our past because it is the only thing we really possess.
Other things are either transitory, illusionary, insubstantial, insignificant,
Or belong to others.
Past is our real myth
Through which we see the present and the future.
After some age we do not create anything new,
Everything is a rework of the old materials.
We go to our past like children go to their mother,
To be soothed and nourished;
We want to relive the great drama of our life.
Past is a an inexhaustible theater

From which we draw new meanings of life.

We often wonder why we took certain decisions in past.

This is not because we were wrong then but because we have changed.

Events may look different depending upon how we place the life-mirror to see them.

Life is an experience, not a rehearsal of something yet to come.

The journey of life is our song as well as its singer,

It is the destination as well as its roadmap,

It is the birth of life as well its death and immortality.

We get lost in search of happiness

Till we realize our anchorless state is the bedrock we were looking for.

In life there are no winners or losers,

As in the end we all arrive at the same threshold:

The opportunity to enter the door to liberation.

In today's life we spend a lot of time on highways;

But we drive toward something -

But our inner journey has no destination.

Man created destinations but God created only a journey -

The journey of life.

"If the doors of perception were cleared

We should see everything as it is - infinite."

* A high quality meal

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