

Thinking Of Surinder

Maharaj Kaul

I just returned from Andover, Mass,
Where I had gone to see my cousin, Surinder's, wife, Billy,
And participate in his first death anniversary.
Surinder died suddenly in January of this year, at only 71.

I was first impressed and then amazed by
Billy's stoic and apparently ungrudging acceptance of
Surinder's untimely and sudden death.
Where do some people get such strength from,
In which part of mind reside the buffers
That absorbs the big shocks of life?

After the first day's social meeting,
The next day I sat next to her
In an attempt to assuage her grief,
But soon I realized I was unable to tell her anything comforting,
As she appeared to have accepted the tragedy
And was now moving on in her life.

But her wound had not vanished -
She had dressed it, and left it to heal.
With all my philosophical and poetical trappings
I was rendered into an amiable fool,
As I was unable to say anything good.
The best I could tell Billy was:
Though Surinder prevented many a heart attack in his patients,
But he was unable to do anything about his own.
She seemed to recognize the irony.

The shraad that followed appeared
Organized, deftly handled, authentic.
A select group of thirty in attendance showed
Reverence, emotion, and patience for the ceremony.
It was neither too short nor too long.

Dadu and Raju, Surinder's children,
Were the instruments through whom
The shraadh connected with the departed one.
It ended with an arti which rendered many an eye moist.

On my way back to New York on Rt. 84
I thought of what goodness, responsibility, and intelligence
Was lost with Surinder.
Why does God do such rash things?
The absurdity of the question boomeranged on me.
He must have seen a 100,000 patients in his 45 years of medical practice,
He must have cured a vast number of them,
He must have saved thousands from the brink of death.

In this age of emotional coldness
Surinder took extra steps to look up his relatives.
Even though he was kidnapped by terrorists for several months,
He continued to live in Kashmir,
Because he did not know how he could leave his home -
People could not understand this.

A day before he died
He told his family in Goa, where they were vacationing:
He was enjoying the stay very much.
Maybe, that is the way good men die.

Suffern, New York, 12.14.09