



Asian Revelations

This was the second revelation in as many months. He thought of it as a revelation because that was the way it happened. The thing, the topic, the subject, was slowly, painstakingly revealed, layer by layer, until the complete answer was spread before him. It was as if someone was saying, *“look this is the way it is (you idiot!). DO I HAVE TO EXPLAIN MORE?”*

It was an extraordinary feeling ... combination of feelings. On the one hand he felt privileged, honoured even, to have been offered this incredible insight that seemed to have come from a power of thought and deduction much greater than he was able to muster. But in another way, he was made to feel extremely lacking. Why on earth hadn't he thought of all this before. It had taken him years to reach these conclusions, which perhaps a more alert mind might have uncovered in seconds, well months at least.

And then there was another element to this. This business of revelations, continuing even as he thought and wrote. Wasn't there a chapter in the bible called *Revelations*? Vague memories sneaked through from a distant boyhood: sitting on the organ stool alongside his grandfather, in *Sunday best*, turning the pages for the chosen hymns. Had the thoughts he had been given from somewhere out there, somewhere up there, been generated by some miraculous process, which his brain, addled though it was, had

finally managed to couple together? Or was there something more powerful happening? Some more complex process controlled quite deliberately and timed to perfection. In short, he had to face the challenging question, as something of a non-believer: did the messages, these silent voices, these undercover communiques, emanate from a God?

The first, shall we call it, 'set of messages' (revelation seems all too church-like and a little too much of the discredited scientist who reaches his conclusion before the experiment begins). Well, the first set of messages were particularly timely, spot on in fact, arriving in the early hours of the morning when the day ahead demanded an important and insightful speech. A few hours later and both messages and receiver would have missed the boat completely.

But it wasn't just the fact that the messages had been conjured up, beamed down, or whatever, just at the right time. It was more to do with the way in which they had been received, shall we say introduced, to the receiver. These thoughts had come to him in a very logical, and in hindsight, obvious sequence. At this point it would have been good to produce the evidence, but unfortunately, though this might still exist, it would only be as rotting scraps of paper, some eight or nine thousand kilometres away, in the trash cans of India . Not readily accessible, one could conclude, to perform as *Exhibit A*. For the evidence he was sure, could have been offered up as (almost) absolute proof that cryptic notes had indeed been scribbled one after the other by a hand that couldn't see the paper; or to put it more correctly, by a hand that didn't have the assistance of sight to tell it where exactly pen was meeting paper.

There was nothing particularly mysterious about this. No séance, or magical pushing of pen. Simply the fact that someone else was present in the room, and that that person

Image: Duncan Gregory



exhibited all the normal signs of sleep; something to be expected at four in the morning. To have switched on a light would have, without doubt, disturbed that situation.

Thus, prized from tropical slumber, under a whirring fan, he scrambled for pen and paper. A few hours before, in the room's harsh fluorescent light, words had been assembled in laborious fashion; enough to half-cover the page. Now, in the dim glow from a light outside the room, shining through a murky glass pane above the door, it was just possible to distinguish where the scrawl of words ended and where the white blank of the page began. Once this was established, the flow of new writing was far from laborious, in fact it was difficult to stop the pen racing ahead in its attempt to record the dream-like thoughts, before memory cast them adrift, unlikely again to be reeled aboard.

Comical really: half-sitting, half-lying on the edge of his single, somewhat spartan bed, rustling and scribbling in the dark. What if his roommate woke? In fact, maybe he was just feigning sleep, either too curious, or too embarrassed, to speak.

Finally, the thoughts were committed to paper, hopefully in some sort of legible fashion. So back to sleep, in preparation for the coming dawn of the important day. Alas, no such luck, more thoughts came floating down; building with unshakeable logic on those before. Once again, they had to be recorded, before they were lost, much in the same way as he remembered sometimes forcing himself to remember the happenings of a vivid dream. Usually the dream recall failed miserably; this time he was

determined that these regurgitations of semi-slumber should not, could not fail.

As the process proceeded, he began to feel that control of the events, as they gradually unfolded, was not entirely within his own grasp. In fact, looking back, he quite distinctly remembered muttering under his breath: "Christ, not again. Pl-e-e-e-se, let me get some sleep!". Perhaps exclamation marks can't be included with mutterings, but he

certainly felt in the mood for exclamation; just that it had to be rather muted if his sleeping (whether feigning, or embarrassed) friend was to be kept at bay.

Then perhaps a further realisation that he would not be allowed to sleep until all the thoughts that were needed had been laid down - committed in indelible ink - and it was obvious that an end-point to this two-party brainstorming session had been reached. By this stage, his mind was entirely exhausted.

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Morning. What was that window doing there? Where was I? Vague bathroom noises: piss against porcelain; toilet flushing; tap water; low cough; shuffle of feet; creek of door.

The light changed. Another cough. Frank was awake. I opened one eye, enough to glimpse my roommate: naked, but for a stretched and faded pair of pants, standing with his back to me. Not young, but firm muscular form. He was an athlete ...it showed.

Slowly, other sounds emerged to pull me through to the waking day. From inside the room, the ceiling fan returned with its monotonous rattle. Then, from the world outside, tell-tale noises of an Asian morning wafted in: spluttering sounds from two-stroke engines and gruff bus noises, accompanied by a back-up chorus of hooter jingles.

“Hi Frank”

“Oh...Good morning. I thought you were asleep”

I was still somewhere between semi-consciousness and full reality, but gradually, recollection of the previous night's sleepless hours kicked into gear. Was it a dream? No No ... I could remember some of the thoughts I had repeated to myself in the darkness.

Where was that paper? I scratched around under the low-slung metal bed and located a single sheet, unfortunately next to my water glass. In my semi-waking state, when muscles still seem self-governed, my hand flicked sideways, knocking the purified liquid over the paper and in a line that stretched across the floor, towards Frank's left foot.

“Shit! Well at least the glass didn't break” I muttered.

And then louder: *"Today's the big day, Frank. The all singing, all dancing show."*

"Don't talk to me about dancing. I'm still trying to work out what those girls were up to last night"

"I told you, it was Indian style striptease; only here they don't take off any clothes".

"Pretty strange sort of striptease, if you ask me."

"Well, if that's what it takes to turn you on..." I said, grinning as he turned to face me with a feigned, aghast look on his face.

I drew the somewhat damp paper near to my face. Even without my glasses (wherever they were!) I could make out the rather foreign looking scribble that I now remembered creating some time before the first auto rickshaw had even thought about stuttering into voice ...well before the dawn had emerged.

I scooped up my glasses. Yes, there were the words as I now remembered receiving them. Certainly, a scribble that any six-year-old would have disowned, but nevertheless a discernible set of messages: the jottings of a blind stenographer.

"You know Frank. Something quite strange happened to me last night."

"Don't look at me when you say that, I was in my own bed all night. I swear."

Frank pulled his shorts up and over his faded pants.

"No. I think I heard voices. It's happened to me before, but never as clear-cut as this."

"I think perhaps the heat is getting to you, my boy."

"No, really Frank. Something or someone woke me up and told me what to say at the meeting today. And then him, or her, or it, wouldn't let me get back to sleep before the whole thing was completed. I wrote it all down. Look."

I pointed to the soggy paper, but Frank had already disappeared. More discrete bathroom noises.

"Yes, I think I heard you in the night ... thought it was that rat again."

His deep masculine voice echoed through the bathroom door, half-submerged in the mounting cacophony from outside.

Sometime later – while still in India - I wrote a poem which attempted to tell the story of that night, and the mix of messages that floated down into my reluctantly wakened mind:

Dreams

*Sometimes I wake
In the middle of the night
And half asleep,
My brain goes into overdrive.*

*I toss and turn
As voices tumble down,
To fill my head
With newfound revelations.*

*It does not cease
And will not let me go,
Until I write
Those sleepy words in stone.*

*Momentous thoughts,
In terms of my own life,
Are there next morn
As evidence of the night.*

Mumbai, 2000

Image: newslick.in

