

[Finding Peace In Mother Ganga's Lap](#)

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MY TURN

Finding Peace In Mother Ganga's Lap

Nothing for sale in America compares to the spiritual bliss that comes for free in India

By Bhagawati

I sit in silent joy, the cooling Ganga rushing across my toes. A young local ashram child whom I love as my own sits in my lap, nuzzling me with the back of her head. My vision is filled with the boundless, ceaseless current of Mother Ganga. The setting sun's light dances off her waters, reflecting into my eyes, making them tear with joy. Lord Siva sits midst of Ganga's waters in all His towering glory. The fiberglass statue, erected for the Kumbha Mela, appears to have been there for eternity.

Pujya Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji sings "Swagatam, sharnagatam, shubha swagatam Gange," "Hail, O holy, Ganga! We have come to you for refuge." My body is filled with the coolness of the ghat and the warmth of a divine child; eyes burst with the darshan of Lord Siva and Mother Ganga; ears are filled with the song of God--sung during the day by Pujya Sant Rameshbhai Oza in his Katha, and sung in the evening by Pujya Swamiji on the banks of this holiest of rivers. The mind,

the senses, the memories of any other life have left, for there is no more room for them.

"But don't you ever miss America?" People ask and I laugh. I came to India in 1996 as a tourist, on a short vacation from my clinical psychology Ph.D. program. I planned to travel, explore, relax and then to return to the white, upper class Western life in which I had been raised. In the West we are taught that happiness can be "acquired" and "obtained" as though it were a commodity. But having had everything Western life has to offer, I was still not deeply happy. Sure, I was happy on the outside, content, "satisfied." But never had I even dreamed of the joy that ran straight to the core of my being the first time I stood on Ganga's banks, bathed in the sound of Swamiji's voice. Never had I even dreamed of such blissful peace as given by life in the lap of the Himalayas.

To be in India at all is a blessing. To be there for Kumbha Mela is due only to God's grace, a time when India's true spirit emerges. It is a time when the essence, the bloodstream, of Indians across the world comes alive and calls them home. They rush, they flock, they flood as though the call came from so deep inside as to be unavoidable. And for what? To listen to great saints speak divine truth. To bathe in holy waters. To offer ghee to rising flames. To cleanse themselves of sins. To imbibe of what their scriptures say is the nectar of immortality. This is the incredible spirit of India.

For what will Americans, the "richest" people in the world, flock in such numbers? For what will they withstand crowds, heat, inconvenience? Perhaps a major sports event, a rock concert?

Perhaps a free McDonald's french-fries giveaway? So, when asked if I miss America, the answer is a resounding "No." But it is more than "no." It is "yes" to India, a country filled with people who will spend their last rupee (and days on buses) to bathe in the holy water of our Mother. It is "yes" to a country overflowing with hungry and shoeless children whose eyes and spirits yet shine with the light of God. It is "yes" to India where everyone understands the ecstasy I am experiencing as I sit with my toes dipped in the holy waters of Mother Ganga, my eyes tearing at the sight of the sun streaming from Lord Siva's open palm, my soul being carried to Heaven as Swamiji leads the arati, the Worship with Lights.

Phoebe Garfield, 27, a former US Ph.D. student, doing seva for Swami Chidanand (Muniji) at Parmarth Niketan in Rishikesh.