

The Journey Within- A report on the December Workshop of 2014

28th December, 2014
The Fellowship

The December 2014 workshop officially commenced on the 28th morning, as thirteen people from diverse backgrounds, ages, cities and perspectives arrived at Asia Plateau, to embark on what would unfold to be one of the greatest journeys of their lives: the journey within.

Even though all those present had attended the youth conference and were familiar with the idea of quiet time, the sensation that this workshop was going to be drastically different in a transformative way was almost palpable.

Our day began early, before the first rays of dawn broke over the blue mountains of Panchgani, with a prayer to set the tone and request GOD's assistance in this mission we were on together; the mission of making a positive difference in ourselves, our families, our society and our country.

The participants spoke of the changes they had implemented since the Youth conference in June, and the results they had experienced in their lives. Everyone also spoke of the current circumstances they were undergoing, and what they were doing in terms of academics and career. This served as an introduction and in certain cases, as re-acquaintance.

The convener mentioned how in a recent conference he had addressed the growing menace of suicide amongst youth, who feel like they have nothing to look forward to and nothing to live for. We were astonished to hear that at least 80% of people at one point or another have contemplated suicide. We identified the root cause of this as thinking that life was hard, a burden perhaps and feeling depressed. So, we began to focus on the other end of the spectrum, we sat in silence by ourselves and reflected on the happiest, naughtiest and funniest moments of our lives. When we began to share what we had jotted down, one could see the participants excitedly adding moments which were

triggered by another's sharing, one could see the smile erupt in everyone's face as they unlocked a distant memory that had made them jump with joy. One could feel the happiness coursing through each person in the room, charging the atmosphere with laughter, joy and elation.

We humans have the amazing power of imagination, and the power to think ourselves into another's experience as we hear them relay it, a deep sense of camaraderie had been struck amongst us, as we experienced each other's most intimately joyous moments.

If there was one thing we were collectively certain about after seeing how much happiness life had to offer, it was that no matter how hard life got, suicide was no longer an option.

The objective of the conference was to focus on the 'I', feel full and empowered from within so that we are able to coalesce into the 'WE'. For this purpose we set out questioning ourselves on every aspect of the 'I'.

We reflected on what our objectives for being present at the conference were, what we sought to make of it, and why we were truly here. Most of the reasons expressed were centred on 'I'; the objective was to ultimately shift our perspective to thinking about our families, our society and our nation so that we could make a true, lasting and positive difference in this world.

The day drew to an end, with us holding hands and praying that our mission is successful.

29th December, 2014
The Winding Road

We had begun our sojourn through the wilderness of our being, this morning we spent our quiet time introspecting on what we were truly searching for in life. This meditation served as more than a simple answer to a question. It focused our attention and energies towards our intended destinations. In today's world, distractions are aplenty with advertisements, hoardings, television and so many other devices that seek to grab our attention, it becomes difficult to focus on any one thing for a prolonged duration and the

result, is shortened attention span and consequentially, lack of clarity on what is important to us.

This question attuned our focus, towards our target; like concentrating the rays of the sun through a magnifying lens at a dried leaf. In this case the magnifying lens was the question, 'what am I searching for', and the object of scrutiny, was ourselves. The result was that we had set fire to the desire of reaching our intended destination; metaphorically, of course.

Rumi once ruminated, "What you seek, is seeking you" This adage is true, simply because when we make a decision to achieve, or reach somewhere, the entire universe, or GOD if you will, conspires to make it happen.

This question, for some of the participants served dual purposes; it eliminated clearly what they were NOT searching for, while highlighting to themselves what they were truly looking for. Personally speaking, it gave birth to more questions, such as 'Who or what is the 'I' that is searching, and Why am I searching? This question was to be a recurring theme of the workshop as we spent a little time everyday delving deeper to unearth and understand this mystery.

Post lunch, we took a short power nap in one of the lounges to the soothing tune of 'Om Mani Padme Hum' playing softly in the background. We (unsuccessfully) tried to keep our minds awake as our bodies went to sleep. Half an hour later, we awoke, refreshed, rejuvenated and ready to journey on.

The heart of darkness

The convener then spoke of something not many people have stopped to ponder over. The eternal enigma of 'Who am I'? It is a deep question that sages and philosophers contemplate endlessly. On the surface, it appears as though we know who we are, as we continue the routine activity of unconsciously piling more layers onto ourselves each day. However, this question made us STOP piling and start assimilating our understanding of ourselves.

Are we just an idea? Are we imagination experiencing itself? Are we just a pile of flesh and bones, destined to follow a monotonous, meaningless course and pass away when the time comes? Or is there something more to us?

We had a long quiet time session pondering over this question, in those tranquil moments, each one of us dove into the depths of our being, and what we found shook us up more than any roller coaster ride. We found lies, ugliness, insecurities, vices, wounds, ego, torn relations, hypocrisy, obscenity, and a multitude of imperfections. We also found bravery, strength, optimism, truth, beauty, authenticity and most importantly, Love and compassion.

An extraordinary synergy had been created amongst us; a bond had been forged where we experienced the freedom and space to share our most intimately held secrets, our deepest desires, our ugliest moments and most painful regrets without fear of judgement or condemnation. We shared this unspoken understanding of the nature of our fragility and imperfection. We stopped seeing each other as a separate entity; we began to feel each other's joys, sorrows and pain. We listened with empathy and spoke without apprehension. To a large extent, we served as mirrors for each other, each one reflecting to the other a part of themselves. This was beautiful and exquisite, simply because there were people between the age groups of sixteen to thirty seven coming from different towns, and upbringings, at different stages of life, where we didn't have much in common. However, we had intersected each other's paths at exactly the right time to play an important part in our collective evolution.

The convener shared his own reflections upon the question and gave us a direction to introspect in, which was a practical and pragmatic approach towards defining and understanding oneself, following which the entire day was spent sharing our most authentic and objective understanding of ourselves.

Something interesting that transpired this day was that Arshaluyus, an IOfC intern from Armenia who is currently pursuing her PhD in psychology joined us for our sessions as an observer. We were glad to have a silent and respectful spectator.

The day ended on a sombre yet tranquil note as we felt the sudden rush of liberation which accompanies finding and facing oneself

30th December, 2014

Light at the end of the tunnel

By now, we were accustomed to the December chill and looked forward to the morning quiet time. It was a space we grew more comfortable with, and being by ourselves, exploring the recesses of our life for prolonged durations was eagerly anticipated. The question of "Who am I?" was not fully answered yet. (Is it ever?) The convener, recognizing the importance of this query in our quest allowed us to deliberate upon it during this morning quiet time as well.

The most significant sharing which followed was from a teenage girl who had been mostly quiet throughout the workshop; she shared with us the story of how she went through severe emotional turmoil as a child due to abuse by a neighbour. The pain and anger which she had carried for all these years, and not spoken about to anybody including her family was released in that intense sharing. That is when the power of such a workshop truly dawned upon me, in those gripping moments, as she bared her most vulnerable, deeply held secrets, the entire group felt every emotion as she relayed and empathised by listening to her in absolute silence. We had nothing to say, so we prayed for her. We prayed that she be healed, and that she finds within herself the courage to forgive.

Now, we had an idea of the kind of people we were, and what we were searching for in life. We had also grown quiet within ourselves to be able perceive our lives through the lens of silence and honesty. The next step was contemplating about the kind of people we wish to be. The afternoon quiet time was spent with each of us finding our favourite spots in the greenery of Asia plateau and introspecting in tranquillity, we envisioned the characteristics of the best possible version of ourselves that we could be.

The very exercise opened our eyes to what we could have been, and a deep sense of understanding of where we had strayed from our highest path emerged. When I saw for myself what all I could achieve or the person I could be if only I let go of my laziness and Indiscipline, I was shocked and amazed.

As each person shared the characteristics they envisioned in their ideal selves, an undertone of motivation could be heard in their voices. There was regret that we had somewhere slipped, but accompanying that was a stronger determination to succeed

going forwards. For what we had seen in those quiet moments filled our hearts with hope, and joy.

That evening the convener told us we would be doing something very different, we would all attempt to reach this point of stillness within ourselves. So we all sat together on the floor in a dark lounge. We focused on the breath entering the tip of our nose, and became acutely aware of the feeling in our hands.

Slowly, we moved into this place of deep calm, where all emotions, thoughts and feelings dissolved into nothingness and with it, so did our sense of self. In this deep silence, we breathed in stillness and became so very quiet that we could feel the blood rushing in our palms. At that moment, we collectively dissolved into silence, and deep blissful tranquillity. For a fleeting instant as my sense of self disappeared, I glimpsed my true nature as it emerged through me; I realized I am pure awareness. Words don't quite suffice to express that experience. We called it a day, holding hands in prayer, feeling reborn and rejuvenated.

31st December, 2014
The last hearth



The last day of the year dawned upon us, beckoning us to reflect upon the last year from a fresh perspective and charging us with the determination to implement the insights we had gained over the last few, to create a magical transformation in our lives.

The day began as usual, with us holding hands and praying. The convener asked us to do two exercises this day. Write a prayer to GOD, and list down all the negative events and incidents that had occurred during 2014 on a blank white page.

In our morning quiet time we focussed on refining our idea of who we want to be. We had a session on Time management following a quiet time reflection where we identified all the creative ways in which we waste time. The winner of that contest was a girl who said she wasted half a day and spent the other half cribbing about wasting the first half. Each one found that we waste a lot of time which is our most precious resource, and saw at the end of the exercise that we could easily add two-three days more in our week if we cut down on our time wasting activities. These additional days could go a long way into working towards our goals and making ourselves the humans we wanted to be.

After a quick tea, we set out on a trek to the top of Asia Plateau. And passed the New Year crowds into a secluded cave where we burnt the sheet which had all our negative moments in 2014. This act was symbolic of letting go of all the negatives qualities and habits in ourselves such as laziness and indiscipline and vices and starting afresh. As we saw the sun sink under the horizon for one last time that year, we felt the year truly drawing to a close.

This night too, we delved deep down to find the point of stillness within ourselves; we planned to ring in the New Year in a unique way. We spent the hours between 2014 and 2015 meditating and praying. We sat in a dark room, in a circle with a lit lamp in front of each one of us. We silently prayed to GOD that HE blesses us and gives us the strength to be true to ourselves and our highest potential. As we sat immersed in the each other's silent presence, each one thinking the most positive thoughts and prayers, we felt a rush of energy surging through us.

Personally, I offered gratitude to GOD as I counted all my blessings, especially for being in the company of such wonderful, genuine and warm people who had intersected paths

to teach me so many valuable lessons at exactly the right time. We brought in the New Year feeling absolutely rejuvenated and on an ecstatic note with our new found family.

1st Jan 2015

A New Beginning, an Empty Canvas



In a continuation of the act of witnessing the last sunset of the previous year, we took to the gardens outside the rock view building to pray as the sun rose for the first time in 2015. We sat on mats in a circle and prayed in silence to welcome the New Year which would witness our transformation into the best version of ourselves.

The quiet time session in the morning was spent addressing a question which we were suitably poised to answer at the moment. How do we get to where we want to be? We knew where and who we were. We knew who wanted to be and our destination. Now it was time to connect the dots and form a roadmap towards our intended destinations. The convener had spoken to us earlier about habits, and we now were encouraged to inspect our habits, both negative and positive. We identified the habits which didn't serve us in our best interest and made a positive commitment to eradicate and replace them with positive habits such as waking up early every day, and making the most of our time.

"We are what we repeatedly do; excellence then is not an act but a habit."

Our entire journey had boiled down to this point where we realised what habits would take us to where we wanted to go, and which ones lead us astray. By consciously

committing to imbibe the former, and remove the latter from our lives we had taken the first step towards our highest selves, towards our dreams and our destiny.

Each of us shared our practical roadmaps which we had consciously designed upon the empty canvas of the New Year; the convener helped us make it as pragmatic as possible by suggesting that we centre them on our habits. A feeling of inspiration surged through all of us as we realised we can truly achieve our potential and that we will.

Bhisham, one of the participants made us perform an exercise which found the intersecting sets between "what our skills were, what our possible career choices are, and what we feel the world needs right now' Which gave a lot of participants a sudden and immense clarity on their purpose and how to make a living out of a career they enjoy whilst making a positive difference in the world.

2nd January 2015
The Road goes on

The sudden realisation that the workshop had drawn to an end struck us as we woke up this day. For in Asia plateau we were engulfed by this sense of timelessness. Each day saw us going through intense happiness, sadness, guilt, jealousy, turmoil, satisfaction, much laughter and many a quiet time insight, all these emotions the learnings and growth we perceived in ourselves in retrospect, were our only measure of time. For the last time we started the day holding hands with our new found family and praying that we continue the gathered momentum and stay true to our positive commitments.

The quiet time was focussed on strengthening our commitment to the habits we choose to inculcate earlier and refining our roadmap for the future. We were then asked to present a formal speech on our experience of the December workshop. Each person's speech reflected in a unique way the learning we had all imbibed, the most prominent speeches touched upon the importance to facing the truth and accepting it, On being more authentic to oneself, forgiving, the transformation in perspective, Self-love, time management and being true to one's highest potential.

The convener then gave us individual feedback on how we had performed in the conference and the star performer was awarded a certificate. We also gave the convener

a star performer certificate for his relentless determination and passion for making a phenomenal difference in our lives.

With that, the workshop drew to a close. We said our farewells with heavy hearts, but with the knowledge that we shall be reunited soon. We walked out of Asia Plateau, stronger, wiser and fully inspired to be the torch bearers illuminating the path towards our destiny.



Alchemy-by Sudarshan Suresh

I often escape into the world of my imagination. A world where I am the protagonist in the story of my life. Embarking on a journey with a mission to shine the light of awareness and vanquishing all the darkness within and outside myself.

A world where I am guided in my quest by a guru, where life becomes a wild and exciting dance with the universe, a love song of intricately woven experiences which I sing and the universe completes, as I let go and surrender to the flow.

A world where I overcome the series of challenges I face by drawing deeper from my inner reservoir of strength and resilience. A world where I am led to the depths of my being, by the sheer magnitude of the challenges I face. A world where magic exists and can be found in our relationship with the universe.

To my greatest delight, I've witnessed the world of my imagination turn to vision and vision turn to reality;

When I landed in Panchgani on a cold December morning, the dawn light was yet to break. The chilly wind and the warm call of a place close to heart welcomed me to a place I now consider a second school.

Little did I know that my alchemical experience was about to unfold. Little did I know the wonders I was about to behold.

I did, however possess this intuitive understanding that the wave coming at me was too vast, too powerful for me to respond in any way other than absolutely surrendering to its flow. So I did, and I could not have possibly imagined the places it swept me away to, the sights I would witness along the way.

When I look at myself in the mirror, I see someone I know inside out, I see somebody I like, I see a friend, I see myself, I see somebody I would do absolutely anything for. I see the journey of my life so far, like watching an interactive movie, where I am constantly weaving experiences to create a tapestry of my universe. I see my hopes and

aspirations in perfect clarity; I see the road map towards my dreams in perfect detail. I see my destiny in perfect alignment with the greatest potential within me.

I feel like I have become more of myself, I am more connected to myself and others. I'm constantly experiencing our interconnectedness by seeing myself in others, through the different emotions pulsating through me.

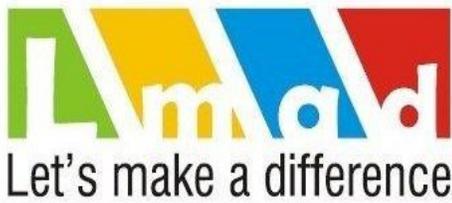
I sense my real self, in what feels like a dam bursting open and the real me gushing forth in powerful waves, every single moment. I have never felt more alive.

There is a vast reservoir of energy within, waiting to be tapped and channelized towards my dreams, it courses through me charging me like electricity, I sense a distant bell ringing, announcing the dawn of a new era, where a constant current of positive, and the most beautiful thoughts flow from the GOD within, infusing my living experience with authenticity, bliss and meaning.

I feel overwhelmed and for the first time, at a loss for words. The experience of the last seven days was curated carefully to bring me to this point of stillness within. As the year drew to an end, we sat in the darkness, in a circle with a lit candle illuminating the dark with hope, inspiration and warmth, we prayed and set our intentions for the next year. We steadily moved in the silence towards this point of stillness in the depths of our being, just breathing and letting go of every notion we held about ourselves. I experienced myself dissolve into nothingness, an infinite, ever-present awareness that permeates all. I was empty, no thoughts, no feelings, and simply pure awareness. I saw myself for who I really am, that awareness that is my true self.

My true nature emerged along with the unspoken understanding of my limitless potential, and I believed with not a trace of doubt that I could do absolutely anything I set my heart and mind to.

Brimming with this newfound GOD like feeling, an ocean of possibilities lay ahead of me. I saw this fog which I had grown accustomed to, lifting to unveil the magnificence of this universe. Connections and coincidences are occurring more often, leading me to experience synchronicity. Events like meeting the exact person I needed to meet at the moment, someone giving me what I needed without me asking for it reaffirmed my thought of life being one big party, the universe was dancing with me, my heart was in the boundless skies, as I leapt off my peak and I was learning to fly.



Asia Plateau, Panchgani - 412 805,
Dist. Satara, Maharashtra,
Tel: (02168) 240241/2
Fax: (02168) 240004
Web: www.in.iofc.org / www.lmad.in
Email: iofc.lmad@gmail.com



A sense of purpose gripped me, the mission of travelling and making the world a smaller place by creating a positive difference wherever I went. This understanding of my purpose filled me with cascading waves of bliss.

For with the guidance of a realized soul, I had found the secret, the secret of alchemy-the art of converting base metal to gold.

When this realization struck me, I couldn't stem the flow of the tears of joy from falling, and the overwhelming freedom which accompanied those tears, consumed me. The secret is to face that gigantic challenge head on, to take that leap of faith, stay true to my course with sheer will power and hurl myself into the abyss of uncertainty. Only to find that instead of hitting jagged rocks at the bottom and perishing; I sprout wings and soar into the infinite skies.

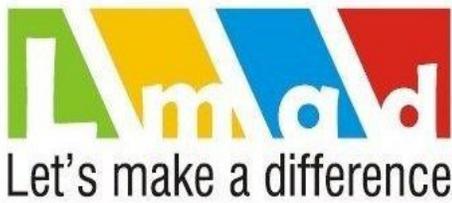
This is the story of my transformation. This was my alchemical journey. Thank you for being a part of it.

My Experience of the December Workshop- Bhisham Mansukhani

I had gathered enough from what I had heard about the Lmad December workshop from some of the privileged, previous participants, to look forward to a deep, introspective experience. I could however, never have realised its intensity and sheer depth until I attended it myself. I was grateful and fortunate to be part of a group of earnest and focussed individuals from whose reflections and insights, I learnt a lot.

Their collective discipline and dedication towards observing long hours of Quiet Time, immersed in their thoughts and then sharing it candidly with the larger group was awe inspiring and set a fine example for me to follow. The positive intent and energy of the group and the sacred vibe of Asia Plateau, allowed me to go deep within my consciousness and look, unscrupulously at who I really was and where I stood in my life with respect to my values, my family, my profession, my country and my purpose. Initially, I was overwhelmed and almost incapacitated, mentally, by the infinite flow of unmerciful insight that my inner voice was letting out. But slowly and surely, a clear perspective began to form and I was receiving answers to my where I had gone so wrong in every aspect of my life, especially my relationship with my family and my mediocre career and personal life. I was struck by my own innate capacity for unconditional honesty with myself and every one I shared the space with, in the Australia Room.

Right from the workshop's first morning, the convenor set the tone for the day, giving us a very clear question we needed to reflect on and when I connected with the question during Quiet Time, the reflections were telling. The reflections were significant. I was truly surprised by how much of myself, those few days revealed to me. In a way, I was rediscovering myself, knowing where I stood and feeling better about myself. The structure and flow of this workshop is so thoroughly effective – like an immaculate art instalment that is fascinating in an abstract sort of way and yet, each element plays a vital role in creating a collective, great human character. And that is testament to the staggering effort and commitment of the convenor. It's conspicuous how every day of the workshop has raised the bar in terms of the conscious realisations, we have about ourselves and each other as a group and the sheer quantum of personal growth, we together experienced in a matter of seven days – on an academic, intellectual and spiritual level.



Asia Plateau, Panchgani - 412 805,
Dist. Satara, Maharashtra,
Tel: (02168) 240241/2
Fax: (02168) 240004
Web: www.in.iofc.org / www.lmad.in
Email: iofc.lmad@gmail.com



Thanks to convenor's conviction and belief in the power of the workshop, we came to know ourselves, our relationships, our goals and our vision for ourselves and the society at large, with astonishing clarity, having chased out confusion and uncertainty from our conscious selves like pale clouds out of a clear blue sky. It's been a great and rare privilege for me to have been part of a journey of introspection, self-discovery and a family of beautiful people with big hearts. This journey was spread literally over the two years of 2014 and 2015 and has been the gift of an experience of a lifetime. The December workshop has led me to pursue my authentic self and an authentic life. I wish it were longer. I wish it were life itself.

.....