

*Monkey and organ grinder,
Creature and mind.
He makes it leap and dance,
He leads it off by the hand.*

Kabir

BOOK ONE

Urbi et Orbi *(The City and the World)* *Jack Kerouac*

Once, when I was very young, I lay in bed in the early pre dawn morning hours, lost in contemplative thought about life. My room was small and narrow. It had one little window that looked out onto the dirt driveway of the house next door. A Mexican family lived there. They had a chicken, a pet squirrel and a rooster that crowed when the sun came up. A block and a half down the street, just across the railroad tracks that carried lumbering, chugging diesel train engines and endless railroad cars filled with coal and scrap iron vibrating into the night, was an old steel foundry called Belle City. I used to see the men that worked there come out onto Albert Street looking like raccoons, their faces covered in the soot of the blast furnaces except for where their eyes had been covered by goggles. As I lie in bed this particular morning, just as the sun was beginning to illuminate the dark sky and all was still and quiet, I heard a huge crash, a startling, reverberating, metallic CLANG! that rattled my window. Then silence returned and the rays of the sun emerged over the horizon. I was stunned. At length, in the orange glow of the morning light, I realized what the sound was. My young mind said:

--Wow, that must have been the crack of dawn!

Chapter One

I am awakened by lightning and thunder; a soft, low rumbling in the distance, at three o'clock in the morning. This is the first time in weeks that I have been able to bring myself to write anything. These have been weeks of turmoil and weeks of love making, weeks of solitude and weeks of reveling in joy and bliss, weeks of isolation and weeks of close personal companionship, too. How all this began, how all the contradictions and polar opposites came to exemplify my existence here on this earthly plane is the story I will tell if I am lucky, if God is with me and if it is God's will that I should do so.

I am long past, I think, desiring the fruits of my labors. That I have come upon my golden anniversary, that I am almost fifty years old, that I have little in the way of possessions or fame or fortune or family or friends -- maybe this is some indication that the fruits of my labor are not desired by me. No, that may be a lie; it is only indicative of the fact that the fruits of my labor have not been realized by me . . . yet. This is a subtle

distinction, however, and one which merits closer examination. Because it is said that first there is the labor, and then, the labor itself becomes the fruit. Pay attention to this. For example, I am still writing, I am still working, I have this purpose, this avocation; I still have my dream of making a difference and of culturally contributing to the collective advancement and sanity of my species, as an artist, and I still feel the urge, the need, the therapy, the release and the camaraderie of my prose, so while writing is my labor, my work, it is also the *fruit*. Similarly, I have begun spiritual practices again, such as contemplation, devotion, meditation and scriptural study. This I have done before, and while it is labor to do so, certainly the fruit of that labor is had without any doubt and is gained freely and in abundance from intimate acquaintance with them.

The clouds relinquished the rain with sad restraint upon the lawn and trees outside my bedroom window, and the lightning and thunder so violent previously ceased almost as soon as I began writing. The brief storm must have been God way of waking me up to tell me it was time to get to work again. Thank you. This, I am sure, is God's response to my achieving sobriety and freedom from drugs. In the past, in the recent past, that is, for the last year or so, I always found myself leaning on the crutch of alcohol, marijuana or cocaine to bolster my writing endeavors, I thought, and as a result, the means to the end were compromised, and the end I achieved, well, let's just say the means certainly did not justify the end. Yes, I've got that right. While I may have accomplished my primary goal, which was the work, the putting down of words on paper, the secondary and tertiary results were definitely something else, like dissipation, addiction and despair. The estimation of the value or worth of the work I will leave for others to fathom and in God's hands in any and every case.

You may well ask, why would I want to add those miseries to my life? A clouded mind, a fouled, poisoned body, bad company, evil conquering over good, sin and suffering and selfishness and pleasure seeking and folly -- these things are not to be embraced, but shunned, this I now realize again. I knew this before, and I had stopped this nonsense previously. So why did I begin again?

I must go back to two years ago, almost to the day, when I stepped foot on home turf for the first extended period of time in over twenty years. That home turf, on the shores of the great Lake Michigan in Wisconsin, is my small hometown of Racine, my humble birthplace. *Natal*. I had come home from San Francisco, my long time residence, and moved in with my parents due to a family illness. My father had been hit with a stroke, and I, being an only child, and away from home for so long, felt the need to come home and look after my aging folks. During this stay, which lasted four months, I shed my addictions, most of them, that is, except for coffee and cigarettes, while enjoying long hours of contemplation in the woods and on the beach, the chanting of God's name in *mantric* rhythm, *Kundalini yoga* meditation and the study of my *guru's* writing and other more ancient scriptural texts such as *Jnaneshwar Maharaj's* commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Hindu Celestial Song.

Back then, as now, I had no gainful employment, which certainly contributed to my ability to engage in these kinds of endeavors. I survived by means of the small but adequate and gracious stipend given to me by my parents. Of course, I did a little work around the house and the yard, and was available to do my mom and dad's bidding at a moment's notice, but although I tried to find a real job, it seemed that I could not find my place in the scheme of things here, the EMPLOYMENT scheme, that is. And I really did

try to find a job the first time I came home, to no avail, and likewise now -- this time, upon returning home in March, I submitted some forty applications and resumes and could not drum up a thing; not a single full time job offer was forthcoming.

This I could chalk up to my age, my intimidating wealth of experience and education, my eclectic character or odd nature, or just to my bad luck. I've often remarked lately that I'm the most over qualified unemployed person in this town of a hundred thousand inhabitants. While I'm convinced that this is a humorous comment, I'm equally sure it's not too far off the mark. In any case, it has been a source of frustration and contention among my parents and I, as well as an inconvenience to me when it comes to my ability to do things with my girlfriend and buy things I might desire or need, to say the least. And the lack of a job, a place to go where I can interact with other people, has increased my loneliness and my isolation. While that is a challenging position to be in, it's not necessarily a bad position to be in, being alone that is, especially if you're a writer.

Because I have found in my life that being in the society of people has its disadvantages, too. While there are certainly good people in the world and it is well worth the time it takes to associate with them, there are other people who are frankly bad influences, negative and depreciating and jealous and gossipy and greedy and lustful and pleasure seeking and profane and violent in word and deed. And, of course, there is the all pervasive tube, *The Eye of Hell*, that national disgrace and disease that plagues our nation, *television*, which makes us feel like we're in society even if we're watching the damn thing alone. Even before my most recent arrival in Racine, and my subsequent isolation from society thereby, I practiced total abstention from watching the tube, as well

as keeping away from newspapers and other forms of popular media. My only vice in this regard has been watching movies on a VCR and occasionally in the cinema.

Even that preoccupation, if you could call it that, is fraught with danger these days, because modern movies are loaded with gratuitous violence and sex and profanity, so much so that you have to wonder how we as a civilization got into this degenerative condition, and how for the love of God we ever hope to eradicate this scourge on our lives. No one seems to care about this, or at least way too few.

Here is an illustration of what I mean. Now, the first generation of Americans who were born without the tube yet lived long enough to see its advent and proliferation, and to take part in that expansion were, I suppose, those born shortly before World War Two. Television first became commercial around 1950, so if you were in your twenties at the time, and are alive today, you might be sixty, seventy, eighty years old, something like that, and therefore, you probably marvel at the technology which brings vivid color moving pictures into the comfort of your very domicile, with such a grand array of programs to choose from on cable and satellite TV. Yet these are the very people who incessantly watch a very small selection of the variety available on the tube, the ones with seemingly insatiable appetites for, among other things, news programs and *real life* crime shows like *COPS*, for example. The results of watching all these kinds of programs, is, I suspect, extreme paranoia, keeping people safely, *they assume*, locked up in their homes, afraid to venture forth due to all the violence and crime they live through vicariously on their tubes.

It is my contention that, except for absolute need to know situations, like a flood is coming, or a killer is at large in your neighborhood, the members of society should not

be inundated with oppression information about the various and sundry aberrations of its constituents. Yes, we do need to appoint individuals, institutions or arms of the government to deal with such aberrant perpetrators, to find true criminals and punish them, but we as a society do not need to have our noses rubbed in the filth. If you watch the tube, however, if you tune into news programs and the like, all that you'll hear about, by and large, are serial killers and rapists and kidnappers and robbers and murderers and thieves of one kind or another. This excessive reportage of all the bad news in America leads to national paranoia and may, in fact, fan the flames of our indolence and evil tendencies. One would think that, after seeing all the blood lust shown in movies and on television, Americans have an unquenchable desire for such sanguine situations. Perhaps that's our fatal flaw; we are the only species that kills its own kind for no reason at all. Is it just our frustration at being born into a world only to have to die to it in the end?

So we televise this kind of abhorrent misery night and day, as we do explicit sexual shenanigans, such as *The Spice Channel*, now on twenty four hours a day on *The Eye of Hell*. For now it's *soft core* pornography -- who knows how long before it will become *hard core*, of the sort that, of course, is available on at least one street corner in every town, and for free on the Internet, and yet, and yet, our desire for such things does not, apparently, decrease by its ready availability. Of course not! What desire, what craving have you ever had which you were able to quell permanently by satisfying it?

This, I think, should give us a hint into the psychology of desire, of pleasure seeking, for if giving full vent to such tendencies decreased our desire for them, then perforce those tendencies would diminish over time, and all the porno vendors and

violence peddlers would be put out of business. But this is not the case. As Bob Marley sang, *every need got an eagle to feed*, and I guess he was right.

The Hindus call this age *Kali Yuga*, the Age of Sex and Violence; an age is also called a *kalpa*, and this last age, *Kali Yuga*, is said to be part of a series of four never ending cycle of ages between the time God, *Brahman*, the creator, opens His eyes and the universe is brought into being and the time, God, *Shiva*, the destroyer, closes His eyes and the universe ceases to exist. I, for one, am certainly tired of this merry go round of sex and violence, of decay and degradation, of moral decline and physical and psychic abuse. So stop the world, *Shiva*, I want to get off!

Still, we all have our individual free wills, and it's in the exercise of that free will that we have the choice to participate in this folly or not. But the pull is so strong and it takes a firm and resolute individual to say no to this nightmare of evil. Where does one begin? Where does the spark of discrimination lay? I would have to say that, classically speaking, it is the job of religion to teach people right from wrong. You certainly can't legislate morality, you can only incarcerate law breakers. While Jesus Christ was on Earth, He taught people what they should and should not do. So did Buddha and *Krishna* and Mohammed. The problem always has been and still is that although the teachings were given, soon they became misconstrued and maligned, I suppose, by the clerics or the citizens, who knows? *Krishna* taught *Arjuna* in the *Bhagavad Gita* that it was okay to do battle with his enemies, and thousands of years of bloody wars are the result. Not exactly what He meant, I suspect. Christ taught peace, yet *The Crusades*, in His name, exterminated thousands. All taught renunciation, yet today we have nations of greedy religious people. What a crazy mixed up mess.

This is why, one could posit, in every age, it is said that when things get bad enough, God sends an *avatar*, an incarnation of himself, to Earth to set things right again. Because in every age, things change, people change, their anxieties and needs and circumstances differ, and a new Christ or a Buddha must come to address those issues, being in tune with the times, when the times turn ruinous enough. So -- when will you send us another, Lord? We need her now.