



**Sehdev  
Kumar**



**Dr. Sehdev Kumar, Professor Emeritus, frequently lectures on cruises on 'Human Journey Across the Ages' from ecological and spiritual perspectives. Author of recently published, 'Matters of Life & Death: Reflections on Bioethics, Law and the Human Destiny', his forthcoming book is entitled '7000 Million Degrees of Freedom'.**

**Email: sehdev.kumar@utoronto.ca**

**www.sehdevkumar.com**

“**T**hough we travel all over the world to find the beautiful, we find it not till we take it with us," American philosopher Emerson wrote in mid 19th century, at a time when over eighty percent people in the world rarely traveled more than 150 kms away from their homes.

These words, however, are far more important today when, it seems, the whole world is on the move. On trains, in buses, in cars, at airports and at seaports, everyone is going somewhere, so desperate to get away from it all.

So much so that today not to have travelled to far off places, to other lands and countries, to remote and exotic places seems a sign of certain backwardness, of parochialism, even of lack of basic education.

Over the years I have travelled quite a bit, and for the past few years I have been travelling on a few cruises to distant islands in the Pacific, Indian and the Atlantic oceans. Recently I was on a trans-Atlantic cruise from Fort Lauderdale in Florida to Barcelona in Spain, and in many Portuguese and Spanish islands on the way. I was on Royal Princess cruise with some 3200 passengers and over 1400 crew members. It was a like a small town, with theatres, bars, swimming pools, casino, art galleries, formal dining halls, and on and on.

Endless sumptuous luxury, an escape from everything, except, of course, from oneself!

"Wherever You Go, There You Are", author Jon Kabat-Zinn calls it 'Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life.'

Whether we are visitors, tourists, pilgrims, explorers, or sojourners, the moment we step outside the four walls of our home - outside the familiar and the known - we encounter something new. How we experience that encounter can be quite unique to each one of us.

# Grain of Sand & A Flower



**L**ife is a journey', is an endearing metaphor for life. When sailing on the sea, though in luxury, but with hundreds of strangers, this metaphor seems even more apt. Who do you meet, what do you talk about and share, what do you miss, what are you escaping, what are you trying to forget, all these things and many more become suddenly quite important.

In the beautiful port of Palma, in Majorca, in Spain, I saw a bag, with the words: "It is not how you look, but how you see that makes all the difference."

At every step of our journey, someone, or something, keeps asking us about the wonder and mystery of this journey.

**M**adeira is beautiful Portuguese island; it is a little paradise - sun-soaked white beaches, mountains, luxurious vegetation, luxuriating weather, and beautiful, handsome people. I never saw such burst of colours and such sensuous flowers anywhere in my travels. Where have they been hiding all these years, I wondered. As I see their mesmerizing forms, colours, and hues, I wonder how such beauty can lie imbedded in a dark seed, and how anyone could possibly foresee the emergence of such grandeur. For a moment I thought some mysterious subliminal energy is smiling out from somewhere and teasingly looking at me.

If the flowers had not first emerged on our planet, an evolutionist once wrote, man would not have evolved. We are all flower children, in one manner or another.

"There are always flowers for those who want to see them," artist Henri Matisse once remarked. What could he possibly mean?

Didn't Marc Chagall once observe: "All an artist is trying to capture is the beauty of a flower and never succeeding!"?

An now suddenly, standing on a sandy beach, watching a young beautiful woman hold these Madeira flowers in her delicate slender hands, for a moment indeed I saw "the world in a grain of sand ... and heaven in a flower."

**I**n Madeira, in the centre of the town there is a beautiful cathedral. Quietly I participated in the service in Portuguese and listened to the beautiful hymns. A few years earlier, on a Panama cruise, I recalled,

how I was in the town of Cartagena in Columbia in Central America with my daughter Ankita on Christmas Day and how we celebrated Christmas in a small church there, and found the experience so very enchanting.

The spread of Christianity - with all its missionary zeal, clever manipulations, insidious destructions and devastation of other traditions and religions - is a long and sad saga. For us in India it is well-known, as the Portuguese were the first European power to come to India in 1498 led by Vasco da Gama, and the last ones to leave India -- Goa and the surroundings on the west coast -- in 1962.

Thus, for me, to visit a church in Portugal (as my daughter Ankita and I did in Goa in November 2014 at the unveiling of the body of St. Francis Xavier) was an experience that stirs many memories about the proselytising history of Christianity in many parts of the world, and what destructions it wrought in the world, and how it changed the map and the character of the world.

Yet, at the Cathedral in Madeira, there was a tender little human drama which touched me deeply, and reminded me of that ever-flowing spring of spiritual impulse that is at the very heart of creation. I saw an old man in a wheelchair all wrapped up in blankets, quite up front in the church. A young woman - his daughter I assumed - attended to him with utmost tenderness. She had one hand placed on his shoulder for well over an hour during the period I watched them. It was a hand of such love-imbued reassurance that it felt like it was the hand of God itself; a gentle smile on his face seemed to indicate so clearly that he savoured every moment of this gracious gift.

For a brief sacred moment I wondered what role has such a hand played in the long and arduous human journey across the ages? And if "a seed in the black earth can rise into such beautiful roses, what might not the heart of man become in its journey towards the stars"?

**S**o you see, how one escapes from it all, and yet, if you let it happen, new doors open all the time, leading one into a new wonderland that we sometimes call the universe.