

pass by and want to
nibble raw grains

As he started
pouring the seed behind the plowshare
pulled by a pair of white oxen
I walked beside him
captivated by the opening and
closing of the furrow.
Present and past happening
in the same instant

Later when he
moved to the Fraser Valley farms
of British Columbia
he picked blueberries.

Sometimes
he paused took a fistful
of the fruit
hurled in the air and uttered,
this one for birds

a whole bunch of song birds
ran riot in his head
Beaks blue with half eaten berries

* * *

Everywhere I go, I find a poet has been there before me.

-Sigmund Freud

Thanksgiving en Suisse

Kavita Ramdya

The term “sibling rivalry” exists for a reason; it is a phenomenon that has plagued many families, small and large, since Cain slew Abel, jealous that God accepted his gift of animal sacrifices over Cain’s less-appealing produce. Of course, fratricide is a rare occurrence, but it is notable that sibling rivalry occurs early on in the Old Testament’s story of mankind’s origin.

There are many scientific theories for sibling rivalry: evolutionary biologists might propose that siblings compete for parental love and resources, Freudian psychologists suggest that sibling rivalry between brothers is a way to assert masculinity in the eyes of the mother, and chemists might say it’s due to the fluctuating hormones that young children and adolescents experience growing up. Despite my voracious appetite for reading self-help guides and evolutionary-psychology books, and talking to friends about their own relationships with their siblings, I’ve never come across my problem, which is the problem of loving one’s sibling too much. Mine is a love that burdens me; while friends feel the lightness of not worrying about their siblings, what I interpret as borderline not caring, I carry the weight of wondering when my younger brother will e-mail or call. Inevitably, when he does it feels like what I imagine it is to win a medium-sized lottery: a happy surprise that causes an upsurge of euphoria followed by a quick, crash landing and a reality check. Plus, the lottery win, although a nice surprise that improves my quality life for a short time, is not enough to change my life forever. That would require much more.

Traditionally, the family – my parents, my brother and I, and our spouses – spend Thanksgiving Day at my Aunt Kathy’s house in Stonybrook, Long Island. She has a God-

given talent for baking a corn casserole that inspires year-long wishful thinking which is only briefly satiated on Thanksgiving Day. We, my brother and I, are slim individuals (he because of his naturally quick metabolism and me from long hours of biking and yoga – DNA is cruel in its randomness), but on Thanksgiving Day we both sit shamelessly on Aunt Kathy’s coach with half a plate of corn casserole crowding out the other tempting yet ordinary dishes (cranberry sauce, rolls, turkey meat, roti, daal – oh, yes, Aunt Kathy also serves Indian food to celebrate our family’s origin in the subcontinent).

This Thanksgiving, since our parents decided to visit India for the month of November, my husband and I are skipping Thanksgiving in Stonybrook as it doesn’t feel right to fly all the way from London, where I live with my husband, to New York and not see my parents. Four months ago, my brother and his wife moved to Lausanne, Switzerland, and although it occurred to me that my husband and I could visit them, it was a fleeting hope, a fancy of sorts that I never expected to transform into reality. So imagine my surprise when, one evening, he and his wife rang to invite us over for “Thanksgiving en Suisse”. Although my husband wasn’t around for me to run the idea by him, I enthusiastically answered “yes!” while wondering what culinary delights I would purchase from Fortnum & Mason whose holiday packaging alone is worth the exorbitant prices of their Shropshire Honey and Cheese Board Chutney, Organic Stilton Cheese and Goose Foie Gras with Truffles, English pies and Cornish pastries.

For years Thanksgiving was and still remains my favorite holiday for many reasons: it is an opportunity for us to celebrate America’s position as a beacon of light for immigrants (my parents and their generation migrated from India), the holiday is without the pressure of buying extraordinary gifts, and there’s no financial pressure. In fact, you can even attend wearing jeans (which I would never do

although my tall and lanky brother once wore a canary-yellow-hued parka that I called him “Big Bird” behind his back). Finally, Thanksgiving is the perfect opportunity to catch up with extended family that I haven’t seen since the last Thanksgiving and either remember why I haven’t spoken or emailed them in a year or regret not having called or texted (I like to think it’s more the latter than the former, but it would be interesting to keep a tally). And, of course, there’s Aunt Kathy’s corn casserole.

Since moving to London, Thanksgiving has shifted in priorities for me: it is now an opportunity to see my brother, study him, talk to his wife and put on the appearance of seeming breezy and worry-free, unconcerned without being flippant, cool and easy without seeming uncaring. Although he is only eighteen months younger than me, whether due to my being a woman, developing the domineering psychology of being an older sibling, pausing before leaping into having children of my own, or any number of reasons (hey, it could even be because I’m a Leo!), I watch and listen to him the way I imagine overly-concerned parents do their kids. My ears prick up when he’s in the room: I eavesdrop on his conversations, notice his body language to decide if he’s okay, monitor dips in his voice to ascertain if he’s telling me the whole story or not, and listen for what themes surface and re-surface in order to decipher what’s really on his mind.

There is no one I am less gentle with than with my brother and it has always been that way. With him I don’t speak gingerly, beat around the bush or employ euphemisms to indirectly suggest what I’m thinking. That’s not to say that I am rude. I made a conscious decision early on to introduce him as my “younger” rather than “little” brother. I eagerly read scientific writing and reviews of scientific books so that I can learn something about his field (his is neuroscience; mine is writing). But, I admit, I am unforgiving when it comes to giving him advice. For example, I risked making him feel uncomfortable by telling

him to, unequivocally, ALWAYS wear condoms. A devoted yogi, I once suggested he have a colon cleanse. After graduating from college, I told him not to even consider smoking marijuana if he wanted to apply for a job at a bank or large corporation. And I pressured him get a respectable summer internship in Manhattan after his freshman year in college while most of his peers were cutting meats at the local, small-town butchery in suburban Smithtown, Long Island. (He told a mutual friend that had he not done the leg work to get his summer internship working at a clinical lab for Alzheimer's research at NYU's Hospital, I would have hopped on the Long Island Rail Road from Manhattan to Smithtown and dragged him by his right ear all the way back to Manhattan. (Pinching a young child's ear and dragging him or her to do a chore or study is not a foreign experience in Indian families).

Like any child, he goes through phases when it comes to communicating with me. During my freshman year of college, he relished his independence from me and was conveniently not around when I called home. That only lasted a year, and I was, for once, too distracted (or too clueless) to really let it bother me.

A year and a half ago, while walking along London's Southbank, my brother made it plainly obvious to me that he was concerned our considerable personality differences were not enough for him to bridge. I knew he was under more stress than he had ever endured: he was in a long-distance relationship with his fiancée and waiting to learn if his research would be accepted by elite scientific journals, enabling him to graduate with his PhD in a timely fashion and reunite with the woman who is now his wife. Despite all my elderly-sibling wisdom and understanding that much of what he said he didn't mean as we are all guilty of speaking hurtfully to our loved ones when we're under duress, it hurt. A lot.

Although I haven't done a Google or Amazon search

yet, my guess is that there are few self-help books about learning how to love one's sibling less, so I am on the road alone. Ironically, my husband is an only child, but I've always known that had he ever had a sibling he would probably be "worse" than me if being overly loving is ever a negative emotion. I'm willing to admit that it is.

That road means breaking the habit of calling every Sunday evening to check in on him. It means questioning whether he really needs to read the article about evolutionary psychology in the most recent *Economist* magazine. It means trusting that he will call or e-mail, that when we say "good-bye", we will see each other again when he is ready. Although it used to bother me that our relationship, if we were to have one, would have to be on his terms, I'm slowly but surely getting used to it.

In the world of increased social networking, I'm wondering if there is any point in my trying to "Friend" him on Facebook. I mean, there are people I'm very close with that aren't even on Facebook or that I haven't communicated with via the application even if they are listed as a "Friend". Why does it matter that neither me nor my brother have reached out to each other on Facebook? I consider myself an individual with some psychological insight and recognize the fact that my lack of confidence in our relationship is why I've wondered if I should reach out. Instead of sending him an invite to be my friend, I keep reminding myself of that "road" I'm on.

I kick myself when I run off my "road" like I did yesterday when he e-mailed me with a request for more almonds from Holland & Barrett, a health-food chain store here in London, for when we visit him and his wife for Thanksgiving en Suisse. A few months ago, I bought piles of health food snacks from H&B for the couple, so much so that my right shoulder and arm ached for three days, well after I offloaded the goodies. I responded to my brother's request with an underly-cool, overly-enthusiastic "Done. I'll

bring as many bags as I can fit in my backpack!" and pressed send before quickly realizing that I had done it again: I fell into the trap of wanting to add value, provide, and express how badly I want to be involved in his life. Because, really, it's not like the almonds could be used for cooking a dish like my Aunt Kathy's corn casserole. Thanksgiving in Stonybrook won't ever be replicated en Suisse, but at least it means having the opportunity to love less.

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We have to do more things in our culture than American writers do in theirs. They can have more time for themselves and for their writings, whereas we have social demands. Pablo Neruda used to say that every Latin American writer goes around dragging a heavy body, the body of his people, of his past, of his national history. We have to assimilate the enormous weight of our past so we will not forget what gives us life. If you forget your past, you die.

-Carlos Fuentes

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

-Helen Keller

Exiled Again

Navtej Bharati

Two days before Dec. 6, 1992.

We celebrated our religious and cultural diversity in a seminar on 'shabad' at FICCI Commission Hall, New Delhi. Sadhaks and scholars from India's many faiths gathered here at the seminar to reaffirm shabad as our common root. And to explore whether the shabad consciousness can help us live together without being the same. The Sufis and Bhaktas of medieval India attest we can. We come from one to many, they say. We are different pots of the same clay, says Kabir. But today is not the same as yesterday or medieval times. Hence the seminar was also an attempt to recast or reinterpret the Sufi/Bhakti experience in particular and the Shabad consciousness in general.

Conceived by Amarjit Singh Grewal and sponsored by Baba Sucha Singh of Gurdwara Gur Gian Prakash Jawaddi, Ludhiana, the seminar was inaugurated by Peer Khawaza Hasan Sani Nizami, heir to Baba Sheikh Farid (1188-1280), the first poet of Punjabi and the foremost saint of Chishti Sufi order, in the presence of luminaries of other faiths. A befitting tribute to Sufis and Bhaktas whose inspiring hand stretches over to us across centuries.

The chemistry of violence is extremely complex. More so in India where religion is invariably used for its justification. But what is used to justify the violence may also be used to counter it. Hence the concept of shabad consciousness which is more spiritual than religious. A subversive and epistemic ploy wrapped in religion. This was the insight the Sufis and Bhaktas gifted to us, and which was the subject of investigation in this seminar.

The focus on shabad was a veiled response to the