

# *Ambassador Clowning*

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Of the four clown ambassador trips I have taken in the past five years, the first trip to India was probably the most adventurous. I went on this trip as the only clown to The Prasad Eye Camp 50 miles north of Mumbai (Bombay). The eye camp did micro eye surgery to restore the vision of those who could not otherwise afford it. Some of these people walked barefoot for days to the camp. I was there to soften the bridge between their world and the impact of the high-tech medical procedures.

In India demons have painted faces, so even though I wore "soft" makeup some people were frightened of me. As an experienced hospital clown, I approached the people with caution, meekly lifting my clown hat, "Meera nome Shobi Dobi hey?" In the local dialect - "My name is Shobi Dobi." Well, as chance would have it, a "dhobi" in Hindi is the person in the village who does the laundry and "shobi" means elegantly beautiful. So here was a middle-aged western woman dressed in rainbow stripes and polka dots blowing soap bubbles calling herself a beautiful washerwoman. The villagers could not contain themselves, they giggled and they played -- they played like everyone else in the world plays. It's that connection to the inner light - that spark that happens when people go into their inner child.

The community and spirit were awesome. Once people came to take me to visit a woman in the triage tent who was going to be sent home as blind as she arrived. Her glaucoma was too advanced. There she was blinded in sight and me blinded in language. Being in the clown moment, I never thought about this, but just knelt down to her. Her village friends gathered around talking to her and maybe explaining, in the local dialect, my appearance. I put her hands on my little bird puppet "Birdie Bird" She took him to her forehead (in Hinduism this is a kind of worship) and said "Ah Chota Garuda" Chota means "little" and Garuda is the large bird that carries the Hindu god Vishnu. So in essence she was calling Birdie "Little vehicle of grace." I was so touched. She was just so grateful that someone was paying attention to her - that was the quality of her humility. It was awesome that as a clown and a foreigner, I could touch her in that spot. So in the village and camp Birdie became Chota Garuda for the remainder of the time. It was a sweet beautiful connection and a way for the Indian people to connect to their benefactors. They would play and touch the feet of my puppets -- which is a display of respect and honor. We would all laugh. But there is a little bit of truth in all jest. I felt the waves of their gratitude. The clown had become a tangible heart level way for the people to express their gratitude. I became the heart to heart connection between the doctors and the community. Awesome!

I went from India to Russia in eight hours. It was from warm colorful wide-open India to freezing cold Russia. But it didn't take us long to melt and touch peoples' hearts. In Russia I was with 12 clowns. This was a different experience and needless to say a lot less responsibility, but still very heartfelt and personal. Once while speaking to two Russian doctors who spoke a little English and I spoke of course no Russian, they asked "Why are you coming to Russia to clown? We have clowns in Russia." I explained "We are not here to perform, but to connect to the people in hospitals and orphanages." "But why?" they kept asking, and I kept trying to explain to explain about caring for patients, and about health and humor. But they kept asking "Why?" Then they finally said "Why to Russia?" I thought a moment and finally said "Because we know you are having problems and we want you to know we care." Their eyes filled with tears and we all hugged. That's the basis of a clown ambassadorship. We want to show people we care.

In Guatemala I went with a dentist, a priest and three clowns. I will never forget the look in the eyes of the women watching me, a female clown, working side by side with a priest and a dentist. While the dentist set up and the priest did confessions, I entertained the anxious people waiting in long lines. When the priest finished saying mass and the dentist was ready, I became a dental assistant and

the priest helped wash instruments. There we were side by side in a community where women do not have equal status. Ambassador Shobi.

The trip with Patch Adams to China changed my whole way of clowning. With 44 other clowns I became more courageous. What I did in the other countries was really one-on-one hospital clowning. In China it could be symbolized by my running into a crowd of people with my arms open and hugging as many people as I could. People would squeal with delight. A sort of tag would start to play leaving everyone laughing. After our first day we were on national Chinese television and in the newspapers, so people knew who we were. People would see our bus and wave. Kids would jump up and down with excitement. There we were at all the monuments playing -- silly wonderful Americans. Everywhere we went, people would point, smile, wave, throw us kisses and give us "thumbs up."

Our clowning was not about entertaining, doing tricks or giving things away. As a matter of fact when ever we did that the connection would stop. Patch said "you stop connecting and become vendors." One time we were let loose in a school. We all went into different class rooms and just did silly lessons or sang songs, or blew bubbles. One of the clowns started giving out autographs, then all the kids wanted to have autographs and the fun stopped and the lines formed and that connection stopped. It became a linear connection. We were on top giving down. It became narrow and more patronizing. With the horizontal kind of joy we were spreading, our joy went into infinite directions. The horizontal was equal vision and we were like a huge tidal wave of spirit and joy.

The wave of joy for the clown is play. As wit is the humor language of the mind, joy is the language of the heart. And that play is in Clown's innocent vulnerable character that exudes unconditional love. Unconditional because Clown has equal vision. Everyone, everything falls prey to Clowns exploration regardless of size rank, profession or age. Unconditional because Clown doesn't ask for anything except maybe to participate in play. Clowns draw out the children in all of us. However, if you don't want to play Clown moves on to the next moment. It is this pull into equal vision and the moment that makes Clown so valuable as an Ambassador.

The further we get from our hearts the more complicated our desires and needs. Our minds separate us with their desires and needs. When we play together with our inner child, we become equal, less complicated. As an ambassador clown you see peoples' hearts and souls. When people are joyful, you see such beauty in the human spirit. It is so sweet, the light that shines in the human heart. The clown brightens that light.

There is a Chinese Proverb:

If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person.

If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house.

If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.