



Following Fate

with Photographer Greg Davis

BY JOHN KRAUSE

“Here’s a godwink for you,” says Greg Davis in a mellow Texas accent.

Godwinks are those serendipitous coincidences that can happen in life, and Davis, a world-traveling National Geographic Creative photographer who exhibited his work at SXSW 2017 as part of the first-ever Podcast Stage, embraces them to guide his work.

The one he’s talking about on this particular occasion is the impetus for his latest film project—a journey to find Mohan, a Hindu *sadhu*, or holy man, whom Davis photographed in 2013 during the Kumbh Mela religious fair in India.

Chronicled in Davis’s short film, *Cloth Paper Dreams*, Kumbh Mela occurs once every 12 years and is the largest religious pilgrimage in the world. One hundred million people journey to the confluence of the three holiest Hindu rivers—the Ganges, Yamuna and Sarasvati—to bathe and drink the water, which is believed to cleanse sins and break the cycle of reincarnation.

During Kumbh Mela, in a sea of millions on the banks of the Ganges, Davis saw Mohan waving to him. Davis sat down with Mohan and the two began chatting. When asked where he lived, Mohan said, “The sky is my roof, the land is my room.”

Beyond intrigued, Davis needed to know more. “I live near the birthplace of Lord Krishna,” said Mohan. By chance, Davis knew that place as Mathura but thought little of it at the time.

Over the next three days, Davis learned how Mohan, an only child, had come from a family of wealth, given it all up, as all *sadhus* do, and devoted himself to Brahman (God).

With his infinite wisdom and broken English, Mohan embodied a real-life Yoda. “The things that came out of Mohan’s mouth, ‘cloth paper dreams, the city is made of these things ... Shanti, peaceful life for everyman, I want’, were beautiful,” says Davis.

Now four years later, Davis is going back to India, seeking Mohan and more importantly, the wisdom that resides within him. “It was never my plan ... It is now,” says Davis. “I’m going back to find Mohan somewhere between the heavens and the earth.”

Davis, along with director Brad Feeser of Hearty Films, have already begun working on a feature-length documentary about their upcoming odyssey, titled *The Man from Mathura*. And with a plot as lofty as the heavens Mohan lives under, they acknowledge the challenge in front of them. “We’re going to this place where millions of people live, to find one person who lives on the streets,” he explains.

But this is where the latest godwink comes into play. “I Googled festivals in Mathura and two came up,” Davis says. “One’s in August when we’ll be there, Janmashtami, celebrating the birthday of Lord Krishna.” Davis figures that if anyone will be celebrating Krishna’s birthday, it will be Mohan.

If they succeed, will it be coincidence or serendipity? Feeser believes it is tiptoeing destiny’s fine line: “It’s not if we find Mohan, it’s when.”

When they do, Davis will give him a box with a gift inside. “What do you give to a man that has nothing and everything at the same time? He chose nothing,” he says. “The answer is in the box.”

To find out what’s in the box, follow *The Man From Mathura* on Facebook.