Six

“I have never seen those people in my life.”
“But they are our neighbors.”
“I just cannot remember seeing any one of them. But I remember many shoes by the door. Too many shoes. I remember taking my shoes off, too.”

Years ago, I was in India and had this conversation with mother. I used to “hand write” my conversations, since my speech seemed to be dissolved in my bones or perhaps my liver. There come some social hurdles when one is anointed with Autism. Some of us — “the chosen ones” — do not speak as a social expectation. We face a cave, our backs to the social light called speech when we reply through our bones. I better start writing, or you won’t learn anything from me.

In India, footwear is supposed to be left outside at a designated place away from the living area of a home. If you wear the shoes on the streets, then they can’t be invited in. The rule is universal: family and guests, all leave their shoes outside. No exception.

I was visiting a neighbor for some function and had followed this social rule. As usual, mother had returned home with a bag of questions for me when I walked out after spending just five minutes inside. I was too young to answer the details of the whats and whys. So mother had to re-word the questions to
discover what I saw and heard and what could make me walk out. Mother followed me. I knew my way back home. It was two houses away.

“You found the right pair of shoes. You did not pick any random pair.”

“I have never seen those people in my life. But if there were shoes, there must have been people.” My reply was final. “If there were voices, there must have been people. And the ceiling fan wasn't moving.”

I do not know what more I could have answered. I had seen a bit but not a blink more. I refused to spill my sensory plate with an extreme load. Visual stimuli are like salespeople. Everything in a social gathering is for visual sale. People clothe themselves to stand out; places are decorated to make them look out of place; faces smile at each other — the smiles are enhanced; the smiles seem to expand out of, and away from, the jaws that make them possible. Every smile expects a reciprocal something.

That’s when I hypo-visualize; that’s when I reject the capitalist solicitor called visual stimulation. One doesn't have to answer every YOU’VE-JUST-WON-A-VACATION-IN-ARUBA-OR-HONOLULU phone call. One needn’t adopt a Disney World-like sensation to arouse the eyes.

Vision for me is more than enough. A profligate enhancer. Do not be intimidated by its wild proposals. Like a nagging salesman, your vision will sell you every corner of the galaxy or glare, or a glorious smile and expect you to pay for it. Vision has a radical scheme followed by the principles of manipulative capitalism.