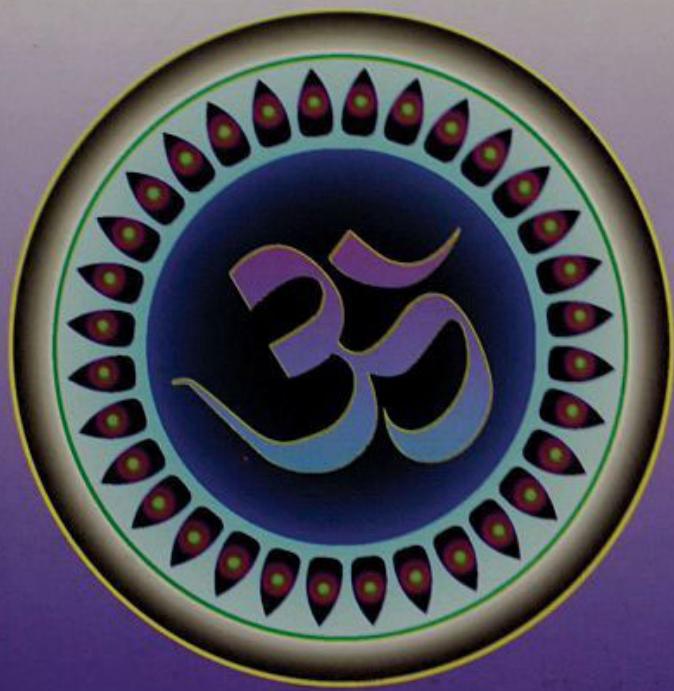


The Odyssey of Enlightenment



Rare Interviews with
Enlightened Teachers of Our Time

Berthold Madhukar Thompson



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by

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Dedication

To the reader—may you realize in this lifetime your buddhahood.

Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Author's Foreword](#)

[Introduction](#)

[The Teachers and the Teachings](#)

[Note to the Reader](#)

[Chapter 1, Osho](#)

[Surrender and I Will Take Care of Your Enlightenment](#)

[Chapter 2, Sri Harilal Poonja](#)

[Realize Who You Are and Then Do Whatever You Like](#)

Chapter 3, Swami Harish Madhukar

Nothing Happens by Chance— Everything Is Significant

Chapter 4, Gangaji

Listen to the Deepest Part of Your Innermost Heart

Chapter 5, Annamali Swami

Knowing the Self Is Being the Self

Chapter 6, Sri Lakshmana Swami

You Cannot Attain the Self Because You Already Are the Self

Chapter 7, Ramesh S. Balsekar

All Is Destined and According to God's Will

Chapter 8, Dadaji

If You Want Enlightenment, You Must Work for It

Chapter 9, Kiran

Spiritual Practices Are Obstructions to Awakening

Chapter 10, UG Krishnamurti

The Worst Desire Is the Desire for Enlightenment

Chapter 11, Adrew Cohen

The Essence of Enlightenment Is Having Nothing, Knowing Nothing, and Being No One

Chapter 12, Sri D. B. Gangolli

Vedanta Is the Science of Reality

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Notes to the Chapters](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Notes About The Author](#)

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Elianne's contribution as an editor was invaluable. However, in addition she functioned as the natural midwife. As a sister seeker and gurubhai (disciple of the same guru) she had witnessed a long stretch of my odyssey first hand.

Her editing skills and personal and cordial advice gave the book the master's touch.

Finally, I would like to express my love and gratitude to my spiritual teachers—and to life, the greatest guru of all.

Author's Foreword

The *Odyssey of Enlightenment* presents a series of remarkable encounters with enlightened teachers that occurred along the path of my twenty-year quest for Self-awakening. I portray my own personal evolution at each step, but the narrative maintains a focus on the teachers, what they taught, and how they taught. Their teachings contain essential insights into the spiritual odyssey each of us travels. More important, they shed light on the phenomenon of enlightenment and the various ways that it can be viewed and achieved in this lifetime.

The ultimate purpose of this book is to demonstrate, through my own example, key features of the spiritual quest toward the nondual realization of truth—which I define as the abidance in one's own true and essential nature. In the process of my own search, I came to understand that all paths and teachings have their culmination in Advaita, or the realization of the nondual ground of presence that expresses itself as the divine manifestation of What Is¹ in the eternal here and now. As the one unnamable essence of All That Is, nonduality embraces all teachings, teachers, seekers and practices, times, locations, and God—and all possible relationships between them.

To introduce you to the teachers I met on my journey, I have provided a short biography at the beginning of each chapter. I then give a brief account of how I was led to this teacher, as well as a brief description of the context in which the encounters took place. (Please note: On occasion, the names of other participants have been changed to avoid encroaching on their privacy.) Each chapter ends with a summary of what I experienced and

what I have learned—and a concluding statement on how my sojourn with this teacher affected my continuing inner search.

For readers who wish to know more about a particular teacher and his/her teachings, contact information and website addresses, plus titles of relevant publications, have also been included with each chapter.

Arranged in chronological order, the chapters combine the story of my spiritual evolution with (in most cases) transcripts of satsangs [gatherings with a spiritual teacher], private interviews, group conversations, and one-to-one communications with the various teachers I met. My questions reflect my most pressing concerns, doubts, urges, and desires at any given time during my odyssey. The transcripts of these dialogues should not be construed as being complete summaries of the gurus' teachings; after all, they document responses to questions that arose from a specific individual at a particular point in time. However, they do express certain key elements of each teaching and give a taste of the guru's style.

It is my intention in writing this book, dear reader, to mirror to you your own sacred journey or odyssey of enlightenment. May it rekindle, intensify, and inspire your exploration into the mystery of Self-awakening.

May it provide wisdom, hope, and encouragement for your quest.

May what you find in these pages also inspire you to fall in love with a new guru—or to get more deeply in touch with your inner guru. I hope that the example of my odyssey can evoke the deepest conviction and certainty that you too are protected and guided at every step of your journey by your own love for truth. May that love lead you to realize and permanently abide in your true nature.

—Berthold Madhukar Thompson

Haiku, Maui, Hawaii

February 2002

Introduction

The old Mercedes lurched and reared with a ghastly scraping sound, then crunched back down and jerked to a halt in the rock debris and dirty snow at the road's edge. My four passengers and I were unhurt, but under the car the broken crankshaft lay steaming on the ground, and a pool of oil trailed behind us. We were stuck on a mountain pass a hundred kilometers from Kabul, Afghanistan, with darkness falling fast. This was not some military or humanitarian expedition; little did I know that this episode marked the beginning of a twenty-year odyssey in search of enlightenment.

It was 1971. I was twenty-two, fresh out of university with a bachelor's degree in industrial management, and heading for India. It seemed like a very long way away.

Luckily for us, a local businessman stopped and agreed to tow us to Kabul through the ice and slush. By truck and a series of bus and train trips, I somehow made it to Pakistan and then down to Amritsar in India, where I bought a bicycle and pedaled fourteen hundred kilometers to the holy city of Benares.

I was looking for adventure, and adventure was not in short supply. But what most impressed me on my travels—and was soon to change my life forever—were the encounters with the sadhus [ascetics], saints, and holy men who lived in the village temples where I often spent the night. I would frequently see them meditating in their temples or along the banks of the Ganges. And whenever I met their gaze, I saw a peace I had never seen before. Their eyes blazed with a light that brought me to tears. Yet most of them owned nothing but the clothes they were wearing, an extra shawl, or lunghi, a blanket, and a bowl.

Although many of them couldn't have known from where their next meal would materialize, they were seemingly living in peace and without a worry for the future. Their contentment was contagious. Sitting with them quietly along the river bank, I felt strangely touched by a stillness that reached into my deepest core.

I moved on from India and traveled around Southeast Asia for a year and a half, wandering as far as Bali in Indonesia, and then returned to visit my family in southern Germany and continue my education. A few years later, I received a master's degree in business management from the University of Karlsruhe and then began a professional career as an industrial executive in Japan.

Before long, I left Japan and found myself starting an import company with a partner in Germany. The venture was a success, and I also inherited property and money from my family. By the age of thirty, I was wealthy, secure, and in perfect health. By most measures, I was a worldly success.

As was natural for a well-off man of my age, I used my wealth to indulge myself in pursuits and pleasures that supposedly bring happiness. But I was not satisfied by these activities; just underneath the surface lurked an aching feeling that something was missing. And it was in those moments that my memories of the peaceful holy men of India would surface. The contentment I had tasted in India began to haunt me.

There Has to Be More Than This!

In moments of reflection, I was able to see that apart from a few fleeting moments of satisfaction, all my pleasurable experiences—regardless of their intensity—simply didn't last. These experiences did not and could not permanently change me; no matter what I did and what I tried, they would never remain a part of myself. In fact, I soon found that it required increasing effort to make the pleasant and exciting moments return as quickly as before. But these efforts never really paid off. In truth, I was exhausting myself by clinging to my materialistic idea of how to achieve happiness. By trying to run away from my emptiness, I had actually become a perpetually unsatisfied seeker after pleasure and happiness.

Then one morning in 1976, while I was working in a management position for a pharmaceutical company back in Japan, I was standing in my office looking down over the courtyard. I watched as all the uniformed workers filed out from the factory buildings to line up for their daily exercises. Hundreds of men and women in light blue uniforms were forming row after row extending across the asphalt between the buildings. As soon as the shrill music punctuated by harsh instructions was piped out over the loudspeakers, everyone began to silently move in unison, like robots.

I began to sweat profusely. As though a straitjacket were getting tighter and tighter around my heart, I gasped for air. Time suddenly compressed. To my utter surprise, a rerun of my life passed in front of my mind's eye. I could not see a single event or relationship in thirty years that had been lastingly fulfilling.

My belly wrenched. I knew this was not the life I was destined to lead. The thought shot through my mind: "There has to be more than this!" and then my mind collapsed. I began falling into a void, falling out of time, falling out of my conditionings—and as it turned out, falling out of my job.

The next morning, I showed up at work without my coat and tie. I went directly to my boss's office and, diplomatically presenting my contract, declared in a firm voice, "I've decided to resign." Instantly, my stomach pain vanished. I felt light and innocent, like a child again—free, full of life, and fearless.

I spent the next year back at the university in another master's program, this time in city planning. Yet my longing for inner peace only intensified. It was all I could think about! The old feelings of emptiness and the agonizing restlessness of my mind returned; I found myself once again right back where I was before my initial burst of clarity in Japan. I made a resolution: Now I knew that whatever the cost, I would free myself from the confining conditioning of Western society, my upbringing in the Catholic Church, and the restrictions of my past. I felt dead serious about finding freedom. In fact, I was ready to even die for it.

The Odyssey Begins...

I was back in Germany again, and as it turned out, help was on the way. As if in answer to my deepest longing, my best

friend and business partner found a way to introduce me to the spiritual teachings of the East. We agreed to practice meditation together each morning. In the evenings, we read spiritual books or listened to audio recordings of spiritual teachers. In my heart I was returning to those early feelings I had years before when I first encountered the holy men in India.

My eyes were opening. I soon began to understand that the urge for lasting inner peace and fulfillment is universal—it was something much greater than my own personal yearning. And it really could be achieved; others had

attained it before me. This blessed state, I learned, is called moksha or nirvana—liberation from the limiting identification with the body and mind, freedom from ignorance of one’s essential nature—enlightenment.

By 1980, I was back in India—this time seeking my own enlightenment. And as you will see in this book, what an intense ride this search would prove! Little did I know that over the next two decades, I would meet more than two dozen spiritual teachers.

My encounters with twelve of these teachers are presented in this book. Four of them became my gurus¹ [spiritual teachers]: Osho, H.W.L. Poonja (also known as Poonjaji or Papaji), Ramesh S. Balsekar, and D.B. Gangolli—in that chronological order.² The other eight teachers were not formally gurus of mine. Although I studied, meditated, worked, and lived in the orbits of each of my root gurus for several years, my encounters with the other teachers were limited to a few intensive occasions.

In their different ways, each of the teachers I encountered claimed to have what I wanted so badly. They said they could teach me how to end pain and suffering and thus realize the deep inner peace and fulfillment that is inherent in my own true nature.

It was my intense yearning for this enlightenment that drew me to spend so many years in their ashrams. Whatever forms my search took, and wherever I went—whether I spent two days or twelve years with a teacher—I felt compelled to find answers to the burning questions that consumed my life:

- What exactly is enlightenment? Could this awakening take me permanently out of my pain and restlessness and transform how I experienced every moment of my life?
- How could I attain the enlightened state? What are the most effective methods and practices for quickening this transformation?
- Who would be the best teacher to study with and what actually is the true function of a guru? How would a guru really help me?
- What qualities did I need to develop in order to become a qualified student of enlightenment?
- Was I really making any progress? What did my ongoing spiritual experiences indicate about how close I was to the goal of nirvana or moksha?

In line with these questions, three underlying convictions about my life forged my quest during these years: First, that worldly pleasure and success were not bringing me enduring peace or contentment, and never would. Second, that enlightenment would remove my pain and bring me lasting fulfillment through the realization of who I truly am. And third, that to accelerate and help catalyze my enlightenment, I needed to steadfastly pursue practices and meditations guided by a teacher or guru.

During these stormy years of my odyssey, I often experienced that I was living from the depths of a greater reality. Sometimes I felt consumed by an eternal love so great that I could not even fathom my earlier sense of separation from it. At other times, I felt so fed up with the whole spiritual search that I even began to ask the teachers how I could drop it altogether and become a “normal” person again. In 1993, I actually tried to do just that. Deeply disappointed by the contradictions and inconsistencies of my gurus and their teachings, I moved back to Germany once again. However,

within two weeks of my arrival, I quietly repacked my life into my suitcases and headed back to India to continue my search.

What a powerful decision that proved to be! For what I discovered during my next sojourn in India was to further pave the way to my own inner realization of the Self.

The Teachers and the Teachings

I started my odyssey in 1980 with the naive hope that I would discover enlightened masters who dwelled only in truth, love, and God-consciousness. To my surprise, I instead saw that these compassionate, inspiring teachers were also fallible human beings.

For example, I witnessed several gurus abusing, intimidating, and screaming at their disciples repeatedly. I myself became the object of a forced expulsion from one teacher's ashram. In another instance, a fellow seeker was seduced, apparently as a means of recognizing his true nature via the bosom of his lady teacher.

Over time, I came to understand that the teachers' and gurus' personalities, temperaments, behavior, and conduct were as diverse and contradictory as their spiritual teachings. I learned again and again the importance of discernment on the spiritual path.

It is impossible to attach labels to these teachers, for they were uniquely multidimensional. But for me each had a characteristic flavor. One could say that I met the guru appearing in the guise of a bachelor, on the one hand (Osho, Dadaji, and D.B. Gangolli), and of a parent and/or householder on the other (Gangaji, Ramesh Balsekar, Kiran). There were the moralist (Andrew Cohen) and the blasphemer (UG Krishnamurti); the monk (Harish Madhukar) and the successful banker (Ramesh Balsekar); the love guru (Osho) and the ascetic (Annamalai Swami); the goddess (Gangaji) and the recluse (Lakshmana Swami).

All of them agreed and taught that enlightenment is possible, but they disagreed about how it could be reached. In fact, they differed on many crucial issues, such as the relationship between the intensity of a seeker's efforts and his or her spiritual progress, the merits of meditation and self-inquiry, and the transformative power of the guru's presence.

Just as one cannot fully characterize a teacher with a simple descriptive word or phrase, it is also impossible to summarize an entire body of teaching in a sentence. But in order to give you an idea of the diversity of the teachings, I have chosen in the examples below what for me was the kernel of their teaching focus. It is what I distilled for myself as most useful for me during the time I spent with them.

My first spiritual teacher, Osho [ch. 1], taught repeatedly: "I can transform you only if you are surrendered to me." After many years of tender devotion and deep surrender to Osho, I then met my next teacher, Poonjaji [ch. 2]. He opened within me a new sense of deep inner focus, skillfully shattering my spiritual preconceptions with his single-pointed hammering: "Recognize who you are, and then do whatever you like."

Living his own truth like a noble mountain standing tall and alone, Harish Madhukar [ch. 3] helped me to fathom that "The real meaning of life is only in Being." Gangaji [ch. 4], a gracious and loving western disciple of Poojaji, emphatically challenged my egocentrism by declaring, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, let him kill you!"

The penetrating insights and living wisdom of Annamalai Swami [ch. 5] reminded me that there are no shortcuts: "Practice until stillness is permanent." Lakshmana Swami [ch. 6] stunned me repeatedly with the direct and illuminating statement: "You cannot attain the Self, because you

are already the Self.” Observing my persistent identification with the cherished role of seeker, Ramesh Balsekar [ch. 7] thundered again and again, “There is no seeker—Consciousness or the Source functions impersonally through the body-mind organism! Enlightenment is predestined and cannot be attained through spiritual practice!”

Yet another part of me was fully supported in my journey by the seemingly contradictory perspective of Dadaji [ch. 8], whose discipline taught, “Enlightenment is not a matter of destiny—you must work for it!”

Going even a step further than Balsekar’s, the powerful teachings of Kiran [ch. 9] blazed through my preconceptions with his proclamation: “Spiritual practices are obstructions to awakening.” I also wondered how far I could go with the implications of UG Krishnamurti’s [ch. 10] ironic quip, “Better to run away with your best friend’s wife than wait for moksha [enlightenment].”

In the spring of 2000, having just returned to the U.S. after twenty years of encounters with the rich contradictions of the teachers I met, I was fortunate to interview the American teacher Andrew Cohen [ch. 11], with his refreshing contention that “Purification is more important than enlightenment.” Andrew’s teachings impressed me deeply, but the insights that led me to true peace and awakening came through the nondual teachings of Advaita Vedanta1 taught by D.B. Gangolli [ch. 12]. His teaching—which gradually became identical with my own direct experience—confidently declared: “All seeming objects, thoughts, and perceptions are nothing but diverse expressions of unchanging consciousness. This is the Self, which is alone real and enduring.”

But it was Gangolli's elegant, inspiring, and consistent teachings that marked the end of my outward journey in search of truth among the living masters of the Vedanta tradition.

Looking back on this lengthy odyssey of enlightenment, I often wonder how it could be that the many gurus I met disagreed even on what was for me the most vital issue: what enlightenment actually is. One teacher defined it as a state of permanent, uninterrupted happiness and peace—that is, an absence of anger, jealousy, and desire. Another contended that enlightenment is the total acceptance of What Is, while a third said, “Enlightenment is to know that there is no such thing as enlightenment at all.” Still another explained, “The Self is certainly within the direct experience of everyone, but not as one imagines it to be. It is only as it is.”

Not only did most teachings of different gurus oppose each other on the subject of enlightenment, their teachings (and behavior) were often internally inconsistent. For example, Osho taught that practice was absolutely necessary for enlightenment to happen, but at other times he said that it was inevitable, and the timing was up to Existence. Poonjaji used to say that ever since his enlightenment he was continuously happy; yet that was not entirely true since I experienced that he sometimes got angry and disappointed just like everyone else. Ramesh Balsekar's fundamental teaching was that all that happens is destined, including enlightenment, but I noticed that he also supported the position that pleasing the guru (for instance, with money) could somehow further a seeker's advancement toward enlightenment.

For me, inconsistencies within a given teaching didn't mix well with what I understood enlightenment to be. To me, enlightenment means not just being established in the Self, it also means truthfulness in thought, speech, and action. So whenever I was confronted with a teacher's inconsistent behavior, I felt an inner struggle: On one hand, I was deeply in love with the

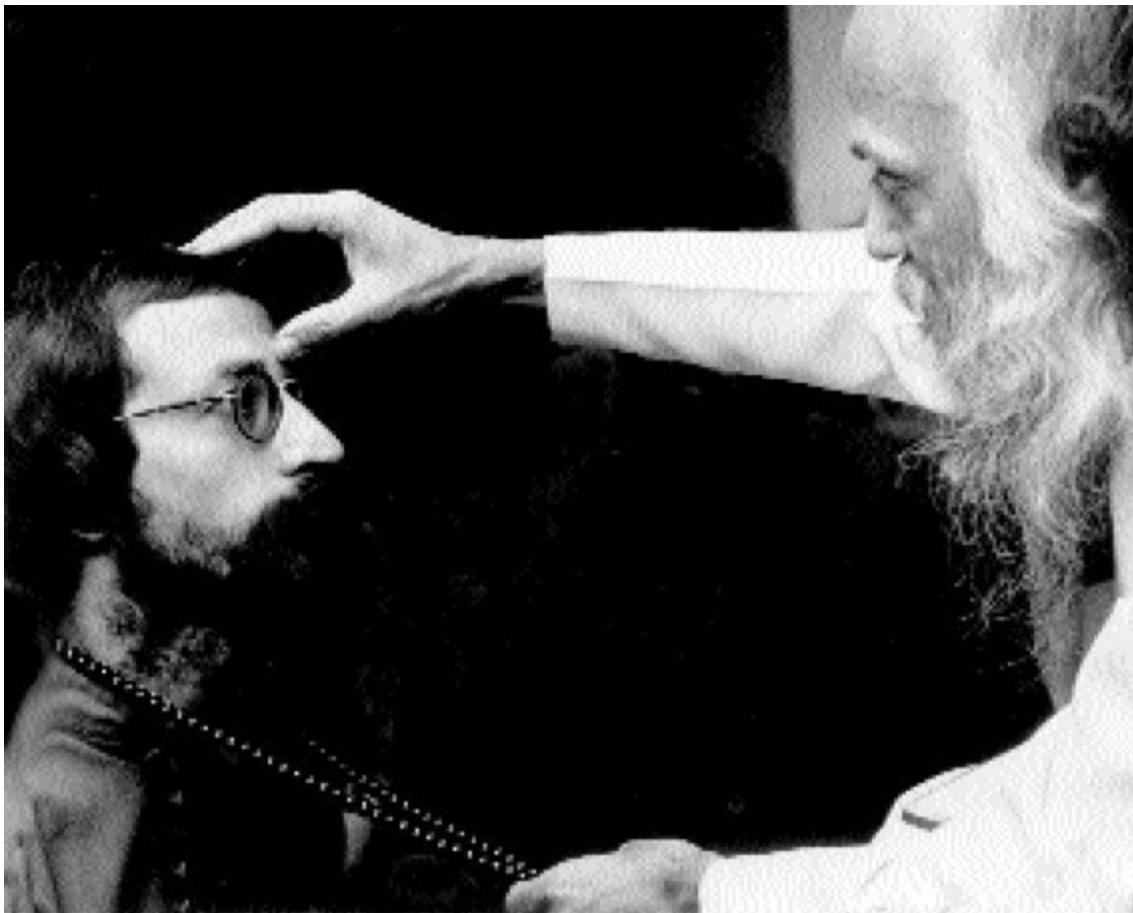
guru in question; on the other hand, doubts about his or her honesty, integrity, or even enlightenment, would arise in me. I could never be certain whether these so-called “Zen sticks” or teaching devices were actually conscious, compassionate methods to bring about my final enlightenment, as I was told they were, or simply signs of the guru’s hypocrisy. Whatever the case, I would find myself departing onward to continue my journey.

However, as you will see in this book, in spite of—and maybe even because of—their contradictions and inconsistencies, each of the teachers I encountered along my journey served as stepping stones for my spiritual progress. Through each I experienced awakening insights, and each helped me through their presence to open my heart and mind more and more to the truth of my own being. One of them even insisted that I had actually achieved enlightenment. But it was not until I met D.B. Gangolli and experienced his pure devotion and his direct and simple adherence to traditional Advaita Vedanta teachings that I felt I was on my way home.

Note to the Reader

On first usage, virtually all foreign or unfamiliar terms are in italics and briefly defined in brackets within the text. When these same terms occur in later chapters, the definition is often included again, for the reader's convenience. Please note that many terms have more than one meaning, so definitions may vary in different places. For the fullest understanding of a term, it is suggested that you read the glossary entry.

Osho



My initiation into neo-sannyas by Osho in July 1980

“Meditation will not give you enlightenment. No technique will ever give you enlightenment; enlightenment is not technical. Meditation can only prepare the ground. Meditation can only do something negatively; the positive—enlightenment—will come on its own. Once you are ready, it always comes.”

Chapter 1

Osho

also known as Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, was born in Kuchwada, in the state of Madhya Pradesh in central India, on December 11, 1931, the sixth child of a pious Jain merchant couple. After his proclaimed enlightenment at the age of twenty-one, he taught philosophy for several years at the University of Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, and then spent many years traveling throughout India leading meditation camps and lecturing on philosophy, religion, and enlightenment. In 1967, he settled in Mumbai (Bombay). One year later, he initiated his first disciples into what he called neo-sannyas [discipleship], more commonly called sannyas.

In the early 1970s, the first Westerners began flocking to him. Over the next thirty years, several hundred thousand seekers from all over the world would become his disciples. He established his first ashram [retreat associated with a guru] in Pune, India, in 1974. In 1981, he founded a self-sustaining spiritual community called Rajneeshpuram in Oregon, in the United States. Within a few years, about three thousand of his disciples from more than thirty countries had gathered there to live with him, and thousands more came to attend festivals and to take courses at the Rajneesh International Meditation University (RIMU). But in the late fall of 1985, the commune started to disband; Osho had been arrested and charged with immigration fraud. The United States government eventually accepted a plea entered by Osho's lawyers that allowed him to maintain his claim of innocence although he was deported from the country. The Oregon commune was dissolved and reestablished in Pune in 1987.

Osho's ashrams and communes, as well as his personality, lifestyle, teachings, and disciples, remained controversial throughout his life. He died in Pune on January 19, 1990, amid allegations that he had been poisoned by the US government during a brief stay in the Oklahoma City Jail en route to his trial in Portland, Oregon, in 1985.

Osho did not appoint a successor, but several months before his death, he entrusted the administration of his expanding work to an inner circle of twenty-one disciples he chose himself.

Today there are hundreds of Osho centers around the world. His Osho Commune International/Meditation Resort, as it is now called, keeps flowering. It is the largest and most comprehensive center for personal growth in the world today, with more than one hundred instructional and experiential courses running simultaneously at any given time.

Osho's words are published in over seven hundred book titles. In addition, several thousand audio and video cassettes of his discourses and talks are available.

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Surrender and I Will Take Care of Your Enlightenment

My quest for Self-awakening, which I came to understand as my odyssey for enlightenment, began in the summer of 1980. I was visiting the Shree Rajneesh Ashram while on a business trip to India. During a breath therapy session a few days after my arrival, I had an experience of the indescribable bliss of egoless and mindless satori¹ [experience of Self]. This was not a conventional religious experience; it was a timeless state in which I experienced unimaginable beauty, peace, and oneness. By the clock, it continued for several hours, but the experience didn't last and my mental process returned. Hoping that Osho (or Bhagwan, as he was then known) could help me become established in a permanent, no-mind state of pure awakened happiness, I asked the master to initiate me as his disciple. On July 22, 1980, my initiation into neo-sannyas took place.

Meditation is seeing reality as it is here-now

Sannyas [initiation] was given by Osho at the beginning of his evening darshans [being in the presence of a guru]. After he greeted the assembly of devotees with folded hands in the traditional Indian gesture of namasté [a sign of welcome that honors a person's divinity], he would sit down in his chair and darshan would begin. One evening, six of us were waiting to become his disciples. We were called forward and asked to sit in a semicircle on the floor in front of the master. Moments after Osho told us to close our eyes, I experienced another satori—a timeless experience of the essence of my true nature. After what seemed an eternity, his words, “Now come back!” reached beyond time and space to “my” beingness. The master had again granted me a glimpse of the goal I so fervently sought.

Osho then called me to come forward and kneel in front of him. Smiling broadly, he held in his raised right hand a mala, a necklace of 108 rosewood beads with his photograph framed in a rosewood locket. Poised to receive sannyas, I leaned forward toward him and, with both hands, he slipped the mala gently over my head. Then he placed his right thumb quite firmly up against my “third eye” center [the spot between the two eyebrows], and I felt a subtle vibration of cool stillness and silent peace emanating from his touch. In a perfectly balanced movement, he exerted pressure on my third eye while drawing me closer, his left hand gently pulling on the mala he had just placed around my neck.

Throughout this powerful and graceful ritual, the master continuously looked deeply into my eyes.² We remained in silent eye-to-eye communion for some time. Then in a fluid motion, everything naturally took on a new form as Osho was handed the official sannyas certificate by his assistant. He signed it and pointed to the document, smiling.

Osho - This will be your new name—Swami Dhyan Bertl. “Bertl” is a Sanskrit word meaning “bright, brilliant.” “Dhyan” is also Sanskrit. It means “meditation.”

Bertl³ was actually my German nickname and, unaware of its meaning in Sanskrit, I had used it on my sannyas application form, expecting the master to choose a new name for me. Instead, he gave the one I already had a totally new significance. The moment he handed me the document, I became a sannyasin [person who has taken sannyas]. The certificate was embossed with a white dove and a red dove—symbolizing the master and the disciple respectively—flying in unison across the sky.⁴ The golden circle encompassing both doves symbolized the union of the two in their spiritual bonding.

While I continued to kneel, Osho proceeded to explain the significance of “bright meditation.”

Osho - Mind is always mediocre. Mind is never bright, never brilliant. By its very nature it cannot be so. Mind is a dust collector. Mind means the past. It is always dead. It is nothing but an accumulation of memories. And how can dust be brilliant? How can the past be intelligent? It is dead. Only the living can have the quality of intelligence, brilliance.

Meditation is bright, brilliant, original. Mind is always repetitive, old. It is a junkyard. Through mind, nothing has been achieved. All that has been accomplished has been achieved through meditation—not only in religion but even in science. Of course, in science the act of meditation is unconscious. Meditative moments are just accidental in science, but all the breakthroughs have happened through intuitive leaps when the mind was absent. They have not come through the mind, but from beyond the mind.

This is confessed by all of the great scientists—although they are puzzled by it—that whatsoever original contribution they have been able to make is not really their own. It comes from somewhere of which they know not. They are only vehicles—at the most, mediums. But, in religion, meditation is very deliberate and conscious. Religion practices meditation. In science it is accidental. In religion it is deliberate.

The whole effort of religion is concentrated on a single point: how to help you to be meditative. And that means how to help you to put the mind aside so that you can look into reality directly, without mind as a mediator. If you look through the mind, mind always distorts. You are never able to see That Which Is through the mind. When the mind is not functioning, you see reality as it is. And that's what God is all about—seeing reality as it is.

“God” simply means That Which Is. But to know it, you need to be utterly silent. And mind is a constant chatterer—mind is crazy, noisy. Silence is original, intelligent. Whatever happens through silence is good, is beautiful, is divine.

By virtue of his conferring sannyas, the master accepted me as his disciple with the promise to guide me to his own state of Oneness, and I vowed to devote my life to the pursuit of truth and enlightenment. As visible signs and tokens of having taken sannyas, I was asked to meditate at least one hour a day, wear clothes in shades of orange, and wear the mala.

My satori experience during the sannyas ritual was an “experience without an experiencer.” Pure objectless being had made itself present—but not to an experiencer. It just occurred in and of itself without purpose or meaning. In the beginning, it seemed to expand from deep inside, perhaps at the bottom of the spine. Its nature was thingless, changeless, timeless, spaceless, limitless, and indescribably blissful. But all-consuming as it was, my “nonexperience” did not last. Or rather, its timeless and changeless nature was soon covered again by the notion of an experiencer who had experienced the “experience without an experiencer.” What remained was the intense longing to have more—to permanently be the “nonexperience” of That.

My first few days in Osho’s presence had presented me with a glimpse of that which neither is nor is not—which is beyond the body, mind, and soul and the entire comprehensible universe, and yet is always present. It was of inexpressible proportions.

What a master! What a presence! What power! What a transmission! Yes, this was my teacher and guru—forever! My heart was singing. A tidal wave of love and gratitude swept from my heart to the master and filled the whole cosmos. I knew I would do anything, whatever the cost, to make That my eternal home. I knew I was possessed by That. In fact, I realized I had been possessed by It since my earliest childhood. But instead of a trickling faucet, now the sluice gates were opened. In the same measure in which the direct experience of That disappeared, the intensity of my urge and demand for It increased.

When the ego is surrendered, a communion with the divine is possible

In the days that followed, I heard Osho confirm that this ecstatic condition could become my own permanent state when I became an enlightened buddha⁵ like him. He added that it might take time for this to happen—perhaps several lives. But I was convinced that enlightenment was a definite possibility in this life because I had had a taste of it. And I knew I didn't want anything else but That in this lifetime; henceforth, the remainder of my days would be dedicated to the goal of finding truth and lasting fulfillment. By taking sannyas, I vowed that all other desires would stand in the shadow of this one consuming desire. In fact, from then on all other desires became the servants of this one desire.

As I understood it, sannyas contained the practical and existential means for unlocking one's full potential. And lasting bliss would ensue from the freedom from all limitations. This is how the master defined it: "Sannyas is a rebellion against all structures. It is a way of living life beyond the limitations of structures. It is an initiation into freedom in which you have nothing to lean upon except your own inner being. Sannyas is an exploration, an opening, a journey, a dance, a love affair with the unknown, a romance with Existence itself, a search for the orgasmic relationship to the Whole."

Thus my spiritual journey began with a tidal wave of ecstasy and the ritual of initiation. Both were no-mind experiences—the culmination of the spiritual search according to Osho. But what did I need to do to let such egoless moments become a permanent state and thus achieve my spiritual goal? What were the steps? Osho made it easy by providing the answer: “Surrender to me, and I will take care of your enlightenment.”

This then was the spiritual formula and credo that governed my relationship with Osho and my spiritual journey as a sannyasin under his guidance. I heard him say, “The master’s and disciple’s melting and merging into each other is a love affair. It is a deep orgasmic experience. It is far deeper than the love between two ordinary people, because the master and disciple exist without an ego. By surrendering your ego to the master, you really surrender it to God. The question is not to whom you surrender. The moment the ego is surrendered, a communion with the divine is possible.”

In this spirit of surrender, I was attuned with the master for the next ten years. What I heard him say was music to my ears, and my heart and soul were celebrating. “To be with a master means to be in a state of saying yes, yes, and again yes! It is an absolute yes, an unconditional yes. So when the master says, ‘Give me your ego,’ you simply give the ego to him.” I was so happy and relieved when he said he would take all of me—my ego, mind, and body—and that he would transform me. “I promise that you will be transformed. But don’t make it a condition. If you make it a condition, then there is no surrender. I can transform you only if you are surrendered. Therefore, forget my promise. And transformation is going to happen.”

“Even if I lead you to hell, be ready for it. Only then heaven is possible. Your readiness to move with me to the very hell—this readiness transforms you.” And how right he was! Soon I would come to know that the master

was not kidding. He meant what he was saying. And I was serious about going anywhere with him—unto death and beyond to the otherworld.

“Surrender means that you are not asking for anything. Your asking becomes the barrier. Surrender means trust. Even if nothing happens, you will wait. Even if your whole life is wasted, you will wait. If you can wait in such a deep way, everything can happen at this moment here and now.”

The love affair between the master and the disciple functions like a catalytic agent for awakening

In the years to come, I would hear Osho say that I could make the most out of my spiritual life, and progress more quickly toward enlightenment, by being in his presence and living in his commune—the Buddhafield, as he called it—the most propitious environment in which enlightenment can occur. Listening to Osho’s words in discourse and darshan, working in the commune, meditating and attending therapy groups—participating in all of these activities with the utmost totality and awareness, and with an attitude of celebration—comprised my life as a sannyasin.

The catch-phrases “Do all and give all, and you get all,” “Participate, contribute, and meditate,” and “Osho first, then the commune, then me” underlined the self-surrendering aspect of spiritual life with the master. For years to come, I, together with hundreds of my sannyasin brothers and sisters, began and ended our daily work (we called it worship) in the Buddhafield by kneeling and bowing down and chanting the sacred wisdom:

Buddham Sharanam Gachchhami

Sangham Sharanam Gachchhami

Dhammam Sharanam Gachchhami

I go to the feet of the Awakened One

I go to the feet of the Commune of the Awakened One

I go to the feet of the Ultimate Truth of the Awakened One

While I lived at the ashram, I began to experience an unspeakably immense and growing love for the master. Actually, I was exquisitely attracted not only to my guru's presence and form, but also to his expansive Buddhafield. One morning in discourse, Osho explained my situation and described my experience: "The master cannot cause enlightenment to happen in you but he can trigger the process—but only if you allow it. And this can happen only in a love affair between the master and the disciple. In the milieu of love, he functions like a catalytic agent—both his spiritual presence and the presence of his body help. The very matter, the very body where enlightenment has been recognized and has happened, is transformed in quality. It vibrates in a new rhythm. To be close to it is to be permeated by its vibration. To touch the body of the master or to be touched by it is to partake of his body."

Later on, he described what I experienced when we sannyasins joined together and became something greater than the sum of our parts.

"Thousands of people functioning meditatively create a certain energy field. I call it the Buddhafield, the field of awakening. The function of the commune is to create an atmosphere of encouragement—that you are not alone as a seeker. The path that you have to travel, you have to travel alone; but if you know that so many people are traveling alone on the path, it gives tremendous encouragement and takes away your fears. Alone you cannot go very high. Alone, you have all kinds of limitations. But when you are one

with many, then infinite energy is available. And many things will start happening which cannot happen alone.”

My religion is love, life, and laughter

Osho’s instruction to “be total in whatever you do, and do it with total awareness” inspired qualities of meditation and intensity of action in my life as a sannyasin, no matter what I was doing or where I was. And Osho’s tenets “My religion is love, life, laughter” and “My sannyasins celebrate everything” promised that the happiness I was yearning for was possible here and now, albeit momentarily, at all stages of the path toward the ultimate goal of enlightenment.

And yes, I did what he had asked me to do. I spent nearly a decade listening to his words, meditating, working, and serving in my master’s presence and in his communes in Pune I and Pune II in India, and in Rajneeshpuram in America. I surrendered to him totally. I gave him all I had—physically and materially. I even donated to him my mother’s farm and the fields that I had inherited, as well as my own successful business.

When Osho was expelled from the US in 1985 by the federal authorities and his commune in Oregon was dismantled, I was left with nothing except my surrender and trust in him. I must admit that, for a few weeks, this trust was somewhat shaken by the events that led to the commune’s closure—it was supposed to have been my home for the rest of my life but lasted only five years! However, my desire for enlightenment did not diminish. The disappointment surrounding the dissolution of Rajneeshpuram faded quickly, giving way to an intensified longing for truth and the pursuit of enlightenment.

After he was forced to leave the USA, Osho went on what he called a world tour for more than a year. During this time, I visited him in Greece and in Bombay for a few weeks in 1985 and 1986. In January 1987, Osho returned to his Pune ashram, and I followed him there a few weeks later.

If you can rejoice with me, you have understood me

On my return to Pune, I felt the need to reconnect and bond again with the master. I wanted to do this directly and personally in public. I wished to express my devotion and love for him, thereby renewing my commitment and trust in him as well as my vow to search for the final truth. So the only “question” I had for Osho during the entire ten years I spent in or near his presence turned out to be a statement and a request. Ideally, as a truly surrendered devotee, I should not have had any spiritual questions for or about my guru. I had surrendered to him, and I was therefore obliged to trust him completely—with no doubts or questions, regardless of what happened around the master.

At that time, seekers who had questions for Osho submitted them in the form of letters to the master. In some cases, he would instruct one of his secretaries to write something back in reply, or to transmit his answer verbally. In other cases, he chose to reply to a seeker’s question during his discourses in the Buddha Hall Auditorium, without notifying the questioner beforehand. If this was the case, one of Osho’s assistants would read out the question over the microphone. After the reading, Osho would give his answer for everyone assembled to hear.

Seven years after taking sannyas, my statement and my small—but, for me, important—request to the master was read out at one of those morning discourses. That letter was the only one I ever submitted to him.

Thousands of sannyasins had gathered for discourse on the morning of September 10, 1987. I was sitting very close to Osho, right in front of him in the fourth or fifth row. When I heard my question being read out over the microphone, I was shocked into both sheer terror and uncontrollable excitement.

My letter was such that I had not expected him to respond at all. While it was being read, Osho seemed to know exactly who the writer was, because he kept gazing steadily at me—directly into my eyes and through them right into my innermost core.

Beloved Bhagwan,

In my mind, I am writing to you almost every day. All my questions and statements boil down to the following:

Gratitude—I want to say, “Thank you, Bhagwan, beloved Master”—and—Attention—Could you say in discourse one single time, “Hello, Hareesh!”⁸ so that everyone can hear it?

So that I am certain that you, and everybody else, know I am existing as your lover and fellow dance partner.

The reading of the letter seemed to take ages. The pressure in my body and mind kept intensifying. The thought came, “All that is left now is to give up. Give up what? Everything!” When the reading finally came to an end,

nothing was left—of “me” or anything else. There was a long, overflowing pause and pin-drop silence. Then the master’s words drifted ethereally out over the congregation like a sacred mantra.

Osho - Hello, Hareesh!

A roar of laughter erupted and swept through Buddha Hall, and then almost immediately turned into a vast sea of joy, bliss, and gratitude. Thrilling moments passed.

Osho - But this will not be enough. Otherwise, it would be like a plate without anything to eat on it, or like a desert where nothing grows. Usually people are saying hello to each other without any reason. I would like to say hello to you, but I would like to present you also with something else so that “Hello, Hareesh!” is not empty.

My first present to you: A man sitting in a bar is complaining to the bartender, “After one year and three thousand dollars with that psychiatrist, he tells me I am cured. Some cure! A year ago I was Nancy Reagan. Now I am nobody.”

A Roman Catholic—a famous priest—and a Protestant minister—also very famous and well known—had a heated discussion over the merits of their respective faiths. Finally they agreed to differ, and as they parted the Catholic said, “Let us go our ways. You continue to worship God in your way, and I will continue to worship Him in His way.”

A minister's wife—my third present—was becoming upset that her husband exclaimed, "Ah, Jesus! Sweet Jesus!" every time he reached orgasm. "It is perfectly proper my dear," he assured her, "and in accordance with the Bible where it says, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

And the fourth present: A Catholic priest heard a number of women confess that the grocer's new delivery boy had seduced them all. He made them each put ten dollars in the poor box. The delivery boy appeared last. The priest asked angrily, "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Just this," replied the boy, "either you cut me in on those ten dollars or I take my business to another parish."

Hareesh, keep your business here!

I can understand everybody's deep desire to be loved. I love you all whether I know your names or not, because names are just labels stuck to you. You have come into the world without names and you will leave this world without names. As far as I am concerned, you don't have a name. And if you look within yourself, you will not find any name there. You are a nameless reality, which is good because every name creates a boundary around you. A name makes you small.

But your question is significant. Desiring attention can have two effects. If it is demanded, it nourishes the ego. If it is asked for with gratitude, it nourishes the soul. I cannot say anything against your question. Your question is so full of love and gratitude that I can repeat as many times as you want, "Hello, Hareesh!" It will not strengthen your ego. It will weaken

it. And so many of the people present hearing me calling you, “Hello Hareesh,” are also repeating the same call. Then it becomes a tremendous energy field, a brotherhood of spirituality in which everybody is sharing his or her abundance.

It is perfectly all right. Many would have liked the same response from me. But they could not gather the courage to ask. You are a courageous man. You are asking that “everybody else should know I am existing as your lover and fellow dance partner.”

Here we are not gathered to talk nonsense about God, heaven, and hell. Here we have gathered to rejoice, to sing, and to dance together in such an ecstasy as all individualities melt into each other and become one organic whole. Many times I have seen it becoming one organic whole when you all laugh together, although the Germans may not understand why they are laughing. But the Germans are intelligent people. Seeing that everybody is laughing, they also participate in the laughter. In fact, they laugh louder than anybody else does so that nobody will suspect them to be Germans. Of course, outside the Buddha Hall they ask other people, “What was the matter? Why was everybody laughing so much? I could not get it.”

My suggestion to all the German sannyasins is to forget trying to get it! The trying is troubling you. While you are engaged trying to get it, the moment of laughter passes. While everybody else is laughing first, you are always second in laughter. You cannot laugh first because you haven’t understood the joke yet.

Here it is a temple of celebration—utterly pagan. Here nobody is serious. Here nobody is bothering about how to reach heaven and get a harp and sit

on a cloud and sing for eternity, “Hallelujah, hallelujah!” Those are the idiots. They are being taken up to heaven just to relieve the earth.

If you can rejoice with me, you have understood me. If my music has touched your heart, it is enough. I’m not here to convert anybody. I’m just helping you learn a little dance of the soul. The dance of the soul is the most religious of phenomena, in which there is no fear of punishment and no greed of any reward. This moment is all in all.

Laugh your way to God

If something like enlightenment exists, then my two earlier satori experiences and the experience while Osho answered my question were the closest I had come to it during my spiritual search thus far. That morning in Buddha Hall, there was no time or space, no “me” and “other,” no guru and no disciple. Truly, it was not an experience, because there was no experiencer to experience anything. The whole event seemed to happen—not objectively—but as “suchness.” Yes, there was only suchness—but not as some “thing.” Suchness just was—expressing itself outwardly as impersonal and indescribable bliss and ecstasy.

I wondered why in his answer to my “question” Osho had told me three jokes that related specifically to the Christian Church and priesthood. Was it a coincidence? Or was he so clairvoyant and intuitive that he knew I had been brought up in a fundamentalist Catholic household and was expected to become a priest? And how did he know that I was German?

How true and exact his observations were about the German sannyasins who had a hard time getting his jokes! That had been my own experience. After coming to the ashram the first time, it took me weeks to understand his jokes in discourse, partly because of his heavy Indian accent. I remember how deeply frustrated and left out I felt at that time. It took me several weeks to understand how masterful Osho was in using jokes to underscore key elements of his teachings, transporting us right into a no-mind experience whenever his joke-telling provoked an outburst of laughter.

As Osho put it: “What happens when you really laugh? For those few moments you are in a deep meditative state. Thinking stops. In total laughter, mind evaporates; the ego, the one-who-laughs, disappears and only laughter remains. This is the ultimate experience in meditation: the taste of bliss, God, truth, freedom—freedom from the ego, from the doer. Therefore, laugh your way to God.

“I teach you life, I teach you love, I teach you how to sing, how to dance. I teach you how to transform your life into a festival, into a carnival of delight; hence laughter has to be one of the most essential qualities of a sannyasin.”

That morning’s discourse was a masterpiece. Osho had tailored his answer exactly to the personal and spiritual needs I had in the moment. At the same time, his teaching, his humor, and his love touched the very core and essence of everyone who was present. He met my desire for attention by lovingly transforming me within a few seconds into a laughing nobody and a no-mind —through a joke! And he masterfully and joyously contrasted the world of sin, guilt, and fear created by organized religion with the celebration in his pagan world of sannyas.

Meditation only prepares the ground—enlightenment comes on its own

From the day Osho responded to my letter until his death almost two and a half years later, I kept on doing what he had told me to do. With total devotion and all of my energy, I contributed to his worldwide vision, worked in his commune, participated in therapy and meditation groups, practiced meditation twice a day, and sought his presence daily by listening to his teachings during darshan and discourse. Although I believe I understood his teaching fully, and assiduously followed his guidance in every detail, when the master left his body on January 19, 1990, I had to admit the naked truth—I was still not enlightened. So I came to the conclusion that without his living presence and guidance, I had to “achieve” enlightenment alone.

From that point on, the following teachings of my teacher became the cornerstones of my spiritual life: “You can test whether your meditation is succeeding or not in your daily life: Go shopping and you will know it. Ask yourself: ‘Am I still as greedy as before? Do I still get angry when somebody says something against me? Can people still push my buttons as easily as before?’ If not, your meditation is succeeding.”

And this: “But remember, meditation will not give you enlightenment. No technique will ever give you enlightenment; enlightenment is not technical. Meditation can only prepare the ground. Meditation can only do something negatively; the positive—enlightenment—will come on its own. Once you are ready, it always comes.”

Osho seemed to be stressing the importance of meditation and, at the same time, to be suggesting that meditation alone was not enough. What else could be done? I had no idea, but in the absence of any clarifying

guidelines, I concluded that meditation was as important and necessary for me as it had been before his death. And even if practice would not bring about enlightenment directly, it would make my life easier. While “waiting” for enlightenment to come over me, meditation could, if nothing else, help me control my hot temper.

I remembered Osho saying, “My whole approach is of living moment to moment—totally, joyously, ecstatically, intuitively, passionately; enlightened or unenlightened, what does it matter? If one lives moment to moment, the ego dissolves. If one is total in one’s act, the ego is bound to dissolve. It’s like when a dancer goes on and on dancing: A moment comes when only the dance remains and the dancer disappears. That is the moment of enlightenment. Whenever the doer, the manipulator, is not there, whenever there is nobody inside you and there is only emptiness, nothingness, awareness—that state of utter silence is called nirvana [enlightenment].”

As a seeker, I found this pragmatic, down-to-earth teaching very reassuring, and I drew great encouragement from it. After all, I had experienced such moments of emptiness on numerous occasions since becoming Osho’s disciple. But, though I took these experiences of the egoless state as a good sign, as indicating some measure of progress in my spiritual search, it was quite clear that enlightenment had so far eluded me, because the urge for final fulfillment now raged within me stronger than ever.

In order to maximize my exposure to meditation and other intense spiritual practices, I knew I must remain in the Pune commune until enlightenment or death. I believed his Buddhafield to be the most spiritually fertile environment imaginable, highly conducive to the occurrence of enlightenment. I therefore made a donation to the ashram to ensure that I would always have a place to live and meditate there. A little more than a year later, I moved into one of the ashram’s newly constructed residential

pyramids. My new home was ideal—a self-contained, air-conditioned studio with kitchen, sitting and working area, bedroom, and bathroom.

Life is a dance and not a problem to be solved

In the months following his death, I reflected on Osho's teachings and the effect his presence had created in my life. He had certainly enabled me to become more aware and free of the conditioning that I had taken on from my family, society, and the church. He taught me that I could live a life without guilt, shame, punishment, and fear. He proclaimed that the angry and punishing God was dead and that there is no God other than the full presence of life itself in each and every moment. He called this very earth the Lotus Paradise and my very own body and being, the Buddha. He encouraged me to rediscover and live the innocence, sincerity, and playfulness of my inner child. Reminding me how to sing and dance and celebrate joy in the present moment, he often stated that "Life is a dance and not a problem to be solved." Osho believed in, practiced, and taught extensively about community living as a spiritual path.

I felt very attached to the celebration, happiness, and spirituality that emanated from Osho's presence, his Buddhafield, and from my spiritual practices; these were catalysts for my enlightenment. But although I was as fulfilled and blissful as one could be while still hungering for complete enlightenment, my sporadic states of illumination weren't enough for me. I wanted what I thought Osho had: permanent happiness and peace. I had heard him explain the two possible ways of living life: the enlightened way of life—his way of living—and the unenlightened way of life—my way of living—which was governed by striving, doubts, and endless desire. I was constantly comparing the two, and I found that I rarely touched the perfect enlightenment that the master seemed to be referring to.

After his death, I was convinced that if I stayed long enough in the presence and power of his Buddhafield, this path would eventually culminate in happiness, totality, and full awareness twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. Such an achievement would mean enlightenment. Was this understanding only an idea, a form of wishful thinking—or even so-called spiritual materialism? I wasn't sure. The fact that Osho hadn't publicly declared any of his living disciples as enlightened during his lifetime continued to be somewhat disconcerting to me.

However, I felt grateful for the opportunity Osho had given me by helping me to turn away from the pursuits of a worldly life with its common desires. He had introduced me to the world of spirituality and offered me experiences of bliss and peace that seemed to originate from a source beyond my comprehension at that time. He had promised me I would discover that mystery in the event of my own enlightenment. He had helped germinate the seeds for awakening within me by teaching me the importance of meditation and spiritual realization. He assisted my inner urge for enlightenment, which had grown into a wonderful tree in his Buddhafield garden.

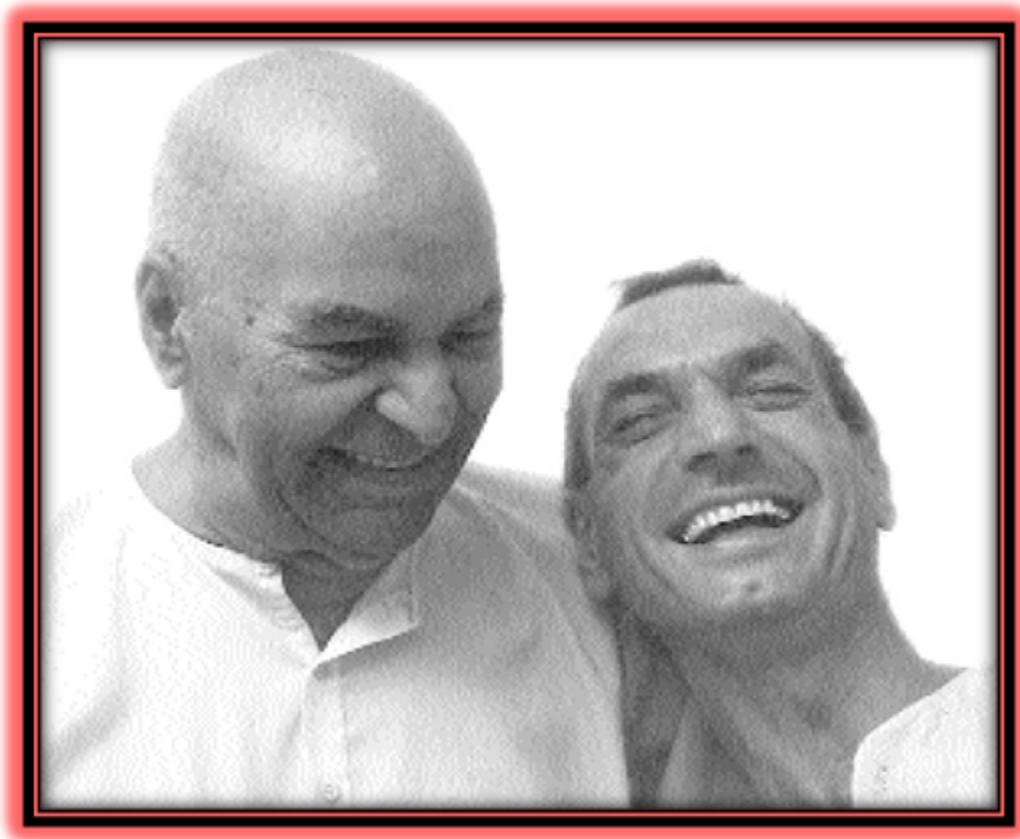
Despite my great appreciation for Osho, however, I stayed for only five months in my new quarters in the Pune ashram. In September 1991, I heard reports of an enlightened teacher, Sri H.W.L. Poonja, who was then living in Lucknow, the capital of the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, some six hundred kilometers southeast of New Delhi. His devotees called him Poonjaji or Papaji, and he was said to be able to awaken earnest seekers to their true nature at their very first encounter with him. I heard from these reports that he taught that no practice, meditation, or long years of preparation were necessary for enlightenment to occur. Those who really wanted it could have enlightenment right away.

This was incredible! Absolutely revolutionary! Could it really be so? Practically every day, rumors of new awakenings reached Pune. How I hoped such stories were true! If they were, there was hope for me too.

My studio in the ashram was wonderful—very convenient and supportive for meditation. But the news from Lucknow brought home to me the stark and uncompromising fact that it wasn't a beautiful room I wanted, it was enlightenment.

By October, I was seated in the living room of Poonjaji's house, in his presence for the first time. And, three days later, I was enlightened—according to Poonjaji, that is.

Papaji



Madhukar's "enlightenment experience" with Papaji in October 1991

"How can one enjoy something in the state of fear? Only a wedding with your own freedom, your own Self, is a wedding which will see no separation. Very few people will celebrate such a wedding. And this wedding can only take place after the cremation of the world of objects. Then Lord Nataraja will dance on the rubble of the destroyed world. Then samsara [worldly illusion] is over. Then all is over and the Self is realized."

Chapter 2

Sri Harilal Poonja

affectionately known as Papaji or Poonjaji—was born on October 13, 1910, in an area of the state of Punjab that is now part of Pakistan. Swami Rama Tirtha, one of India's celebrated saints, was his maternal uncle. Poonjaji had his first direct experience of the Self when he was eight. Through his mother's strong influence—she was a guru in her own right—he became a devotee of Lord Krishna, pursuing a mantra practice [repetition of a sacred word or phrase] day and night.

When he was twenty, his parents arranged his marriage. In 1942, he joined the army, only to quit less than two years later to continue his spiritual quest. Penniless, he was living in his father's house with his wife and two children when the enlightened master Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi appeared to him in a vision. The Maharshi directed him to the Sri Ramanashramam in Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, southern India. There, in 1944, through Bhagavan's grace, his search ended.

During the partition of India, Poonjaji moved his family from the Punjab to Lucknow. He worked as a salesman of sporting goods and heavy equipment, and then as a mining manager until his retirement in 1966. After living on the banks of the Ganges and traveling the world, he settled permanently in Lucknow. From the early 1990s until his death on September 6, 1997, hundreds of seekers from all over the world attended his daily satsangs in Lucknow. The hallmark of his teaching was his capacity to awaken accomplished seekers to their true Self in his presence.

Prior to his death, Poonjaji stipulated that his house should serve as a place for meditation, and that lunch and dinner should be provided for visiting seekers. Surendra and Usha, his son and daughter-in-law, have made it their lives' work to entertain visitors according to Papaji's last wishes. Down the road at the Papaji Satsang Bhavan, a small group of his devotees show daily videos of his teachings.

Surendra and more than a dozen of Poonjaji's disciples are conducting satsangs on his behalf in different parts of the world. Two of his former students, Gangaji [ch.4] and Andrew Cohen [ch. 11], are both popular teachers of enlightenment in the United States and Europe today.

I studied with Poonjaji from October 1991 until the end of July 1993. I was with him almost every day, either at his house or in satsang. At that time I was called Hareesh, a name given to me a decade earlier by my first guru. After I left Poonjaji's physical presence in 1993, I remained spiritually associated with him until his death on September 6, 1997.² The following exchanges and episodes depicting our time together appear in chronological order.

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Realize Who You Are and Then Do Whatever You Like

Upon my arrival, I discovered that Poonjaji lived modestly in an inexpensive, small, single-story, two-bedroom house that belonged to his daughter-in-law, Usha. The house was situated in the ugly concrete jungle of one-and two-story homes in a newly developed suburban township called Indira Nagar, some five miles away from the town of Lucknow proper.

Before British rule, Lucknow was the capital of a small Moslem kingdom called Aradh. But today, only the palace ruins, two mausoleums, and a couple of mosques remind us of the city's past glory. In modern times, Lucknow became famous—or rather, infamous—as one of the most polluted cities in the world. Countless two-wheelers, cars, buses and trucks, plus more than fifty thousand three-wheeled, ten-seater taxis called tempos, fill the roads. Thick black fumes from a half-combusted mixture of diesel, kerosene, and waste oil issue from their exhausts.

To reach Poonjaji's house from our hotels downtown, most of us seekers had to travel the polluted roads in those tempos. Some of us could tolerate the pollution only by wearing military gas masks.

I had heard of Poonjaji's reputation for imparting instant enlightenment to many who expressed to him an intense desire for it. Several of my close sannyasin friends who had made their way from Osho's commune in Pune to Papaji's satsang in Lucknow before me had already been declared enlightened during the past few weeks. Until I heard about the "enlightenment wildfire" that had been set in Lucknow, I was convinced that realization was not such an easy thing to accomplish. Perhaps several

lifetimes of austerities and practice would be necessary for me, I thought. But now, all of a sudden, enlightenment became a real possibility.

When I first met Papaji in fall of 1991, approximately twenty seekers were attending the daily satsangs in his living room. I remained silent all through that first satsang, but after the one that followed, I would not be the same person again.

Sitting in my second satsang with Poonjaji, I suddenly realized that I had to ask his help—right now! It seemed as if every single minute of my life had been leading up to this moment. I braced myself to make my request. My whole being was explosively charged. I gathered all my courage and, as I began to speak, it was as if an inner atomic chain reaction had been irreversibly activated.

Madhukar - Poonjaji, I want to become enlightened here and now. I have heard that with you, I can get It. I have been told you can give enlightenment—transmit it in a split second, in a finger snap. I want enlightenment now.

My heart was pounding as I spoke. My throat was so tight I could hardly breathe. Poonjaji looked intensely into my eyes, and I looked into his. That was all. Nothing was said. No meaning was transmitted. There was no intention anywhere. Then I noticed Poonjaji's lips move and I heard his voice.

Papaji - You can have it right now. There is no problem. Inquire simply, “Who am I?” Ask yourself now! Do it now! You can do it. Do it!

No thought formed itself in my mind and no word came to my lips. All awareness of myself began to evaporate. Everything became suspended in pure beingness, absolute peaceful beingness—beyond any sense of personality. Time came to a complete standstill. All was silence.

Finally my awareness began to collect itself again. Although my body-mind could not respond on any level other than simply to be, it was nevertheless wonderful to see Poonjaji gently continuing to gaze into my eyes. There was a silent understanding, a deep knowing. In this moment, nothing needed to be done. This was the bliss of “an experience without an experiencer.” But was this enlightenment?

My third satsang with Poonjaji was about halfway through. I was sitting right behind Krishna, a devotee from California, who was expressing his deep gratitude to Poonjaji with heartfelt words. At one point, as I listened to his account, my mind stood still and my heart just exploded. Tears of joy and bliss shook my whole being. I’m not sure how long this lasted, but eventually I heard Krishna concluding what he had to say.

Krishna - . . . All I can say is, “Thank you, Papaji!”

Papaji - Thank you, too! That is right: “Thank you!” is all that is left to say now.

Immersed in continuing bliss and ecstasy, I heard Poonjaji’s voice boom.

Papaji - You! Yes, you! You come here! [Addressing the other seekers present, he continues] He got it! He did it! Bring him here! Bring him to me!

I was crying and crying, and had no idea that he was talking to me. Seeing that I had not responded to Poonjaji's summons, the people around me shook me gently. Gradually I became aware of their touch, and I began to recognize my surroundings again. I was overcome with an immense feeling of gratitude and love toward nobody in particular—just gratitude and love. I felt tears streaming down my cheeks. I witnessed the body shaking with ecstasy and bliss. There was no sense of time. But finally it dawned on me that Poonjai was speaking to me—the body and mind called Hareesh. I couldn't think. I was just there, but at the same time, I seemed not to exist.

I didn't know what to do or what not to do—there was nothing to be done. Everything was being taken care of. Events were just unfolding impersonally. There were no personal speakers or listeners or doers. Yet words were being spoken and heard and actions were happening. The people seated around me helped me to my feet and, with my arms around their supportive shoulders, they brought me forward and lowered me onto the thakt, a small, slightly raised platform where Papaji sat.

Tears were still coursing down my face. I was overwhelmed by feelings of love, ecstasy, and gratitude. I felt Poonjaji place a comforting arm around me, and that made me cry even more. He hugged me, holding me tightly. I felt mothered and completely taken care of. My heart cried out in love, "My Papaji!" (That's what I called him from this moment on—Papaji.) There was nothing else to come, I felt. Nothing at all—this was completion.

Through my blissful tears, I heard Papaji laugh and laugh. I felt the warmth, the vibration, and the shaking of his huge, laughing body. I felt him to be the womb, the ocean, and the universe of all that ever was, is, and ever could be. After what seemed an eternity, my crying and his laughter slowly subsided. Only then he spoke.

Papaji - You did it! You did your work! How did you do it? Tell the others how you did it!

Papaji's words were heard, but there was no one left to whom he could address them. The speaking and the hearing were occurring as one single, impersonal event. I couldn't make sense of what was heard and was unable to think or to speak. I just sat there, engulfed in bliss, with Papaji holding me in his embrace. Aftershocks of laughter kept erupting. Tears of joy and love kept falling from our eyes. However, I was, and could only remain, silent. Then, I heard his voice again.

Papaji - Camera! Bring the camera! Ha, good! This is the moment!

Papaji continued to hold me, with my head resting against his chest, while a photograph was taken.

Papaji - Now tell them how you did it! Tell them how it happened! Tell them what happened!

I was still unable to speak. I didn't understand what he was saying. I just kept looking on in silence and wonder.

Papaji - Tell them how you did it! How did you get it? Tell me now! Tell me what the key is so that everybody else can use it, too. Everybody will be happy to know how to get it. Everybody has come here wanting it. Everybody is here for only that reason. So now, tell us how you got it! This is a trick. Nobody has defined it yet. I can't define it either. This is the time for you to speak!

I couldn't say anything. My mind was not able to respond intelligently. Then, all of a sudden, my thoughts rushed back again, as if shocked into existence. An inner voice asked anxiously, "What happened? How did this happen? What happened to whom?" But I was still unable to say anything. My silence continued, and Papaji seemed to become impatient, even slightly disappointed, with me.

Papaji - What is the use of you sitting on the thakt if you don't tell us how you did it? Sit down there!

As instructed by Papaji, I sat on the floor at his feet and stayed silent for the rest of that satsang.

Surrender to the Self and become the Self

Following these events, my friends who had come to Lucknow before me were all delighted and congratulated me on what had happened, taking it that I was now enlightened just as they were. I, however, was not convinced that the experience with Papaji at satsang was final enlightenment. I was definitely not in the thought-free and doubt-free state that he claimed

enlightenment to be. No matter what anybody else said, I felt sure that as long as I had one single doubt about my “enlightenment,” it just could not be true. My doubt was all the proof I needed that enlightenment had not occurred.

By evening, the bliss and ecstasy had subsided, but in the interim, I had come to two crystal-clear conclusions. First, I knew with absolute certainty that Papaji was my new guru. I wanted to stay with him and become his disciple. And, for this to happen, I felt I had to tell him about myself and my spiritual search up to the day I met him. I figured that before accepting anyone as a disciple, the master needed to know who they were and where they were coming from. Secondly, my doubt about my supposed enlightenment had by now become so strong that I knew I just had to tell him about it.

In order to meditate and reflect on my predicament, I had stayed in seclusion at my hotel after satsang. That night in my hotel room, I wrote to Papaji. After meeting him, I wanted to practice what is called viewing and speaking of myself in the third person. Within Papaji’s framework of understanding, Advaita Vedanta, the body-mind organism is seen as not being a separate entity with an ego-centered sense of free will and personal “doership.” But rather, it is known to be part of the divine impersonal expression of manifestation. Intending to practice disidentification from my ego on the one hand, and on the other hand, to keep my interaction with Papaji on the level of his Vedantic teachings, I deliberately wrote my letter to him in the third person.

I had noticed that before or during satsang, some seekers would slip a letter to a spot on the thakt, next to where he sat. At a moment of his choosing, he would pick up one at a time, read it silently to himself or/and out loud for everybody to hear. He would then call the person to sit in front of him on the floor on a cushion—the hot seat.

At satsang the following morning, I passed my letter forward and, shortly afterward, he read it aloud.

Papaji - [reading] Beloved Papaji. Hareesh's greatest wish is to be totally free. This letter is dated? Yesterday?! I thought you are already free. Yesterday in satsang it happened.

I felt very embarrassed. I was supposed to be enlightened, wasn't I? I didn't have the courage to tell Papaji my doubts about my enlightenment. I was afraid that if I told him the truth, Papaji might not help me any further in my quest for Self-realization. So I decided to lie.

Madhukar - It's an old letter.

Papaji - This must be an old letter! That is what I say. The letter has no date. [continues to read the letter to the group] His greatest wish is to be totally free. Please accept him as your disciple. To surrender to you means surrendering to the Self.

Surrendering to the Self is not surrender. Who else could surrender to the Self? What, apart from the Self, could surrender to the Self, if there is only the Self? There is only the Self! Therefore, the Self alone can surrender to the Self, and become the Self. The notion "I am not the Self" has vanished. That is what has happened in your case.

[reads on] The Self, the One, the Whole, is surrendering to the Self, to the One, to the Whole. Please, accept Hareesh's surrender to you, who is the light of the Self. Could you guide him home and support him to be and stay at home?

You are at home, Hareesh! Hareesh, you are at home. Where else could you be? You are not in the fish market!

[resumes reading] Could you guide him to stay at home in the ocean for good? Could you guide him to lead a practical life in the ocean? Hareesh became a disciple of Osho in 1980 in Pune, India. In 1982, he moved with Osho to Oregon, USA. When asked, he sold all his possessions and donated them to Osho's commune: his house, fields, business, and money. In 1985, Osho's commune in Rajneeshpuram, Oregon, was terminated and Hareesh was angry with Osho for a few weeks because he had lost everything. During the period from 1986 until 1991, he ran a business for one and a half years, spending the rest of the time with the master in his ashram in Pune.

You ask for discipleship. I have no disciples. And there is no teacher. I don't believe in any teacher, any teaching, or any student. There are no students and there is no teacher. In freedom, in pure consciousness, there is no scope for any teacher or any teaching, and there is no one who is ignorant.

This is freedom. Everyone is free in freedom. The notion "I am bound" has got nothing to do with this freedom. If there is no notion of bondage, who could be your teacher and who could be the student? I don't believe in discipleship at all. I have no disciples. I have no ashram and no teaching.

When you come to me, we meet as friends. We talk to each other and we share each other's view. That's all. You have allowed me to sit on this thakt. I obey you. If you don't like me sitting on the thakt, I will sit on the ground with you, amongst you all. There are no high and low, no up and down. We are all one. We are just playing. Someone becomes a policeman and somebody else becomes a thief. This is a game. That's all.

You have no right to serve others if you have not served yourself yet

During satsang a month later, in November 1991, I asked Papaji for a new spiritual name. He called me forward and had me sit next to him on the thakt. After looking into my eyes for some time, he picked up a sheet of paper and wrote MADHUKAR on it in big letters. He handed the paper to me and then asked me to pronounce my new name for him. When I said "Madhukar," he took me into his arms and hugged me warmly. I asked him if I could kiss him—the Self that was present in his form. He laughed happily, kissed me first, and then offered his cheek saying, "Kiss!"

I did. With this kiss, Papaji became my new guru; despite his nondual perspective about there being no teacher and no student, he had accepted me as his disciple. He said that Madhukar, like my Osho sannyas name, Hareesh, was another name for Lord Krishna. In addition, he related a further meaning.

Papaji - The honeybee is called madhukar in Hindi. The madhukar collects pollen all day long. By doing so, it is taking the flowers' essence and at the same time it is giving life to the flowers by pollinating them. One evening, the madhukar visits a lotus. And when the lotus closes its petals at sunset, the madhukar disappears forever in an eternal kiss.

For me, the new name was a testimony to the formal recognition of the guru-disciple relationship between my new teacher and myself. Equally important, my new name marked a restatement of the dedication of my life to the sole aim of finding truth and enlightenment.

The stream of new arrivals to Papaji's satsang swelled, and by December 1991, the number of people far exceeded the capacity of his living room. Two of his devotees rented a new house, with a large living room hall, less than a mile down the road from Papaji's home, and from then on, satsang was held there. Papaji christened it Papaji Satsang Bhavan—Papaji Satsang Meeting Hall. Around New Year's Eve, I moved into one of its two bedrooms. I made myself responsible for its expenses and physical upkeep, as well as for the daily flower decorations for satsang. Soon I bought the necessary equipment for Papaji's satsangs to be recorded daily on audio and video, in order to provide seekers and devotees with documentation of his teachings.

At this time, I felt drawn to further deepen my devotion and service to Papaji. In the spring of 1992, I wrote a letter to him requesting him to let me do so. Papaji read my letter out loud.

Dearest Papaji, Master of Service,

Madhukar has devoted his life to finding liberation. After he met you, both the desire for his personal enlightenment and the longing to serve you and your devotees have enormously intensified. Being with you, his deepest wish is to serve you.

Dear master of service, Madhukar witnesses every day how masterly you are in your service by assisting everyone to find freedom.

You became a master of service after you met your guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi. When asked, “What is the best service a disciple can render to his master?” Sri Ramana answered, “To serve not the guru but his disciples and devotees.”

Madhukar has no wife, no children, no family. He has no worldly obligations. He has no home or house. He wants to live only for enlightenment and service. Today he finds himself in prostration at your feet, begging you, the master of service, to let him be your son of service. Please, grant his wish and let him serve you and your devotees with all that he has.

In eternal gratitude,

Your devotee and servant

This time Papaji didn’t call me forward. Although he used the pronoun “you,” he spoke to the satsang audience at large.

Papaji - First you must serve yourself. You must do your work first. You must finish your work first. Have you done it? Have you done your work? You have no right to serve others if you have not served yourself yet.

Selfless service must be your motto. Your work will be of benefit to the whole world if it is done selflessly. Then it becomes worship. Then whatever you do is worship, even sweeping the floor. There is no difference between dusting the shoes in the shoe rack and meditation. You can have a taste of freedom when you are selfless in work. By doing lowly work with the right attitude, you can even attain freedom.

Papaji's words evoked a further question in me, and so I asked him:

Madhukar - What is a true devotee?

Papaji - As a true devotee, you have no right to ask me for anything. One becomes a true devotee only after fully surrendering to devotion. To be a devotee means to be in a state of devotion. Having merged in devotion, the devotee gives up his identity in the same way that a river gives up his separate nature when it flows into the ocean. After merging, the river has no right to say, "I am a river," because that identity and separation disappear when it becomes the ocean.

A true devotee becomes what he is devoted to. If he is devoted to service of the Divine, he becomes the Divine. That divineness then stays in the heart of the devotee, for the devotee is the heart of the Divine.

Madhukar - What is the guru's role in all this?

Papaji - When the devotee and the divine merge, my role also merges and disappears. There, in that place, I do not know what part is left for me to play.

Om, shanti [peace], shanti, shanti.

Wanting freedom is the only desire that can lead to total satisfaction

Sometime in the spring of 1992, I allowed my doubts about my attainment of enlightenment to again be voiced in satsang. This occurred by chance rather than by design, as I had not prepared my question in the form of a letter. Papaji had just guided a student through the self-inquiry process, culminating in the student's proclaimed enlightenment. However, the man found himself somewhat doubting his experience almost as soon as he had it. Prompted by their conversation about this important issue, I spontaneously spoke up. What follows is their dialogue, which leads into my questions.

Papaji - Because you have come to me, I request your whole being for five seconds. Mind you, nothing should trespass into these five seconds. Only five seconds are needed for freedom and liberation—just five seconds in a span of eighty years. I give you five seconds. That's very long. Usually, I don't give that much time to anybody. But you are from New York. I know New York. I have been living there. New York was very friendly to me. [laughter] That's why in your case I am very liberal with time.

Don't even allow a single thought to stir! During these five seconds, not even one thought should rise. That's the condition. I will wait for these five

seconds to pass and then I will check your reaction. Tell me now if you have understood what I have said about these five seconds. I will go on explaining them to you again.

Let - Well, I am just sitting here . . .

Papaji - Don't make a mistake! I will tell you one more time: You have to spend five seconds without stirring a thought. You used the words "I am." Didn't you say that?

Let - I used the words "I am"?

Papaji - You said, "I am sitting here." I told you not to let trespass any thoughts, not even "I am." This "I" has not to arise during these five seconds. No thought should rise from anywhere. These five seconds are going to be your own time. Actually, without the arising of a thought, they will not belong to time at all. They don't belong to the past, future, or even present. If five seconds are too much, I can reduce the time. Five seconds! Do it now! [a long silence elapses] What happened during these five seconds?

Let - It was dark. But in the darkness there was light. And there was a good feeling, bliss.

Papaji - That's all! You have done well. You are an honest man. This is it. That's all! This is all you have to do. This is enough now. This will recall you. This you can't forget so easily. I am very sure about it. All the rest you

will forget or you must forget. You must have forgotten your boyhood experiences already. But this is going to stay with you and this is going to help you all the time. And this is the only help on which you can depend safely. This is a raft. This is a raft that will take you to the other side of the ocean of misery. You can only use this raft when you don't make any effort. No effort is needed because it is already here. If you make any effort, you will not recognize it.

That's how it has happened. It was already there. I only hindered the possibility that you would make an effort. I helped you to avoid your relationships, efforts, and the thought process—and you recognized it! You recognized it only because I removed the thought process, thoughts, thinking, and effort. When you think and when you make use of effort, you don't see your Self-nature. It is already there. It is always everywhere. The only way to see it is to keep quiet—and you are there. Keep quiet! Simply keep quiet! Then it will reveal itself. It can't withhold itself. It's a revelation, not a gain. It has to reveal itself when you are in love with it.

Do you have any further question?

Let - How can I do it and not think?

Papaji - Any work you do comes from not-thinking.

Let - All work is coming from not-thinking?

Papaji - Yes. And That you do not know! You do not know That from which the power to work comes. You do not know where the urge and energy to work are coming from. I will tell you. For any kind of work, you need energy. Even to lift a pair of scissors you need energy. My hands are holding this tin of apricots now, okay? Do you know where the energy for this action is coming from? Go back now to that energy. And you will see that it is the same place where you have been a few minutes ago during those five seconds. Whatever you are doing, be in that place! You came to know that place. Now you know it. Before you didn't know it. Knowing That, you know that it is taking care of everything. Now you will not be arrogant anymore and say, "I' did it." It is the supreme power that is making use of you. You are its instrument. When you know this, you are free. No bondage! You are free. And you will always be free.

Now [since your enlightenment occurred] you can live better in your household. Now you are a better householder, a better husband, a better father, a better friend, and a better doctor.

You only had to know where this betterment

is coming from. It comes from knowing your own Self. It is your own Self. You are that Self. This you are not going to forget. I am very sure you can't forget It. It has a hold on you. One single glimpse of It is enough. You got it. I am sure, you got it. You got it!

Let - I got it? If you are sure that I got it, then I am sure I got it.

Papaji - If you are not sure, you must tell me now. This is the time now. I strike when the iron is red!

Let - Right, I am very sure now.

Papaji - Now, the iron is very red. And the hammer is in my hand. And I know where to strike.

Let - That's why I came to you. That's what I came for. Strike me again!

Papaji - Welcome! Welcome! Ah, that's why you came! So I will give you a good shape. What is your name?

Let - L-e-t. Let.

Papaji - L-e-t. Let me in, then! It is a good name. You were in trouble because of the board "To Let." Remove this board now!

Let - What? Remove the word "let"? [laughter . . . Let falls silent and remains with his eyes closed for some time, considering]

Papaji - [waiting] Yes. . . ?

Let - Okay, no Let anymore. . . .

Papaji - Yes, no trespass for Let! Nobody can live “in here.” “To Let” means to be led out. Once you are led out, anybody can pick you up and make use of you. Now remove this board “To Let.” That board you have had hanging around your neck for 35 million years. And you were belonging to others. Some tenants have been living in you for all these long years as long as you wore the board “To Let.” And in five seconds, you have expelled everything, everybody, all the tenants—forever. And now you see your own beauty.

Okay! Good luck! Chalo! [Let's go on!]

Papaji's command “Let's go on!” was the signal for me to speak up. Sitting on a cushion on the floor about fifteen feet away from Papaji, I waved my extended arm quite wildly in order to beckon his attention. As soon as he had spotted me, Papaji called me forward.

Madhukar - Papaji! When the iron is hot, it needs to be hit. My iron is hot! It wants to be hit. My real desire, my only desire, is permanent no-thought. Please, teach me how to be in permanent no-thought.

Papaji - Your desire is to have permanent no-thought. So, occupy the mind with only one desire. Then it will not allow any other desire to enter. That one desire is, “I want to be free.” Because you did not have that one single-pointed desire before, many desires could enter your mind. And they did!

But they did not give you satisfaction. Now, all those other desires will be expelled by this one single desire.

To be free is the last desire. Only this desire can lead to total satisfaction.

Madhukar - For the state of permanent no-thought to occur, does the desire for that state need to be present at all times?

Papaji - Yes, if you are serious and sincere, it will always be present. If you really want that state, how could you get rid of this desire? This desire will not leave you alone. It will scorch you like a man whose clothes have accidentally caught fire. While he is running to the nearby river to save his life, do you think such a man will listen to somebody on the road inviting him, "Come to the restaurant and have some ice cream with me. That will cool you down."?

Madhukar - No!

Papaji - What is the burning man's only desire?

Madhukar - To jump! To jump into the river!

Papaji - The desire "I want to be free" must be equivalent in intensity to that man on fire wanting to jump into the river. Then "I want to be free" will be

an incessant desire. Such a desire can't be commanded. When the right time arrives, this desire will appear.

Why are only a few people here in satsang? Because most other people are merrymaking and are not interested in freedom and satsang. And why will some of the people who are here in satsang run away and also join the others? Because they are not serious in their desire for freedom. They will change their minds. They will want to go merrymaking too.

We have been following quietly what our fathers have been doing and what our teachers have been telling us to do. Religions mean crowds of people. We have been told from birth to go to the church and obey the Book.

Very few people here and there will pick up their own path. But they may lose heart, because they will

be almost alone. Nobody will agree with what they say and do. And when they will lose heart, they will become disappointed. Only a few, someone here and there, will not depend on the society. But most people want to be in the crowd. Wherever there is a crowd, there must be a dance-drama going on or some falsehood is being practiced.

Mind you, very few will be there with you in your search for freedom. To have the desire "I want to be free" is not common. Why can't we produce a Buddha in every century? Why must two and a half thousand years pass before a Buddha appears again? Because the search for freedom is undertaken by only a few.

But it [enlightenment] is so easy that one cannot even do it!

But you want to suffer. You don't want happiness and love. You don't want to keep quiet and you don't want to stay at home. You rather want to disturb yourself and run somewhere else.

Madhukar - Papaji, you gave me this space. This space of no-thought can be had easily at any time for a short moment, for two moments or five moments. But in my case, this space did not stay permanently. This is my question. How to make it last?

Papaji - Why shouldn't it last? Why doesn't it last? It can last! The mistake is that you call the space of no-thought a gain. You say it has happened and you consider this happening to be your gain. That is why you are losing it. Don't call it a gain and don't say, "It has happened."

My friend Mr. Let has the same problem. He wants to have that space all the time. You can be directly face to face with "This." But it cannot be acquired. Don't make it an acquisition. Don't call it a gain. Just identify with that space and the problem is over.

Understand this! When you see your face in the mirror, you don't need to ask anybody, "Whose face is this?" Do you have any doubt whose face it is? Do you call someone and ask him, "Who is that person in the mirror?"

Madhukar - I know that the face in the mirror is my own face. I don't need anyone to tell me that.

Papaji - That's right! And that's exactly how it is when you have the experience of your own Self: "This is me!" You know it for sure and for good because you are it. How could you lose it? How could you lose what you are?

Madhukar - With your guidance, I have recognized my own Self in the mirror of your Self. Consequently, I expected the desire for freedom to subside. But it hasn't.

Papaji - For thirty-five million years, you didn't see your own Self because you were looking at the faces of others. Finally, you have lifted the mirror for the first time and you have recognized your own Self.

Emptiness is the mirror in which you can recognize your Self for the first time. Call out thrice: "This is me! This is me! This is me!" Identify with That! Forget yourself! Forget the visitor that appears in the mirror. You must have been mistaking yourself for the visitor. No! You are not the visitor! The mind was the visitor. That mind has been cheating you, fooling you and deceiving you. That is over now. Let it go! You are at home.

This is called direct recognition. I can't call it perception. "This" is very direct—not a recognition through any of the senses. Until now you have been using your mind and senses. All experiences were indirect: speaking, seeing, hearing. That is indirect knowing.

In order to have a very direct perception, you have rejected your senses, the intellect, the mind, and the body. You cannot lose this direct perception.

Anything indirect, anything gained, anything gained in time, and anything gained through the senses can be lost. You have to forget this old habit of gaining and you have to forget that which is not true. What is true is very direct. What is true is not even seeing. This I call darshan.

In the months that followed, I repeatedly stated—publicly in satsang—that I believed that I was not fully enlightened, but Papaji kept firmly insisting that I was. And each time I came in front of him to tell him of my doubts, they would all be instantly dispelled by his unique ability to point to, and let me recognize, my own true nature.

Thus, the experience of satori, or no-thought, which he called enlightenment, occurred for me on numerous occasions. It would last for some time and then the mind would click back in again, and thoughts, doubts, and identification with the body and mind would reappear.

Shout from the rooftops that you are free!

Then, one morning in satsang, in June 1992, I heard Papaji tell a devotee, “Whatever you believe, you are. If you say you are bound, you are bound. If you say you are free, you are free.

So, just declare you are free and you are free. That’s all! It is as simple as that. Be bold! Shout from the rooftops that you are free. You must do it! If you want to be free, you must shout thrice, ‘I am free, I am free, I am free!’ And you will be free.”

Hearing this, a new possibility opened before me. By boldly declaring that I was enlightened, I could actually make it happen! By owning it, I could ease into its advent and its permanent establishment as my reality. This novel approach was one of the few methods I had not yet tried. My yearning for enlightenment was so great, I was ready to try anything to the utmost.

Then one night before my forty-third birthday, that same month, I woke from sleep with a song running through my mind. I got up and wrote it down.

I was ready for the rooftops! All this time, enlightenment had eluded me because I had been begging for it. Now I would follow Papaji's prompting and lay claim to it, declaring it mine—loud and clear. When the song came to me, I realized I would be making this declaration on my birthday, shouting it out—admittedly not from the rooftop of the Satsang Bhavan, but downstairs in the satsang hall itself—from the bottom of my heart. Buoyed up by this realization, and determined to go through with it, I wrote to Papaji and submitted my letter at satsang that morning. He opened it and read:

Beloved Papaji,

When Madhukar arrived in Lucknow some eight months ago, he had the most burning desire to be free. Beloved Master, his wish was granted by your grace.

Madhukar is bowing down to you, my father, touching your feet, ever so grateful, in emptiness, silence, bliss, and gratitude.

Why is Madhukar still here with you after finishing his work? The only thing left for him is service and surrender to you and to the Self. The burning desire for freedom through the question “Who am I?” did lead to the Source. There is a deepening conviction of freedom.

Now this burning desire has transformed itself into a huge torch that flares out from the Source in order to destroy the vasanas, the old latent tendencies of the mind.

Setting the letter down, Papaji looked directly into my eyes and declared:

Papaji - This is not correct. I will correct it. First of all, you have used the word “destruction.” I have explained the word vasana in satsang earlier this morning. Cravings for objects by the senses are called vasanas. After the vasanas are destroyed, you have no mind and you are free. In your case, those vasanas are destroyed already.

This desire for freedom is fire itself. The vasanas cannot return because the desire for freedom has burnt all the vasanas. The fire was as strong as the conflagration of a forest. It has burnt all vasanas and desires, and all the ones in waiting. The ceremony of destruction has already been performed. When this occurred, you entered into the source of knowledge, which is the torch you speak about. It is fire, light, and the source of light.

This is a very beautiful sentence: This huge torch burning out from the Source toward the mind, toward the old tendencies and toward the no-mind
...

There are no tendencies anymore because they have already been destroyed. The result is knowledge, freedom. There is nothing left for you to destroy.

Madhukar - But the fact is that mind comes back, thoughts come back.

Papaji - With this torch in your hand, they will not come back.

Madhukar - In your presence, at this very moment, pure Consciousness is present. Of course, in your presence, there are often no thoughts. But when I am alone, or when I am physically away from you, forgetfulness occurs quite often. Then thoughts return and mind exists.

Papaji - Let them come! Don't fight with them. Let them come! They come to play with you, don't they? They don't come for destruction. Don't destroy them. First of all, they don't exist!

The mind became no-mind, and no-mind is freedom, and freedom is knowledge. This is the torch. It will work by itself. There is no quarrel with your vasanas.

Now you can play very well. There is no harm. Now you are returning to the kingdom and you sit on the throne of freedom. Nobody can arrest you now.

Before, you belonged to the public and you were governed by the laws of the land. Now you are the law. Even the gods will bow down before you. This world belongs to you. It is for you and it is beautiful. This world exists for the enjoyment of the enlightened person. For a foolish person, the world is a graveyard and the person suffers.

Madhukar - So what do I do with my thoughts?

Papaji - Don't fight! There is nothing wrong with them. Now you have become fresh. You have had a bath in the fountain of nectar. Now you are very young once again. People who see you will be happy. They will come to kiss you and play with you now.

For you, doership is finished, ego is finished, ignorance is finished, darkness is finished. So, where are these vasanas now? They were only imagination. This samsara [the cycle of birth and death] is imagination and God is imagination.

Madhukar - What about the "I"?

Papaji - Even this "I" about which we speak is imagination. You imagine "I," and this imagined "I" has multiplied into this world and the next world. "I" became God and the world. Everything is just imagination: men, words,

heavens, sufferings and enjoyments. Freedom and bondage are imagination. Although no handcuffs and fetters exist, you imagine that you are bound. In a dream, some people get handcuffed and put in jail. They suffer in the dream. Only after waking up do they realize that they were dreaming. Their suffering stops because they realize that it was a dream.

Therefore, without knowledge, everybody is handcuffed, chained, and fettered. The world is a vast prison. “I” is the prison. “I” are the walls. But “I” is only an imagination from which you have not woken up yet. One must be released from the “I,” from the “I”-thought. But that release is also imagination. Bondage is imagination, freedom is imagination, consciousness is imagination, bliss is imagination.

And this knowledge is freedom—how easy it is! And how difficult!

The perfect teacher has no teachings

Madhukar - Whenever the “I” dissolves momentarily, all vasanas dissolve with it. However . . .

Papaji - Where are the latent tendencies and the dormant old habits? They exist in the old language in the dictionary of fools. A wise man has no dictionary. He does not need to read or study. Studying is not wisdom. Wisdom means not to cling to anything, not to cling to any concept. Get rid of the conceptualization of concepts. Understand this! Without concepts, where are the old tendencies? To understand this is freedom.

The perfect teacher has to say that you are free. The perfect teacher knows that he and you and all are perfect. The perfect teacher has no teaching, because you are free. What teaching do you need if you are free? Only a man who looks at the body, mind, and senses will teach you something. But is he going to teach the body? The body is inert, the senses are inert, the mind is inert. Who is teaching whom?

Papaji's words pointing to my true Self penetrated my heart. The Self knows no differences, multiplicity, or diversity. I understood that my ideal and perfect state could only be rediscovered again and again and stabilized through direct inner experience of the Self. I could not attain it by trying to change or transform my body or mind.

From the point of view of my new understanding, Osho's approach of total surrender to the master in order to attain liberation appeared to be a diversion from the existential and experiential understanding of immediate Self-knowledge: "Knowing myself is being myself." My next question to Papaji expressed these reflections.

Madhukar - Papaji, sometimes my previous teacher appears to me as a kind of demon. I would like to request you to help me to detach myself, gracefully and finally, from the entire past. I wish to be free forever from all past relationships.

Papaji - That is past. Now there are no demons. [laughter] Demons are for demons. In the light of the Self, who is a demon and who is God? Who is good and who is bad? This is foolishness!

Only the wedding with your own Self will see no separation

Madhukar - Papa, a little song came to me. Can I offer it to you?

Papaji - Where did it come from?

Madhukar - It just came to me at three o'clock in the morning.

Papaji - Oh, very good! What song?

Madhukar - Perhaps it came from you. A small song. I am shy. I have never sung in public before.

Papaji - Let us enjoy it. Usually people keep their secrets for themselves. Even with a small secret, people want to see me privately. There is nothing secret. What is secrecy? "I cannot speak to you in front of so many people," they say. There is no secrecy. Because you don't keep it a secret, everybody will enjoy. I want even secrets to be shared with everybody. Which is the song that came to you?

Madhukar [sings]

Papa, I am free, I am free, I am free,

Papa, I am free with you.

Papa, I am free, I am free, I am free,

Papa, so much thanks to you.

Beyond you and me,

Beyond you and me,

Free, free, free!

Singing, singing, dancing, dancing,

Free, free, free, free, free, free,

Free, free, free!

Everybody in satsang was laughing and clapping.

Papaji - How beautiful! How joyful! Let us have it again! Sing! Madhukar, do it! Yes, sing it!

I sang the song once more. The whole satsang joined in again, singing, clapping, laughing, and celebrating along with me.

Papaji - All of you have witnessed this wedding. Normally, people are not even happy at their own wedding. This wedding here is such a beautiful wedding. This is an eternal wedding without a groom and a bride. What a joy! Joy is the groom and joy is the bride. Joy is hugging joy in the chamber of joy. How beautiful! He who has been wed just now can only enjoy and sing.

Others will weep at their wedding because fear

arises at that time. When two persons meet, fear arises. Whenever there are two, the fear of separation exists, because the two have to separate sooner or later. How can one enjoy something in the state of fear? Only this wedding with your own freedom, your own Self, is a wedding which will see no separation.

Very few people will celebrate such a wedding. And this wedding can only take place after the cremation of the world of objects. Then Lord Nataraja will dance on the rubble of the destroyed world. Then samsara is over. Then all is over.

Very good! Very beautiful!

Madhukar - Papaji, I have one more wish. I would like to express my gratitude. I would like to thank you and everyone else.

According to the ancient Indian tradition, the disciple, having received his guru's final transmission, circumambulates his master thrice as a token of his gratitude. Since Papaji was seated with his back supported by a cushion propped against the wall, I could not walk around him, so instead, I placed a cushion in front of him to symbolize his physical form. Then, with hands folded in deepest respect, I walked around it three times while Papaji sat motionless, watching me. I knelt before him and bowed thrice, touching my forehead to his feet. Getting up, I turned toward my brothers and sisters and, with folded hands, bowed deeply to them three times.

Papaji - Beautiful! How beautiful! This is done beautifully. Such luck! This should be done! I am really happy, really happy. You have really done everything that has to be done. Nobody else did it yet. Who taught you this? This has to be done! This has to be done!

What Madhukar did is very traditional. I don't ask you to perform this tradition. But you all could see what a beautiful experience he had by doing it. This was very beautifully done.

Perhaps, this is wisdom. This is wisdom!

You have to thank everybody, and you have to wish well even those who are burning in hell. You must send your good wishes to them. Perhaps they will be happy to see your light. Your wisdom and your compassion will help them. They are burning endlessly in hell for their sins. You can part with your happiness and share it with them.

What Madhukar did is very traditional. You go around the guru three times. Then you bow down and stand up three times in front of the guru. There are three rounds, one for each of the three worlds: the world of the past, the world of the present, and the world of the future. These worlds were with you and now you thank them, wish them well—give them a good send-off and say a final good-bye to them.

In your happiness everybody is happy.

That evening, I threw a party to celebrate my first birthday—as an enlightened one! The whole Satsang Bhavan was decorated with lights. Papaji made me sit next to him while his devotees expressed their love in bhajans [songs of devotion]. The letters in icing on the heart-shaped birthday cake read: FREEDOM WITH PAPAJI. Hand in hand, Papaji and I cut the cake together. He said, “Marriage—kiss!” And, in front of everyone, he put his arm around me and kissed me on the mouth!

I almost fainted with the intensity of my feelings—surprise, love, joy, and devotion. In satsang I got married to the Self, and now I was married to my guru too. The marriage was consecrated by that kiss.

Immerse yourself in the holy Ganges and all your sins are washed away

In the months that followed, I became one of Papaji's closest disciples and, as part of his household entourage, I went with him wherever he went. As one of his right-hand men, I helped out with the various organizational and administrative tasks that became necessary as the number of people attending his satsang continued to dramatically increase. I helped set up and run guesthouses for Papaji's devotees, a bookshop, restaurant, and a publishing operation for printing Papaji's books. I helped organize the many festivals and marriage celebrations⁴ that occurred. I also produced a professional video film on his life and teachings [Call Off the Search] and a studio-recorded audio cassette [Be a Lion!] with bhajans devoted to him.

Around the time of my "marriage" to him, Papaji decided that next to the old hall we would build a new and much larger air-conditioned satsang hall with a seating capacity for four hundred people. On his birthday on October 10, 1992, Papaji blessed the new Satsang Bhavan in a special inaugurating satsang. I arranged for him to be interviewed and filmed by Doordarshan, the governmental, all-India TV channel.

Since the summer of 1992, I had been carrying most of the financial responsibilities for Papaji's work and for the Satsang Bhavan building program. I was also taking care of most of the ongoing daily expenses at Satsang Bhavan as well as the upkeep of Papaji's home. On guru purnima of the same year, the day traditionally set aside for renewing a disciple's dedication to the guru,⁵ I gave Papaji a letter containing a list of all my bank accounts, plus a check written out to his name for the full amount of everything that I owned to date. I declared that all my possessions were now his own and at his disposal. I said I wished that the master would use them for himself, his family, and the satsang community.

By the fall of 1992, my written will had found its way into Papaji's vault in a downtown bank, and I felt free and surrendered to the mystery of life and my spiritual odyssey. Papaji later ripped up the check; just the fact that the offer had been made was sufficient.

Several weeks later, Papaji's wife died. She was about his age and had lived very reclusively at his old family house in downtown Lucknow. Her ceremonial cremation and the ensuing rituals took place at Haridwar, one of the holiest Hindu pilgrimage places in India, on the banks of the Ganges. Besides his son, Surendra, Papaji permitted only three of his devotees to attend them.

We took the overnight Deradoon Express train and arrived in Haridwar in the early morning hours. The city felt holy. It seemed somehow both ancient and familiar. So many of the old buildings were ashrams and temples. The smell of incense was everywhere, accompanied by the sounds of temple bells. I noticed shrines filled with offerings at almost every street corner. Vedic prayers echoed through the narrow alleys, reminding me of Papaji's wife's death and my own mortality.

Along the Ganges, hundreds of holy men lived on small mats, with only a few belongings. Some wore ochre robes and others were dressed only in their own long, matted hair; they meditated and prayed in serene solitude. Down narrow alleys, stray cows would wander and nibble on the unprotected produce displayed in front of the stalls.

It was on this occasion, one day after the consecration ceremony for Papaji's wife's ashes, that I found myself sitting next to Papaji in a small barber shop bordering the Ganges. There he ordered me to have my head shaved like his. There we sat—the guru and his disciple—on high wooden

stools overlooking the Ganges on our left. Right in front of me, the mirror reflected a strange sight: our two pairs of eyes were gazing meditatively out of two completely white foamy heads covered from the neck up with shaving cream. The sight made us smile. Still not yet fathoming the importance of the ritual that was taking place, I was reminded of silent mimes or some kind of visiting extraterrestrials. A few minutes later, with all my hair removed, my head glistened in the light. It looked like a shiny newborn baby's bottom, and I felt as though my mind were free and naked.

Silently we left the barber shop and proceeded down to the Ganges. There Papaji instructed me to face the sun, fold my hands in prayer, and to dip seven times into its holy waters so as to be completely covered by them. Slowly, attentively, and with deep reverence, I stepped into the Ganges. From my soles to the top of my head, its glacier-cold, clear waters brought about a total cleansing of my body, mind, and spirit. My mind became empty except for an occasional flood of unfathomable gratitude. Moments of eternity passed. My heart exploded and the Self shined forth in its purity. After completing the ritual, Papaji and I sat silently together for a short while in the holy waters. Papaji finished the ritual, declaring, "With this ceremony, every single sin in all your past lives and on up to this moment is washed away. Now you are free. Stay free by shaving your head every day."

Papaji then took me, along with Surendra and my two devotee friends, to the nearby home of the family pundit [priest]. While we all sat on the floor, a huge book was produced and placed on the low table. The pundit recorded in it the cremation of Papaji's wife's body and the departure of its soul. Beginning with Papaji and Surendra, he also inscribed the names of all five of us present. When Papaji asked me to sign the documentation with my signature, I simply signed "Madhukar."

Later, Papaji and I went riding the streets of Haridwar in a rikshaw [three-wheeled bicycle taxi]. We sat comfortably, arm in arm and holding hands.

All of a sudden, he squeezed my hand very hard and pulled me close to him by my arm. With my head fixed right in front of his own, his being surged through his eyes into mine and poured into the core of my heart.

“Madhukar, you are more a son to me than my own son is.” I heard this and felt his profound love, but I really didn’t know what it would mean, practically speaking. I was deeply honored and touched by his words while his intense presence swept my mind away. Then, still mystified, I witnessed a lone thought cross the screen of my awareness. It said, “First I became his ‘wife’ and now I have become his son. But truly I am always the Self.”

Your body may travel, but the Self remains as it is

In the months that followed, many powerful events and experiences occurred in my master’s presence, but doubts about my enlightenment remained, subsiding only occasionally. Finally, after having been in Papaji’s presence every day for almost two years without attaining lasting fulfillment, I felt compelled to leave him for a while. With every new day, I was feeling more and more tormented by the discrepancy between my master’s insistence that I was enlightened, and my own doubts about it. After all, I still had thoughts, got angry, was jealous, and most of the time felt identified with the body and the mind. So how could I consider myself truly enlightened?

I had come to the point where I could no longer bear the tension. So in June 1993, I asked Papaji’s permission to visit the holy mountain Arunachala [in Tamil Nadu, southern India], which is said to be the physical form and manifestation of Lord Shiva [god of destruction] on Earth. I also wanted to visit the ashram of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi [1876–1950]—Papaji’s guru—which had been established in the 1920s near the city of Tiruvannamalai at the foot of Arunachala. Papaji consented to my request.

From Lucknow I flew, via Delhi and Pune, to Madras. From there it was a five-hour taxi ride to Arunachala and the Sri Ramanashramam. Bhagavan's nephew, Sri Venkataraman, the ashram president, invited me to stay there. My small and simple room had electricity and an attached bathroom. It had a view of the holy mountain. During my stay, I spent most of my time sitting in silence either in Bhagavan's samadhi [tomb of a saint] hall, where his physical remains are enshrined, in the Old Hall where he spent most of his life, in the Virupaksha cave, or at Skandashram. (Situated on the slopes of the mountain, these last two locations were Bhagavan's abodes during the early years of his stay at Arunachala.)

At other times, I met and talked with ashram residents and devotees who had lived with Sri Ramana for extended periods. Some of them were now spiritual teachers in their own right. My interviews with these gurus are described in chapter 5 [Sri Annamalai Swami] and chapter 6 [Sri Lakshmana Swami]. I sought them out because they were all former gurubhais [followers of the same guru] of my own teacher. I thought that perhaps they would understand my predicament, help me to overcome it, deepen my inquiry, and assist and guide me further in my spiritual search.

During my two-week stay, I had several insightful and clarifying conversations with them. I came to the conclusion that I needed to leave Papaji's physical presence and continue my life and my search for enlightenment on my own. The day before I left Arunachala, I sent Papaji a fax to this effect. I said that I didn't know what I was going to do, or where I was going to go, or how I was going to live. I told him that I would shortly be returning to Lucknow for a few days to organize my departure. I asked him to bless me in my endeavor.

Before leaving Arunachala, I called Ramesh S. Balsekar, a spiritual teacher living in Bombay, and asked if I could meet him. He readily agreed to my request. I stopped over in Bombay for a few days on my way back to

Lucknow, hoping to speak with him, too, about my predicament. This conversation and the full story of my relationship with Ramesh are recounted in chapter 7.

As a result of my interaction with Ramesh, the urge that was driving my search in India for the final truth and enlightenment seemed to drop away. He had influenced me with his teaching that no striving or any kind of effort would further or quicken my chances of enlightenment. I therefore booked myself on a flight to Germany that was leaving in less than a week's time and headed off to Lucknow for a final meeting with Papaji.

On arrival, I wrote a letter to Papaji to inform him of my intended departure. This letter did not say why I was leaving—I felt I had to explain that to him personally. As I awaited our meeting, I found myself telling him in my heart that I wanted only the real thing—permanent enlightenment—not just bliss experiences and the occasional momentary recognition of my true nature. I wanted him to understand that I doubted I would ever attain final fulfillment under his guidance, that something in my core was feeling blocked, and that my burning desire for enlightenment had somehow dropped away. These were the reasons why I felt compelled to leave, I told him in my heart.

For three days prior to my departure, I therefore repeatedly asked Papaji for a private meeting. Each time I asked, he agreed to let me have one. In the meantime, I told no one that I had decided to leave the master for good. I quietly paid all the outstanding bills of the Papaji Satsang Bhavan and of Papaji's household, cleared up all pending personal business, passed all my duties on, and packed my belongings.

Despite his assurances that he would grant my frequently repeated request, no private meeting with Papaji was forthcoming. I waited in anguish and growing desperation. I just could not leave my guru without letting him know why I was going. Finally, the day of my departure came. With no sign of the private interview materializing, I found myself with no other option but to speak directly to Papaji in satsang. The following transcript is from that morning's satsang, which ended just minutes before I had to leave for the airport.

Papaji entered the satsang hall and walked slowly into the room, his right arm held by a disciple named Bharatmitra, his left arm supported by me. Perhaps three hundred people had assembled. After the master was seated, I lowered myself into my regular seat to the left of Papaji. During the customary introductory silent meditation, I opened my eyes and gazed softly at Papaji's form. His eyes closed peacefully. Serenity and beauty seemed to emanate from his being, filling the whole room and permeating each one of us. In my heart I thought, "Perhaps I will imbibe your beauty and enlightenment physically one last time, but your presence and your being will stay on in my heart forever in this eternal meeting in truth—in satsang." Feelings of immense love and gratitude intensified and brought tears to my eyes as I allowed my wet gaze to drift across the hall from one meditative, peaceful friend's face to the next. My heart cried out in agony in the face of my imminent separation from them and from my guru.

Soon, Papaji's deep voice soothed my pain when he, hands folded, opened the oral part of satsang with his traditional and enigmatic invocation, "Om. Let there be peace and love among all beings of the universe. Let there be peace, let there be peace. Om, shanti, shanti, shanti." Satsang continued. Finally, and just before its conclusion, I decided to speak up. In anticipation of his unpredictable response, I heard my trembling voice boom over the loudspeakers:

Madhukar - Papaji, I would like to say something about what happened or did not happen to me. When I left Lucknow for Arunachala five weeks ago, I still had the very, very strong desire to be free. During my stay at the Sri Ramanashramam, that desire somehow just dropped away. Nothing else happened. But the desire is gone. It just left. It is just like that. There is no desire for freedom anymore. There is just the acceptance of What Is.

I don't know what enlightenment really is, and somehow that doesn't matter anymore. I would like to explain my situation more clearly. But I don't really know anything about my situation. I am not able to explain myself better. There is just no explanation.

I want to let you, Papaji, and everyone else, know that I am leaving today for good. I don't know what I will do. I only know that I have to leave. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you, Papaji, and to all of you assembled here.

My announcement exploded into the congregation like a bombshell. Everyone seemed to be arrested in a state of disbelief. Utter silence, stark presence, and suspense filled the interim between my disclosure and Papaji's answer. After having stated my intention for everybody to hear, I felt instantly relieved, unburdened and free. I felt strong and ready to face and embrace anything—including the possible chiseling or hammering on my ego by the master. And even before Papaji uttered a word, in my mind's eye I saw myself resuming my odyssey of enlightenment by boarding the raft again and setting the sails for destination unknown. I was determined to resolve my doubts. I felt guided by a deep inner knowing.

Papaji - This happening has to happen. It is not really a happening. Yet this happening had to happen and it has happened. That is why I am very happy

about this. There are very few people to whom this happening could happen, and has happened.

Observing what has happened to you, I can only say that it is not a “regular” happening. It is the Self that is happening. It came by itself. So, you take it as it is. I wish you all the best of luck wherever you are. I also wish you luck on behalf of my children of satsang. We wish you the best of luck.

It is not that you are leaving. “You” cannot leave. Let the body go anywhere, but yet “you” are not leaving. How can you leave? But yet I like what’s happening with you. Your leaving I like. Leave everything! One day you will have to leave behind everything that you have. It is very difficult to do so while still being in the body. Everyone has to leave his body, his near and dear ones, his relationships, and everything else. The earlier that happens, the better it is. Why wait for tomorrow? Tomorrow nobody has ever seen.

I am happy with this trusting step that you have taken. It is a divine gift. Take it that way. Thank you for everything!

By the time Papaji had finished addressing his touching words to me, the whole congregation was in tears. The master’s words had hit the core in my seeker’s heart. They encouraged, strengthened, and empowered me on my journey. They supported my inner guidance and affirmed that I was on the right track. I felt deeply blessed by, grateful to, and in love with, my guru.

Leaving satsang, Bharatmitra and I assisted Papaji again, walking together into “Papaji’s Room.” In that small room, the first thing he did every morning after arriving at Satsang Bhavan was to read through the letters and questions for satsang before it commenced. After satsang, he met and welcomed new arrivals there as well as those who were leaving Lucknow on that day.

Seated on the thakt, Papaji motioned me to kneel down in front of him. First he took the Sri Ramana picture down from the wall behind him and placed it in my hands. Then he picked a red rose out of a nearby bouquet and laid it on the picture. He ordered a rudraksha mala [a 108-bead necklace worn by traditional Hindu sannyasins] to be brought. He then placed the mala around his guru’s portrait. Papaji then asked me to touch Sri Ramana’s feet. And so I touched my guru’s guru’s feet.

At this instant, I was overcome with the most intense, almost unbearable, feelings of love and gratitude. I threw myself at Papaji’s feet and began to dissolve. I had the impression that my death was imminent. It felt as if I were dying—dying from love when I dissolved into nonexistence at the feet of my teachers.

On my return to physical reality, Papaji looked firmly into my eyes and spoke into my being: “Having filled their cup completely, I wish everybody would be leaving with you today, and on my return to satsang tomorrow morning I would find the hall empty. Then my mission would be fulfilled. Blessed you are. Go with my blessings.”

More tears! Could I ever make it to the airport today? Did I still want to get there? It turned out that I didn’t need to worry about that. Papaji took care

of me. After he had returned to his house, he sent his Maruti van back to Satsang Bhavan with the instructions to take me to my flight.

The truth itself will go to a holy person and exalt that person

To my complete surprise, I was back in Lucknow less than five weeks later. Germany had nothing to offer; everything seemed empty and dead. So within two weeks of my arrival there, I booked a flight back to India. My desire to be free had not dropped away at all. Quite the contrary—the craving for final freedom and fulfillment had resurfaced with greater intensity! I was absolutely convinced now that my life's only purpose was to complete my odyssey—and realize the Self. I felt I was getting older very quickly. Time seemed to be running out fast. More than anything else, I wished that my ego would die before my body did. With that spirit of deep desire, I returned to India, and to Papaji. But this time, I felt determined to deepen the inquiry into the ultimate truth of Self-realization through the guidance of other gurus and teachers as well.

I arrived back in Lucknow in the fall of 1993 and celebrated my return with a big party in the Papaji Satsang Bhavan, which Papaji attended. He again invited me to sit next to him while devotees sang their songs of devotion to him. I felt happy and satisfied. Papaji was loving and kind to me, treating me again like a true son. I rented a flat, and was once again a member of the master's household, though without taking on any fixed duties.

But it soon became clear to me that there had been a great change in my life as a spiritual seeker, and a new pattern was emerging. I now discovered that the urge for final fulfillment and enlightenment, which had been burning inside me for so long, now alternated with periods in which I felt overcome by a sense of disillusionment—even hopelessness—about the spiritual

search. At these moments, it seemed that the spiritual quest was just an elusive mind game.

At these times, I felt that instead of asking the guru to show me how to get enlightened, I would do better to ask how to drop the search altogether and become a “normal” citizen again. Once again, I knew that my time with Papaji was coming to an end. Within three weeks of my return to Lucknow, I left again—this time for a pilgrimage to the source of the holy Ganges in the northern part of India. I set out to request the river goddess Ganga to lead me to a new teacher who could help me out of my dilemma and guide me onward to the conclusion of my odyssey.

Over the next twelve months, I returned to see Papaji three more times for short visits lasting about a week each. I had several conversations with the master during satsang; the topics included predestination and the benefits of seeking out more than one teacher. I also attempted, once again, to clarify Papaji’s teaching on enlightenment. Here is the transcript of one of those interviews.

Madhukar - I heard you say that you have not given your final teaching to anyone yet. I would like to request you to give the final teaching to me, today—now.

Papaji - It is very true. I haven’t given the final teaching to anyone yet, because the truth exalts a holy person. Therefore, the truth will go to a holy person. It will itself choose such a person and reveal itself to such a person.

It is a very secret and sacred teaching. I cannot give it to everyone. So far, I have not done it.

Some people run away from the teaching because they are rejected by the truth. Only when one is very holy in all respects, then the truth will unfold its own glory to oneself.

On the other hand, one has to wait without demanding anything, and then one will find oneself being chosen by the truth. But you have to be chosen one day! Who will be chosen? The one who is absolutely holy and most beautiful will attract the truth.

After winning, do not go to the racecourse again

By saying that he had not imparted his final teaching to anyone yet, did Papaji mean to say that none of his disciples had actually attained final enlightenment? Wasn't enlightenment the fruition and culmination of the final teaching? And hadn't he declared me and others enlightened? Three satsangs later, I asked Papaji to clarify this issue.

Madhukar c The other day you told us that the truth exalts a holy person. On the other hand, you used to tell me and other people, "You got it! You did your work! You did it!"

What did you mean by that? Did you mean that the truth had come to me or not?

Papaji c That means: I have seen that you are holy, and I have given you what a holy person needs to be given as a gift.

When you win a derby lottery of one million dollars, everyone will tell you, “You got it!” Because you backed horse number six, and it won. That means, “You got it!”

It doesn’t mean that you got the horse or the jockey. Everybody will tell you, “You got it!”

And you got the price that was fixed for someone who is holy. The holy person is given that gift.

Madhukar - And then? What comes after that?

Papaji - And then? That person will not ask any further questions, because he has won one million dollars. “And then?” means: He will go again to the racecourse and lose all that he has won. I have seen many people who lost everything they owned in the horse races. They became dropouts and beggars in the streets of Bombay. They could have kept the prize.

That is why I say, “After winning, do not see the racecourse again!”

You must have seen the horse races in Pune. I don't think that anybody is happy who bets in those races. I have even known some people to commit suicide after the horse on which they had bet all their possessions lost the race. Only one horse will win. Among the many, only one man will win.

In truth, too, among the many, only one will win. Who will win? The prize of truth will go only to a holy person. What I have read to you from The Mountain Path [a magazine published by Sri Ramanashramam, Tiruvannamalai, India] indicates who and what a holy person is and what his qualities are. He has no association at all with anyone who is associated with sense objects. He rejects anyone who is attached to sense objects.

If you understand what I say, then you tell me now who you are. Who are you? For one second, don't think of the one who is attached to the sense objects! Just don't touch that person for one second! For this one second, tell me who you are!

Papaji's words had summoned me again into my indescribable true nature. With great intensity, Papaji looked into my eyes for a long time. Absorbed into silence and That which is prior to sense objects, I felt an unspeakable peace that silenced all understanding.

When all impurities of mind are dissolved, you will stay quiet

I had heard from several of Papaji's longtime Indian devotees that he had visited and conversed with hundreds of gurus and teachers in India and elsewhere. This went on until the mid-1980s, forty years after his own

enlightenment. I wondered what had motivated him to keep seeking so ardently and decided to ask him about it.

One day, Papaji silently watched me move into the “hot seat” cushion in front of him. Sitting there cross-legged, I pulled my letter out of the right-hand pocket of my kurta [Indian style long shirt worn loosely over a pair of pajama-style pants] and handed it to him. Very slowly and gently, he pulled the letter out of the envelope and read it silently first to himself. Then he read it out loud:

Beloved Papaji,

The fire of one thousand suns is blazing within, leading Madhukar from guru to guru and from teacher to teacher. There is no way to resist this force. This force has never happened to Madhukar before.

You yourself visited many gurus, saints, and teachers before and after your years with Sri Ramana Maharshi. Please, tell me what benefit that wandering had for you.

Face to face with the lion, eye to eye, fearlessly—Papaji, oh, Lion!—you are requested to pounce on Madhukar now and kill his ego forever!

In your grace,

Madhukar

Papaji - My going from teacher to teacher? When?

Madhukar - I am asking you, "How did you benefit spiritually from your own earlier wanderings from guru to guru?" Your answer may help me to understand my present situation. Right now, this body-mind organism called Madhukar appears to need more help and feels compelled to wander throughout India in order to meet other gurus and teachers. I want to know if this pilgrimage, which takes me away from your feet to the feet of some other gurus and teachers, is right. Is what is happening to me presently a natural stage in a seeker's spiritual quest?

Papaji - Just now I have read to you the story of Shunya Baba. Like you, he also had gone to many teachers. Finally, he was led to Arunachala, and there his wanderings stopped.

Similarly, you are also wandering. You have to wander! And some day your wandering will also stop. Now you are visiting Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath, Kedar-nath, Kathmandu, and so many other places. Something is driving you to these places and to these gurus. There is the urge in you to purify your atman [Self] inside of you. There may be a fault here or there. But when you are purified, the atman will pick you up someday.

No doubt, in my case too, I also have done plenty of wandering in order to find a good guru. Why? Because something was troubling me. Some trouble must have been there that was making me run from guru to guru,

from place to place, and from pilgrimage to pilgrimage. So, I have done all these things myself.

And there must be some reason for your wandering, too. You were here with me. Then you went away. There must have been a reason for your leaving me and going away. So, whatever happened and whatever happens to you, is carried out according to “somebody’s” wish.

Madhukar - Do you mean to say the wandering is not my own doing?

Papaji - Yes. That’s why I say, “. . . according to somebody’s wish.” Your wandering is not because of your own wish. That “someone” doesn’t want you to rest yet. He is

making you wander about. So everybody is made to do whatever he or she does by that “someone.”

The river can’t just stop. It has to run until its journey has ended. That is when it finds and meets the ocean.

One day, when the cravings of the mind stop, you will keep quiet. Then you will settle down. One day, when all impurities of mind are dissolved, you will stay quiet.

Madhukar - Thank you, Papaji.

Realize who you are and then do whatever you like

Two days after this satsang, I left on a flight to Bombay. I didn't know that it was the last time I would see Papaji alive.

Three years later on September 7, 1997, I returned to Lucknow to pay my final respects at Papaji's funeral and to participate in the mahasamadhi [death of an enlightened person] celebrations that marked the physical death of the master. Around three hundred of his devotees participated in the beautiful and peaceful ceremonies. Papaji's joyful and robust presence was all about us, and no sadness clouded my mind. Only an unspeakable gratitude for the teachings and courage of this great teacher brimmed from my heart.

Time seemed to stop during these days around Papaji's funeral. I had plenty of respite to reflect on my own life and what I had learned from my teacher. While Osho taught how to celebrate and savor the richness of life by being total and aware, Papaji tended to discount life's emotional challenges and taught primarily by pointing back to the Self. Osho had taught that life could be transformed through meditation and surrender; in contrast, Papaji focused only on realizing the Self and wasn't interested in developing skills for improving the quality and coherency of one's life. He was not concerned with eliminating or even addressing, for example, fear or anger. Instead, he pointed to the subject or "who it was who had the anger." He simply taught, "Realize who you are and then do whatever you like."

Through his personal guidance in the self-inquiry process during satsang, Papaji facilitated my recognition of my true nature and declared me

enlightened for having recognized it. But for me, enlightenment meant an enduring realization of my essential nature. My recurrent predicament of forgetting the Self and becoming upset signaled to me that I was not really cooked. In fact, I found myself still caught in the emotional turbulence of daily life. I judged myself severely for becoming doubtful, angry, and fearful again and again. Wouldn't true enlightenment take the painful edges out of living? Shouldn't I be experiencing continuing selfless love, compassion, and pure service?

Throughout my two-year stay with him, Papaji seemed unable to advise me regarding my doubts or to assist me in transforming them except through the moments when he assisted me during satsang to recognize the Self. I was longing for something that I hadn't yet experienced—peace and happiness that were independent of outside circumstances or intervention. This longing became a gnawing sore that worsened each time Papaji declared that I "got it." As he encouraged nothing else that I could do to cultivate the awakened state, I became frustrated and felt trapped. By the time I finally left Papaji, I had arrived at a seeming checkmate with him and his teachings. I could find no way to break through.

Supported by his personal power, satori experiences seemed to be initiated only through Papaji's "pointing to the Self." Every spiritual experience of his students occurred through him. He contended that the seeker alone was not able to recognize the truth by him-or herself; the guru needed to be present to confirm it. And because of his insistence that I only needed to discern the truth once and would henceforth remain enlightened, he could not acknowledge or assist me in my predicament.

He taught that no spiritual practice is necessary before, during, or after the momentary experience of what he referred to as enlightenment. Full recognition, he insisted, occurs in an instant that is beyond time, and so he deemed all spiritual practices as superfluous. "You cannot practice to be the

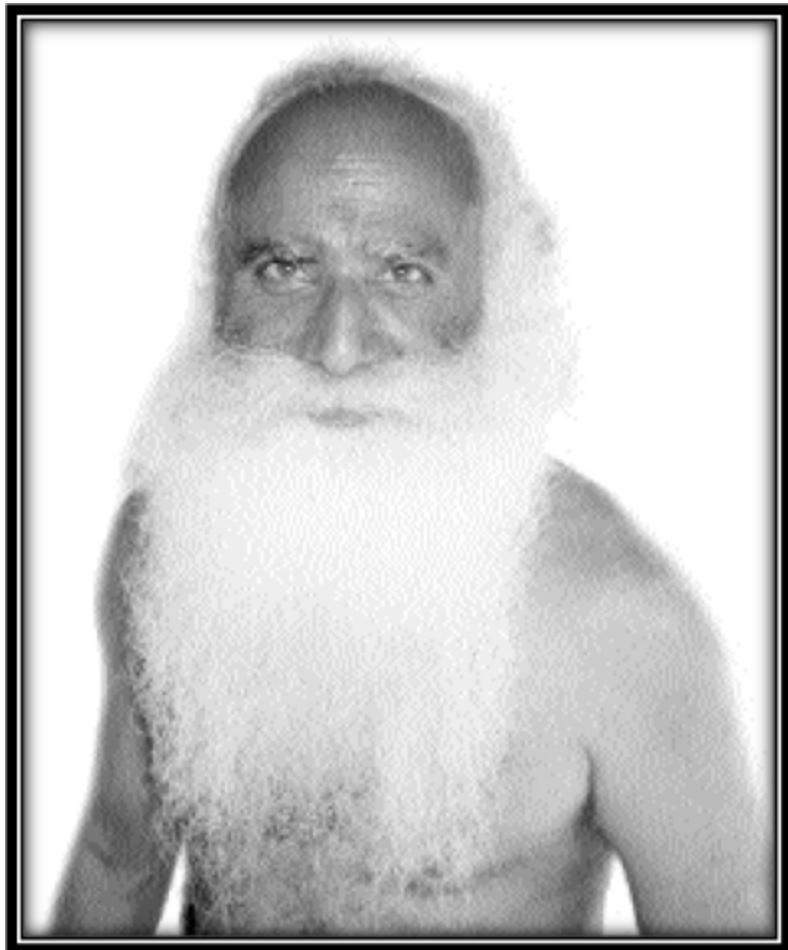
Self because you are already the Self.” Apart from remaining in satsang with him, there was nothing, according to him, that I could do to advance on my path of spiritual awakening.

Despite the shortcomings I perceived in Papaji’s teachings, I nonetheless felt a deep devotion and appreciation for his single-pointedness. Although I began to feel quite repressed with him, I was immensely grateful for Papaji’s generous love and for the opportunity I had to serve him and his devotees. The greatest gift Papaji blessed me with was his persistent pointing to my own full recognition of the Self.

Despite being so blessed by his proximity, his personal care, and his love, I was now certain that I needed to simply reconnect myself inwardly to the truth without his governing directives. Through my visits to the sages around Arunachala and through Ramana Maharshi’s own teachings, as recounted in some of the coming chapters, I became convinced that spiritual practices, especially self-inquiry, were useful and necessary for me. Contrary to Papaji’s teaching, I had realized that the recognition of the Self was not enough, but that it takes persistent practice and commitment to the Self to become fully and permanently established in Self-realization. I was prepared to dedicate myself to whatever work was needed for that to occur.

“Om. Let there be peace and love among all beings of the universe. Let there be peace, let there be peace. Om, shanti, shanti, shanti.” With Papaji’s words echoing within me, my odyssey continued.

Harish Madhukar



Harish Madhukar at the Shakti Yogashram in May 1994

“Sit with me. This is the time when the spiritual transmission from the guru to the disciple occurs. Just as you have experienced, from the lit candle of the guru the flame can jump to the unlit candle of the disciple.”

Chapter 3

Swami Harish Madhukar

was born in 1923 in the Punjab, a state in northwestern India, and went to college in Lucknow. A householder and businessman, he lived with his wife, two daughters, and four sons in Bombay. Following his retirement, he spent two years studying the Vedas and other traditional ancient Hindu scriptures. He then left Bombay to walk to the high regions of the Himalayas—a pilgrimage of some two thousand kilometers. Three and a half years later, he found his guru, who formally initiated him into the Saraswati sannyas order. He claims to have achieved enlightenment within six years.

After spending a total of eight years in the mountains, Swami Harish Madhukar moved to the state of Maharashtra in western India. In 1984, he founded the Shakti Yogashram in the village of Ambavane, which is situated between Pune and Bombay in the Western Ghats. Following the death of his guru in 1992, he began to teach those who sought him out, some of whom requested initiation as his disciples. In 1995, he moved from Ambavane to the nearby village of Telbaila, where he founded the Shakti Yogashram Gurukulam, a Vedantic school. The swami [title of respect for a holy man] left his body on October 31, 1996.¹

Today the school is run by the Shakti Yogashram Gurukulam Trust, which is presided over by his two leading disciples, Mandakini Trivedi and her husband.

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Nothing Happens by Chance— Everything Is Significant

In mid-November 1991, the day after receiving the name “Madhukar” from Papaji, I returned to the Osho commune in Pune. There I ran into one of my best friends, who asked me where I had been for the past few months. I shared my adventures with her, telling her that Papaji was my new guru, I had changed my name from Hareesh to Madhukar, and was about to move to Lucknow for good.

The next morning she appeared, waving a book. “This is for you,” she said, handing it to me. I found myself looking at the photo of a tall, powerfully built man with fiery eyes and a white beard that was even longer than the one Osho had had. His broad chest was bare, and a rudraksha mala hung around his neck. The book was called *Moments in Eternity*, and the author’s name was Swami Harish Madhukar!

I was electrified—a swami, perhaps a teacher, with the very same names I had been given by my two gurus! I remembered vividly how Papaji had a few days before sealed my initiation as a disciple with my new name and a kiss on my cheek. My sannyas initiation with Osho flashed across the screen of my mind’s eye and I remembered his words, “The new name is of tremendous significance. It represents the closing of accounts with the continuity of the past. With the new name, whatsoever you do will not be an addition to the past. It will be something utterly separate. When I give a name, I give you a message with it. It may contain your whole future. Its meaning will become slowly clear to you, because the unfoldment of its meaning in your life is existential.”

Excited thoughts about the synchronicities of the events leading up to my new name and the presentation of Swami Harish Madukar's book collided like box cars against the walls of my mind. This was significant! This was important! This was no coincidence, but a sign from God, a good omen. As I looked at the swami's picture on the book cover, my heart began to beat strongly; my blood pushed against my temples and heat waves rippled from my feet up to the top of my head. Suddenly, my mind filled with light and dissolved. Moments passed. Then thoughts returned again. I felt elated with possibility. What was happening? What did this mean? Were my chakras [psychic energy centers along the spine] being aligned? Was I perhaps being tuned to the Higher Power in preparation for my own enlightenment occurrence? Had Osho and Papaji somehow prepared the ground for this all these years?

I felt the powerful urge of destiny stepping forward in me. Even if I didn't become straight-out enlightened, I anticipated that at least a very significant spiritual transmission would happen from teacher to student as soon as we met.

I felt I had to find this man immediately, alive or dead. Where did he live? If he was dead, where was his samadhi [memorial shrine]? As it is believed in India, I was convinced that even visiting his buried remains or ashes could bring about a transformation for me.

I leafed through the book to find a clue. On the back cover was an address: "Shakti Yogashram, Ambavane, Lonavala, Tal. Mulshi, District Pune."

I was in luck! Lonavala is a hill station some sixty-five kilometers from Pune on the road toward Bombay—I could get there in a couple of hours. I had no idea where Ambavane was, but I was sure I could find out once I got

to Lonavala. I took a motor-rikshaw to the taxi stand outside the nearby Blue Diamond Hotel. There I showed a taxi driver the swami's photograph and said I had to go to Lonavala to look for him. The driver agreed to take me and, after a ninety-minute drive, we arrived at the hill station. We drove around for almost an hour, stopping at five different ashrams before we found someone who knew where Ambavane was. Apparently it was a village in the high mountains that were called the Ghats, another twenty kilometers away—and yes, I learned, a baba [holy man] was living there.

Off we went. The dirt road wound high into the mountains, and the farther we traveled, the more its surface deteriorated. Eventually, the driver refused to go any farther, fearing his car would be damaged. I paid him extra money as baksheesh [an extra payment or tip], and we continued. When the road became even worse, I had to pay more baksheesh. At last, after much grumbling by the driver, we reached Ambavane, a farming village comprised of perhaps forty simple dwellings.

I got out of the taxi and a small group of curious villagers gathered around me. When I showed them the swami's picture on the cover of the book, they smiled and nodded, exclaiming, "Ambavane Baba! Ambavane Baba!" and pointed toward a small hill outside the village. We drove the remaining distance along the track indicated by the villagers. I left the disgruntled driver and his, by now, rather dusty-looking taxi at the foot of the hill, and began walking up toward the small house on the hilltop. A long bamboo pole was fixed to the side of the house, and from it a saffron flag blew in the wind. "A Shiva flag. Perhaps it's a temple," I thought.

Just at that moment, a tall man appeared in the doorway of the house and in an instant began slowly and powerfully to stride down the hill to meet me. From his strong frame and his long white beard, I knew it had to be the swami himself. As in the photo, he wore only the rudraksha mala, a saffron

lunghi [man's sarong], and sandals. "Welcome, welcome!" he cried. "Be my guest. Be a guest of the Shakti Yogashram."

Together we walked up to a stone building that housed the swami's room and a kitchen. No one else was present. The swami invited me to sit on the floor of his porch, insisting that we have tea before discussing the purpose of my visit. While he prepared the tea, I sat down and was overcome by a profound silence that met me as I looked out at the incredible beauty of the view. I gazed out into the peace of the steep, grassy slopes of the Western Ghats. The smooth contours of the hills extended as far as I could see to the south and east.

I noticed that I was watching my mind from a deep inner place of stillness. Wider and wider the moment opened until time was swallowed in the stillness. My breathing stopped, hearing and seeing seemed to suddenly merge together into an expanding light. Poised on infinity, everything dissolved into the stillness of the gap—everything except the intensely brilliant light that was growing brighter and brighter from behind, in back, beyond, in front of everything. Then my awareness rippled and I sensed myself witnessing the scene from above. Everything overlapped in unity: the place, the swami's presence, the clanging of the dishes, and all the events that had led to this moment. At last, after what seemed like a long time, I felt a condensing back into my physical body as the swami served our tea.

As we sipped the wonderful masala tea [spiced oriental tea], I was utterly speechless, mindless. The world seemed to be just a dream. A knowing light flashed from the swami's gentle eyes as he met mine with complete awareness. Finally he asked why I had sought him out in such a remote location. I told him about what I had just experienced and about my search with Osho and Poonjaji, recounting how that very morning my friend had

given me his book. I explained to him how my previous gurus had created a kind of rite of passage into the depth of my being by giving me new names.

His first reaction to my story was immediate: “Nothing happens by chance. Everything has meaning. Everything is significant. That we are namesakes and that we meet today is not a coincidence. You are welcome to stay in my ashram for as long as you want. This ashram belongs to you as much as it belongs to me. The twenty-two acres of land were given to me. You can live here for the rest of your life. You can bring your girlfriend or spouse along. There are no inhibitions here, no rules, no do’s and don’ts. Here you can do whatever you like.”

He then told me that although he had published four books, he currently had only a few shishyas [disciples]. When I asked him about his mode of teaching, he told me that he practiced formal sitting meditations with his disciples every morning from four AM onwards. “Sit with me. This is the time when the spiritual transmission from the guru to the disciple occurs. Just as you experienced, from the lit candle of the guru the flame can jump to the unlit candle of the disciple. And don’t be afraid—the tiger who used to visit and sit with me every morning doesn’t attend anymore.”

I thought he was kidding, but he wasn’t. The story was true.

“All my dogs have gone into the stomachs of the tigers. The cows are still with me. The horses I have sold. I used to raise race-horses here. At one time I had twenty-two of them.”

He then told me that he also read, taught, and explained the shastras [traditional Hindu scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita] to his disciples. Another form of teaching occurred each year when he spent time traveling through the Himalayas with his disciples.

It was almost dark when the taxi driver insisted that we return to Pune, impelling me to leave Swami Harish Madhukar and his beautiful, secluded mountain ashram.

Although I often had strong longings to go back there, on returning to Pune, I was soon to be fully absorbed in my study with Papaji. Almost two years would pass before I would meet Swami Harish Madhukar again. A few weeks after this first encounter, I presented his book *Moments in Eternity* to Papaji and narrated my meeting with him. Papaji just looked at me in silence for a while. He never commented in any way on the book, nor on the significance of the episode. However, his demeanor was no surprise to me. I concluded that, first of all, he didn't want to lose me to another teacher and secondly, he had surmised that the swami, like so many of the other hundreds of saints and gurus he had met in his life, was probably not fully realized. Only three he consistently honored as authentic: Sri Ramana Maharshi, a certain mysterious sheikh from Baghdad, and himself.

Some four months later, in Lucknow, I received the following letter from the swami:

Ambavane, 30 March 1992

Beloved Hareesh,

A group of devotees and I will be reaching Haridwar on the 4th or 5th of April. We plan to stay at the Swarga Ashram in Rishikesh. We will be roaming about the Himalayas for a few months thereafter, visiting saints and sacred places at leisure. It would be wonderful if you'd like to join us on this pilgrimage to the Self within us.

With all the blessings that are mine to bestow.

Yours in love,

Swami Harish Madhukar

I wrote and thanked him for this invitation and for his earlier offer to come and live in his ashram. But I declined both, explaining that I was entirely focused on my new guru, Papaji, and that I didn't want or need any other teacher. My experience with this swami had touched me deeply, but the momentary awakening I had felt in his presence had not lasted and had long since faded from my mind. And I doubted that the opportunity to live with Harish Madhukar on a daily, twenty-four-hour basis would bring about the desired enlightenment transmission.

I decided to keep devoting myself to working with Papaji. By this time, I was living in the Papaji Satsang Bhavan, supporting and administering his fast-expanding work full time. It was obvious that I could use my managing skills much more effectively in assisting and serving the many people who now came to be with Papaji than by living with the swami in his small ashram all by myself. In addition, I found both Papaji's single-pointed

Advaitic inquiry into essential nature and my total service to him most conducive for progress toward my enlightenment.

In September 1993, two months after leaving Papaji, I visited the swami again while I was on a pilgrimage through India, in search of a teacher. This time the visit felt open ended. I no longer felt restrained by moral obligations to Poonjaji. Yet I knew I was not ready to become the swami's disciple. I had returned to his ashram just to deepen my meditation and perhaps experience the illumination I had tasted before. I was duly blessed with profuse silence and deep peace during my short stay.

Then, on January 19, 1994—the anniversary of Osho's mahasamadhi—I moved from Lucknow back into my studio in the Osho commune. From there it was only a three-hour car journey to Ambavane, so I was able to visit the swami several times before his death in November 1996. Sometimes it would be just a day trip, and other times I would stay for up to three days.

Although by this time in my odyssey I had glimpsed and experienced repeatedly who I truly was, this understanding had not yet translated itself into my daily life. Lapsing into my old thought loops or sticky emotions was not uncommon for me. I still found myself overcome at times by anger, judgments, fears, and desires—especially the supreme desire for enlightenment. Besides meditating and learning from the teachings in the shastras, I wanted to learn from Harish Madhukar's own living example how to integrate my spiritual understanding more fully into my life, how to conduct myself more ethically, and how to be of further service.

I was interested as well in observing, studying, and participating in Swamiji's work in the eye examination camps and medical camps he ran at

his ashram for the farmers of the neighboring small villages. The swami also taught the farmers' children, and conducted public festivals and rituals according to the Hindu calendar. He instructed me together with his disciples in the practice of prayers, rituals, devotion [bhakti yoga], selfless service [karma yoga], and meditation [dhyana yoga].

Only one of my many conversations with Swami Harish Madhukar was recorded. It took place in May 1994 at the Shakti Yogashram. My Indian friend Ajai and I were the only visitors present on that occasion.

Once you know God, everything and everyone becomes His light

Madhukar - Swamiji, would you tell me about your shishyas?

Swami Harish - Actually, there is no difference between a master and a shishya, because a shishya must become the master. The master is already in the shishya. Unless the master sees himself in the disciple, he can never be the master, and the shishya can never become the master. The difference between the two is only outwardly. Essentially there is no difference between them.

Madhukar - What do you teach your shishyas? How do you function for them?

Swami Harish - I only tell them to enjoy. What I say cannot be called a teaching because joy cannot be taught. Love cannot be taught.

Madhukar - Often I hear you speak of God. In your own words—what is God?

Swami Harish - You know so many attributes of God. All of them are only concepts. God is only a concept. But He is only a concept as long as you don't meet or see or understand Him. Once you know Him, everything and everyone becomes His Light. For me, you are nothing but God. You have God in yourself. You have many aptitudes of God. God is everything; He permits everything. To me God is everything yet He is nothing. One who knows the difference between nothing and everything also knows that nothing and everything are one and the same. There is no difference between them. The difference is only in our minds.

Let us be the Super Buddha—be that!

Madhukar - We came to meet each other because of our names, or so it seems. May I ask how you got your name?

Swami Harish - You see, anyone who has the final diksha [gift of enlightenment from the guru] becomes, automatically, a swami, a guru. This statement may smack of self-importance. But it is not so.

Madhukar - In your understanding, what do the words “Harish” and “Madhukar” mean?

Swami Harish - “Hari” means “the God who takes away all your difficulties, all your sorrows, all your diseases.” That God is known as Hari. “Madhukar” means “the one who spreads and creates sweetness everywhere.” He is the one who brings love and joy to every human being.

Madhukar - Who gave you these names?

Swami Harish - “Harish” was given to me by my father. “Madhukar” was given to me by my guru. With so much love, he used to call me Madhukar. But my real name, my renunciate name, is Suprabuddhananda Saraswati.

Madhukar - Does “Saraswati” indicate the lineage?

Swami Harish - That’s right. I was initiated into the Saraswati order, one of the main four sannyas orders in Hinduism. And “Suprabuddhananda” means “Super Buddha” in English. Let us be that! Let us be the Super Buddha! Be that! Why only to be called by that name? Be it! Instead of talking, just be! Instead of working, just be! Instead of thinking, just be! Being is a lot of work. It includes all types of work: eating, drinking, working—everything.

How did you get your name?

Madhukar - The name “Hareesh” I got from Osho. I used this name for twelve years. After Osho’s death, I stayed with Sri Poonjaji in Lucknow. I asked him for a new name and he gave me the name “Madhukar.”

Swami Harish - Why did you want a new name?

Madhukar - The sadhana [spiritual practice] with Osho was over. With him I had tasted the experience of samadhi quite a few times over the years. Poonjaji, on the other hand, was able to help me to recognize my eternal, indescribable, and unfathomable nature that is underlying all experiences, including the experience of samadhi. This new understanding was so profound that I wanted to stay connected with him as deeply as possible, out of appreciation and in order to have more of such experiences. When I acknowledged him as my guru, I felt that a new chapter in my spiritual search had begun.

Like Osho, Poonjaji used the practice of giving Sanskrit names to his disciples. For me, the new name indicated my new level of spiritual understanding. I felt that a new name would deepen my relationship with my guru and my inner being, which in turn would quicken my enlightenment. When I received my name from Osho, he explained its significance. He said that Hareesh means “God the thief.” Isn’t “Hari” a name for God? And “eesh” means “thief.” Is that right?

Swami Harish - “Hari” means “God;” “eesh” can mean “God” or “to take away.” But take away what? God does not take away particular things. He takes away everything —your body, your mind, your senses, your intellect. And he replaces them with pure joy. He gives you pure joy. Such a “man” may not be called a thief. Such a factor can never be called a thief.

Madhukar - When my friend gave me your book with “my” name on it, I jokingly said to her, “I need only to exchange the swami’s picture with one

of my own on the cover and instantly I will have a finished book." Would you allow me to do that? [laughter] If you would, I don't need to go through the work of writing one. You see, you could make me a great guru in an instant by simply allowing me to exchange my photograph with yours.

Swami Harish - You can! I allow you to do that! Do it! Exchange it!
[laughter]

The real meaning is only in being

Madhukar - I appreciate your offer. Do you believe all things are predestined? Ramana Maharshi is said to have taught that the simple act of lifting one's hand is predestined. From his teaching, it follows that every single thought must then be predestined too. What do you teach? Was it destined that we met each other?

Swami Harish - Everything is destined. There are no coincidences; nature and everything else is planned.

Usually we don't recognize the immanence and the importance of the moment. That's why we get hassled and worried. But if you could recognize the moment, and if you could recognize the meaning of everything that we see . . .

Actually there is no meaning to anything. But there is a meaning in being. The real meaning is only in being. Once we know that reality is being, or being is part of reality, or reality is part of being—take it however you want

—then everything becomes important. Then everything becomes very important. And on the other hand, nothing at all is important. Importance and unimportance are the same thing.

The truth shines even through your desires

Madhukar - I want to know truth. What is truth?

Swami Harish - You have to let things merge into you, and you have to let yourself merge into them. Such merging will become the real beginning of life. It will become the real joy of life and the real truth of life. That truth will enlighten you. It will give joy on your path. That truth may enlighten even a tree or a stone. Even a stone will be filled with joy by that truth.

The light is always in us. We should keep it above our thoughts, ambitions, desires, cravings, concepts. But usually we keep the light buried. Yet it cannot be buried. The truth shines even through our desires, even through our thoughts, even through our cravings and ambitions, because all ambitions and cravings are nothing but the perversions and distortions of the same light.

Madhukar - Who is the guru? What are his characteristics? How can he be recognized?

Swami Harish - The one that we can see in the innate light, which is within everything and nothing, that one is the light of being, that one is Shiva incarnate. He may look like a man, but Shiva is everything. He can be a

man. On the other hand, the common run of people want only small things because they don't have the capacity for big things. Commonly, people have really small capacities.

Life is like a big river. Life is like the ocean. You don't go into the water if you don't want to. Or you just take a dip. You just take a swim. You do whatever you want. But whatever you do, it doesn't make any difference to the ocean or the river. The river flows in its own joy.

If you have a big capacity, joy can come towards you. But it can actually come to you only when you live with a master, a genuine master, a real swami—the real ocean.

Madhukar - Why do you call the real swami the real ocean?

Swami Harish - What is meant by "ocean"? I mean the one who is living now. The one who is throbbing with life now. Only those who have earned great merit in their past lives, and perhaps in this life, will recognize such a holy person.

Many people come face to face with such a person without realizing whom they see. They don't know whom they are meeting. Those people are like men who see a river and are afraid to go into it. Therefore, they only walk around it. They only walk along the river.

But there are others who want to get lost in the ocean. They want to drown in the ocean. By drowning, they will become the sea. And this sea is the sea

of spirituality. It is the sea of essence.

After Swami Harish Madhukar died in November 1996, I felt sadness for the loss of one great light on this sea. He had been a respected teacher for me and I was grateful for our time together. He had taught me through the selfless example of his service to humanity and his firm commitment to inner truth. I knew he had left his gift of presence with me.

Had my consciousness changed through his teachings? I was now finding myself in a deepening state where not infrequently I would experience a clear understanding of who I truly was in the nonduality of What Is. While with the swami I had deepened my experience of an inner silence and peace. From that place, now I could often witness with compassion the restless agitation of my ego. Still, most of the time I kept living in the notion of being a separate individual with a sense of free will and personal doership that is identified with the body-mind organism. I knew I needed to continue bridging between the state of pure being and consciousness and the perils of everyday life. But how could I integrate daily life into my spiritual understanding or my spiritual understanding into my daily life?

However strongly this vital challenge kept pushing me, I was certain that I didn't want to focus my spiritual search on Swami Harish Madhukar's Vedic teachings, which included ritualistic devotion, chanting, or repeating the name of God. Deep inside, my heart longed for the direct path of knowledge, or jnana, to which I had been first introduced by Papaji. At times I felt so very close to my goal of enlightenment. At other times, I felt just like a novice. My odyssey was bound to continue.

Gangaji



Gangaji in Marin County 1999

“I say be attached! Be totally attached! Be so attached to the form of your guru that there is no possibility of separation. Then you will recognize his form—the Self—everywhere.”

Chapter 4

Gangaji

was born in 1942, as Antoinette Robertson Palmer, in Mississippi. After graduating from the University of Mississippi in 1964, she married and later had one child, a daughter. Feeling a deep longing for fulfillment and a thirst to experience deeper levels of being, she moved to San Francisco in 1972. Gangaji's search for the truth led her on a long spiritual journey. She practiced meditation in the Zen and Vipassana traditions, took bodhisattva¹ vows, and helped manage a Tibetan Buddhist meditation center. Later Gangaji became a licensed acupuncturist and, from 1981 to 1987, ran an acu-puncture clinic in San Francisco.

Still feeling that there was more to life than these successes, she went in search to find a true and wise teacher to help her on her path. In 1990, she and her husband, Eli, who had already met Papaji, flew to India to meet him in Haridwar, in northern India. It was there, on the banks of the holy River Ganges, that she realized the complete fulfillment she had been seeking all her life. Papaji confirmed this realization of the Self that happened in his presence. He gave her the name "Ganga," for the Hindu goddess of the holy Ganges River. Soon afterward, he asked her to carry his teachings to the West.

Gangaji is now based in Novato, a town north of San Francisco, where she holds regular satsangs and has a large following. She also travels widely, giving satsang and conducting spiritual retreats in various places around the world.

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Listen to the Deepest Part of Your Innermost Heart

During the two years I spent in Lucknow with Papaji, Gangaji came to visit twice; the first time was early in 1992. Before I had ever met Papaji, Gangaji had been declared enlightened by him. By then, she was generally recognized as one of Papaji's leading disciples and an enlightened spiritual teacher in her own right. I looked forward to her visit with great excitement —it would be the first time since my search began that I would meet a fully realized gurubhai [follower of the same guru] who had been authorized to teach while our guru was still alive. The fact that she was said to be enlightened also reassured me that enlightenment really was possible in this lifetime. Her upcoming visit thrilled me for another reason. During the entire time I had spent in India, I had not come across a single female sage who exclusively taught jnana, the path of knowledge (in this case, the particular jnana path of Advaita Vedanta).

As the day of her arrival approached, I began to reflect on other enlightened female teachers, as they are not uncommon in India. Unlike Gangaji, most of them teach a combination of paths such as devotion [bhakti yoga], service [seva], meditation [dhyana yoga], action [karma yoga] and knowledge. Some of these gurus attract disciples and devotees in huge numbers.

In recent times, one of the most revered of these teachers was Anandamayee Ma. By the time of her death in 1981 in Haridwar, her following exceeded one hundred thousand disciples and devotees.

Another contemporary is the well-known teacher Ammachi [“Amma” means “mother”]. She is highly respected by hundreds of thousands of followers not only in India but all over the world. Born as Sudhamani Idamannel, and now holding the name of Mata Amritanandamayi, she lives an exemplary life of unconditional love, holy simplicity, and selfless service with the goal of removing the suffering of humanity. Although she rarely speaks in public, Ammachi teaches the practice of mantras, rituals, service, meditations, bhajans, pujas [worship], and proper conduct. I had the good fortune to meet her in person.

In 1989, I attended one of Ammachi’s satsangs on Maui, Hawaii. Divided into men’s and women’s sections, participants took part in singing bhajans, silently meditating, and performing rituals and saying prayers for hours while Ammachi rested in complete silence on a thronelike seat raised upon a podium. Wearing a crown, she abided in seeming ecstasy hour after hour while endlessly pouring her spiritual power into our hearts. The highlight of that darshan night came when we were invited to come forward one by one to meet her.

Like she did with each one of us, she beckoned me to kneel and rest against her. She put her right arm around my shoulder and held me, and with her left hand touching my heart, she gently intoned the mantra, “Amma— amma – amma...” Suddenly, vibrations that seemed to be coming from deep inside her soul touched my entire being like the blessings of God Him/Herself.

My mind was emptied, and I bathed innocently like a baby. We both were enveloped in an unexplainable and mysterious matrix that brimmed with divinity, love, innocence, and ordinary suchness. While the sounds of her godly mantra gently pervaded my soul through my ears, a waterfall of love and peace fell through her eyes into mine, filling my heart to the brim and making it overflow in abundance. I felt as if I were the infant Jesus in the

arms of Mother Mary. And I felt ecstatic—transported into a timeless state. Regrettably, this ecstatic state did not stay with me as a permanent physical condition. Yet it remained imprinted so deeply in my soul that I can relive the incident to a great extent each time I remember it.

But now I was about to meet Gangaji, a teacher who taught the path of knowledge. I hoped that she could provide me with an experience similar to the one I'd had with Ammachi—perhaps this time through the wisdom of her words.

During her first visit in January 1992, Gangaji held several wonderful satsangs on the lawn of the Carlton Hotel in downtown Lucknow. I attended them all. On Gangaji's second visit to Lucknow a year later, in January 1993, I arranged an interview with her, and used the opportunity to ask the questions that consumed me at the time. I hoped that her teachings, like her earlier satsangs, would again be illuminating and would quicken my own search for full awakening. I was also interested in finding out why, contrary to my own experience, she had been able to continue to abide in and as the Self after her very first recognition of her true nature. The interview took place in the Papaji Satsang Bhavan, with roughly twenty other devotees of Papaji in attendance, some of whom also put questions to Gangaji.

If you meet the Buddha, don't kill him! Rather, prostrate before him and let him kill you!

Madhukar - Could you say something about your spiritual journey, particularly when and how you met Papaji?

Gangaji - Once you have met someone like Papaji, you discover that your whole life has been leading to the truth that there is nothing and never was anything separate from It. Right before meeting him, there was a certain urgency and intensity, and a recognition that everything I had tried to do by working on myself had been limited.

Actually, I was relatively happy and successful, and I had a very good relationship with my husband. Yet I still knew there was something incomplete, something not finished. I kept trying to finish it, to become complete, in our Western way, through psychology, groups, social or political movements, relationships, acquiring things, or whatever.

But I continually reached a dead end. I had a great relationship. Ah! So what! I got to the limit of that. I don't want to take away from that, and I also had a very good job and a nice home in a beautiful part of a very prosperous country. But still I felt, "Something is missing." This yearning was unfulfilled.

So out of all this, I simply said to myself and to whoever would listen, "I need a teacher, a real teacher—someone who can end my yearning and finish it." I had no idea who that person would be.

Madhukar - I heard you were a Buddhist at some stage during your search.

Gangaji - That's right. Up until the time I met Papaji, I called myself a Buddhist. I had never been drawn to India or to anything Hindu. That was not what I was attracted to in my mind. Then maybe six months after I had acknowledged I needed help, final help—not some kind of relative help, but

absolute help—I was in Haridwar, where I first met Papaji. And when I saw him, I saw help, absolute help.

From the point of this meeting back to my earliest memories of this lifetime, I can retrospectively see that all I had been doing was seeking love—trying to find love, trying to get love, trying to discover love, trying to buy love. I was also looking for outward fulfillment; I tried being assertive and successful. But all of this was somehow the same seeking. It was, in reality, the search for the master who reveals one's Self to oneself.

Madhukar - What happened when It happened? What exactly occurred for you when you met him, when your realization happened?

Gangaji - What happened? What I am saying at this moment is, “It’s happening.” There have been many experiences following that meeting with Papaji. But this meeting here and now is “the happening.” Everything that happens is “that happening.”

Meeting him. . . Well, I just knocked on his door. Eli, my husband, met him first. Then Eli returned to California to bring me to India. When I arrived, I knocked on Papaji’s door and he opened it. I saw his open arms, open eyes, and open heart, and I recognized It! I realized that my search was over. I must say that I recognized It the very moment of seeing his eyes, his endless eyes. Whatever minor struggles happened after that were irrelevant, because once It has been recognized, nothing can touch It—really, ultimately.

Hear, just hear, the master

Madhukar - Because so many of us are facing perhaps similar minor and major struggles, could you elaborate a bit more on this topic?

Gangaji - Minor and less minor and even less minor . . . Do you mean the struggle with “Am I getting It? Will I lose It? Where did I place It? Where is It now?”

Madhukar - That's right.

Gangaji - This is the only struggle! And if you listen very closely to the master, you find all these struggles being taken care of. Nothing, nothing needs to be done! And listening is just the beginning, because even listening is a kind of doing—a straining to get something.

So what I am really saying is, “Hear, just hear, the master!” If you are lucky enough to recognize the master, then hear! Everything is really in This—quite naturally, easily. Naturally!

Madhukar - How did it happen that you became a teacher?

Gangaji - I do not call myself a teacher. In fact, I continually tell everybody that I am not a teacher. If people want to see me as a teacher, that's fine and that's their business. But I'm not a teacher. I'm simply sharing the truth of my experience, the truth of my realization, the truth of Papaji. When I was with him, he told me I must go and tell people about my realization . . .

Madhukar - . . . and about his teaching?

Gangaji - Well, at that particular time, someone who had been with Papaji [Andrew Cohen, whose interview appears later in this book; see ch. 11] was saying he was teaching Poonjaji's teachings. But what he was doing was inadequate. It was inaccurate. It was not true. Some people had been hurt by that falsified teaching. So it was very

necessary that I went to those people and directly told them the truth of Poonjaji. Out of that, many people called me a teacher. But I am not a teacher. I wouldn't limit myself by that definition, and I would not glorify myself by that definition. I am not a teacher. I am your own Self. If you see me as anything, see me as your sister.

Madhukar - That takes care of one of my other questions.

Gangaji - If I really do my job right, your questions will all be gone.
[laughter]

Listen to the deepest part of your innermost heart

Madhukar - Do you encourage your fellow brothers and sisters who are seekers to visit Papaji in Lucknow? I have some friends in Maui who told me, "We have our teacher, Gangaji, here in Hawaii; therefore, we don't need to meet Papaji personally."

Gangaji - You know, I encourage everyone to listen to the deepest, deepest part of his innermost heart, the heart of hearts. And if that heart pushes you and pulls you to Lucknow—to Poonjaji—then yes, I encourage it. If it is some kind of a concept, I don't encourage or discourage it. But I am very excited for people who have sat with me and listened to me and recognize that they must come to Lucknow and see Poonjaji. And hopefully, they come with only a very few ideas about who they are. And then they possibly can “see” Papaji immediately as their own Self.

I don't immediately go into a group of people and tell them, “You must see Poonjaji in Lucknow!” I know there have been a lot of people who returned to the West from India and other parts of Asia and said, “You must go and see my teacher. You must do that.” Then it becomes “Oh! I must do that or else I am bad!” Or, “If I do it, I am good.” It gets judged in those realms. And “This” is beyond good or bad. “This” is something of the kind that, if you hear the name of Poonjaji or you see his picture or you catch fire from his light, then you must come to Lucknow. That's wonderful! Or if you catch fire and you burn wherever you are, then you are already in Lucknow. Poonjaji is not limited to this place. He is not limited to India as a country or Lucknow as a town. He is “Luck Now,” as he says. And it is true. It's true!

Madhukar - So, you don't give advice to people?

Gangagi - Maybe sometimes I do! [laughter] But I really encourage people to just be very quiet, very quiet, and stop all ideas of where they should go or where they should not go, and then to discover the truth in their innermost heart. This is my own experience.

As I have said, I had no idea of coming to India. I was not attracted to coming to India. I was afraid of India. But now I spend eight months of the year waiting to come to India.

Madhukar - What makes you return to Papaji every year? What is this wanting? Do you miss him?

Gangaji - No. I can't say I miss Papaji when I am away from him. I really don't miss him. I am filled with him all the time. And now it seems that I am playing a particular role in this play. I am happy with that, and yet when I arrive in India, there is something else—the privilege of being in his physical presence while he inhabits this form called Poonjaji. And if you have just one hour or one day in his presence, you are never the same again. To have the opportunity of having another hour, another day, is such bliss. I can't even call it bliss because it leaves bliss far behind. It's a privilege, an enormous privilege. How lucky we are! So lucky! Who can even understand this luck, this real luck? It is grace, real grace. A living master is speaking in words that you can understand and in the vernacular that you can understand. It is real grace that he is not removing himself from you but that he is living and present. He is here for you—unbelievable! I am privileged to come here.

Madhukar - Papaji's master was Ramana Maharshi . . .

Gangaji - Is! [joyful laughter]

Madhukar - Two or three days ago, you arrived in Lucknow from your first visit to Ramanashramam. Could you share something with us about your

visit there?

Gangaji - Well, the last time I was here in Lucknow, it became very clear that I must go to Sri Ramanashramam—I must go! There were no choices like “Where to go?”, “Should I go?” or “Maybe I will go?” It was “I must go!”

On landing in India this time, I went straight there. I was very happy to go there; I was very happy to be there. I was very happy to meet my master’s master in form. His body is not present, but the form is present. Formlessly, he is everywhere. He is in every heart. He is in form at the Ramanashramam without the physical body. Does that make sense?

Madhukar - It makes “heart.”

Gangagi - How wonderfully put! [joyful laughter]

So, visiting Sri Ramana’s ashram was again a great privilege. And Arunachala is indescribable! To be able to walk on the sacred mountain that is my guru’s guru’s guru³—what a privilege, what a blessing! The ashram is very welcoming, very happy to see disciples of Poonjaji, to see their light and clarity and naturalness and respect! It was a beautiful meeting. It is a beautiful meeting.

It is very rare to live in the presence of a living master

Madhukar c Could you say something to your brothers and sisters, perhaps something intimate, arising out of this moment? Do you have any suggestions for them regarding their search?

Gangaji - Out of this moment . . . I am very much privileged to be here with you because you are lovers of truth. You must be because you couldn't possibly be here otherwise. Whatever you name the truth—maybe you name it "guru" or "master," "freedom" or "enlightenment," or "happiness" or whatever—the name doesn't matter. Ultimately, to get this far—to be at the feet of truth—you are in love with truth. And somehow truth has fallen in love with you! [joyful laughter] It's a great privilege—true sangha [spiritual community] doesn't need laws saying, "This is sangha." True sangha is the sangha of the heart.

Madhukar - In order to live permanently in the orbit of our teacher, many of us have now rented homes near Papaji's residence and near Satsang Bhavan. Could you say something to those of us?

Gangaji - Many of you are now living here in Lucknow permanently. Because of that there may be, perhaps, a tendency to pick up again your old ways of living. I notice that people coming into Lucknow as visitors don't have their old habits with them. Therefore, they are able and open to hear, and out of this hearing they "see."

But for you residents, there is perhaps a tendency to pick up the old habitual ways of living. Just be aware of that possibility.

Stay open to hear and see! Because this is very rare—to live in the presence of a living master who eats in the restaurant you eat in, who walks the streets you walk, who has no separation between himself and you—in reality or even in illusion. This is great, good luck! Don't throw it away! Treasure it, honor it, prostrate to it, serve it! You are very lucky! You know? He has only allowed people to stay around him in the past few years. He must be very attracted to you. He sends me away all the time. [laughter]

Attachment to the guru is no problem

Mohini - How do you cope with your attachment to the physical form?

Gangaji - To the physical form of Papaji?

Mohini - I believe Papaji's physical form can be a trap.

Gangaji - It seems to me that there is no trap in the attachment to the physical form of Papaji, unless you expect that form to behave in certain ways—like not to die, or to look at you when you want him to. In that case, there can be a problem. But the attachment to his form is blissful. A problem arises only when there is an attachment to somehow controlling this form. If you can just be attached to surrendering to his form, then what can be wrong?

People ask me a lot about their attachment to Papaji or to other gurus they've had. They say, "I'm so attached to the guru. I'm so attached to the Buddha. I need to kill the Buddha." A very big misunderstanding has come

out of this. Of course, I understand the concept, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!” This saying means that if you meet a concept of the Buddha, kill it. But, I say if you meet the Buddha, you prostrate and let the Buddha kill you! This is what you’re here for. [laughter]

A lot of times people ask about their attachment to Papaji and say, “What can I do? He’s just the finger pointing to the moon.” I tell them, “This finger is the moon!” Therefore, this attachment to his form is no problem. No problem!

Madhukar - Perhaps the seeker’s expectation of how the guru should be could become a problem.

Gangaji - The attachment to your idea of what, or how, this form should be is the same old problem that you brought to this meeting with truth. I say, be attached! Be totally attached! Be so attached that there is no possibility of separation! I’m very attached to his form. I am very happily attached to Papaji’s form. Therefore, I had to recognize his form everywhere. And to recognize God’s form in his form is double, triple, bliss.

I don’t know if it’s also true for Asians or Indians, but in my experience, Westerners seem to struggle with the issue of dependence and independence. This fear of dependence and the search for independence arises out of a misunderstanding regarding the truth of oneself on the one hand, and the desire to be independent from the teacher on the other hand. Seeking to control one’s attachment to the guru creates emotional dependence. It is the kind of relationship where one feels, “If I’m dependent enough, I’ll have control.” On the other hand, independence is: “Now I don’t need anything. Now I’ve got it [enlightenment].” Both of these two

possibilities are just traps of the mind. And in between these two, there is a little independence and a little dependence.

Madhukar - But this attachment to the guru, to truth . . .

Gangaji - . . . has nothing to do with dependence or independence. It has nothing to do with “I am dependent” or “I am independent” or “I need to be independent.”

How can you not be attached to Papaji’s form!? It is so magnificent! [joyful laughter]

Sri Ramana was totally attached to Arunachala. He went there and never left. This is attachment. This is real attachment. Has Poonjaji ever left his master? Never! This is attachment. The physical body has nothing to do with it. The physical body can go, but this attachment cannot be severed. It’s impossible. I’m glad you have asked this question. It is a good question. Any other questions?

“Be quiet!” Everything is contained in this statement

Madhukar - Do you have a particular teaching? What is your teaching besides the teaching that “this very moment is all there is”? I hear Papaji often say, “Keep quiet!” He uses “Keep quiet!” as a teaching. Or is “Keep quiet!” perhaps a pointer to our true nature?

Gangaji - Sometimes people hear “Be quiet!” as if “quiet” is something like an ending, like “Oh! Now I am quiet”—as if it were something like “Okay, here are my glasses.” As if “quiet” is limited or finite, as if first there was “not quiet” but now there is “quiet.” But quiet, I guess, is more like a verb, and this quiet is endless. Once you have just a glimpse, or you have just the beginning of the recognition of quiet, then the exploration of quiet starts. In “I am in search of the boundaries of quiet,” a very great discovery is made. Because what is beyond the words “quiet” or “Be quiet!” is the master’s essence—Being Quiet! Everything is in this statement—everything and more. Everything and more!

Madhukar - More than everything?

Gangaji - In this quiet is the meeting with the master. In this quiet, there is no “I” as in “What do I need?” or “What should I do?” or “Am I getting It?” or “Did I lose It?”—no “I”! In the surrender to quiet is the meeting. This is meeting truth. Again, I don’t mean the kind of quiet that is the absence of noise, like, “Now there is no quiet because there is the noise of an automobile.” I mean, see if you can find the boundaries of this quiet. See if you can find anything that is not this quiet. This is attachment to quiet!

Not the true I, but the identification with the false “I,” has to be killed.

Ran - Do you see or remember your “I” arising?

Gangaji - The “I”? Like what is now called Gangaji? Yes, it arises.

Ran - In which form?

Gangaji - As a joke! [laughter]

Ran - And every time you see it, you laugh?

Gangaji - I laugh or cry—it's still a joke! [laughter]

Once the master has severed the identification with this arising “I,” maybe the “I” never arises again and maybe it does. But if it does, it never can be believed totally again.

Let us say you’re a young child and you go to your first movie, one with horror or terror, and you’re terrified. You believe you are really dying or are being eaten by a monster or terrorized and tortured. You may tremble and shake, and your mother has to soothe you, take care of you, and let you know that it is just a movie—“It’s okay, you’re fine. Look, see, it’s just a movie.”

It may take some time, but finally you get it. You recognize she’s right. After that, you may never go to a horror movie again, or maybe you do. And maybe you’re terrorized in the horror movie, but you can never again truly believe it is your terror. There may be great actors and you enjoy the movie, but you know somehow that the terror you feel has nothing to do with you. From then on, if you like horror movies, there’s no problem.

Likewise, even when this “I” arises, it is not separate from the quiet—the quiet becomes “I” and the “I” becomes quiet.

Ran - When the true I arises and the recognition of this is immediate, there is quiet. But if it takes even one second for its recognition, then the false “I” is there. If the recognition takes even one second, this one second is not quiet.

Gangaji - Yes, but the awareness of this one second is always quiet. You see, it is not the “I” that’s been severed, it’s the misidentification that’s severed. It’s not the “I” that has to be killed—it’s the identification with this “I,” this false “I.”

Ran - Is this “I” itself identification?

Gangaji - This false “I” is misidentification! When this is revealed, then the true “I,” the true Self, is—not becomes, not wasn’t and then is—but is. Clear?

Ran - Your eyes are very clear.

Gangaji - So are yours! Only clear eyes can see clearly.

Look into your own mind and discover the source of good and evil

Jeff - Where do you suppose this moment arises from? I don't mean the individual acts of people. I mean people themselves, people in the world, and the world too. You were speaking about the movies. That made me think. I saw this movie Silence of the Lambs. Afterwards, I was really frightened deeply for days. And it was not an identification with something that happened to me. I was frightened by the knowledge of that deep evil that exists somewhere in the human soul. From where do you suppose this evil arises? How can it arise? How can such evil as we see in the world arise? How does it get "made"?

Gangaji - It's very important to discover within your own mind where evil arises. Because when you look outside at something like that movie or at a severely damaged psyche, it's easy to say, "Ah, that is all evil. This is purely evil with no good in it." Or you look in history and can see the same thing. You are saying, "This one is evil. How is it possible for that one to exist?" But the real opportunity, it seems to me, is to look into your own mind and discover what is the source of this evil, and what is the source of this good.

Jeff - I don't possess that evil in my own mind. But what I can see—the kinds of things that are being done in this world—is unimaginable to me. It is unimaginable for me that people do hurt people. I can't believe it! I can't believe that it happens. I just can't believe it. The evil seems to be something that is outside of my experiences. So trying to look inside and find that source, that's great. On the other hand, I imagine that there are people who don't even have the slightest interest in truth.

Gangaji - Yes. But you know, as long as you continue to say, "It's unimaginable; I don't get it!" then there is still this vast separation, this gulf. And this is the beginning of "It's them!" or "It's evil. I could never be

that evil. It's over there!" But at some point, there needs to be a willingness to see what you have not seen so far—some possibility of the curiosity to look more deeply into yourself. Evil is in fact present in all minds.

Meera - May I ask you to share how it is for you to be the

manifestation of the truth in a body? And how are the reactions of people to you as a manifestation of the Self in a body?

Gangaji - Well, isn't your question similar to the earlier question of the emerging "I"? If I sometimes look down and see a female body, I don't take it to be my Self. [laughter] And I don't advise anyone else to take it that way either!

Meera - Actually, I was wondering about the reactions of the seekers. You know, there are these old concepts that the master can't live in a female body, and there is the concept that women have to reincarnate as a man if they want to become enlightened, because enlightenment can happen only to men.

Gangaji - Oh, yes! There are a lot of concepts around. All concepts finally have to be done with. Being a woman doesn't cause me any problem.

Meera - Maybe being a woman is even an advantage in this time of the . . .

Gangaji - I would say: No advantage, no problem! [laughter] This talk has been quite enjoyable. To be here with you was such a beautiful present. Thank you!

You are the Self— you are already free

Gangaji's teachings were straightforward and agreed with Papaji on most points. Gangaji describes the discovery of freedom of the heart and teaches that in truth we are not really capable of leaving it. In short, she invites us to find out immediately who we are. With great clarity and simplicity, she is persistent in her invitation to let go of the pretense of a separate self. Her main tenet simply proclaims, "You are already the Self. Hear the truth. Just recognize it now. And you are already free!"

Since 1993, Gangaji's work has expanded tremendously. Established as a nonprofit organization in 1993, the Gangaji Foundation began with a small group of volunteers in the basement of the executive director's home. Today the foundation is a worldwide network of volunteers.

Its statement of purpose reads: "The Gangaji Foundation serves the truth of universal consciousness and the potential for individual and collective recognition of peace, inherent in all Being. It is the purpose of the Gangaji Foundation to present forthrightly and respectfully the teaching and transmission of Gangaji, through the grace of Sri Ramana and Sri H.W.L. Poonjaji."

From simply teaching her mystical style of Advaita Vedanta in satsangs, Gangaji's work has expanded to engage in the field

of social service. The Gangaji Scholarship Program, worldwide Video Satsang Groups, Gangaji on Public Access Television, the Gangaji website, and the Gangaji Prison Program have been created. Hundreds of volunteers and donors have made it possible for many thousands of people to hear directly that they are already free. All programs offer this profound message in their unique way, and all are supported entirely by contributions and volunteer hours.

Gangaji appears weekly on thirteen public access TV stations in seven states in the United States. The Gangaji Foundation Prison Program supports prisoners worldwide by providing books, audiotapes, and videotapes at no charge, and by prison visits by volunteers.

But contrary to classical Advaita, her teachings are not based on any specific scriptures. Her way of pointing to the truth derives uniquely from her own experience of the Self.

Gangaji's purity, kind heart, and her deep love and devotion for Papaji and Sri Ramana touched me deeply and made my own heart sing with joy. I have been deeply inspired by this bold and loving guide. She has gifted me with experiences of profound peace and understanding, and during satsangs with her I was graced with several dips into the Self. Her spiritual courage set my heart ablaze to remain steadfast on the path and to continue my odyssey.

Annamalai Swami



Annamalai Swami in his ashram in 1993

“Because of your eyes, you are able to see everything around you. But you cannot see your eyes with your own eyes. Even though you can't see your own eyes, you cannot deny the existence of your eyes. But you know with

absolute certainty that they exist. The Self is like that. You cannot see the Self as an object, but you know with certitude that you are. That pure being within is the Self. You are that Self. Being the Self is knowing the Self. In that state there is no duality. Being one's Self is jnana [wisdom]. You are always That. You think that you are different from the Self, and that is the mistake. Giving up the difference is sadhana [spiritual practice].”

Chapter 5

Annamali Swami

was born in 1906 in a small village in Tamil Nadu, southern India. He was named Sellaperumal, and from an early age showed a keen interest in spirituality.¹ When he was twenty-two years old, he traveled to Tiruvannamalai. There he met Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, who lived near there on the slopes of the holy mountain Arunachala. Annamalai Swami eventually became Sri Ramana's personal attendant, and in 1938, ten years after his arrival in Tiruvannamalai, he realized the Self in his guru's presence. Sri Ramana gave him the name Annamalai Swami —"Annamalai" is another name for "Arunachala"—and instructed him to oversee the ongoing construction of the Sri Ramanashramam.

After his realization, Annamalai Swami moved out of the Ramanashramam and went to live in his own hut in Palakottu, an area adjacent to his master's home. A few years later, acting on Bhagavan's instructions, he built the Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram. He lived there until his death on November 9, 1995.

Annamalai Swami and Papaji were gurubhais, since Sri Ramana was their common guru. Annamalai Swami was what can be termed a Vedantic mystic and teacher because, like Papaji, he had not been taught in the lineage of traditional Advaita Vedanta.

Annamalai Swami was known for his compassion and kindness. He advocated moderation—"the middle way"—in food consumption, sleep, self-discipline, and so on. Although he taught each seeker who came to visit him at their particular level of understanding, his main teaching was atma vichara, self-inquiry—what Sri Ramana called brahma nishta, the greatest spiritual weapon. Using this method, Annamalai Swami returned most questions and queries back to the questioner with the counter-questions, "Who wants to know? To whom does this question appear?" And the seeker would recognize that the answer is, "To me." In the next step of the atma vichara process, the teacher asks the student to further inquire, "Who is this me? Who am I?" By thus turning the question 180 degrees and pointing it back toward the true questioner, the Self, the nondual nature may be revealed to, and be experienced by, the seeker in an instant beyond time.

Since Annamalai Swami's mahasamadhi [death in the enlightened state], his longtime disciple, personal assistant, caretaker, and interpreter, Swami Sunderam, has been maintaining the ashram. He performs the morning and evening prayers and pujas at his master's samadhi [memorial shrine]. Visitors are invited to partake in these rituals as well as in the ongoing meditations led by the swami. Sunderam answers questions about his guru's life and teachings.

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Knowing the Self Is Being the Self

I first met Annamalai Swami in June 1993, during my initial visit to Arunachala and the Sri Ramanashramam. As I explained earlier, I was eager to meet with disciples of Papaji's guru, Sri Ramana Maharshi, in the hope that they would be able to assist me in my predicament as a seeker and guide me further in my spiritual endeavor.

At the time of my visit, I was Papaji's ardent disciple and one of his right-hand men. I was deeply grateful for the fact that through his presence and guidance, he had helped me to recognize my true nature. He facilitated many dips into the Self during the time I was with him, but I was still not satisfied with my own awakening. In addition, I had doubts about several aspects of Papaji's teachings. Annamalai Swami was the first of Papaji's gurubhais that I sought out, hoping he could clarify these issues for me.

I wanted to hear more about the qualifications of the true guru, the necessity of practice, the initial recognition of the Self, and how the latter related to final enlightenment. I also wanted to determine if and how far Papaji had departed from his own guru's teaching. I hoped that such an exploration would help me better understand my own teacher and myself. I was determined to ask my questions in a humble search for truth, and I was clear that I did not want to shed a bad light on my own guru, Papaji.

Let me be more specific about my dissatisfaction: Since I'd had my enlightenment experience with Papaji, my life hadn't changed significantly. I still got angry and judgmental. At times I also found myself fearful, or immersed in desire or aversion. Obviously, I was not permanently happy

and in peace. Foremost was the fact that I still had the desire for true enlightenment.

My meeting with the swami shortly after my arrival in Tiruvannamalai was preceded by an unexpected encounter that surprised and encouraged me. I was heading back to my lodgings in the Ramanashramam after an evening walk on the slopes of Arunachala, when I happened to pass a white bungalow in which fast, rhythmic music was playing. The familiar sounds stopped me in my tracks. I could hardly believe my ears—it was the music for Osho's Dynamic Meditation!² Somebody in Tiruvannamalai was practicing one of Osho's meditations! Who could it be? I was overcome with curiosity and resolved to try and find out.

The entrance to the bungalow's compound lay a few yards ahead of me along the path. It was marked by an iron gate set in an archway with an inscription identifying the place as the Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram. I passed quietly through the gate and followed the sound of the music. It led me to a wooden door at the side of the bungalow. It wasn't locked. I opened it as quietly as possible, just enough to be able to take a peek inside. A lean, bearded man, clad only in a lunghi, had reached the third phase of the meditation. He was alone and oblivious to my presence. Smiling to myself, I closed the door softly and withdrew, walking back home through the gathering dusk. The next morning, when I took my seat in Annamalai Swami's presence, I was surprised to find that his personal attendant and interpreter was the man I had seen doing Dynamic Meditation the evening before. Swamiji spoke only Tamil, the language of Tamil Nadu, his native state. His interpreter's name, I learned, was Sunderam.

I met with Annamalai Swami almost every day during my two-week stay at the Sri Ramanashramam, and Sunderam was always present as interpreter. Our exchanges were not recorded, but the conversation that follows

represents a digest of our various encounters during that two-week period. I reconstructed it from memory shortly after our last meeting.

In daily life, Annamalai Swami was simply called Swamiji, and that's how I addressed him in our conversations. In order to keep the interview in the same intimate climate that occurred in his presence, I will call him the swami, or Swamiji, in what follows.

Practice until stillness is permanent

Madhukar - Poonjaji told me that I have done my work, that I have realized the Self. However, I still find myself confronted with questions and doubts arising about it.

Swamiji - Who has questions? Who has doubts?

Madhukar - Me . . . Now I suppose your next question will be: "To whom do doubts appear?" Right? [laughter] And I will answer, "To me," and then I will need to continue to inquire, "Who am I?"—Sri Ramana's self-inquiry.

Swamiji - That's the right way to practice.

Madhukar - In my case, I have doubts about my realization in spite of Poonjaji's assurance that it has really happened. My awareness of the Self is not without a break.

Swamiji - If there are breaks in your Self-awareness, it means that you are not a jnani [enlightened sage] yet.

Before one becomes established in the Self without any breaks, without any changes, one has to contact and enjoy the Self many times. By steady meditation and the continued practice of self-inquiry, one will finally become permanently established in the Self, without any breaks.

Madhukar - How can I repeat the experience of peace and stillness that I often feel in Poonjaji's presence?

Swamiji - Your experience of stillness is due to the influence of the milieu in which you find yourself when you are with your guru. However, your experience is momentary. Therefore, you need to practice until the experience of stillness is permanent.

Madhukar - Is the blissful and ecstatic state that I experience in Poonjaji's presence samadhi [experience of the Self]?

Swamiji c Samadhi is perfect peace. But it is only momentary. Ecstasy arises when the mind comes back at the end of samadhi. It arises with the remembrance of the peace of samadhi. When the ego has finally died, the symptoms of bliss and ecstasy cease.

Until you have realized the Self, you should study and practice the teachings of the guru

Madhukar - Poonjaji holds that no practice is necessary in order to realize the Self. You and Bhagavan Sri Ramana, however, contradict his stand quite clearly. To demonstrate this, I would like to read a quote from Sri Ramana. Is that okay?

Swamiji - Please, go ahead.

Madhukar - “In the proximity of a great master, the vasanas [latent tendencies of the mind] cease to be active, the mind becomes still, and samadhi [blissful experience of the Self] results. Thus the disciple gains true knowledge and right experience in the presence of the master. To remain unshaken in it, further efforts are necessary. Eventually the disciple will know it to be his real being and will thus be liberated even while alive.”

Swamiji - I agree fully with Bhagavan. Bhagavan’s teaching is my own experience. I don’t know what Poonjaji is teaching.

Madhukar - As far as I have understood him, he teaches that self-inquiry needs to be done only once in the presence of the guru. In the first or perhaps second or third encounters with Poonjaji, the Self is realized. Papaji says that after the initial recognition of the Self, no further practice is necessary. However, he stresses that the guru’s presence and the association with him in satsang are usually required before that recognition can occur.

Swamiji - Only the serenity that is devoid of the ego is the highest knowledge. Until you attain the state in which you are the egoless reality, you must continue to seek the annihilation of the “I”-notion. This happens by associating with the teacher and by diligently practicing self-inquiry.

Madhukar - How long should one stay with one’s guru?

Swamiji - The association with the guru is necessary until the seeker has realized the Self. Only in the company of a teacher who has realized the Self can one become aware of one’s Self. Until you have realized the Self, you should study and practice the teachings of the guru.

The master is the Self— the Self is really the master

Madhukar - What are the characteristics of a proper guru?

Swamiji - In the guru’s association or presence, you should find peace whenever your mind is attuned with him. He should have virtues like patience, quietness, forgiveness, and compassion. The one in whom you have faith is your guru. The one you feel a deep sense of respect for is your guru.

Madhukar - Although Poonjaji is my guru, I have met quite a few other gurus during my present stay at Arunachala. Is that okay? Is it okay to be in contact with more than one spiritual master?

Swamiji - Dattatreya had twenty-four masters. In fact, gurus can even be inanimate. Bhagavan's master was Arunachala. The master is the Self. Through the grace of the guru, the seeker will come to know that Self which is true reality. Thus he recognizes that the Self is really his master.

Madhukar - While staying at the holy mountain, it becomes clearer to me with every passing day that I will have to leave my guru's physical presence. However, the thought of leaving him makes me uncomfortable.

Swamiji - As I said, the Self is the reality, and the Self is the real master. So where could you go? You are not going anywhere. Even supposing you are the body, let me ask you, "Has your body come from Lucknow to Tiruvannamalai?" You simply sat in an airplane and in a car, and finally you say that you have come here. But you are not the body. The Self does not move at all. The world moves in the Self. You are only what you are. There is no change in you—the Self. Even if you depart from Poonjaji, you are here and there and everywhere. Only the surroundings change.

Madhukar - I am afraid perhaps to be missing out on Papaji's grace.

Swamiji - Grace is within you. If grace is outside you, it is useless. Grace is the Self. You are never outside its operation. It is always there.

Madhukar - I have already told you something about my first teacher, Osho. I would like to share the most disturbing incident I had with him.

Swamiji - Please, don't hesitate to speak. However, your doubts must naturally relate to the level of the body and mind and manifestation. They can only relate to what is unreal. Perhaps one day all your doubts will be removed once and for all—when you realize who you really are.

Madhukar - About six weeks before his own death, Osho's lover and companion, Nirvano, took her own life in his ashram in Pune. She had lived intimately in Osho's presence for almost twenty years. Her suicide shocked me more deeply than my guru's death. It wasn't just that she did not attain enlightenment; she must also have lived in a state of terrible misery and depression. My hopes of ever getting enlightened crashed with her death. I thought that if she, who had had such intimate contact with the master for such a long time, could not achieve enlightenment, then what chance was there for the rest of us? Her death quite disillusioned me.

Does her example demonstrate how difficult it is to become enlightened? And what about meditation? In her case, two decades of meditation practice failed to lead to enlightenment, and indeed it couldn't even save her from committing suicide.

Swamiji - I can understand your feelings about the lady's death and the conclusions you have drawn from it. Each person's life evolves according to his or her destiny and karma [the law of retributive action] from the previous life. Everything that happens, happens according to the Supreme Power. An event in a devotee's life does not occur because of the influence of his or her guru. It happens because it is so destined. Such an event has nothing to do with the ability or inability or power or powerlessness of the guru to govern events.

Take the example of Sri Ramana. In the 1920s, Bhagavan had a personal attendant who had served him for many years. He was called Annamalai Swami, like me. That devotee had the privilege of being in his master's presence around the clock. At some point, he left Bhagavan and lived alone in the forests some thirty kilometers from here, because he thought he was not worthy to be near his master. Several times Bhagavan tried to bring him back to the ashram. He sent several people to fetch him. But Annamalai Swami refused to return. Instead, he committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree.

The swami's narration shocked me. I felt deep compassion for these two devotees who couldn't even be saved by the proximity of their teachers' presence. I knew that further questioning about this topic wouldn't help dissolve my pain. If anything could, it was nothing less than the presence of the Self. When Annamalai Swami finished narrating this story, we sat together for a long time in silence.

No need for ripe fruit to stick to the tree

I returned to Arunachala six months later, in December 1993. My earlier conversations with Annamalai Swami convinced me that I had come to a spiritual impasse with Papaji. Consequently, I had decided to leave my teacher and return to the womb of his guru's holy mountain.

Since Papaji had offered no further guidance, Annamalai Swami's words during my earlier visit were a big help to me: "If there are breaks in your Self-awareness, it means that you are not a jnani yet. Before one becomes established in the Self without any breaks, without any changes, one has to contact and enjoy the Self many times. By steady meditation and continued practice of self-inquiry, one will finally become permanently established in

the Self, without any breaks.” After researching Sri Ramana’s works, I came to the conclusion that Annamalai Swami taught what his teacher did. And that teaching was now being confirmed by my own experience. On the other hand, Papaji had established his own, unique teaching in this respect, which wasn’t congruent with my experience. I was now beginning to face this reality.

On my previous visit to Tiruvannamalai, I had considered myself still associated with Papaji as a student. However, on this visit, I felt I could ask other teachers questions without inhibitions. I wasn’t yet sure if I was looking for a new teacher. I stayed for six weeks, and during this time I had a further series of conversations with Annamalai Swami. The following talk was recorded on December 24, 1993 at the Sri Annamalai Swami Ashram. In addition to the swami, Sunderam, and myself, four other seekers were also present.

Madhukar - You lived with Sri Ramana Maharshi in the Ramanashramam from 1928 to 1938. After ten years of ashram life, you moved out and lived on your own. You chose to distance yourself physically from the Maharshi. I would like to know what made you stay away from Bhagavan while he was still in his body?

Swamiji - When Bhagavan entered my being, my life became natural, and so there was no need to stay with him. Bhagavan acknowledged this, and therefore I went on my own. When a flower becomes a fruit, there is no need for it to stick to the tree any longer.

Madhukar - From 1938 to 1993, for fifty-five years, Swamiji has been living in his own ashram. Is that right?

Swamiji - In the years 1938 through 1942, I was living on my own, but I was going for Bhagavan's darshan on a daily basis. I was meditating with him every day.

On one occasion in 1942, Bhagavan covered his face with a cloth when I came for his darshan. I became very worried and I asked him, "Why have you covered your face as soon as you saw me? Does it mean that I should not come anymore, or what?" Bhagavan remained silent. He was not saying anything. After a while he said, "When I am just relaxed in my own Self, why do you come and disturb me? That is what I want to say." I understood that Bhagavan did not want me to come to him any longer.

After I had left the hall and walked away for some distance, Bhagavan called me back and said, "If human beings don't think of God or meditate on God or truth, they will live in misery and suffering. Similarly, if one has reached the state of maturity and if one—in spite of one's maturity—keeps thinking that one is different from the guru or from God, such an attitude will produce the same suffering."

These words made me understand that Bhagavan didn't want me to come to the ashram anymore. He didn't want me to come to see him any longer. He wanted me to stay by myself. That's why I stayed by myself in Palakottu from that time onwards.

Madhukar - Was Bhagavan happy with your decision? Did he comment on it?

Swamiji - Not directly. He had his own way of communicating with me—like in another incident in which Bhagavan made it clear to me that I should stop seeing him. Bhagavan used to go for a walk on the hill almost every day. He was using the path which led past my hut in Palakottu. I used to go to the hillside to meet Bhagavan on his walk. True, Bhagavan had indicated that I shouldn't meet him in the ashram anymore. But he had not told me not to come to the hill and have his darshan during his daily walk. I had thought that Bhagavan didn't mind my habit. But when I met Bhagavan on this specific occasion on the hill, he asked me three times, "Why have you come? Why have you come? Why have you come?" Then he said to me, "Staying by yourself, you will be happier than me."

Madhukar - Could you finally let go of his physical presence?

Swamiji - Yes. I did.

Oh! Now I remember another incident which happened before the one on the hill. One day, Bhagavan came to Palakottu. I saw him standing outside my hut. When I went outside to greet him and prostrate to him, Bhagavan said, "I have come for your darshan." His words shocked me. I said to him, "Why is Bhagavan saying something like that to an ordinary man like me? Why is Bhagavan using big words like this? It is not correct to say things like this!" Bhagavan said, "You are living by my words. Is it not great?!"

Bhagavan told me that I did not need to go anywhere. He told me to just stay at my place in Palakottu. He told me just to be by myself. He told me just to be my Self. And he told me that whatever I will be needing will happen by itself. He said there is no need to ask anybody for money. "Money will come to you whenever it is needed," he said.

Madhukar - Did his words come true?

Swamiji - Yes, in every respect. Bhagavan's words all became true. And I did stop seeing him. Even on his mahasamadhi, I remained by myself—with my own Self.

There isn't anything outside. Whatever you are seeking is yourself

Madhukar - I heard that Swamiji has never left Tiruvannamalai during the past fifty-five years. Is there a reason for this or did it just happen?

Swamiji - Bhagavan told me to stay at this place. I followed my guru's words. I found that there is no happiness outside. So I stayed "at home." There isn't anything outside. Whatever you are seeking is your Self. Whatever you are seeking is the atman. That's why there is no need to go outside. Bhagavan told me, "Don't even go to your neighbor's room." So I didn't.

Madhukar - But you used to do the thirteen-kilometer-long pradakshina [the practice of circumambulating a holy object] around Arunachala once a day, didn't you?

Swamiji - Yes, I used to do that.

Madhukar - Are you still doing that practice?

Swamiji - No, nowadays I am not doing pradakshina anymore.

Knowing the Self is being the Self

Madhukar - Let me tell you what I understand as discernment by means of inquiry:

A thought arises.

Now the “I” or the ego asks, “To whom does this thought arise?”

The answer is, “To me.”

The “I” then asks, “Who am I?” There is an “answer” that has no words. Somehow, nothingness or silence is present. Nothingness or silence is there as an answer to the question “Who am I?”

Swamiji - Correct.

Madhukar - Is it necessary to keep asking, “To whom does this nothingness and silence appear?” When nothingness and silence “appear,” do I need to ask further?

Swamiji - As soon as you realize that there is only a rope and not a snake, you don’t need to keep questioning whether what you see is a snake or not. But you should not forget that there is only a rope.

Madhukar - Do you mean to say that there is no need to ask again, “To whom does nothingness appear?”

Swamiji - That’s right. There is no need for any further questioning, because there is no duality in that silence and nothingness. Silence and nothingness are not things you experience—they are what you are.

Madhukar - I am asking this question because it seems to me that there is duality. Isn’t it the “I” or the “I”-thought that is perceiving nothingness or silence? There is nothingness. But this nothingness or silence is still perceived by something that I think is the ego.

Swamiji - In that nothingness or silence there is no “I”-thought. That is real life. That is reality.

Madhukar - I am still not clear. Let me ask again: Is the perceived nothingness, or silence, perceived by the “I”?

Swamiji - Let us take an example. First you misunderstand yourself to be somebody else—not a human being. Some day you come to know that you are a human being. This understanding will always stay with you. After you have this understanding, what more do you need? So it is with the Self. Knowing the Self is being the Self.

Say you are Madhukar, but you think you are somebody else. Now you come to know that you had mistaken yourself to be somebody else; you have come to know that you are Madhukar. You realized that you were Madhukar before, but you just didn't know it. Having come to know your true identity, there is no need to do anything further. Now you know you are Madhukar. There is only one Madhukar. Whatever exists is in a state of oneness. And in oneness there is no duality.

Madhukar - Swamiji, please clarify one more time for me: After asking “Who am I?” and “To whom does this thought appear?” there is simultaneously beingness or nothingness and the awareness of perceiving the object “nothingness.” If inquiry is done correctly, should there be only nothingness without the sense that an object called beingness or nothingness is perceived?

Swamiji - For whom does this duality exist?

Madhukar - For me. In Sri Ramana's inquiry, the next question would be “Who am I?” In my case the “answer” is a nothingness and silence without words. The sequence is, “To whom does this nothingness, this silence, appear?”

“To me.”

“Who am I?”

“Nothingness, silence.”

So you can see, my situation is like a dog biting its own tail. There seems to be no way out of the circle. How should I proceed with my inquiry practice?

Swamiji - You are Madhukar, you know that. After you have come to know that, why do you repeat that you are Madhukar or why do you forget that you are Madhukar? Be Madhukar! You are Madhukar. Knowing that you are Madhukar, you are Madhukar. At the moment of recognizing that silence and nothingness as your Self, you are the Self. In that instant, you will also recognize and know that you were never anything else than the Self, and you will never be anything else than the Self.

Madhukar - In each attempt of self-inquiry “Who am I?”, the “me”—the “I,” the ego, the “I”-thought—dissolves, and that nothingness and silence remain as my true nature. And each time, I recognize that the “I” or “me” or the “I”-thought actually never really existed. Inquiry leads back to nothingness and silence and being what I truly am. But at times I forget this and I am back where I started.

Swamiji - Who forgets it?

Madhukar - Me! Well, here we go again! [laughter]

May I ask you another question: Somebody who sits in a cave has more time to do sadhana [spiritual practice] than somebody who has a family and a job. Has the meditator a better chance to reach enlightenment?

Swamiji - One doesn't realize one's true Self. The true Self is already there. One person may do a job while another person is playing. Whatever one does, it is of no use. While working, abide in your Self as if you are living in a cave. There is no outside and no inside.

The real Self is not connected with any thought

Madhukar - I would like to go back to what we discussed before. Is it advisable to focus on this nothingness and wait for the next thought to arise, or is it advisable to keep inquiring as to whom this nothingness appears?

Please excuse me if I keep repeating this question; I do so intentionally. Because self-inquiry is the most important and fundamental practice for me, I need absolute clarity about its correct, practical application.

Swamiji - If you stay constantly in that nothingness, then no thoughts will arise. Only if you give up the hold on that state will something come up and take you away from it. So in that case, you have got to inquire again. If you live always with the understanding that there is only a rope, then how can a snake arise from it?

Or let us take another example. If you fill your pots full of water and you pour more and more water into them, they will not contain it. Like that, if

one knows oneself, there is nothing else to know. The one who knows his own Self becomes content within himself, like a pot full of water.

Madhukar - In the waking state, the “I”-thought, the “I” notion, seems to be always present as an underlying silent sense of “I.” It is a kind of “I”-consciousness.

When I wake up in the morning, the “I”-thought slides in without being noticed because I am so used to believing that I am the body and the mind, and therefore I call them “I.” I believe that is why the “I”-thought seems to be always there. It is an ever-present feeling, although it is not always noticed.

Swamiji - To whom does this “I”-thought arise? Who is sleeping? We are all asleep. Only the sage is not asleep.

Madhukar - Okay. Let me formulate my question in a different way. It is difficult to ask the precise question. I’ll try.

What I am pointing to is how I perceive this “I”-thought or this “me.” What I am describing is how this “I”-feeling happens to Madhukar. It seems as if the “I”-feeling appears in the moment of waking up from sleep. Then the thought arises, “I want to have a cup of coffee.” It seems as if the “I”-thought and the thought of wanting a cup of coffee exist together. They become “my” thought. Is this correct?

Swamiji - To whom does all this happen? Whatever thoughts may arise, you are not that. For example, so many people in the world are thinking so many thoughts. Their thoughts are just arising by themselves. We can see all these thoughts as “just thoughts.” We can have the same kind of view regarding our own thoughts: “Whatever thoughts may arise, I am not these thoughts.” Because for the real I there is no thought. The real I is not connected with any thought. It is free from all thought. As in sleep, there is no thought.

Madhukar - Do I hear you say that thoughts are not “my” thoughts? Are thoughts just thoughts arising or appearing?

Swamiji - Thoughts appear by themselves only in waking or in dreaming. Otherwise they would need to appear in deep sleep too. Do they appear in deep sleep too?

Madhukar - No, they don’t.

Swamiji - Sleep is a miracle. In sleep there is no thought, no mind, no world, only samadhi. After waking up—as soon as the mind begins to function—the body appears and the entire manifestation begins to function. When you have come to know who you really are, nothing affects you because you know that all is your own Self. Mind is Me. Everything is Me. All is Me. I am searching for my own Self. Take an example: There is only one gold but many different kinds of ornaments. Different kinds of ornaments are made of the same gold.

The one who does not realize his true Self thinks that the body is the true Self. The one who realizes his true Self finds that everything is his true Self. For him there is no samsara [cycle of birth and death], no nirvana [liberation from samsara] no maya [manifestation mistakenly believed to be real], no ego. All is Self. That is why this state is called the wakeful sleep. All and everything are the Self.

Being nobody, only the Self remains

As Swamiji explained these things, I was overcome with tears of gratitude and bliss as a further recognition of the Self occurred. All at once my heart energy expanded and expanded until it finally burst out of all confines and fountained upward as intense light and heat that consumed my body awareness. Everything stood still. When I became aware of my body-mind self again, I found myself prostrated headlong in front of Annamalai Swami, gently touching his feet in reverence and devotion. I was unable to speak, and a deep silence permeated the room. After a long time, I sat up and resumed questioning Swamiji.

Madhukar - Listening to you, my questions don't make sense anymore.

Swamiji - For each lock there is a key. I remember the incident when four famous pundits came to Bhagavan with a list of sixty-three questions in hand. It was a very long list. They gave the list to Bhagavan. He looked at the list. After seeing all those questions, Bhagavan asked them from whom or from where all these questions came. They just looked at each other. They looked at me, then at Bhagavan. Then they asked, "What is the answer to this question?"

Bhagavan said, “All questions have the same answer. Find out to whom the questions and the answers come. Who is the questioner? Who wants moksha [spiritual liberation]? When you know it, all questions will be answered once and for all times.” Hearing Bhagavan’s words, the pundits became silent.

Madhukar - Bhagavan seemed to have used his final weapon on the pundits. Wasn’t atma vichara, self-inquiry, called the supreme weapon by Bhagavan?

Swamiji - Yes, he called it brahmastra, the ultimate weapon. This weapon is able to defeat all other weapons. If you put armor around your body, nothing can harm your body. This is brahmakosam, the ultimate armor. Therefore if you wear the armor of your Self or if you remain in your Self, no misery, no thought—nothing—can disturb you. You get only shanti [peace] and that’s it. Shanti.

Bhagavan often used to repeat a particular teaching: He used to say about himself, “Others should not be jealous of me, because there is nobody in the world who is smaller than me. I am the smallest. I am nothing. I am less than nothing.” What he wanted to say was that one should not have an ego at all. Only a person who has that kind of humbleness can realize the Self. The one who has no ego is greater than all others. When we are nobody and no one, the Self remains. By being the Self, one is All.

On one occasion, I returned to Bhagavan when I had completed all the ashram building works he had asked me to do. Bhagavan said to me, “Don’t look back on what you have done!” From that moment onward, I have lived my life and done all my work with this selfless attitude.

You cannot see the Self because you are the Self

A few days later, on New Year's Eve 1993, another interview took place at the Sri Annamalai Ashram. On this occasion, only Annamalai Swami, Sunderam, and I were present.

Madhukar - On the occasion of my previous visit, I asked you for guidance regarding my self-inquiry practice. Today I would like to ask you for further guidance.

Swamiji - Don't hesitate to ask.

Madhukar - I think I am going to repeat myself. Is that okay?

Swamiji - Ask your questions!

Madhukar - When I arrived at Arunachala, my practice of self-inquiry proceeded in the following manner:

When a thought appeared I would ask myself, "To whom does this thought appear?"

Answer: To me.

Question: Who am I?

Answer: Emptiness, nothingness. This answer expresses itself not as a word but rather as something like a feeling within myself.

Question: To whom does this emptiness appear?

Answer: To me.

Question: Who am I?

Answer: Emptiness, nothingness.

Then the next futile circle of inquiry would start again. There seemed to be no way out. As I told you, the situation was similar to a dog chasing its own tail.

Now, after having been four weeks at Arunachala, the content of the answer to the inquiry “Who am I?” seems to have changed. The same “I” that is present in the inquiry “Who am I?” stays present as the all-pervading and

silent “I”—as an unspoken answer. The “I” is everywhere and in everything. Would you comment, please?

Swamiji - That is the real I.

Madhukar - At times, the perception of the I pervading everything is stronger than at other occasions. Why is that?

Swamiji - The perception is less to whom? [laughter] In fact, in the Self there is no “more” and no “less.”

Madhukar - In this I, there is neither good nor bad. In this I, is nothing but I.

Swamiji - In the days with Bhagavan, there was no such thing as good or bad. There was nothing to judge. We

didn’t judge what was good and what was bad. Whatever was, was accepted.

Madhukar - I heard you say, “Hold on to the I!” You said that the all-pervading I that I have described to you is the real I. How can I know it is the real I?

Swamiji - If you don't hold on to the real I, there will be the idea, "I am the body and the mind." They look real. That is why it is suggested to hold on to the real I until you have become firmly established in the real I. The conclusion of meditation is to remain in your real state. But the truth is that nobody is doing meditation. All is the Self.

Madhukar - That state is not really a state, and therefore it cannot be "my state." That state is "nobody's state."

Swamiji - In this state, you are not remembering and you are not forgetting anything. You are not thinking and not remembering "I am Madhukar" or "I am not Madhukar." When you have the feeling "I am Madhukar," you are selfconscious. As long as we are referring to the body and mind, we have to meditate on the Self. Remember, all thoughts and methods regarding karma yoga [path of action], bhakti yoga [path of devotion], dhyana yoga [path of meditation], and jnana yoga [path of wisdom] are not the truth. We should not meditate on the body and on the mind but only on the Self. When we become established in the Self, there is no need to think about the Self.

Take the example of the snake and the rope.

As long as the illusion of the snake is there, the truth is not revealed. When you are fully convinced that there is only a rope, then there is not even the need to remove it.

Madhukar - When a rope is a rope there is no need for inquiry. When the rope appears to be a snake, there is a need for inquiry. Is that what you are saying?

Swamiji - To reinforce what I taught you in your first visit, I will quote a song from Bhagavan: "I am a man. And once I know that I am a man, what is the need to think that I am a man? But if I think I am somebody else or something else, then I must first come to know and to recognize that I am a man. And I then must give up that illusion to be something else."

The vasanas—the latent tendencies, conditionings, and habits of the mind carried over from many past lives—hinder the realization of the realized state. These tendencies appear and cover the truth. That is why you must inquire, "Who am I?" and "To whom does this happen?" Such practice will irradicate the vasanas.

Madhukar - Are you saying that inquiry is essential in every moment and in every situation?

Swamiji - As long as light is lit in the house, darkness cannot enter. Likewise, as long as meditation and self-inquiry are practiced, vasanas cannot stay on. Continuous meditation is like a river. The flow of the river is always uninterrupted. When a constant flow of awareness is going on, vasanas cannot enter. This is constant meditation.

Madhukar - In a state of bliss, is it also necessary to keep inquiring, "To whom does bliss happen? Who am I?" and so on?

Swamiji - Try to inquire into happiness and you will find the same peace and quiet of the Self that is underlying both happiness and misery.

Madhukar - For many years, my understanding was that the experience of permanent bliss is the experience of the Self. Bliss or misery is experienced by the “me.” Both are experienced on the same level. How can I go beyond happiness and unhappiness?

Swamiji - Only on the level of the mind do opposites exist, like pain and pleasure, unhappiness and happiness. But in the Self there is no such thing.

Let me give you an example. Because of the eyes, you are able to see everything around you. But you cannot see your eyes with your own eyes. Even though you can't see your own eyes, you cannot deny the existence of your eyes. You know with absolute certainty that they exist. The Self is like that. You cannot see the Self as an object, but you are the Self. Being one's Self is *jnana* [wisdom]. Being the Self is knowing the Self. In that state, there is no duality. You are always That. You think that you are different from the Self, and that is the mistake. Giving up the difference is *sadhana*.

In the deep-sleep state, there is no difference between you and the Self. At this moment—here-now—there is also no difference between the Self and you and everything else. All is One. All is the One. All is one Self.

Madhukar - Bliss and misery don't touch the Self. Seen from the viewpoint of the Self, they happen like a dream. In the realized state, bliss and misery are happening within awareness but without personal identification. Is that correct?

Swamiji - Ultimately you cannot divide anything. All is Self. Take the body as an example. The whole body is yours: The two legs are yours; the two hands are yours; the two eyes are yours. In bodily life, happiness and misery always coexist. It is important to meet both with equanimity. In a small baby, you can see vividly that happiness and misery merge into one.

Realize the tricks of the mind and be free from it

I had one last interaction with Swamiji. I wanted to hear one more time what he had to say about the issue of gurus declaring their students enlightened, and in particular, about Papaji's declaration of my enlightenment. I expected him to have at least some reservations about Papaji's distinctive custom. I decided to seek from Annamalai Swami a more private answer in the intimate context of a personal letter. Thus, the following questions and answers were conveyed by mail in summer of 1994. They are set out below, along with his answers (translated by Sunderam).

Madhukar - Did Bhagavan ever declare any of his disciples enlightened?

Swamiji - As far as I know, Sri Bhagavan did not declare anybody enlightened except his mother and the cow, Lakshmi. Nevertheless, many seekers reached very high states and attained peace and maturity in his presence.

Madhukar - Do you believe that my guru, your gurubhai, Poonjaji, is enlightened?

Swamiji - Although I never met Poonjaji in person, I consider him as an enlightened being.

Madhukar - Poonjaji declared me enlightened several times. But I didn't consider myself to be enlightened. Was Poonjaji fooling me as well as others?

Swamiji - You said in your letter that Poonjaji declared you enlightened. Poonjaji is correct. But you did not trust and stay by his words. You moved away from the state of enlightenment and got yourself caught in the trap of the mind and its doubts. So it is not Poonjaji's mistake. It is your mistake. Realize the tricks of the mind and be free from it.

Madhukar - I wish I could meet my real, final, and last guru in this life. How can I find him? What can I do to find him?

Swamiji - If you have the intense desire to live with a guru in whom you have total trust, that intensity will take you to a master. If you are fully ready to receive a master, the master will come to you.

Alive or dead—the same ananda [bliss]

At the end of 1995, I received a letter from Sunderam that contained the sad news and some of the details of Sri Annamalai Swami's mahasamadhi. He wrote that Swamiji had not been feeling well and his body had become increasingly weak during the preceding months. Early one morning after Annamalai Swami awakened, he had asked Sunderam and a French devotee

to help him sit in his armchair. As he sat there, the swami closed his eyes and seemed to go into samadhi. However, his breath soon became weaker.

Sunderam sat on the floor in front of Swamiji, and the French devotee sat in a chair behind Swamiji, holding and steadyng him in a gentle embrace. There was no talk. Both devotees knew that Swamiji was leaving his body; both devotees sat in silence and with full awareness. They knew that nothing could or should be done other than what they were already doing—just being there. A short while later, Swamiji's breathing ceased. His mahasamadhi had occurred in the early morning hours of November 9, 1995.

When I met Sunderam in Bombay in spring 1996 I asked him what he had felt or experienced just before Swami's death, at the moment of his death, and right after his death. Sunderam said that he did not experience anything special during his guru's passing away. There was no special transmission or energy phenomenon, he said. Swamiji died exactly in the same way he lived—ordinarily and simply. Sunderam told me that after the traditional rituals had been performed, his master's enbalmed body was lowered in the lotus posture into the samadhi shrine that Swamiji had prepared a few years prior to his death. Sunderam said that it didn't seem to matter to Swamiji where he sat—in a chair or in his samadhi. Death, in the sense of the ending of his attachment to the body, had happened way back in 1938 when Sri Ramana's words, "Ananda [bliss], ananda, ananda!" had confirmed his enlightenment.

I was deeply touched by the simplicity of Annamalai Swami's teaching and lifestyle. In fact, I was in love with him. During my conversations with him, I became immersed several times in the peaceful and blissful experience of the Self. It happened without effort. It was so easy!

Questioning Annamalai Swami repeatedly about the technique of the self-inquiry process, and my experiences of practice in his presence and under his guidance, opened up a new spiritual vista for me. Swamiji's clarifications enabled me to directly and easily experience the Self. This ability inspired me to sing with joy and relief. A deep relaxation and tremendous satisfaction occurred in me when the understanding arose that my own Self is available anytime. In fact, I am the Self! I knew with certainty that it could perhaps be forgotten momentarily but never again would it be lost. Until my meeting with the swami, I wasn't aware that the Self revealed itself so often during my self-inquiry practice. Like the manner in which a windshield wiper provides a clear view after pushing off rain with each swing, my thoughts now dissolved anew during each attempt of self-inquiry, revealing my true nature. My meditations now became an opportunity to directly and frequently experience—on my own!—the peace and quiet of the Self.

From my experience with Papaji, I knew first hand that the initial “pointing out” by the guru and the subsequent recognition of the Self by the seeker through self-inquiry were crucial to the awakening process. But contrary to Papaji’s teaching—and congruent with my own experience—I now was convinced that the first conscious experience of my true nature was not enough for me to be permanently established in enlightenment. I had learned from Annamalai Swami that one needs many dips into the Self through ongoing practice, perhaps over lifetimes, until one can remain constantly in and as the Self.

At one point, I had asked Annamalai Swami how many of his own disciples had become enlightened and whether he proclaimed the event of their moksha. He replied that it was up to them to discern if enlightenment had occurred and to declare so if they wanted to. He added that he didn’t know who or how many of his devotees had found freedom so far. Shouting his own enlightenment or that of others from the rooftop was not his business, he said.

What I heard from the swami made me ponder Papaji's custom of declaring seekers enlightened. I contemplated particularly the fact that about one hundred seekers—including myself—supposedly had become enlightened in his presence!

But could this be true? I began anew to question Papaji's claims. Why didn't Sri Ramana declare his disciples enlightened? Why didn't I hear about similar enlightenment success rates of other teachers of Advaita Vedanta or of other traditions in India, or in other schools such as Tibetan Buddhism and Zen?

Perhaps I would not have needed to struggle so much, had Papaji only told me that what I had experienced was a recognition of the Self and not the final experience of enlightenment. Then my odyssey would probably have unfolded in a rather different fashion. It is quite possible that I would have relaxed and kept practicing with Papaji until his last day on Earth.

My meetings with Annamalai Swami convinced me that final enlightenment in my case simply required more practice. I was ready to do just that. By the same token, I was still not ready to let go of the concept that enlightenment is a Big Bang event that in its culminating moment is complete once and for all. I still believed in a sudden transformation after which every one of my perceptions would be different from then on, rather than a continuous vigilance and expanded awareness grounded in my essential nature. In spite of my own experience, part of me still hoped that Papaji was somehow right in his assessment of my enlightenment and that it merely remained mysteriously veiled. And I still believed that the spiritual power of a guru could be synchronized with my consciousness and act with the aid of practice as a catalyst for awakening. By my simply lifting the

veil, enlightenment would remain. Driven by such hope and possibility, my odyssey continued.

Lakshmana Swami



Lakshmana Swami in the early 1990s

“Give up all other thoughts and catch hold of the ‘I’-thought. Then follow the ultimate instruction: Be still and quiet! Stabilize in this state where there is no thought. In that stillness, the Self will embrace the ‘I’ and eat it up. Then the Self will be revealed. This is grace.”

Chapter 6

Sri Lakshmana Swami

was born on December 24, 1925, in Gudur, Andhra Pradesh, India. A great desire for Self-realization arose in him while he was still in his teens. It was then that he began to study the Hindu scriptures and to practice pranayama [breath control]. In 1950, during the Navaratri celebrations [nine-day festival of the Goddess Durga] at the Sri Ramanashramam in Tiruvannamalai, he realized the Self in the presence of his guru, Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.

He spent the next thirteen years in solitude and complete silence, and it was not until 1963 that he began to receive devotees and seekers, allowing them to come and sit with him. Then, as now, he teaches primarily through silence, encouraging those people who come to him to follow the simple words of his own guru, “Just keep quiet.” Lakshmana Swami adds, “Bhagavan will do the rest.”

In the early 1980s, he moved to the holy mountain Arunachala, establishing his own house-cum-ashram just a few minutes’ walk from the Sri Ramanashramam. Lakshmana Swami lives a reclusive life with his enlightened companion, Sarada, and only meets visitors four times a year—at the religious festivals of Kartigai Deepam [two-week festival in January], Shivaratri [festival for worshipping the god Shiva], Navaratri, and on his birthday.

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You Cannot Attain the Self Because You Already Are the Self

I was intrigued by the fact that Lakshmana Swami had spent such a long time in solitude and silence after his enlightenment, and was continuing to lead a reclusive life offering almost no access to himself. This, coupled with the fact that he was living with a young and beautiful enlightened woman named Sarada, made him appear mystical and mysterious to me. I imagined that the power of his presence and his establishment in the truth would help catalyze my own enlightenment.

In traditional Vedanta philosophy, it is held that one will never be graced by enlightenment unless one has been exposed to a true guru who is Self-realized. At the time I met the swami in 1993, I had been perpetually looking for the encounter that would kick-start the completion of my own enlightenment process, and I now wondered if Lakshmana Swami and his mate could supply it. Furthermore, I was looking forward to the opportunity of meeting for the first time in my life a couple who were regarded as enlightened.

After I read his book, I felt I needed further clarification on Lakshmana Swami's seemingly paradoxical teachings about how enlightenment occurs. He seemed to be saying that it only can happen through a combination of effort and practice on the one hand, and the power of grace [of God, or God in the form of a guru] on the other. The question this raised was: Is our free will, intention, and effort the key or is grace responsible for what occurs? In my understanding, the two standpoints each excluded the other.

In late June 1993, the day after my last satsang with Sri Annamalai Swami, I went to visit Sri Lakshmana Swami. Through the iron gate at the entrance, I was told by a caretaker that it was not possible to meet the swami since he only gave public darshan on a few occasions during the year. Hearing this, I went away and wrote Lakshmana Swami a letter. In it I respectfully told him that I found it inappropriate to permit his book *No Mind: I Am the Self* to be written and published, and not give a seeker the chance to ask the sincere questions that had arisen while reading it. The next morning, I walked to his house, delivered my letter, and waited at the gate for his reply. Much to my surprise and joy, I was called into the compound and asked to wait on the veranda of the swami's house. I sat down there and looked out at the magnificent view of Arunachala, the holy mountain.

A few minutes later, Sri Lakshmana Swami appeared, dressed in a traditional white kurta. I rose to greet him, and he silently folded his hands in the traditional namasté gesture. He then sat on a white chair, and I sat on the straw mat at his feet. No one else was present at the time. We remained in silence together for a few moments, and then I spoke up. The following dialogue has been reconstructed from memory.

The ultimate instruction: “Be still and quiet!”

Madhukar - May I speak to you?

Lakshmana Swami - Please, go ahead.

I gave Lakshmana Swami a short account of my spiritual search up to that point, after which I came to the crux of the matter that was troubling me. I

decided not to bring up my doubts about my enlightenment with Papaji, hoping that I would experience a transmission of enlightenment from the swami. Papaji was still my guru, and I didn't want to show him in a bad light and perhaps see him ridiculed. I also didn't want to go so far as to say point-blank something like, "Please, let me sit in your presence and awaken to my own true nature as you have awakened to yours."

Madhukar - In the presence of my teachers Osho and Papaji, I have often had moments when the mind was without thought. But the "I"-thought, or personal identification, has never dissolved permanently. Rather, after every new experience of bliss, doubts and questions always resurface; thoughts and doubts are with me instead of silence. Osho told me that meditation is necessary for reaching liberation. Poonjaji, on the other hand, says that meditation and all such sadhanas merely postpone enlightenment. I have tried both of these approaches, and neither has resulted in enlightenment.

You say that effort and grace are both necessary for enlightenment to happen. You write that without atma vichara [self-inquiry] there is no grace, and without grace there is no atma vichara. On the other hand you say, "There is only the Self and nothing else," and "Through atma vichara you can hold onto the 'I'-thought by your own effort; more than that you cannot do."

That sounds as if I can, and therefore must, apply my volition and make the effort required to do sadhana [practice], such as atma vichara. Yet, on the other hand, it is grace or God's will, and not my volition, that is going to do the trick. So is enlightenment my responsibility or is it God's? Can I, or can I not, make enlightenment happen? If so, to what extent can I assist in its occurrence?

The question really is: Who or what is holding on to the “I”-thought? Whose effort is that? Who is doing atma vichara? Aren’t effort and practice being done by the same Self that is also called grace? Isn’t any personal effort already the activity of impersonal grace, so to speak?

Lakshmana Swami - The mind must die. There is no other way to realize the Self. Inquiry and surrender are the only techniques that bring you to the state of inner stillness and quietness. The effortless, thought-free state is the highest level of practice. Only in this state can the Self destroy the “I”-thought. You have to get rid of all thoughts, and the first of all thoughts is the “I”-thought. Therefore, give up all other thoughts and catch hold of the “I”-thought. Then follow the ultimate instruction: Be still and quiet! Stabilize in this state where there is no thought. In that stillness, the Self will embrace the “I” and eat it up. Then the Self will be revealed. This is grace.

Yes, besides grace, effort is absolutely necessary. Atma vichara and surrender are the practices.

After our conversation came to an end, we kept sitting silently and bathed together for a long time in the blissful presence, peace, and love of the Self. Arunachala reflected the late-afternoon sunlight warmly and benevolently on us.

You cannot attain the Self because you are the Self

During my second visit to the Sri Ramanashramam in December 1993, I visited the swami again. By this time, I had left my guru Poonjaji and was

traveling through India in search of a teacher who could guide me further me on my odyssey. During my previous visit to the swami, I had deeply felt his powerful peace and presence and I wanted more of the same. I liked the swami; and I was attracted to his wise presence.

On the occasion of the Tamil New Year at the end of December, Lakshmana Swami gave a public darshan, and I didn't want to miss this rare opportunity. The darshan was held in silence in the Sri Lakshmana Swami Ashram compound, beneath the majesty and beauty of Arunachala. Sri Lakshmana sat in his white chair with his back to the holy mountain, while about forty seekers and devotees sat on the ground before him, facing Arunachala. A few days later, on the occasion of his birthday, the swami gave another public darshan. This lasted about one hour, and Swamiji spoke for only a few minutes at the beginning. The following is a reconstruction of this talk, drawn from memory. The rest of the darshan passed in silence.

Lakshmana Swami - Every blade of grass is the I AM. Every blade of grass expresses the I AM through its mere appearance. Its phenomenal form is the Self's unreal and illusory aspect, while the true nature and reality of the Self is invisible and must stay hidden. Just like a blade of grass, every human being expresses the I AM in his or her own uniqueness, which ultimately is illusory. But the real, unchanging Self remains always as it is.

Each blade of grass is as important as a human being in the workings of the whole universe. The universe would be immensely poorer if it would miss just one single blade of grass. Everything in the universe is in a state of perfection. Every object is perfect by itself. Every object is perfect as it is. And all objects are perfect in their interdependence with each other at all times, in all places, in all circumstances, and in all states of being. However, every thought, every individual, and everything else in manifestation is only an illusion, a phenomenal aspect of the Self.

Some people say that complete equanimity of mind is Self-realization. This is not true. Equanimity of mind is only a stage that one passes on one's way to Self-realization. Other people say that seeing the Self or God everywhere is Self-realization. This is not true either. To see the Self everywhere there must be an "I" who sees. And while that "I" exists, the mind also exists. In the Self, there is no seeing. In the Self, there is only being. The Self is always present. There is no question of realizing it. You cannot reach or attain it because you are already the Self—now. There is only the Self and nothing else. There is nothing apart from it. The Self is one without a second.

There are not different kinds of enlightenment

A few days later, in January 1994, I had the good fortune to be granted a second private meeting with Sri Lakshmana Swami. During my visit six months previously, the swami clearly taught the ongoing practice of self-inquiry until one day grace would permanently and uninterruptedly shine forth as the Self and the only reality. Since that time, I had practiced atma vichara quite intensely. In each attempt, I had reached the highest level he was teaching—namely, the effortless, thought-free state. But it was only momentary. How could I get rid of all thoughts? They kept coming back, no matter how hard I tried! Had I been practicing incorrectly?

I wanted to inquire about this dilemma, the self-inquiry technique in general, and specifically about the wall or dead end I had encountered while practicing. I also wanted to ask him to shed light on my Papaji-proclaimed enlightenment state. Since I had now freed myself from the guru-disciple relationship with Papaji, I felt unrestrained about sharing my doubts concerning my former guru with him.

The procedure was the same as during my initial visit. On arriving at the ashram gate, I was told by one of his attendants that the swami was not available at that time of year. Once again, I went away and wrote him a letter, which I delivered at the gate the next morning. In the letter, I told him that as a seeker, I was badly in need of help, assistance, and guidance because I had recently left my guru, Papaji, for good.

Returning to the ashram the next morning, I met an American woman at the gate who was a devotee of the enlightened American teacher Robert Adams, author of *Silence of the Heart* [Infinity Publications, 1997]. (Adams himself had been a disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj.) I had met the woman earlier in Lucknow with Papaji, and in Bombay with Ramesh Balsekar. We both waited in silence. After a short while, we were led to a veranda at the side of the house that offered an even more perfect view of Arunachala than the one I had enjoyed on my first visit. Lakshmana Swami eventually appeared, accompanied by his enlightened companion, Sarada. After greeting us with folded hands, he sat down in his white chair and Sarada sat on the floor next to him. The woman visitor and I sat facing them. After a moment of silence, he beckoned me to speak.

Madhukar - Often, while he was speaking to me, Papaji would somehow initiate an energy phenomenon. In the initial phase of such an event, an energy wave of heat and light would originate from the bottom of my spine and travel upward through my body. Then my third eye would vibrate and white light would emanate from it in spiral-shaped circles. When this happened, I would not be able to think anymore. Actually, at these times "I" didn't exist anymore and neither did he. I could hear his voice, though as if from far away; there were words, yet there seemed to be no one who spoke and no one who heard. It was rather a singular and impersonal experience or event.

At some point during these impersonal experiences, my being would be filled with intense feelings of love and gratitude. I would hear Papaji say, “This is it! You got it! You did your work.” But after some moments or minutes, after the bliss had subsided, thoughts would arise again, often in the form of doubts. My question is: How could this be enlightenment if doubts rise again?

Are there different kinds of enlightenment? If so, what kind of enlightenment is or was “my” enlightenment? Could you please comment?

By the end of my long and descriptive question, Lakshmana Swami and Sarada were laughing, apparently about what I had just told them. They seemed to joke with each other, speaking in Tamil. Unfortunately, I couldn’t understand what they were saying. They eventually stopped laughing and commenting, and Lakshmana Swami replied. The following is my recollection of his words.

Lakshmana Swami - There are not different kinds of enlightenment. What happened to you was not enlightenment. Poonjaji was fooling you.
[laughter]

When the mind is quiet, the “I”-thought [here the term is synonymous with the ego] may experience a little of the bliss that is emanating from the Self. But you will not experience pure beingness until the “I”-thought has completely subsided into the [spiritual] heart. Your imagination is making you think that a peaceful or blissful experience by the “I”-thought is an experience of the I AM or the Self. This belief has arisen because of ignorance and not because you have experienced the real I, as it really is.

Madhuar - Thank you for explaining this so clearly. I assume this means I have to redouble my sadhana. But my practice seems not to be working. Since I arrived at Arunachala, I have been doing the atma vichara practice of "Who am I?" very intensely and vigorously according to the instructions of Sri Ramana. But my efforts seem to have led to a dead end.

The atma vichara happens for me as follows: When a thought arises, I ask, "To whom does this thought arise?" The answer is, "To me." The next question is, "Who am I?" Then as a wordless answer, silence and nothingness—emptiness—prevail. At this point, the next question is, "To whom does this emptiness and silence arise?" Once more the answer is, "To me," and again the question follows, "Who am I?" As before, the answer is a prevailing nothingness, emptiness, silence. The cycle begins again with the same old questions and answers.

The result of all this effort is that I feel my atma vichara practice has become pointless. It's stuck. It doesn't lead anywhere. It has become something like an unresolved Zen koan. How do I proceed from here with the practice?

Lakshmana Swami - Now, only God can help you. At this point, you can only pray. What is left for you to do is to pray.

I was stunned and confused by this unexpected answer. Did he really mean to suggest that I drop my self-inquiry practice and pick up prayer as a new sadhana? Or did he merely want to tease me? I had expected to hear him teach something like: "You are practicing self-inquiry correctly, but remember that this practice ends when the sense of emptiness—silence—

ensues. You are that emptiness, peace, and stillness! That is your true nature. Recognize it! Know that at least for a brief moment, your mind was quiet as it subsided in the Self, right after your inquiry ‘Who am I?’ and before the arising of the next thought. And know that your next question, ‘To whom does this emptiness and silence arise?’ is actually the next thought that appeared from the nondual Self. All you can do is keep practicing. Practice atma vichara until the ‘I’-thought has completely subsided into the heart and you experience pure being permanently.”

My mind tried hard to make sense out of the swami’s suggestion to pray. And disappointingly, I didn’t get a chance to clarify my confusion. During the few moments I was locked into my ponderings, Lakshmana Swami had invited the American woman who was sitting next to me to speak. Her “problem” was the exact opposite of mine—she wanted confirmation of her enlightenment. She began by outlining the many years she had spent searching, assisted by various spiritual teachers, and then told how, a few weeks earlier, she had come to Arunachala to be alone in her new-found peace and contentment. She didn’t say how her enlightenment had occurred, but she described her post-enlightenment experience and her state of permanent bliss and peace very beautifully. It was Sarada, Lakshmana Swami’s companion, who answered her:

Sarada - Hearing your account, I can tell that you are already “there.” What else could you want? You have no need to go to anyone. Just relax and be happy. There is nothing else for you to do.

Woman - Yes, I know that. I felt I needed to come to share with you both what happened to me. In my aloneness, I have no one to talk to. Now I feel I can be in peace for the rest of my life.

I somehow needed a final reassurance from someone like you. I received it. Thank you for speaking with me.

Don't wait for grace—practice!

Lakshmana Swami and Sarada got up and went into the house. The two of us were led away by the attendant. The wo-man and I parted in silence and went different ways. I never saw her again.

She had looked truly beautiful and radiant. Her eyes expressed a deep silence, contentment, love, and fulfillment. I silently wished that her enlightenment was real and enduring.

The contrast between this woman and myself was upsetting. Instead of having received a supportive and stimulating blast of presence from the enlightened couple, I felt judged, stirred up, and defeated. I felt my hope of becoming enlightened by a direct transmission from a spiritual teacher beginning to fade.

Suddenly, I felt lost. Lakshmana Swami had just given me the koan “Pray!” Pray? But what, how often, and to whom? Was this guy serious? Or was he making fun of me when he said, “Poonjaji was fooling you.” Lakshmana Swami’s words and laughter echoed unpleasantly in my head.

I had just witnessed the confirmation of enlightenment of another fellow seeker. But was she really enlightened? How could one person confirm so matter-of-factly the enlightenment of another? Was that possible?

After my meeting with the swami, I felt assured that I didn't want to simply wait passively or expectantly until enlightenment struck me by mercy or by the power of any other sort of grace. Soon the prayer issue resolved itself into a crystal-clear comprehension that I needed to keep practicing no matter what Lakshmana Swami meant to say. Translating his suggestion according to my heart's own guidance, I simply kept practicing self-inquiry and made it my ongoing prayer.

I discovered that I didn't need to pray to an outside, objectified God. Rather, it became extremely and instantly rewarding here and now to inquire into the one-who-prays, the subject within. In such "prayer," it happened that the praying was heard and answered concurrently. And in a moment beyond time, the one-who-prayed, the prayed-for, and the act of praying were all transcended in a simultaneous revelation of the Self. Self-prayer or self-inquiry contains Self-revelation. What a wonderful discovery that was—and is!

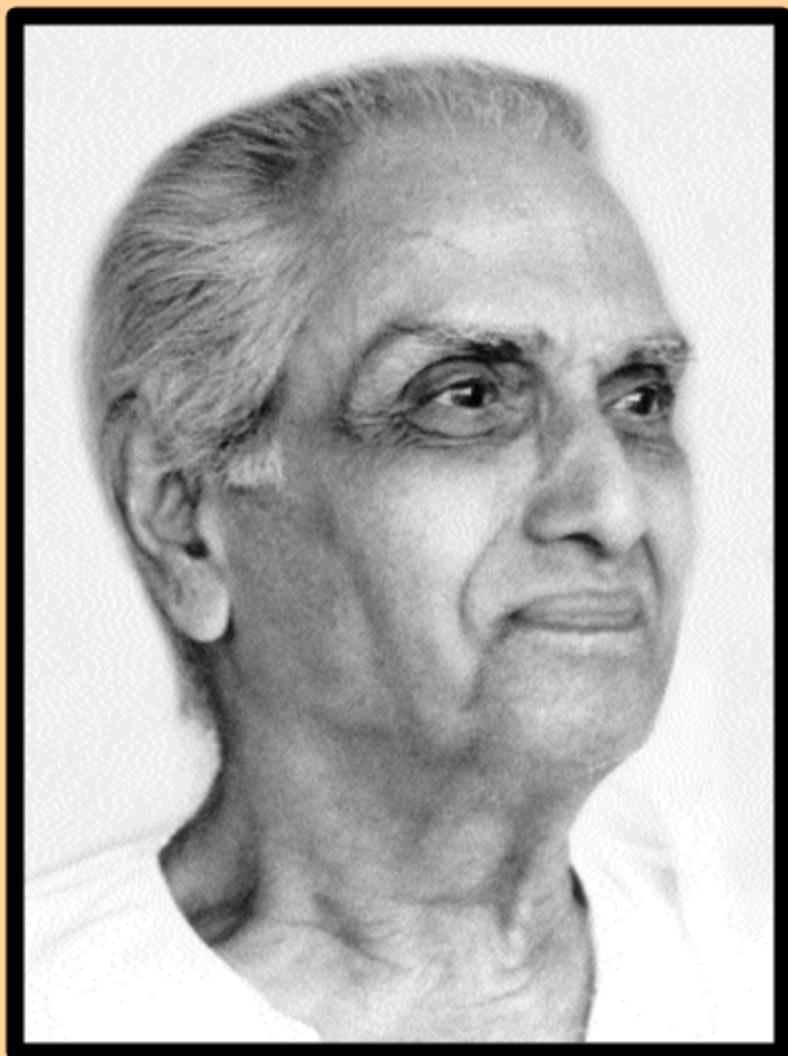
During my practice, I was blessed every so often by the friendly and fatherly appearance of Sri Lakshmana Swami before my mind's eye. The sagacious and humorous twinkle in his eyes, his deep silence and benevolent presence, assisted and strengthened my efforts greatly. His urging words, "Don't wait for grace—practice!" and his warning, "Without practice, no grace!" helped me to keep practicing and continue my odyssey.

My last meeting with Lakshmana Swami occurred a few days later on Sri Ramana's birthday. As part of the festivities in honor of Bhagavan, thousands of people, including hundreds of beggars, were being fed a festival lunch on the ashram premises. While I was seated cross-legged on the floor in one of the long rows of devotees eating the simple but delicious South Indian food, a female ashram official came rushing toward me.

“Madhukar, come quickly!” she shouted in great excitement, “and bring your video camera along! Lakshmana Swami is paying his respects to Sri Ramana in the Samadhi Hall. Come, hurry up! You can film him when he comes out.” She seemed to be as eager as I to use this opportunity to get a few rare frames of the reclusive swami.

She didn’t need to tell me twice. I rushed to the ashram office where I had momentarily stored my video camera. Within seconds I was out of the office, adjusting the camera and getting it ready for shooting as I was walking along. With my eyes fixed on the camera, I almost ran into Lakshmana Swami! In shock, my mind stopped. Without any personality, we gazed as the Self into each other’s eyes and through them as the beyond and into the beyond. There was no time and nobody there. In a moment, this magical experience of the Self dissolved. The Swami slipped into his Maruti van and disappeared before I was able to function again and push the “on” button of the camera.

Ramesh S. Balsekar



Ramesh S. Balsekar in Bombay in 1994

“Enlightenment is the annihilation of the one who desires enlightenment. Enlightenment, which can only happen because it is the will of God and the destiny of a body-mind organism, means that the ‘one,’ the ego who wants enlightenment, is annihilated. That is why no ‘one’ can achieve or become enlightened, and no ‘one’ can enjoy enlightenment.”

Chapter 7

Ramesh S. Balsekar

was born into a devout Hindu Brahmin family in Bombay on May 25, 1917. After his studies at the London School of Economics, he went to work for the Bank of India in 1940. He rose to become the bank's general manager and retired after thirty-seven years of service. Ramesh married in 1940, and with his wife, Sharada, raised three children.

Although Sri Ramana Maharshi (whom he never met in person) was one of his most important spiritual mentors, his personal guru for more than twenty years was Sri Vithal Rao Joshi, who lived in Pune. Ramesh met his second and final guru—Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj—in Bombay in 1978, and he soon became one of the people entrusted with the task of translating Maharaj's words in satsang into English.

In 1979, during Diwali, the Hindu Festival of Lights, Ramesh attained enlightenment in his guru's presence, according to his own account. On September 6, 1981, Maharaj passed away, and Ramesh began teaching. Since 1987, he has taught at public seminars held in Europe, the United States, and India. He has also written and published numerous books on the teachings of Advaita Vedanta.

Ramesh could be described as a Vedantic mystic because although he teaches the nondual or Advaita awareness of truth, he does not rely on the traditional scriptures for foundation or method. Basically, he teaches that

everything is an appearance in consciousness, like a dream. And the functioning of manifestation is an impersonal, self-generated process in which all events are predestined. According to Ramesh, the seeker cannot do anything to hasten or hinder his or her own enlightenment.

Ramesh is known for the impressive number of disciples who are said to have attained enlightenment. To date, Ramesh has publicly declared six of his students enlightened and he has encouraged them to teach in Europe and in the United States. Four of them co-lecture with him every year in his seminar in Germany.

Ramesh meets seekers and answers their questions every morning from 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM at his residence in Mumbai (Bombay). The number of those attending these satsangs has grown considerably over the past few years, and at the time of this writing, it was not unusual for fifty people to be present. During the last fifteen minutes, devotional songs [bhajans] are sung.

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All Is Destined and According to God's Will

I first came to hear of Ramesh Balsekar in 1992 while I was living in Lucknow. I read a number of his books expounding the Advaita Vedanta teaching and found them deeply inspiring and helpful. When the time came for me to leave Arunachala and return to Lucknow to take my leave of Papaji, I decided to call Ramesh and ask if I could stop by to see him en route.

At this point, I was feeling quite confused. Papaji's teachings and life example had proven insufficient for me. The teachers that I had met at Arunachala appeared to be able to guide me further on my odyssey. What they taught was congruent with Ramana Maharshi's teaching on all points, but contradictory to some aspects of the teachings of Papaji.

In particular, I wanted help with the important issue of free will versus predestination. I also felt it critical to understand if and how practice and effort would facilitate or hinder the occurrence of enlightenment. Papaji taught that the initial recognition and experience of the Self in the presence of the guru amounted to enlightenment, and that no practice before or after this is necessary. In contrast, Sri Ramana and the two disciples of his I had met held that the direct experience of the Self is crucial, but that many more dips into that experience were necessary until one is firmly and permanently established in it.

As I stated earlier, the latter matched my own experience. And now, from what I read in his books, Ramesh seemed to teach that no practice whatsoever would bring about enlightenment. In fact, he held that

practising could even hinder its occurrence. According to him, liberation is simply a matter of destiny. And once it occurs, it is final.

In satsang, Papaji had spoken highly and repeatedly of Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramesh's guru. He held him and his teachings in such high esteem that he visited him in Mumbai in the late 1970s.³ From this I inferred that Ramesh, as one of Maharaj's successors, was a highly evolved teacher. I hoped that he would have illuminating answers to my questions.

Ramesh readily agreed to my request to visit him, so in early July 1993, I flew from Madras to Mumbai and eventually found my way to his apartment in the Warden Road district. I rang the doorbell, and Ramesh himself greeted me warmly, saying, "Here you are! Welcome. Come in!" He led the way to his study and offered me a seat on a small bench facing his armchair. No one else was present.

Once we were comfortable, he asked about my trip to Arunachala. He and his wife, Sharada, had visited the Sri Ramanashramam back in 1975, and he commented that Sri Ramana's presence was still felt there very strongly. I agreed with him and told him of my experiences there. He then asked me to tell him something of my life up to that point, so I gave him a short account of my spiritual search, emphasizing my life with Osho and Papaji. The dialogue that follows has been reconstructed from memory.

Consciousness functions impersonally through the body-mind organism

Ramesh - Tell me, what can I do for you? Why have you come?

Madhukar - I am seeking enlightenment. I am ready to do anything to reach this goal. I will do whatever it takes. Can it really be done? Can I do it? Just tell me how! How did you do it?

Ramesh - Who is seeking what? When you understand the “who” and the “what” in your question, your search will come to an end.

Madhukar - I need help right now. I find myself at a crossroads in my search. While at Arunachala, I received teachings from two of Sri Ramana’s disciples, teachings that oppose the ones of my guru, Poonjaji. In fact, I am now contemplating whether I should leave my guru for good. This is why I have come to you. I would like to request from you some clarification and guidance.

Ramesh - Well, Madhukar . . . Madhukar is an Indian name. How did you come by such a name? Who gave it to you?

Madhukar - Shortly after I asked Poonjaji to be accepted as his disciple, I requested that he give me a new name.

Ramesh - Oh, I see. But let me tell you that “I am Madhukar” means, “I am identified with a body-mind organism called Madhukar, with the sense of free will

and personal doership”—doesn’t it? Whether you have a Christian name or a Sanskrit name makes no difference.

Madhukar - Yes, of course. I am not here to declare that I am not identified anymore with the body and mind. I am not saying Aham Brahmasmi [I am God]. I am not here to declare my enlightenment or have you confirm it. On the contrary, I am here because I am supposed to be enlightened and I doubt that I am. This is exactly the point that I have come to clarify.

Ramesh - Tell me, what is your understanding now? What understanding have you come to after all these years of seeking?

Madhukar - My first teacher, Osho, had three approaches, all of which were supposed to lead to an egoless state. One was, “Be total in whatever you do.” For instance, when you dance with your total being, the ego—the doer—will evaporate, and the dance or pure dancing remains. The second was, “Do whatever you like to do, but do it with total awareness.” In this approach, every action is executed without thinking of one’s own interests or of the consequences. Actions done in total awareness are done impersonally, without the sense of personal doership and involvement. Osho’s third principle was, “Do everything in an attitude of celebration.” Actions done with an attitude of celebration also occur impersonally.

In my case, these three approaches were supported by countless Zazen and Vipassana retreats in Pune and elsewhere. These meditations were supposed to bring about more and more choiceless awareness. These three approaches are meant to lead to disidentification with the body and mind and to complete egolessness—enlightenment.

Ramesh - Were your practices with Osho successful?

Madhukar - Not all of my actions were done with absolute totality or with absolute awareness. But I can say that I know the experience of acting with absolute totality very well. I became skilled in that as a student of Osho. To act in totality creates a wonderful state beyond time and space. As I understand it, in such totality, the ego—the “I”-sense—evaporates, and action and awareness remain as an inseparable oneness. However, acting with absolute awareness is more difficult for me. But I can say I know from my own experience how to do this.

During the Buddhist meditation sittings, my mind definitely cooled down and slowed down. But I never reached the complete and enduring thoughtless state. I never became the master of my thoughts or of my mind. In contrast to my own experience, Osho held that he could use his mind at will—as an instrument. With enlightenment he had become its master.

I do not know from my own experience what he is talking about. Regardless of my many satoris and wonderful experiences of no-mind and bliss, the best thing about being with Osho was that I never had a single doubt regarding my nonenlightenment. I always knew beyond doubt that I wasn't enlightened.

Ramesh - And what did you learn with Poonjaji? What experiences did you have with him?

Madhukar - With him it was the other way around—almost everybody could become “enlightened” without doing any sadhana or practice. Either his mere presence or his personality guided the self-inquiry, which caused many seekers to realize their true nature in an instant, according to Poonjaji.

He would proclaim such events frequently. In my third satsang with him, I had an overwhelmingly consuming, blissful, and egoless experience, and he claimed I was enlightened.

Ramesh - So, enlightenment happened.

Madhukar - Well, that's what Poonjaji said, but within a couple of hours, I began to doubt it. It is true that there was an experience of no-thought—an experience without an experiencer—which was accompanied by a huge wave of bliss. But that experience didn't last. When I came back to normal, I began doubting, and I began to ask myself how I could be enlightened if questions and doubts were continuing to arise. Somehow I have the total conviction that as long as I question my enlightenment or I have one single doubt about it, I can't be truly enlightened.

Ramesh - Your questing, asking, and doubting are the proof that your seeking has not come to an end. That means enlightenment cannot have happened.

Madhukar - Definitely not. Actually, these experiences of no-mind and bliss intensified my search for final enlightenment.

Ramesh - Before we speak of the seeking and enlightenment, let me begin with my basic teaching: All there is, is Consciousness. If Consciousness is all there is, then there is no “one” who is doing any action. The Buddha said the same thing: “Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer thereof.”

Madhukar - Could you make this clearer?

Ramesh - If Consciousness is all there is, then how can there be an individual doer, or seeker, or decision maker? Yet there is doing, seeking, deciding—as impersonal functions of Consciousness, or Totality. The ego, with his or her sense of personal doership, believes that he or she is functioning. In fact, it is always and can only be Consciousness that is impersonally functioning through a body-mind organism.

Madhukar - Then the spiritual search must be an impersonal occurrence as well.

Ramesh - Of course! The search for truth and its ultimate fulfillment in the final event of enlightenment—the annihilation of the ego, the seeker—are like any other actions or events. They are the impersonal functioning of the Source, Totality, God, Consciousness, or whatever you want to call it. When I use the word “God,” I do not mean an entity within or outside of manifestation. By “God” I mean the Source. Yet even this is a mere concept. Anything any sage or any scripture has ever said is a concept and not the truth and, consequently, can be either agreed with or disagreed with. The value or usefulness of a concept is only to the extent that it points to the truth. The notion that both the totality of manifestation and the functioning of manifestation are reflections by and of the Source is a pointer to the truth, which is the Source.

Madhukar - In this context, who then is seeking? And who becomes enlightened?

Ramesh - There is no “one” who is doing any practice or anything else in order to get or achieve enlightenment.

Your head is already in the tiger’s mouth. There is no escape.

Madhukar - I am puzzled. What then do you say enlightenment is? How do you define it?

Ramesh - Enlightenment is the annihilation of the one who desires enlightenment. Enlightenment, which can only happen because it is the will of God and the destiny of a body-mind organism, means that the “one,” the ego who wants enlightenment, is annihilated. That is why no “one” can become enlightened and no “one” can enjoy enlightenment.

Madhukar - But enlightenment is an event in phenomenality, in manifestation, right?

Ramesh - Yes. It is a spontaneous event at the end of the process of seeking, in which there is the intuited, total understanding in the spiritual heart that there is no doer and never was a doer or seeker. In this event the ego, the “me,” is completely destroyed.

Madhukar - If enlightenment is destined, everything else that happens must be destined too—including spiritual seeking.

Ramesh - Yes, of course. Seeking either enlightenment or a million dollars is not in your control. Both are God's will and part of the destiny of the body-mind organism. Whether you want a million dollars or enlightenment, and whether you get what you want—neither is in your control. If you think you can choose, I would suggest choosing to go after the million dollars, because if you get the money, there will be someone to enjoy it. On the other hand, if the ego—you believing that you are the seeker—goes after enlightenment and it happens, there will be no “one” to enjoy enlightenment!

Madhukar - So would you say therefore that making money is actually an obstruction to enlightenment?

Ramesh - God has not laid down any restrictions regarding enlightenment. Enlightenment can happen to a beggar or a millionaire, to a saint or a sinner, to a meditator or an alcoholic. Enjoy food, sex—whatever comes along. “You” cannot make any mistakes because “you” don’t exist. Whatever happens is in God’s plan.

Madhukar - If everything is destined, then it must be destined who becomes a spiritual seeker and when. And it must also be destined for every single seeker whether enlightenment will happen or not.

Ramesh - Absolutely correct. And furthermore, the destiny of all events in the entire manifestation at all times implies that no power on Earth can hasten or hinder the advent of enlightenment. Ramana Maharshi used to teach the same truth to seekers of his time by saying, “Your head is already in the tiger’s mouth. There is no escape.” To start with, it wasn’t “you” who decided to become a seeker. Seeking just happened. Tell me, how did you become a seeker?

Madhukar - Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be happy—permanently. When I came to India, I heard about some people who claimed that they were permanently happy. In my first minute in Osho's presence, I had a profound satori experience accompanied by indescribable bliss. Then I heard him say that I could have this experience twenty-four hours a day into eternity, if I became his disciple, surrendered to him, and did what he said. Oh boy, I can't tell you how much I wanted that! I didn't want anything else in my life except that experience again. And I wanted it to last forever. This is how it all started.

Ramesh - You see, those events just “happened.” You didn't plan them. Intense seeking just began, with one single experience.

Madhukar - And with that experience, the seeker came into existence. But you say there is no doer and no seeker.

Ramesh - There is no doer or seeker as an individual, separate entity with free will and doership. There is no “me” as an entity. However, there is a body-mind organism named Madhukar, impersonally functioning in the manifestation of Consciousness within itself.

Madhukar - Theoretically, if God wanted me to become enlightened, I would become enlightened even if I didn't want it—because I don't have a will in the first place. [laughter]

Ramesh - There is will, but is it your will or is it the will of the Source—God's will? That's the question. It is God's will. No matter what you or

anybody else does or doesn't do, every act happens according to God's will.

Madhukar - From the highest point of view, who is the seeker?

Ramesh - Seen from the highest point of view, the seeker already is what he is seeking. "He" is Consciousness. Consciousness is all there is.

Madhukar - Can you make this more clear?

Ramesh - What the seeker is seeking is actually "doing" the seeking. The seeker and what he believes to be "his" seeking are that which is sought. All there is, is Consciousness. To understand this—not just intellectually but totally, intuitively in the heart—is enlightenment. Understanding is all. With it, the seeker, the ego, is annihilated.

When Ramesh said these words, my mind stopped. My heart sang and rang with joy and relief as the truth sank in. A deep understanding occurred in an instant of oneness beyond time. In fact, time completely disappeared, and past, present, and future all became one as my "I" dissolved into an ocean of light. A widened consciousness of total oneness engulfed my awareness. Another experience without an experiencer had occurred. I felt elated and deeply grateful.

Ramesh invited me to return the next day to hear more of the teaching. I gladly accepted his invitation, and the next morning I turned up at his apartment again, excited and somewhat apprehensive, with a number of

further questions burning inside me. Again, I was the only visitor present. The dialogue that follows has been reconstructed from memory.

For the sage there is experiencing, but no experiencer

Madhukar - Yesterday we were saying that the seeker just doesn't exist. We said that there is merely a body-mind organism functioning as part of the manifestation of Totality in the role of a seeker. And this organism has no personal free will or power to influence the spiritual search and its outcome. That is why no "one" can achieve or become enlightened, and no "one" can enjoy enlightenment.

Now I come to my question. If there is no thinker and doer of actions, there can't be an enjoyer of the results of actions either. From this teaching, it follows that there cannot be an experiencer of thoughts, feelings, actions, and events either.

Ramesh - You see, the manifestation is simultaneously both real and unreal —like a reflection or a shadow. In the present moment, or What Is, all there is, is Consciousness. In the present moment, the eternal moment, there really is no manifestation and no body-mind organism, with or without the sense of doership, and no experiencer experiencing anything. All there is, is the present moment—no time—no past, present, future. Time is a concept, as is everything that appears to happen within it. So in the present moment, there is no body-mind organism and no conceptualization taking place.

Madhukar - So, when we speak about an experience, it is already past, right?

Ramesh - Any experience that “we” appear to have is only when we talk about that experience. An experience is always in the past. The experience comes up as an event from the past, even if it occurred only a split second before we now look at it. It is now coming up from our past at the moment we think about it—and only when we think about it.

Madhukar - Are you saying that whenever there is an actual experience, there is no experiencer?

Ramesh - Absolutely correct. Any experience is necessarily an impersonal event and becomes personal and individual only after the brain reacts to the input and makes it an experience. Then, and only then, does the ego make it “my” experience. The “me” gets involved and says, “I had such and such experience.” In the case of a sage, the brain still reacts and there is an experience, but there is no ego, and the awareness is that the experience is not “my” experience. For the sage there is experiencing, but there is no experiencer.

Madhukar - “My experience” is already in the past.

Ramesh - In any actual experience, whether pain or ecstasy, there never is an experiencer, because the experience is always and necessarily in the present moment—which is outside duration or time.

Madhukar - That is a totally different dimension.

Ramesh - That's right. The present moment is not "the present," because the present is related to the past and future. An experience, any experience, is the present moment.

Madhukar - And the experience of the present moment is gone the moment I think about the experience.

Ramesh - Yes, the act of thinking about the experience is the present moment.

Seeking ends with the annihilation of the seeker

Madhukar - I told you that Osho said he could use his mind at will—as an instrument. After his enlightenment he became its master. In your book Consciousness Speaks, I read that thought comes from outside. Is the arising of a thought really an impersonal event?

Ramesh - It is impersonal. Nobody can hinder a thought from arising, because a thought does not originate in the body-mind organism. It comes from outside, from Consciousness. The brain reacts spontaneously to a thought according to its programming—genes plus conditioning. It is the ego, the "me," which personalizes it and makes it "my" thought or "my" idea or "my" action. A thought is an impersonal input, and the brain reacts to it, which leads to an output. If this is so, "who" could be the master of thought?

Madhukar - Yesterday we spoke about the seeker. Today, could you speak about the search?

Ramesh - Again, seeking—all seeking—is an impersonal process of Consciousness that begins from the first moment a baby intuitively seeks its mother’s breast. Life is nothing but seeking, regardless of what it is for.

Madhukar - What about spiritual seeking?

Ramesh - Spiritual seeking is a process which begins with an ego, a “me,” thinking that it is actively and independently seeking something, and this process ends with the annihilation of the seeker. It is a process of moving from identification to disidentification and, for a given body-mind organism, it may or may not end in the destruction of the seeker, the ego. The seeking was started by the Source, and the seeking will proceed at its own pace according to the will of the Source. The main point to understand is that the ego will not destroy itself. The ego is being destroyed.

Madhukar c In my meditations I often try to fight my ego. First, I feel disappointed when so many thoughts arise; and I get even more fed up by judging myself for condemning and fighting those thoughts.

Ramesh - The ego gets its nourishment from your opposition to it—from your fighting it. But if the ego keeps on getting no nourishment, then it gets weaker and understanding goes deeper. For this reason, I say to accept the ego, don’t fight it. Many people find this difficult to accept because most books and teachers tell you that the ego is the problem and that you must destroy the ego. My concept is not to fight the ego but to accept it. Why?

Because you didn't create the ego. The Source created the ego, and the Source is in the process of destroying the ego in some cases.

Madhukar - In this process, the first step seems to be the event in which one becomes a seeker—when the search begins. In my case it was the satori experience with Osho.

Ramesh - Yes. And the process of seeking begins with an individual who is convinced that enlightenment is attainable through his or her personal efforts and spiritual practices.

Madhukar - At this stage the seeker desires—in fact, almost demands—"enlightenment must happen in my case, because I am doing so much for it." For a long time I, too, thought I could force myself into enlightenment, or enlightenment into me. [laughter]

Ramesh - Sadhanas and spiritual efforts may go on for years until the process of seeking—disidentification—reaches the stage where the seeker realizes that enlightenment may or may not happen. He comes to the intellectual understanding that Consciousness is all there is; that there is no doer. But whether this understanding, which is destiny, happens totally and intuitively in the heart also depends on destiny, on God's will.

Madhukar - Do you mean to say the seeker realizes that he has no power to influence the outcome of his search?

Ramesh - Of course! The occurrence of enlightenment depends strictly and entirely on God's will—the will of the Source—and the destiny of the body-mind organism. No “one” is enlightened. Enlightenment “happens” in a body-mind organism—with the total, intuited understanding in the heart that Consciousness is all there is.

Not practice, but only the Source can destroy the ego

Madhukar - So what about sadhana, spiritual practice?

Ramesh - Spiritual practice involves a doer, a seeker. But “who” is doing sadhana? “Who” is doing anything?

Madhukar - Most people would answer, “Me, the seeker after truth.”

Ramesh - Yes, the ego starts it, but in the process gets weaker and weaker. Remember, the ego, as I use the concept, is not just identification with name and form, it is the identification with name and form as a separate entity—as a separate doer of one’s actions.

Madhukar - No sadhana!? Is that what you are saying? I can’t believe it!

Ramesh - Well, if you really want a practice, here is a sadhana that I can recommend for you. I designed it especially for you! [laughter] At the end of the day, take any actions that you call your actions and see if they were

truly yours. Did they not originate from input over which you had no control—a thought, a feeling, a memory, something seen or tasted or heard? Did the brain not merely react according to its programming and cause an action to happen, which you call “your” action? Therefore, this sadhana will convince you that there is no such thing as “your” action.

Madhukar - So what you mean is that if the seeker understands with conviction that “No action is ‘my’ action,” then he knows he is making progress in his search.

Ramesh - Yes. But bear in mind that whatever happens is part of the impersonal functioning of Totality. The seeker is merely a body-mind organism in that functioning. “He” does not make any progress because “he” doesn’t exist as a doer. The Source starts the seeking and the Source maintains the process of destruction of the ego, the seeker. Only the Source can destroy the ego.

All your actions and their consequences are destined and according to God’s will

Madhukar - Then the seeker should be able to know when he is nearing the completion of his search? Can he notice any signposts or milestones that indicate this?

Ramesh - That’s a good question. There is a penultimate stage prior to enlightenment itself. If you ask me what is indicative of the threshold to the imminent occurrence of enlightenment, I answer that it is the attitude:

“Enlightenment? Who cares!” From this stage, enlightenment can occur at any moment.

Madhukar - How would a seeker know that he is making progress prior to arriving at this penultimate stage?

Ramesh - You will know you are making progress if, in daily life, you find yourself more tolerant towards other people’s actions. After all, if no action is “your” action, then how can you blame others for theirs? And life becomes simpler—no pride, no guilt, no hate, no envy. With this understanding, you know that the teaching is going deeper.

All there is, is Consciousness

Madhukar - Who is the guru? What does he do or not do for the seeker in the process of disidentification?

Ramesh - The guru is merely a mechanism in “phenomenality” for this process to happen. When the seeking begins, the guru is not necessary. But for the seeking to progress, the teacher is necessary. Whether you meet a suitable guru or not will depend on God’s will and the destiny of the body-mind organism, just as the occurrence of enlightenment does.

Madhukar - What, then, is the final truth?

Ramesh - The guru's teaching is not the final truth. All a teacher can do, as part of God's will, is to point to the truth. What is the truth? I AM—the impersonal sense of being—is the truth. But as soon as you think or talk about it, it is in phenomenality and is no longer the truth. Then I AM becomes a concept.

Madhukar - You say that the guru and the disciple are both part of the impersonal functioning of Totality, and as such, neither can influence the outcome of the seeker's search one way or the other. What, then, is the guru's grace? If it can do anything at all, what is it?

Ramesh - The guru's grace is also part of phenomenality. It is part of the process. It is part of the impersonal functioning of Totality. But the traditional Eastern way is to say that for the seeking to progress substantially, the guru and his grace are necessary. Again, whether this happens or not depends on the destiny of each body-mind mechanism.

Madhukar - If the seeker is not a separate individual entity, the guru cannot be one either, right?

Ramesh - Consciousness is speaking and Consciousness is listening. What appears to be two is actually a single movement in Consciousness. All there is, is Consciousness. The guru does not see himself as a separate doer, but the seeker does. The ego is still present in the seeker.

Madhukar - I am going to Germany in a few days. Having heard your teaching, I feel at a bit of a loss as how to proceed from here. I mean, you

say that no practice is necessary. Hearing the teaching and understanding it is all that can be done. What do

you suggest? How should I proceed?

Ramesh - Keep on doing what you have been doing so far. If you have been meditating, meditate. If you feel like stopping your practice of self-inquiry, stop it. If you feel like continuing it, do so. If you feel like leaving Poonjaji, leave him. Just remember that whatever happens—whatever the consequences are—is destined and according to God's will.

I wish you good luck. Enjoy life in Germany.

I spent the next two mornings in Ramesh's presence. His teaching had filled me with a deep sense of freedom—freedom from personal responsibility and doership. It was a tremendous relief to realize and understand that the spiritual search could be viewed as an impersonal occurrence. But while it lessened my angst, this understanding did not bring an end to my seeking, for I knew that final enlightenment was still eluding me!

My mind initially relaxed and evaporated completely on hearing the good news that I couldn't hasten or hinder my enlightenment whatsoever. The wheel of constant spiritual effort and doing came to a sudden halt the moment this aspect of Ramesh's teaching penetrated my understanding. Pure being, silence, peace, and total clarity ensued in the simple acceptance of What Is.

Ramesh's teaching had decisive ramifications. Almost instantly, I experienced a deep sense of disillusionment regarding my search. If spiritual effort and practice were utterly useless, I had no reason at all to stay in India! This understanding reinforced my reasons for traveling to Germany within a few days. If enlightenment was going to be bestowed on me (or not) by God according to His own plans, why not simply become a "normal" citizen again and take care of my future worldly existence? But it didn't work! My experience of the Self in conjunction with the understanding of destiny faded quickly. And the urge for enlightenment resurfaced with a renewed driving power; the odyssey continued. Within two weeks, I was back in India.

Over the next two years, I visited Ramesh in Bombay perhaps a dozen times. I also attended the two-week seminars he gave at Kovalam Beach in Kerala, on the west coast of India, in 1994 and 1995. His teachings held real significance for me and greatly clarified the predicament I found myself in at the time. I was somewhat reluctant to acknowledge him as my new guru, but it eventually became clear to me that I wanted nothing more than to be in his presence each day, listening to his teaching and allowing it to percolate deep into my being. So, with his permission, I moved to Bombay in September 1995. I rented a room in the Malabar Hills district and, for the next six months, I attended his talks daily.

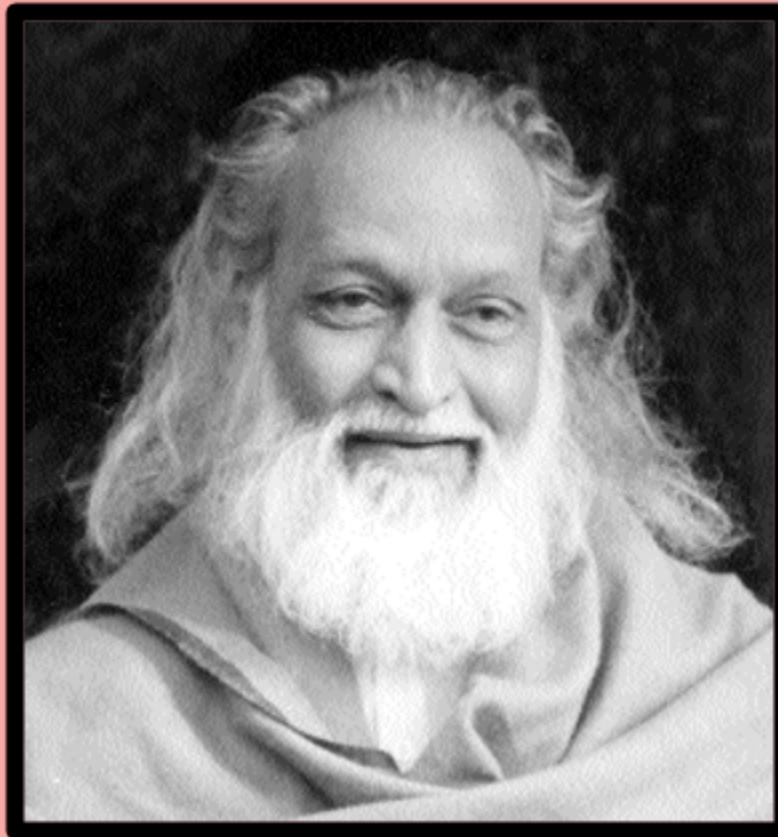
To sit with the guru in satsang, to listen and reflect on his teaching, was a powerful practice for me. However, over the next six months, destiny made me lose interest in Ramesh's path of acceptance of What Is. Instead, I found myself more and more compelled to execute deliberate spiritual effort and sadhana as an instrument of the Source—the only and real doer. Functioning as such an instrument, I was unable not to care about my enlightenment or simply wait for it to happen. The urge for enlightenment was as natural to me as breathing.

Simply facing this powerful inner passion for Self-awakening was a sadhana in itself. Without much concern that I was perhaps interfering with the will of the Source, or God (could I really?), I began to practice self-inquiry again. This path enabled me to enjoy “enlightenment” at least in small increments here and now. My study with Ramesh made it clear to me that the emphasis of my quest was on the path of inquiry and not the path of acceptance. Only later did I discover that my own path had its home in classical or traditional Advaita Vedanta [ch. 12]. This teaching proclaims that no effort must be spared to make a completely thorough and rigorous inquiry.

Practicing self-inquiry again, I began to feel spiritually stronger, and I realized that my own experience was actually quite contrary to Ramesh’s teachings. I did not find that spiritual practices were a hindrance to my spiritual progress. Perhaps they did require a sense of “doership” to pursue. But at the level I found myself, they distinctly helped increase my sense of clarity, hope, and strength and refocused me on what was truly important in my life. I discovered that practicing supported me more and more to center and anchor my awareness in my true nature and to return to my own inner guidance more quickly whenever I left it.

Although I had tried to understand and live Ramesh’s perspective regarding predestination and acceptance of What Is, it was time for me to move on. I felt gratitude for all the guidance he had offered me which, paradoxically, seemed to have taken a lot of effort and practice on his part to convey. I knew I had benefited immeasurably from his insistence on the impersonal functioning of the body-mind organism and manifestation as a whole. This insight had furthered the development of a witness consciousness in me that was often beyond any attachment to being the doer of my thoughts, feelings, or actions. For this I was immensely grateful. I was now happy to go on my own way and continue my odyssey. I took leave of Ramesh’s company at the end of February 1996.

Dadaji



Dadaji in Thane, near Bombay, in 1994

“Those who are really hungry—passionately hungry—for realization will approach that hunger in a different way than the those who are only interested, curious, and excited about enlightenment. The latter want realization without working for it. In contrast, the ones who ‘arrived’ worked hard for their realization. They are of a different breed. Don’t wait

for destiny to make it happen for you or you will wait in vain. You have to create the situation in which this transformation can take place.”

Chapter 8

Dadaji

was born in Bombay in September 1917 as Dattaram M. Gavand into a well-to-do business family. He soon proved to be highly talented. In his youth he excelled at sports, and he went on to become a gifted photographer and successful businessman. His spiritual search, however, drew him more and more toward a life of seclusion and meditation. Since his enlightenment a few decades ago, he has been affectionately known as Dadaji [“Dada” is Hindi for “elder brother”].

Through his teachings, he offers guidance to those who want to discover their inner intelligence, advance their spiritual evolution, and find the way toward enlightenment.¹ In September 1975, at the invitation of a group of American devotees, Dadaji traveled to the United States for the first time. Since then he has returned regularly to teach, and he currently spends three months a year there for this purpose.

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If You Want Enlightenment, You Must Work for It

I first met Dadaji in Pune in the fall of 1993, shortly after my return from Germany where, for a few weeks, I had tried in vain to become a “normal” citizen again. I had been feeling stuck and disillusioned with my spirituality for some time. My search had neither direction nor drive. I felt I needed a teacher who could understand my predicament, provide a fresh impulse for continuing the journey, and offer support, encouragement, and guidance.

In these circumstances, I met an old friend of mine in the Osho commune who had been a disciple of Osho for many years. With a joyous twinkle in her eyes, she invited me to meet a new teacher at her home on the premises of the ashram. I gladly accepted the invitation—surprised and excited that such a meeting could actually take place within the commune, which did not welcome other teachers to hold meetings on the grounds.

Before she introduced me to Dadaji, she told me that, in contrast to Osho’s emphasis on living together with the teacher in his commune as a device for generating growth and higher consciousness, Dadaji taught, “The best practice is to be alone.” Such a teaching seemed quite in line with my natural inclination toward sitting practices; the sadhana of Buddhist vipassana and Zazen meditation had proved very beneficial for me. Although they hadn’t led to final enlightenment, they definitely were quieting the chatter of my mind and making me deeply aware of the impermanence of everything that arises and exists—including my thoughts, my feelings, my body, and the world around me.

I followed my friend into Dadaji's room, and instantly my whole being was permeated with such an exquisite and peaceful vibration that my mind went into a complete standstill. Heavenly silence soaked with stark presence melted away any sense of unfamiliarity and separation. Though I continued walking, my feet seemed not to touch the marble floor; I felt as if I were levitating.

And then I saw him! He was sitting cross-legged and motionless on a bed with a white bedcover. He had a long, white beard and his thin, shoulder-length hair was white as well. From underneath the white shawl that covered his torso, his folded hands greeted me in namasté while his eyes emanated radiant love. His being brimmed with presence.

As I moved slowly toward the bed, my heart began to fill with love and devotion, and I witnessed my body kneeling down in front of him as if moved by a divine power. My own namasté met his in silence while our eyes gazed into and through each other into the beyond.

Then, light as a feather, my head—face down—began to sink onto the bed until it could find rest. At the same time, my hands stretched out—unintended—finding, touching, and holding on to Dadaji's feet. From his feet, heat and energy flowed into my hands, arms, and body. Soon I felt his warm and benevolent hands touching my head and resting there. A deep sense of timelessness, peace, and presence filled the space. No one moved, and not a word was spoken.

After what seemed like an eternity, our “divine embrace” loosened. I, still kneeling, straightened up slowly and bowed in namasté again. With the sweetest and most loving smile, Dadaji beckoned me with a gesture to sit down on one of the cushions on the floor near his bed. I sat, crossed my

legs, closed my eyes, and rested my hands gently in my lap. By now only the two of us were in the room.

After an hour or so, I heard my friend quietly announce that Dadaji's dinner was ready. I opened my eyes and saw Dadaji smiling at me. "Come tomorrow!" he said—the only words spoken in this first encounter.

Prior to his return to Thane, near Mumbai, I went to Dadaji's house to visit him several times. Sometimes I was alone with him; at other times, a few other seekers were present.

The following account of our second meeting is reconstructed from memory. I began our conversation by relating the main stages of my spiritual odyssey up to that point and expressing my disenchantment with my life as a seeker.

The best practice is being alone

Madhukar - I find myself in a state of disillusionment. I wish I could let go of this whole madness of searching for enlightenment. If only I could drop the search! I don't want to be a seeker anymore. I want to just be normal. I want to live ordinarily and in peace.

Dadaji - I understand. You have come to a point where it is best for you to be on your own, to be alone. There is no need for you to visit any guru anymore. You don't need to listen to any of them any longer. It is time for you to start to go within.

Madhukar - Are you suggesting practice and formal meditation?

Dadaji - You need to be alone! In aloneness, you begin to watch every incoming thought. You will come to understand that the past is nothing but the “I.” With the preservation of the “I,” the past continues. When you discover the deceptions of the “I”—which is the mind—your journey toward the spirit begins.

In this innerness, in this inner attentiveness, you will watch every thought, idea, and desire that comes into the mind. If you continue to stay in that inner space of observation, the activity of the mind will quiet down. Through constant, unmotivated looking within, you can step out of the field of thought.

Madhukar - Can I do what you suggest in the company of my lady friend? Can sitting and meditating in her company also be beneficial? Or are you saying that physical seclusion is the only way to support meditation?

Dadaji - You have to decide, once and for all, to make all your energy available for the meeting with what I call the spirit. Once you have decided, you need to concentrate all your energies towards this watchfulness. Then proceed slowly and quietly and discover what meditation is.

Attention without thought is meditation. Slowly, through watchful attention, you step out of the field of mind. You will be able to act without the prompting of thought and desire. And that freedom from desire is being in the present. That freedom is in the now.

You should work with all your understanding,

senses, and energy and less with the thought and desire for activity. Do not choose to be motivated by desire! Choose not to discriminate between good and bad. It is the mind that gives labels. The best practice is being alone.

Thought activity is the main hindrance to realization

Madhukar - As I said earlier, I just want to be finished with the spirituality trip. But somehow I am not able to walk out of it. The search seems to continue in spite of my desire to drop it.

Dadaji - There are two things. One: You have come to the point at which it is made clear to you that you have to leave all gurus behind. You have to understand that nothing can be gained from outside or from other people. You alone have the means within yourself to discover and experience that quality we call the spirit.

Two: The search will keep hold of you until you have experienced the Divinity. How can we experience the quality that is the spirit, the soul, the Divinity? We never ask this question quietly in the depth of our being. We always hope to find the spirit outside, via someone else or something else. Gather all your energies! Go directly to the core, to that center in which the whole secret and mystery of life lies. To be with the inner spirit, you have to be really alone and anonymous.

Madhukar - But being alone and meditating doesn't stop the mind either. That is my experience so far.

Dadaji - Only through watchfulness will you be able to see and know the mind completely. The whole secret of spiritual life is to understand the inadequacy of the mind and its thoughts, and to be free of them. This imaginative and desirous mind can be eliminated only through watchfulness and understanding. Thought activity and the thought process are blocking the incoming spirit. Not seeing this clearly as a fact is the main hindrance to realization of the spirit.

The more you stay in that inner attentiveness, the more you will become free from all the reactions of the known, the past—which is the mind. Then one faces the unknown, and the energy becomes pure and sensitive. This energy is then free from all ideas and desires, which are born out of the past.

Madhukar - How can I get out of my own way?

Dadaji - On one hand, the “I” is the mind that seeks the spirit. On the other hand, the image of the “I” is the cumulative effect of the whole past. The elimination of the past is freedom from the mind, which is the seeker. And as the seeker himself is dissolved, all seeking comes to an end. At this point, living becomes the experiencing of the total moment, and time merges into the timeless. To discover this eternal moment and live in it anonymously is the beginning and the end of all human searches.

Madhukar - Right now I can feel this timeless and eternal moment here with you. I wish this feeling would remain for all time, everywhere, and for everybody [a long beautiful moment of silence and peace ensued].

Dadaji - We are living in a very crucial period of human history. Nature expects human beings to change a great deal. This dimensional change, which is the discovery of the beyond, is the challenge of our time.

I gave Dadaji's teachings a lot of reflection. I knew from my own experience how important single-pointed focus on practice is. His tenet, "To be in the present is freedom from desire" was quite often my own experience, but when this state occurred, it was short lived. According to Dadaji, this situation would change for the better if only I would leave my partner and be alone. But I had strong reservations about this suggestion. True, the time spent with my partner I could instead be spending in meditation. However, I felt I did meditate enough and, as far as I could see, my relationship was not blocking my spiritual growth. My partner and I meditated together regularly and thus were supporting each other. Furthermore, during my practices I was alone anyway—with or without a partner. I was convinced that enlightenment did not require complete solitude.

Secondly, I really enjoyed investigating my true nature in the presence of teachers as well as by myself. In short, I was not willing to let go of the opportunity to deepen my understanding through communion with the teachers that I was meeting. I wanted to keep my ongoing inquiry as open as possible.

Therefore, it didn't surprise me that it was almost three years before I met Dadaji again.

Nobody can give you enlightenment on a platter

In April 1996, I took Sunderam, Sri Annamalai Swami's personal assistant and interpreter, to meet Dadaji in Thane. Another friend of mine, Mr. Gurudayal, accompanied us. The following conversation was video-recorded at Dadaji's residence.

Madhukar - I heard that you met Ramana Maharshi while he was alive, could you say something about your meeting with him?

Dadaji - Yes, I have been to Arunachala. I visited Bhagavan when he was still in his body. I stayed with him for three days at a time when I was wandering all over India. I asked him a few questions. I also took food with him. I don't remember exactly the year of my visit.

Madhukar - So in the early years of your search, you were also visiting various teachers, just as I do today. Is that correct?

Dadaji - There is always a time in one's life when one has to wander and see and understand the wise people. In my time of wandering, I went to Bhagavan. I came to realize, however, that we cannot really learn much from others. What we look for is not to be found outside of ourselves but within ourselves. But as long as the mind is wandering and curious about outside things, you will never get satisfied. And even when that thirst for realization is there, you have to wait for it to become strong. Only when it is strong can you enter into yourself.

Madhukar - I feel I have that thirst for realization you are talking about, but . . .

Dadaji - All that you want is inside you. But we never generate enough power within ourselves. We go out all the time; our energy goes out. But you must realize that nobody can give you anything on a platter. Let me repeat: You will get nothing from outside. This is the real secret of life.

There are people who have realized their reality, found their own Self. But they have discovered it within themselves, by their own effort. They didn't get it from outside. Such people are rare. They are beautiful.

Madhukar - People like Ramana Maharshi . . .

Dadaji - When Ramana Maharshi lived at Arunachala, he stayed most of the time in the mandir [hall]. He didn't go much here and there. He didn't go to get something from others. This is what is called tapasya [intense practice] —the inward search, the inward questioning. That inwardness is very rare in life.

As long as you don't see the futility of that kind of search, your search will not come to an end. But let me tell you, realization will take time.

Madhukar - What is the real hindrance to realization?

Dadaji - At all times, the mind is eager to look outward. It is always trying, searching, moving. All this activity of the mind is the real hindrance to realization. As long as the mind is active in looking outside itself and is focused outward, there is no chance for realization.

You must realize that all that is important in spirituality is within you. But you never come to that “inner.” You never come to that inner with your total energy of life, with your totality. You are halfway here, halfway there; halfway in, halfway out. When all that outer focus comes to the inner, we realize that the key to realization lies hidden within ourselves. And that innerness is all we really want from life.

Realization occurs because of your own effort

Gurudayal - Is it destined that some people become seekers? And is it destined whether we will become enlightened or not? In my opinion, it must be destined because not everybody can achieve the inwardness you talk about. Perhaps a few souls like you were destined to realize the Self.

Dadaji - What is destiny?

Gurudayal - All our efforts are futile—that’s destiny.

Dadaji - Who says effort is futile? First you adopt the idea of destiny and then you expect everything from it—too much, too soon. What is destiny?

What created destiny? Who created destiny? Who has created your destiny? The concept that realization happens through destiny is just a convenient idea.

You must create the situation in which realization can happen. Somehow you are here at this place and in this life to make a beginning for realization to happen—somewhere, sometime. Some people have done this; they have come to that realized state by practicing.

Gurudayal - But some teachers say that realization happened in their case because it was destined.

Dadaji - Such a teaching makes their students think that realization can be obtained without doing anything for it. But let me tell you again: There is no such thing as destiny! Realization happened to some individuals because they have worked hard for that goal for some time, somewhere. It happened for them because of their own effort.

Gurudayal - There is something in a person that makes them an artist or a musician. What is that “something”?

Dadaji - In order to become an artist or a musician, one has to work. Practice—not destiny—makes people masters in their field. They had to do all kinds of practices for a long time for that to happen. If someone attains mastership in a short time, it means that he or she has had experience with it in some earlier life or lives. They were not simply born into this present life without any responsibility to work to develop the talents that were seeded in another life.

Madhukar - But wasn't their birth also predestined?

Dadaji - Birth alone doesn't create your destiny. Unless you really work for it, your destiny will not be created. You have to work for the fulfillment of your destiny.

Gurudayal - Fulfillment because of destiny or because of personal free will and effort? This is the only point that is not clear to me.

Dadaji - Where are we? What do we really want? Let us ask, "Are we really working for realization? Are we really hungry for spiritual fulfillment?" No! Many of us have only a lukewarm interest in that: many of us have only a superficial curiosity, and the mind takes over and plays with it. But those who are really hungry, passionately hungry for realization, will approach that hunger in a different way than those who are only interested, curious, and excited about enlightenment. The latter want realization without working for it. On the other hand, the ones who "arrived" worked very differently—they worked hard for their realization to occur. They are of a different breed. So, don't wait for destiny to make realization happen for you! You have to create the situation in which this transformation can take place.

Sunderam - Yesterday and this morning, I went to see Ramesh Balsekar. He is a guru who is teaching Advaita Vedanta in Bombay. He was talking mostly about destiny. I told him that I took care of my guru, Annamalai Swami, for twenty years, but enlightenment I still do not have; it hasn't happened to me yet. Balsekar replied, "Unless . . ."

Dadaji - . . . it is destined . . . No! No!

Sunderam - “. . . it will not happen.” He said to me, “Just live your normal life. If enlightenment is predestined for you, it will happen. You do not need to worry about it.”

Dadaji - Some people talk that way.

Sunderam - If the guru only stresses destiny, the seekers will not make an effort and they will become lazy. I think people will not be helped by this approach.

Dadaji - Listening to such talk, people will become fatalists. They will only wish for the fate that enlightenment is going to happen to them. They will not work for it. Destiny is just a word, a concept. There is no such thing as a destiny that falls on us from somewhere.

Sunderam - Balsekar kept repeating, “Unless it is God’s will, enlightenment will not happen. No practice and effort will help it to occur.”

Dadaji - Who will give enlightenment? Does this mean that unless it is given, it will not happen? Are there some preferences by means of divine will? Is there a God with His preferences? Does He give enlightenment to some people and not to others? If so, God must be a partial person then—no? Do you think God is such a partial person?

Madhukar - You indicate very clearly that the occurrence of enlightenment mainly depends on the seeker's practice.

Dadaji - Absolutely. If you work with your whole intensity and with your whole life energy for something to happen, it has to happen, and it will happen. In that case, nobody is going to be refused by anybody. Nobody can halt such an effort. But you must be ready to pay the full price for what you want.

It is like scaling Mt. Everest. To reach the top, you really have to work hard for it. Those people who reach the summit have to pay a price. They don't reach it by sitting at home. They don't reach it because it is destined that somebody else will take them there. No way! If you wait for that, you might just keep sitting where you are without ever reaching even the bottom of Mt. Everest.

Gurudayal - Don't you think the body-mind organism called Sunderam was destined to visit you? Sunderam wasn't aware of your existence until yesterday.

Dadaji - No, he wasn't. But his appearance in front of me is not caused by destiny. His visit to me was not predestined. Why do you call it destined?

Gurudayal - Well, destiny may be just a word . . .

Dadaji - [To Sunderam] How did you come here? How did you hear about me? Don't think so much of destiny! The fact is that you have come. And that happened because you were moving with Mr. Gurudayal from his house to my house. It happened because you were interested in meeting me.

[To Gurudayal] And you had the interest to bring Sunderam to me. That's why our meeting happened.

[To Sunderam] Don't you have an interest in visiting wise men?

Sunderam - Yes, I am interested to see enlightened beings.

Dadaji - That's what it is! Unless you have that interest, you will not come to visit me.

Gurudayal - Swamiji, I agree that the eagerness and desire to meet you arises only if such an interest exists in him, but I believe that that interest is not his choice. Didn't the interest just come to him one fine day? Isn't that what destiny is?

Dadaji - Why does he have this interest? If he had been interested in music, he would have become a musician. [To Sunderam] And if you were interested in music, you would visit musicians in Bombay, wouldn't you? You would not be visiting wise men.

Gurudayal - But is it really in our power to choose which interest we have or are going to have? My real question is, "Is it up to us and is it in our power to have the interest in spirituality?"

Dadaji - What gives power to your quest, sir? Isn't it your interest? What will satisfy your interest, your longing? Your hunger for spirituality. You give all these mysterious names to this simple fact of life. We make so much fuss about it. If you have a real interest and a real desire to meet a wise man, you will. If you have no interest and you refuse to visit a person, nobody will take you to him or her against your own wish. And there will be no meeting. It has nothing to do with destiny.

Not mind, but life, realizes the truth

Sunderam - I remember, Osho said in a discourse . . .

Dadaji - Ah! Oh, God! Don't tell me what he has said! Don't listen to all these people! So many people say so many things! And you go to all of them. This is how you are deceived—because Osho said this, because that man said that, because that saint said this and that . . .

Sunderam - The scary fact is . . .

Dadaji - What about you? Find out about your "inner"! Of what use is it to listen to all these people and what they say? Enough of all these things now! You are caught up in the opinions of all these people. Osho is quoted. Ramana Maharshi has said . . . Krishnamurti proclaimed . . . These people

may have realized something in their own way, yes. Now your challenge is to discover that realization in your own personal way. That's important. But you never come to that.

Sunderam - I simply want to learn from these teachers. That's why I visit them.

Dadaji - You are always carried away by the images and ideas of other people. And you are hooked to their opinions. That is the problem. As long as you live with the opinions of others, you will never have the realization of your own inner understanding. But you have to work for that. You have to wait for that. Then realization can happen within yourself. And it will be your experience. Then you will not quote what other people have said.

These people carried out their mission. On the other hand, you keep yourself busy playing with their opinions and their findings. By doing so, you become only a second -hand individual. You don't need to do that. Be what you are. If you have the interest to know what you really are, pursue that interest. Do something! Find! Go and pay the price for it! But you don't!

Madhukar - Are you urging us to go beyond words, beyond the mind and concepts?

Dadaji - Mind is so clever. It is just making words after words. By doing so, it is fragmenting and dividing itself. It keeps asking: "Why this? Why that? Doesn't this guru say so and so? Doesn't that wise man say that?"

You don't see this factor. You don't see how you are caught up in the opinions of other people. To have an opinion about something does not mean you have an understanding about it. You can collect the opinions of all the wise men in the world, and you will remain ignorant.

Madhukar - More important than any intellectual understanding is experience—and more so the lasting experience of peace.

Dadaji - Yes, experiencing is something different. Only that inner experiencing is the real understanding. Opinions are merely concepts in the mind. Realization is not an idea.

You are already fragmented human beings. And by playing with other people's ideas and philosophies, you get yourself even more divided.

Madhukar - But there are different stages on the spiritual journey and . . .

Dadaji - Yes, yes, I understand. At the beginning of the search, there is a little curiosity and an interest in finding out what spirituality is all about. Finding out what, and where—in books? From other people? Finally, the searching has to lead to yourself. There is a place, a seat, within yourself where you can find and realize what you were looking for. Your own realization will be your own wisdom about life. Then you will not be bothered by the opinions of other people. But you don't want to do what's necessary for that to occur; you don't want to pay the price, nor do you have the necessary patience.

Gurudayal - Guruji, what actually is realization?

Dadaji - Realization means to realize that truth. It means to actually experience the truth within ourselves.

Gurudayal - And what is that truth?

Dadaji - What do you want? An explanation of the word? Truth is that which is real.

Gurudayal - What are we? What is real in us? What is the truth in us?

Dadaji - We are whatever is real. What is it that is real? The answer is: experiencing the real—the realization of That, of the “inner.”

To have concepts and ideas about this is not enough. Concepts and ideas are part of the thought process. It is the mind that has concepts and ideas. But it is life itself that realizes, knows, and understands the truth.

That is all.

More freedom from the mind means more presence

It was already my experience that the activity of the mind did quiet down when I stayed in the inner space of observation and witnessing. Only through witnessing or self-inquiry was I able to see and know the mind more clearly and understand its inadequacy. But to be free of the thoughts it kept generating necessitated more practice on my part. Therefore, I felt deeply met and supported by Dadaji's insistence on rigorous practice.

"Freedom from desire is to be in the present," Dadaji taught, and I knew that that freedom was only available in the now. How could I always be in the present moment? I couldn't! But in my meditation sadhana and in my self-inquiry practice, presence remained each time the thought process came to a stop through awareness. More freedom from the mind meant more presence. I felt grateful for Dadaji's simple equation, which was congruent with my own experience.

This time, Dadaji's persistent suggestion to leave all teachers behind and be on my own struck a chord in me. Even before meeting Dadaji, I knew that the day was not far off when I would be alone on my odyssey. But did Dadaji want me to remain without any other teacher except him? Is that why he invited me to stay as long as I wanted and to live and meditate in the gazebo in the garden next to his house? Did he want to instruct and guide me in my practices? If so, what about aloneness? Yes, I wanted to—and did—practice, but I didn't want to do so exclusively with him as my teacher.

On my last visit to him, I didn't have the chance to ask Dadaji these questions. In any case, I was not inclined to take up his offer.

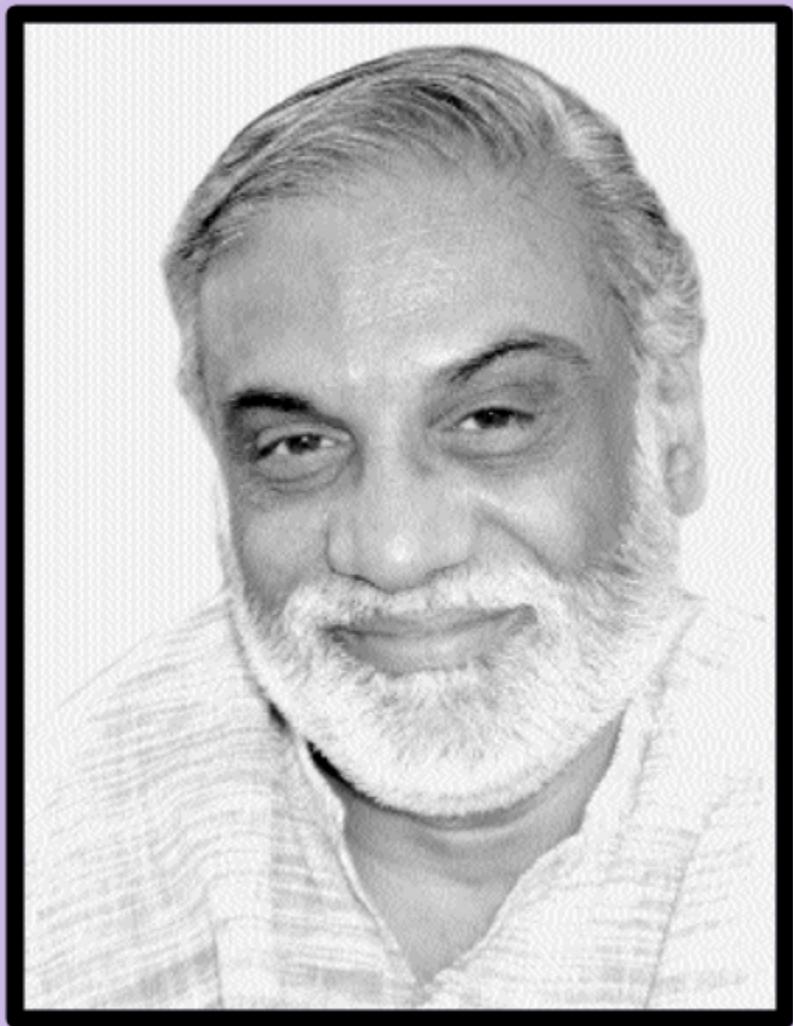
Dadaji had kindly offered me what he owned: his house and his wisdom. And from his compassionate heart, he suggested devices to me that he knew and taught from his personal experience: aloneness and practice. They were part of Dadaji's own path that helped him reach the state he was in. Like Ramana Maharshi, he has remained a bachelor all his life.

At this point, I didn't care much anymore about the issue of predestination versus free will. If everything was predestined, I thought, then my practicing was predestined too. Within that system of belief, if I thought that doing spiritual practice was a function of free will and an act of personal doership, having that belief and doing those practices—which Ramesh Balsekar [ch. 7] felt were unnecessary for enlightenment—was itself destined. By the same token, I could even get enlightened against my own will, if it were so destined. So why bother about predestination at all!?

I was deeply touched by Dadaji's personal example and attainment. His pointing out again and again the importance of practice strengthened the roots of meditation even more deeply in me. I am profoundly grateful to him for that.

Spurred on by Dadaji's loving presence, deep peace, gentleness, and fatherly goodwill, I was now happy to continue my odyssey.

Kiran



Kiran in the forest of Bubaneshwar near Pune, in 1994

“There is no cause-and-effect relationship in the awakening process. Awakening is not an event that is going to happen because you are doing something with your mind—be that meditation or any other practice. Awakening is uncaused. It cannot be achieved through effort because you have never lost it.”

Chapter 9

Kiran

was born in Bombay in 1941. Shortly after his birth, a palm reader, seeing his extraordinary full-circle fingerprints, foretold that the boy was destined for great things and would become either a king or a guru. In his youth, Kiran developed a strong interest in spirituality. On leaving school, he studied Hindu philosophy at the Sanskrit College in Thane, near Bombay, which was founded by his first guru, Pandurang-shastri Athavale. He went on to become a lecturer for Chinmayananda's Divine Life Society. In 1967, he became a disciple of Osho [ch. 1], while pursuing the life of an industrialist, householder, and father of two sons and a daughter.

Following Osho's 1981 departure from India for the United States, Kiran sought out a number of other gurus. The one who influenced him most was UG Krishnamurti [see ch. 10].¹ Then, in 1993, he began to teach, sharing his understanding with seekers from all over the world. He travels abroad each year, teaching in a number of countries in Europe and South America, but his permanent residence is in Pune.

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Spiritual Practices Are Obstructions to Awakening

I first met Kiran in Pune in November 1993 at a friend's house. I was in town to visit Dadaji [ch. 8] and, while I was waiting to be admitted into Dadaji's presence, a middle-aged couple arrived. My friend introduced me saying, "This is Kiran, an enlightened Osho disciple who lives in Pune, and his wife, Vinodini. Dadaji is an old acquaintance of theirs." This seemingly casual introduction had an electrifying effect on me. An enlightened disciple of Osho! A gurubhai who had achieved what I had been longing for all these years! Could it be true? Kiran was the first Osho disciple I met who was said to be awakened.

I was intrigued. I wanted to hear the story of his spiritual quest and how it had ended. I wondered if he had practiced the same sadhanas I had performed under the guidance of our common teacher. Had Kiran become awakened while Osho was still alive? Had Osho perhaps given him an individual spiritual transmission and recognized Kiran's enlightenment, unknown to anyone else? How does his realization compare with that of Osho? What could I learn from Kiran's example and life? Such questions raced through my mind. Unfortunately, the social event that evening offered no room for us to converse. But the following evening, at Kiran's invitation, I went to visit him at his residence in Mukundnagar,² near the famous hilltop temple of Parvati [Lord Shiva's consort]. I was excited and very curious to meet him. Four of his disciple friends and I sat in his garden—as friends. At least that's how Kiran put it. With his permission, I videotaped the following conversation.

Seeking is itself the obstruction to realization

Madhukar - How long have you been with Osho?

Kiran - I was his disciple for more than fifteen years.

Madhukar - Up to a point, you and I both traveled the same path with Osho. As a brother seeker of yours, the most important questions I have are: What exactly happened to you? And what did you do or not do to bring about your enlightenment? I want to know if you practiced exactly the same methods and meditations that I did. And if so, why did realization happen to you but not to me and other friends of ours? If you practiced different or additional meditations and methods, what were they? What can I learn from you? Can you assist me and your brother and sister seekers and gurubhais on their spiritual path?

Kiran - For many years, I was traveling together with you all; we were fellow travelers on the path searching for something—searching for truth, searching for the reality of life. While we were traveling together with Osho, we did many things—meditation, therapies, groups, work in the ashram. We did whatever Osho suggested to us. We followed him totally. We surrendered to him totally.

Madhukar - We had the privilege of experiencing Osho's guidance “live” every day, twice a day.

Kiran - Me too—I sat there right in front of him and

listened to his lectures for many years. I was following his suggestions with the hope that one day I would reach my goal of enlightenment. My spiritual and worldly lives were absolutely secure and safe with him. I was absolutely satisfied with him. However, I fell asleep.

Madhukar - How could you fall asleep in the presence of your teacher?

Kiran - When I met Osho for the first time in 1967, I was on fire and my thirst for truth was very strong. But as I came closer to him over the years, I fell—slowly, slowly—asleep. For a long time I didn't notice it. Only when he departed for the States in 1981 did I wake up to this fact—and remembered the search. With great intensity, I took it up again.

Madhukar - What happened then?

Kiran - By and by, I began to understand that something was wrong with searching. I felt that it was wrong to be after something all the time. I woke up to the understanding that I was making a mistake by searching for something, somewhere outside. I came to know that I was making a mistake by going to somebody, by asking for the way, by sitting at somebody's feet, by waiting for something to happen, or by desiring that realization may happen with the help of effort and spiritual practice.

Madhukar - What did you do then? Did you stop practicing?

Kiran - I started to simply watch myself, to watch my mind. I was watching all my inner processes. And—ever so slowly—I began to understand that

the desire, the effort, the doings and practices, were the actual disturbances of my peace. The seeking was the obstruction to realization. Osho had told us many times that we had to drop all our doings and efforts. He said that we had never lost our enlightenment—that it was already our nature. Sitting right in front of him, I had heard him say that so many times. But I could not understand him because I was sleeping and dreaming. I believe that's what happened to all of us—we fell asleep and therefore didn't hear him.

Madhukar - How did dropping all efforts and practices affect your life?

Kiran - I just became an ordinary man. And slowly, very slowly, I began to awaken. I worked in my business and I looked after my family. I did not desire anymore to achieve something spiritually. I was not after anything any longer. I said, "It's there, it's there. Let it happen, let it happen. I am not bothered." The thirst was still there—inside me. That longing remained. But I was not doing anything about it. That's why I stayed away from Osho's physical presence for the last ten years of his life, three of which he lived here in Pune right around the corner.

Madhukar - What happened for you when Osho returned to Pune?

Kiran - I didn't feel a pull to go to the ashram. There was no energy inside me that made me go and see Osho, because in my aloneness everything had started settling within me. Then one day it dawned on me that the search had ended. All my searching just dropped away by itself. I started accepting Existence. I found I could accept myself as I was. I did not desire any change. I was not even asking to become something.

I found myself saying to myself, “It’s okay. It’s fine.

I don’t want to become somebody. I don’t want to get anywhere.” I was not asking for enlightenment anymore. I was just relaxing with myself. I was happy, peaceful, and relaxed with how and what I was in the present moment. All questions had dropped. All questioning and searching were simply finished.

Madhukar - Let me ask you, “Are you enlightened?”

Kiran - For many years, I just sat quietly alone at home on this chair here. I was enjoying nature and myself in silence and aloneness. I did not bother whether this was enlightenment or not. I could feel the silence descending on me. I was feeling close to Existence and to everything and to everybody. Slowly, slowly I was dissolving. In my silence, I was becoming one with everything. Nothing could disturb the peace inside me.

From January 1993 onward, people started coming to see me. This was a surprise for me, too.

Madhukar - So we practiced the same sadhana—except perhaps the most important one: Did I understand you correctly that the only additional spiritual method you applied was basically not doing anything? Your blooming and awakening happened only after all doing was left behind and “just being” remained. Is that correct?

Kiran - That is correct.

Madhukar - Was there anything that triggered your blooming? Was there any kind of cause and effect relationship? Usually we believe that practice leads to the goal. Please, tell me as much as possible about the blooming process and its workings. By describing your process, you may help me to understand my own. Furthermore, through your description, I may come to know where I am in my search.

Kiran - There is no cause-and-effect relationship in the awakening process. That is my basic understanding of the whole spiritual journey. Awakening is not an event that is going to happen because you are doing something with your mind—be that meditation or whatever. Awakening is uncaused. It cannot be achieved through effort, because you have never lost it.

All efforts are taking you away from yourself

Madhukar - Were all of our practices and our efforts in vain then? What was missing in our search for enlightenment with Osho?

Kiran - We forgot the main point: We have to seek the seeker. We always seek somewhere outside. We are always after some goal: We seek enlightenment. We seek buddhahood. We seek so many things. Because we are so busy with seeking, we have forgotten to ask who it is that is seeking. Who is it that wants to become enlightened? Who wants this enlightenment? Who wants to become a buddha? When we forget to ask this question, we go on trying in all directions. We go on making all the effort to seek outside of us.

Who is the seeker? We must go on asking, “Who am I?” And who is asking this question? You are asking this question! You are asking these questions because you want to know who you are. But it is a contradiction. How can you find yourself somewhere when you are not lost anywhere? All efforts and all doing are taking you away from yourself. Therefore, anybody who has awakened could come to “know” only after dropping all doing and all effort.

Searching for enlightenment with the help of the mind is of no use

Madhukar - Please, explain further why, in your understanding, meditating is a mistake?

Kiran - We all were making this basic mistake of undertaking goal-oriented actions. Intentional and purposeful actions are initiated and done by the mind. The mind understands only the language of doing.

I can tell you, “Sit silently, do nothing, the spring comes and the grass grows by itself.” Osho said this so many times. We heard him say it again and again. But we don’t understand what “sitting silently, doing nothing” means. We keep asking, “How to do nothing?” We always want to know what to do, how to do it, and how to reach it—even when the “it” is “do nothing.” All these questions come from the mind.

Madhukar - And what we are—or rather, who we are—is beyond the mind.

Kiran - That's right. In our quest, we are searching for a space which is beyond the mind. It is a space that the mind cannot reach. That space can only be reached when the mind has dropped. Actually, that space remains when the mind is dissolved. The mind is a wrong instrument here; it is of absolutely no use. How could you reach that space by using the instrument of the mind? The mind is actually a hindrance to reaching that space.

The practice of meditations, the undergoing of therapies and groups, and all such nonsense are done by the mind. We all were committing the same mistake. We were even doing meditations sitting right in front of Osho. These practices are actually the obstructions to awakening.

Don't meditate! Simply stop and see!

Madhukar - Are you saying, "Don't meditate!"?

Kiran - Yes. I say, "Drop all your efforts! Drop all your doings! Just stop and see! Watch! Simply look at what is happening. Just drop all desire to become." And when you drop all your doing, the doer starts to dissolve immediately. The doer is the mind. The more the doer dissolves, the more Existence expresses its own doing. And, in one fine moment, you'll find yourself to be free. "Oh God! Is it so? Is this it? This is it!" you will say to yourself. And you just laugh. You just laugh at everything. It's so simple, so easy. But we made it so complicated!

Total frustration leads to total surrender; surrender leads to total acceptance

Madhukar - Your teaching seems to hold that Osho gave us a wrong teaching. He requested us to meditate and practice.

Kiran - As I said, if I tell you to do nothing, the mind will not understand it. What you really are is beyond the understanding of the mind. As long as you are using your mind, the master must give you something to do. He gives you something to do until you become frustrated and exhausted by all your doings. But at some point, you will be finished with all doing. At that time, you will know and feel that you have done everything possible, and that in spite of all your efforts, nothing has happened. Then you come to the point of total frustration. This will lead to total surrender. At that point, you say, "Oh, I can't do anything anymore. I am finished." This surrender will take you to total acceptance. You will start to accept Existence and yourself. And acceptance will cut all the roots of the mind that was nourishing all doing. Without nourishment, the ego will dissolve.

By witnessing what is happening around you and by not doing anything, this state of acceptance will start to come—slowly, slowly. Then you see that everything is just happening. When you come to that point of being the witness, you are "there." You are at the end of your journey.

Madhukar - Okay, you seem to be saying, "Nothing can be done, no teacher can help, no technique or method is useful, and no meditation practice can cause enlightenment to happen." On the other hand, I see seekers coming to you for advice and guidance. And I even notice people sitting and meditating in your meditation room. Did you teach a meditation technique to those people?

Kiran - No. I don't give any techniques. I stick to what I am saying: "Nothing can help!" Sitting with me is not of any help as long as you're not

awakened and as long as you have an urge to do something.

I don't claim to be a master. I am just sitting here as a friend helping you. I am not helping you in the sense that I teach you something or because I know something you don't know. It is as if you were just closing your eyes and crying, "I can't see the light."

I say, "Just open your eyes and you will see that the light is here." This is how I can help. I am telling you, "Just open your eyes!"

Madhukar - This sounds so simple!

Kiran - It is. But for many of you, even "open your eyes" may seem to imply some doing. How can I convey to you that "open your eyes" is not a doing? I have to use the words. Awakening is not even the effort to open your eyes. It is just a waking up. It is like when you wake up from sleep. I see you all asleep, dreaming, and crying. I am just shaking you and waking you up. I say, "Please, wake up! Don't cry! No dreams!" This is what I am doing here.

Madhukar - So why, then, do those people meditate in your cottage over there?

Kiran - I allow the people to sit in the meditation room because for many, many years they have been in the habit of meditating. As long as they still want to enjoy their dreams, they can sit in meditation. I want to keep them with me. I let them sit in the hall so that they don't escape. [laughter] But I

am waiting for the opportunity to hit them and shake them again and again and shout at them, “Please, wake up!” This is what I am doing. [laughter] I am not proposing any method or any doing whatsoever. So if they enjoy sitting there, fine. I know I don’t sit there.

Madhukar - But you sit here as a teacher.

Kiran - When they come out of the hall, I hit them again. I ask them, “What are you doing there?”

Madhukar - What are they doing there?

Kiran - I am providing a space for them to sleep. When they come close to me, I shake them again. I try to wake them up in the hope that they will awaken at some point.

Madhukar - Can you do it just now? Please hit me! Please, wake me up once and for all!

Kiran - I am doing it. We are doing it now. That’s what we are doing in this conversation.

Madhukar - I know.

Kiran - But you are enjoying the dream. What can I do?

Madhukar - What would you do to me if I came out of the meditation room at this moment and sat down opposite you?

Kiran - I keep telling you this is a dream. You are enjoying it. I am sharing my awakening with you, although I know it is of no use to you. It has no meaning at all. If I try to wake you up all the time, I become your enemy. I want to remain your friend. That's why I can't keep on hitting and shaking. Once in while I have to be friendly to you.

Madhukar - Is that why you share dinner after these "friendly meetings" in your house? [laughter]

Kiran - Yes. Sometimes it is difficult for you because I must beat you hard. I know you want to run away from here. But there is no other way.

Surrender to Existence, accept yourself as you are, do everything with total awareness

Madhukar - You claim not to have a teaching. On the other hand, you are suggesting three points to the seeker: One, accept Existence as it is; two, accept yourself as you are; and three, be totally aware of everything you do. For me, these suggestions imply that something actually can be done for enlightenment to happen. To whom are you talking? Who is the listener?

Kiran - This question is asked by the mind. It's a logical question. You know who I'm talking to and who is listening and who is ready for this acceptance. You know it very well. What I really want to say I cannot convey with words. But when I speak to you, I have to use words. That's why I give the three suggestions to enable people to stop their efforts: Surrender to Existence with total trust; accept yourself as you are, with love; do everything with total awareness.

You think that I am giving you a method or a technique when I share my suggestions. If you simply live my suggestions in this very moment, you will find that you are instantly being brought back to your own self. Those suggestions are calling you back to your own home.

A mother is calling her children from the window of the house: "Come children, the meal is ready." The mother wants the children to come home. To make them come home, she tempts them with foods or chocolates. I am doing the same thing with you. I want you to come back to your own home. My suggestions are temptations with which I try to coax you home.

Madhukar - Why is surrendering to Existence so important?

Kiran - When you surrender to Existence, all your efforts drop automatically. For a long time, you have tried to achieve something through the ego. You wanted to mark your place in this world. When you surrender, you come to realize that you are nothing in relation to Existence. You are just a tiny dot. What can you claim as yours in this vast Existence? In it, everything is just happening. You think you can go your own way just because you want to. That's ridiculous!

Madhukar - Well, the human being has reached the moon.

Kiran - So what! It has reached the top of Everest. So what! It has reached the bottom of the ocean. So what! Great achievements! What you are calling great achievements by the human being have no value at all in the spiritual realm. They are like the climb of an ant from the ground to the top of the microphone. The ant's climb means nothing. The achievements of the human being mean nothing as well. But for the ego they mean a lot. Remember, you are nobody in this vast existence. The whole Existence has been working for billions of years. What impact are you going to have on it during your short life of sixty, eighty, or a hundred years? Basically no impact!

You must have trust in Existence, which has given you life on this Earth. Let God decide what is going to happen to you. Why bother? Listen to Existence, which speaks as your own inner voice, and follow it. Trust that He knows what is best for you. Let Existence decide your destination. Don't you decide it.

Madhukar - What does your second suggestion, "Accept yourself as you are," accomplish?

Kiran - Your surrender to Existence in the outer world cuts short the outer journey of worldly achievements. Accepting yourself as you are cuts short the inner journey. You give up all demands for inner growth and inner achievements. You step inwards. When you are no longer focused on an inner journey and spiritual growth, you start to love yourself. Hate is rooted in the nonacceptance of yourself and in the desire to become somebody else. Nonacceptance and hate go together. But acceptance brings love.

Madhukar - Total acceptance is difficult for me because I want to be a better person, inside and outside.

Kiran - Yes. You want to improve yourself, not only on the outside but also on the inside. You want to get rid of all the diseases of the mind like anger, hatred, and jealousy. You keep doing therapy groups and all such nonsense. You keep cleaning the mind. All these activities are part of the inner search. I say, "Why waste time? Just accept yourself as you are. Cut off your inner and outer search altogether!"

Madhukar - If a seeker can follow your suggestion, what is supposed to occur next?

Kiran - Then a miracle happens, a miracle nobody can believe. Surrender and acceptance bring you to the point of witnessing. And no doing, effort, practice, or method was necessary!

By accepting yourself, you are cutting the roots of the mind. The mind survives only as long as you desire to become something. When there is no becoming, there is no goal. Without a goal, where is the mind? It becomes just a beautiful instrument. The moment you accept the mind—which was fighting all the time to become something—the problem is finished. Then you are not fighting with the mind. You aren't trying to win over the mind. You are not cleaning the mind.

This mind is the mud. When you leave it alone, the mud starts settling by itself. Because there is acceptance, the mud settles. Through acceptance,

without any effort or any doing, the mind starts to become quiet. This is a miracle. Your mind will not accept it. It will ask, “How is this peace, silence, and joy even possible without doing and effort?”

Although you were searching everywhere, you couldn't find peace and joy. That's why I call it a miracle. The moment you accept yourself and you listen to the inner voice of Existence, you become a witness. The doer, which is the mind, dissolves. The ego dissolves.

Madhukar c For that to occur, witnessing needs to be cultivated.

Kiran - Correct. When you keep simply witnessing,

you will slowly, slowly begin to realize that you are “just looking” and everything is “just happening.” The sudden recognition and awakening arise that you are not part of the whole worldly rut of problems and sorrow and misery, but instead are part of the whole beautiful Existence.

Madhukar - You mentioned the inner voice. Where does it come into the picture?

Kiran - While you are witnessing and watching everything that happens, you can hear your inner voice and guidance. Now you are just following that inner voice and your inner force, wherever they take you. You got rid of all your bondage, bindings, and clingings by surrendering to Existence. You let things happen and you float in the current of events. You don't swim. You float in the acceptance of What Is and what you are. When you

just relax in the water, the miracle occurs—the current takes you wherever it wants, and you accept it. The current has no destination.

This current is the force that comes through from inside. You keep floating according to the inner voice and the inner current. They are tuned with the life force that is moving them at all times. Floating in this manner is so beautiful. You just keep floating without any effort or any fight. You just keep watching and witnessing. Now you are enjoying the whole Existence.

Madhukar - At this stage, witnessing has become constant and natural. Is that correct?

Kiran - That's right. When you don't let yourself be pulled down by any burden and you stay relaxed, you will notice a lot of joy springing up. Silence begins to arise because there is no hindrance of any kind. And Existence starts expressing itself through your personality. Without any effort, you become quiet. You become joyful. Love starts flowing from you. Energy starts flowing from you. Fragrance starts flowing from you—the fragrance of Existence. Joy, love, beauty, and fragrance are the qualities of Existence.

When you are still, you are in oneness with Existence, which is your own space. Then you have come back to your own home. You have come back to your natural state and you remain there for good. To be in oneness, joy, and love becomes your way of life. You simply live moment to moment. You celebrate each moment with joy. For you, there is no fight anywhere. You enjoy whatever comes your way. This is what I want to share.

Enlightenment is neither a process nor a sudden event

Madhukar - I have heard you say that realization is a gradual blooming process. On another occasion, you said that waking up from a dream is always sudden. How do you reconcile these seemingly opposing statements?

Kiran - It is very difficult to express this “happening” with words. Usually one uses a metaphor to explain it. Often the metaphors of flowering and of waking up from a dream have been used. These metaphors are not to be taken literally. Flowering indicates a slow process or a growing. Waking up stands for a sudden event like lightning. These metaphors are indicating what cannot be said with words. They are only hints. Flowering and waking up are experiences known and understood by everybody. That’s why they are used as indications.

Madhukar - Are you saying that awakening occurs outside of time and space and therefore doesn’t happen either due to a gradual process or a sudden event?

Kiran - Realization has nothing to do with an event—whether it is a slow process or a sudden awakening. Realization means just coming back to your natural state. What is this natural state? When a flower blooms, it is in its natural state. In this natural state, its fragrance starts flowing. The flowering of a flower is not a slow process during which—at some point of time—you observe that it flowers and starts giving its fragrance. It is the state of becoming a flower. The flower experiences being in the state of flowering which is its highest peak.

That flowering is the flowering of the human consciousness, its highest peak, at which you start to give out fragrance. Actually, the fragrance of Existence starts flowing through you. The fragrance is not of the flower. The joy which flows from Existence is expressed as fragrance. This fragrance and this joy start bubbling up in a totally silent space. Silence—the quality of Existence—starts to come up in you.

Madhukar - If you will, Kiran, please explain the meaning of the second metaphor: “Realization is like waking up from a dream.”

Kiran - The whole mind game is similar to a dream. When you wake up, you have total understanding and knowing and clarity. The first understanding is that you were living in the mind, which took you for a ride. When you wake up, you realize that the dream has no reality anymore. At the moment you wake up, the pleasures that you enjoyed in the dream are gone. Thus the enlightened state is similar to the feeling of having woken up.

As I said, these are all metaphors. Don't take them in the literal sense. What really happens is not a slow growth or a sudden enlightenment. Coming back to your natural state means just accepting yourself. When you start to accept yourself—slowly, slowly—you are cutting off the roots of the mind. And at some point, you come to the total understanding. You come back to your own natural rhythm. You become one with the whole Existence. Trees are in that natural rhythm. The birds are in that natural rhythm. You too, you come back to that natural rhythm. Free from all effort of becoming, you are just relaxed. This is what freedom is. Freedom means arriving back at your own home.

Madhukar - One can be told, “Be!” or “Be aware!” or “Accept yourself!” or “Accept existence!” But is it something we can “do”? I believe that acceptance and awareness are actual and existential expressions of an egoless state.

Kiran - These suggestions are the expressions of the enlightened state reflected in words. When you awake from your sleep and from your dreams, you say, “I am awake.” You describe the state of waking with those words. Similarly, you use the words “acceptance” and “awareness” to describe the state of spiritual awakening. To really know the inner awakening, one needs to be awakened. The expressions “acceptance” and “being aware” are merely words describing that inner state.

Enlightenment is the return from spirituality to an ordinary life

Madhukar - When I talk to my friends about you, they often ask me, “Who is this Kiran?” Let me ask you, “Kiran, who are you?”

Kiran - You just tell them that I am an ordinary man. I live like everybody else. There is only one difference between you and me: You are still in the dream and I am awake. I understand that the whole manifestation and life is nothing but a dream, a play. I am playing the whole game. While doing anything, I keep myself detached. I am simply witnessing what is happening. I am simply accepting what is happening. I am simply enjoying life. I have no complaints of any kind. I have no goals or aims to reach or to fulfill. I returned from spirituality to an ordinary life. I am back in my own natural space.

Madhukar - Outwardly, you appear to be ordinary. What is the difference between you and me?

Kiran - Outwardly, I am just ordinary like you. Inside, I have no frustration, no misery. I have total clarity. The more I understood, the more ordinary I became, because I came to understand that I know nothing at all. I am just stunned by this mystery. I am not exerting any effort in order to know or understand something. Who would understand it? From where do I have the knowing and oneness that do not demand any knowledge or understanding? I have it because of the “tuning” that is part of Existence itself.

Madhukar - So what can you claim?

Kiran - I don't claim anything. What is there to claim? When you awaken in the morning from your dream do you claim, “I am awake! I am great!” Is it an achievement? It is a feeling of freedom. You feel freed from all those dreams of suffering. You feel you are coming back home. You are relaxing, enjoying, and celebrating life.

There is nothing to understand, nothing to know, and nowhere to go

Madhukar - If you have no teaching, and you are not a teacher, what function do you have?

Kiran c I am not teaching anything. Teaching implies some knowledge. Teaching is a demand from the mind for someone to understand something.

When you are asking me questions, I am not giving you answers which add to your knowledge. I am just sharing what I have.

Madhukar c What is the difference between sharing and teaching?

Kiran - Sharing is sharing your joy, silence, and understanding. Because I am awake, I share my awakening. Because you cry in your dream, I shake you and try to wake you up.

You may ask someone in your dream, “Please give me some method or some technique which will awaken me!” If that someone answers you and gives you some techniques, he and his methods are also part of the same dream. In fact, you only can be shaken and woken up by someone who is outside the dream. What technique can be applied in a dream? There is no communication possible except to hit you hard and wake you up—shaking you so much so that you wake up. We can share no other thing. When you wake up, you just laugh and I laugh. There is nothing to understand, nothing to know, and nowhere to go. All is a dream. Your practices of methods and techniques for awakening are part of the dream. And the one who is suggesting methods for waking up is also taking part in the dream. You are dreaming about him and he is dreaming about you. No communication is possible.

The real teacher does not allow the student to cling to him

Madhukar - How do you handle people who make you their guru and become attached to you?

Kiran - At all times, I am very alert that I don't become part of somebody else's dream. When I realize that somebody is clinging to me, and he is making me part of his dream, I create a device which forces him to return to his normal waking. If he doesn't wake up, the device forces him to leave me. On the other hand, if I let him dream and cling to me, I create a situation which compels the seeker to get hooked to me. Then I am not helping him, I am harming him. This may sound contradictory. But it is the bitter truth. That is why a real teacher does not allow the student to hang on to him. Rather, he hits him, shakes him, and wakes him up. Therefore, one always hates the person who wakes one up from one's dream—more so when the dream was very beautiful.

Madhukar - Are you a guru?

Kiran - I share what I have understood. I don't claim "I am enlightened" or "I am awakened" or "I am a free bird." I have come to my home, to my own natural space. It is so beautiful there. I invite you all to partake. I want to share it. I don't want it all for myself. I don't want it for my own exclusive enjoyment. It belongs to you too.

I am not afraid of any comments. If somebody misunderstands me, it is his problem. In spite of misunderstandings, I go on hammering and pounding until somebody wakes up and laughs with me. If it was possible for me to wake up, why should it not be possible for you too? Existence is speaking through me.

There is no sat [truth], there is no sang [meeting]!

Madhukar - You say that enlightenment has no cause and that no effort can help it to occur. Why then do you give satsangs and take us out on picnics with you?

Kiran - I am just making all the efforts to wake you up to the understanding that there is no effort to be made and nothing to reach. To tell you this, I need some excuse. Therefore, I create the excuse with the name “satsang.” Because you understand only your language, I have to speak in that language. That’s why I call our meetings

satsang. I am not doing any bhajans in satsang. I am just calling you to come to me in the name of satsang. When you are here, I am talking to you. I am simply waking you up to the fact of my understanding, which is: There is nothing to do. You must only understand the whole game of the mind. I repeat myself endlessly every evening in our meetings which are called satsang. There is no sat—there is no sang!

Madhukar - I like your term, “friendly meeting.”

Kiran - Yes, this is just a friendly meeting in which a friend is speaking with another friend. I am just standing at the corner of the street, telling people that this road doesn’t lead anywhere. If I stood on the street silently, you wouldn’t listen to me or understand me. Therefore, I create a small shop, a guide shop to which you can come to ask for directions. When you visit my shop, I can tell you, “Please, don’t take the path of doing and effort. It doesn’t lead to enlightenment.” The purpose of the signboard “Guide” is to attract the people so that they can be told the truth.

Madhukar - You could put up another sign that reads, “No way!”

Kiran - Once the people come to my shop, I tell them, “There is no way!” [laughter] The signboard “Guide” gives the impression that there is somebody who is able to show the way. I am sitting in the shop playing the guide. The seekers are attracted to the guide. When they enter my shop, I show them that there is no way. Therefore, satsang is just an excuse. A picnic is also an excuse. In your language, to picnic means to be together in nature and share some food. I use the occasion to tell you that there is no way to reach enlightenment through effort. I say, “Just eat, relax, and don’t expect anything.” Is that difficult?

Wherever I am, I say the same thing: “Just go inside yourself! Look within and wake up!” I am using all these tricks to make you listen to this simple understanding.

What touched me most about Kiran was his friendly, innocent smile, as well as his humor. His almost fatherly love came right from his heart. Being in his presence was naturally uplifting. Joy and kindness beamed from his eyes. Kiran extends his deep affection and love not only to his wife and family but to everyone he meets. He referred to each spiritual seeker as “friend.” Besides sharing his caring attention during the Sunday afternoon picnics in the forests surrounding Pune, he often invited us for dinner in his home after satsang.

Kiran cared about everyone. He wanted to see everyone happy. He even visited seekers at their homes or in the hospital when they were ill. In short, he was as much a loving householder as he was a teacher. Once a year, he took his “friends” on a week-long retreat to Goa, a small state on the Indian west coast. Here he emphasized a type of spiritual vacation. He had all who

joined him focus on getting deep rest, letting the psyche unwind and taking time to withdraw from life's usual activities as well as one's mental activities. He invited us to let go and sink into the vast simplicity of just being.

Kiran's guru, Osho, had emphasized the practice of meditation, communal work and the power and transmission of the teacher's direct physical presence. In contrast, Kiran taught that any effort toward enlightenment is actually detrimental to reaching that goal.

Between 1993 to 2000, I had frequent meetings with Kiran. We became dear friends. And very slowly I began to understand that I was making an error by searching for something somewhere outside of myself. I came to feel how important it was to connect with my own truth and became less consumed about finding the perfect teacher.

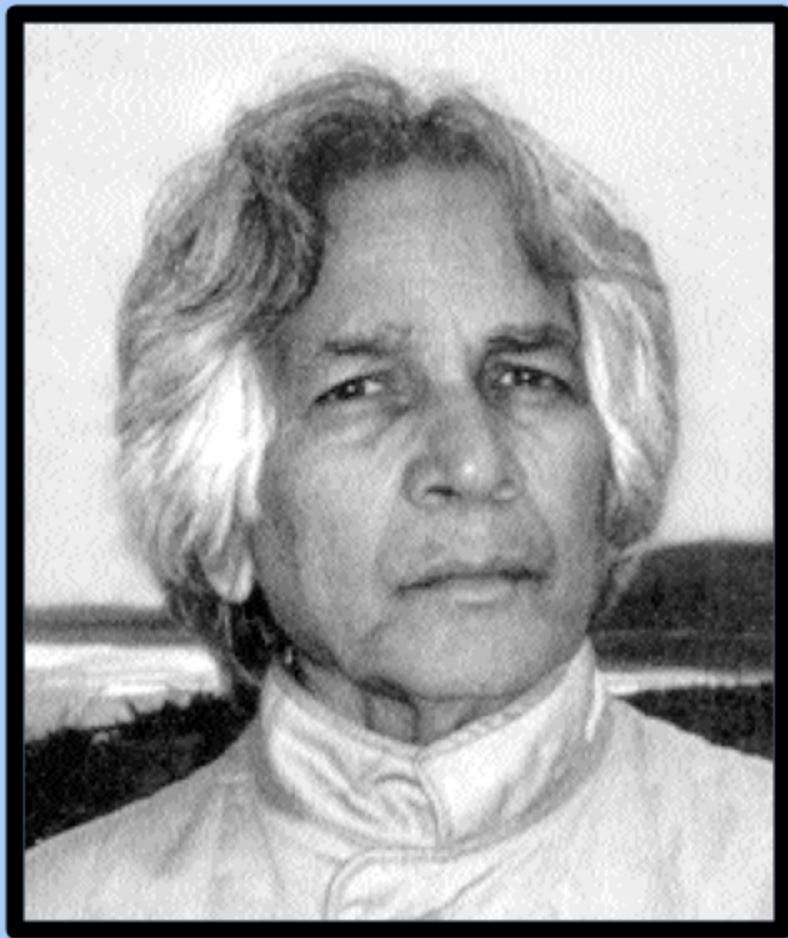
Kiran's five-step teaching, "Become completely frustrated, surrender to Existence, accept yourself as you are, witness everything that arises, and what remains is your true home," was profound. It helped me enormously. However, I wondered what Kiran suggested to all those who hadn't yet reached what he called the "boiling point of frustration." He seemed to have created that beautiful meditation cottage in his garden especially for the type of student who needed to keep meditating in order to reach maturity. At times he sent selected students to other teachers whose guidance in severe austerities and sadhanas facilitated the boiling point of frustration for them.

Without a sampradaya [lineage], Kiran—like his guru Osho—is a Vedanta mystic teaching his own singular path of surrender. Once surrendered to the ordinariness of life through the renunciation of all seeking, what else is to

be done other than celebrating moment-to-moment experience, and attending friendly picnics and spiritual vacations with fellow nonseekers? However, Kiran's joyful sadhana of celebration seems fitting only for those students who have already moved through their frustration, their "dark night of the soul."

Under Kiran's guidance I still did not yet experience a consistent disidentification with my ego. Consequently, I kept practicing the self-inquiry process that I had learned from Sri Ramana's direct disciples. A knowing that was somehow beyond my mind compelled me to continue my odyssey.

UG Krishnamurti



UG in Marin County, California, in 1988

“The dead structure of the mind, which is interested in freeing itself from desire, can never touch what is alive. The mind and its desires can never

touch life and what lives. By wanting to free yourself from desires, you merely replace one desire with another.”

Chapter 10

UG Krishnamurti

was born into a wealthy Brahmin family on July 9, 1918, in the village of Masulipattam in Andhra Pradesh, India. His childhood was steeped in the Hindu religion and the philosophy of the Theosophical movement. His grandfather's house was frequented by monks, renunciates, religious scholars, pundits, gurus, mahatmas [great souls], and swamis. There were endless discussions on philosophy, comparative religions, occultism, and metaphysics, and by the time he was twenty, U.G. Krishnamurti—or UG, as his friends and students called him—had met hundreds of gurus and holy men. He spent seven summers in the Himalayas studying classical yoga with Swami Shivananda, and in 1939, he traveled to Tiruvannamalai to visit Sri Ramana Maharshi.

UG studied philosophy and psychology at the University of Madras. He married in his mid-twenties—a marriage that lasted seventeen years—and had four children. He became a public speaker, first on behalf of the Theosophical Society and later as an independent platform orator in India and in the United States. During this time he came to know his famous namesake, J. Krishnamurti. In 1963, he took up residence in the Swiss village of Saanen with his friend and fellow traveler, Valentine de Kerven. In 1969, he experienced what he labeled the “calamity,” or the “mistake,” of enlightenment. He has established a reputation as a controversial and uncompromising teacher—some even call him the “anti-guru.” UG travels frequently to various parts of the world to meet and guide his followers and others who seek him out. He says, “I have no message for humankind. But of one thing I am certain: I cannot help you solve your basic dilemma or save you from self-deception—and if I can't help you, no one can.”

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The Worst Desire Is the Desire for Enlightenment

I first heard of U.G. Krishnamurti in April 1993. During one of Papaji's satsangs, a seeker referred to UG and his declaration that he didn't "give a damn about spiritual experiences." I was intrigued by this surprising statement, and over the next few months, I read all the books I could find on UG and his teachings. I was shocked that he referred to his own enlightenment as a "calamity" and a "mistake."

Less than a year later, in January 1994, I met UG in person. During my visit to the Ramanashramam in Tiruvannamalai, I heard that he was staying at the nearby hill station of Yercaud, as was his custom during his annual visits to India. A three-hour taxi ride took me to Yercaud, and I found my way to the bungalow he was renting there. As soon as he saw me, he shouted out, "Why have you come here? Go home! I can't give you anything. There is nothing to get! Go home!" I was surprised, of course, but I wasn't going to give up that easily. Perhaps because at that time I was feeling deeply disillusioned about the spiritual search, I actually found UG's direct, no-nonsense approach strangely appealing. I wanted to understand why he thought that a student couldn't be assisted by a teacher in his or her quest for enlightenment. I also wanted to know if and how the spiritual quest could be dropped. In fact, I was interested in whatever he had to say—and more important, how he had come to his unusual and startling conclusions about the spiritual journey.

Hoping to pacify him, I handed over two loaves of brown bread that had been freshly baked by some Western seekers in Tiruvannamalai. Brown bread is quite a rarity in the villages of southern India, and I thought it would be a treat for him. But UG just gave it a scornful glance and

exclaimed, “That’s the worst! Brown bread! Give it to the dogs! I don’t want it!” Fortunately,

I had also brought some cheese for him, and this he received happily enough.

“I hate spiritual seekers!” he declared some minutes later.

“Well, who else would come and visit you?” I asked.

But he ignored the question and went on: “I haven’t come across even one single virgin. All these seekers are running from guru to guru and prostituting themselves to them. Many are widows of Ramana Maharshi, Nirsargadatta Maharaj, J. Krishnamurti, and Rajneesh. More are divorcees of Poonjaji, Mahesh Yogi, and others.” At this point, I saw my chance, and introduced myself as a widow of Rajneesh and a divorcee of Poonjaji. I said I had a number of questions to put to him and that I was hoping to videotape our conversation. Somewhat reluctantly, he consented to this, and we arranged to meet the following morning.

A transcript of that interview, which was attended by five of his disciples, is given below.

I don’t know what happiness is; therefore, I can never be unhappy

UG - Why are you here?

Madhukar - I would like to ask some burning questions I have.

UG - I am sure you have read some of my books.

Madhukar - Yes.

UG - Attributed to me. The authorship is attributed to me. After reading those books, how come you still felt like coming and seeing me in person?

Madhukar - I needed to meet you in person.

UG - That means the books have not done their job.

Madhukar - Well, they started to do the job. But I would say I need final clarification on a few topics.

UG - Has it ever occurred to you that all the

clarifications we seek clarify only thought? Thought can never, ever help us to understand anything. The one thing that I emphasize—overemphasize—is that there is nothing to understand. Hearing me saying this, you may very well say it's a joke that I sit here and agree to talk to you. But I know that

there is not going to be any dialogue or any conversation between the two of us. Our talk is bound to be in the nature of a monologue.

Madhukar - The first question is, “Are you happy?”

UG - You see, that question never occurs to me. I never ask myself if I am happy or not. For all practical purposes, I don't think I ever feel happy at all. That's why I don't even know what happiness is. Therefore, I can never be unhappy either.

Madhukar - I mean blissful happiness, a blissful state. Are you permanently in a blissful state?

UG - Such a state does not exist at all. There is no such thing! We have been brainwashed for centuries into believing that there is such a thing as a blissful state of eternal happiness. This is utter nonsense. Only a person who believes himself to be in a blissful state talks about his being in the blissful state. And such a person wants to share that blissful state with others. But actually, you have no way of knowing whether you are in a blissful state or not.

Madhukar - From my own experience I do not know bliss as a long-lasting state either. But at times I am overcome by feelings of joy and bliss.

UG - I did this kind of sadhana when I was young and stupid. At some point I asked myself, “How the hell do I know that I am in a blissful state?” That

was when I suddenly realized how stupid it was to believe in this kind of nonsense.

Obviously the knowledge of the blissful state that is passed on to me is from one who tells me that the state I am in is called blissful. "This is bliss. You are blissful. You are in a blissful state," he says. Otherwise—if I wasn't told—I would have no way of knowing whether I am in a blissful state, or in the state of eternal happiness, or that I am bored, or that I am in any kind of state. The experience itself never, never tells me that I am in a blissful experience. And after having known a so-called blissful experience for the first time, there is bound to be a demand to have more blissful experiences and to have fewer not-so-blissful experiences.

Every blissful sensation is bound to turn itself into pain

Madhukar - In fact, within myself I experience a demand for permanent bliss.

UG - Yes. The gurus, the holy men, and the conmen of enlightenment that we have in our midst today offer us permanent bliss. This promise has been passed on to us from generation to generation. Because we are brainwashed into believing in this centuries-old offer, we continue to believe in the experience of bliss, which our gurus and holy men claim to experience nonstop.

I don't know if what I am saying makes any sense to you. That's why I keep telling people that the great spiritual heritage of Hinduism, which many Indians are so proud of, was born out of acid heads and . . .

Madhukar - . . . bliss junkies.

UG - Yes. They are living in jungles and forests. They lead isolated lives. They are living in the midst of nature, drinking what is called soma [rejuvenating] juice. Soma is not a chemical drug. The high or the experience they claim to undergo is the shoddy experience called bliss, beatitude, immensity, or enlightenment. I am not saying anything against pleasure. But we definitely have bliss placed before us as the ultimate pleasure, right? So these experiences are nothing but mere pleasure experiences which you can share with others. All those spiritual experiences, however extraordinary they may be, are in the area of pleasure. Please, don't misunderstand me! I'm not saying anything against pleasure. But when these petty experiences of bliss occur, there arises the drive to share these pleasure moments with others.

Madhukar - Okay, let me replace the word "bliss" with the word "pleasure." Did you . . .

UG - It makes no difference. If you are going for a walk and you see a beautiful spot, you exclaim, "Look! What a beautiful spot this is!" Or those of you interested in sunrises or sunsets suddenly stop and say, "What a beautiful sunset it is!" You want the chap who is walking along with you to experience your feeling of beatitude and bliss too. You want to share your experience with someone else. Only pleasure can be shared with others. But in the very nature of things, every pleasure is also pain. Actually, there is no pleasure at all.

Madhukar - What do you mean by saying that?

UG - The moment you experience a pleasurable sensation in your body or mind, the body rejects it. It doesn't want any pleasurable sensations. It doesn't want any of this bliss, beatitude, or immensity the sages have been speaking of for centuries. The body is not interested in bliss and beatitude at all because the living organism is, by itself, already in an extraordinarily peaceful and blissful state. It is not interested in anything that you have created through the use of your thought. Not interested, it rejects bliss. The moment you call a sensation a blissful sensation, it is bound to turn itself into pain.

Madhukar - What about the question of happiness?

UG - The moment you say to yourself that you are happy, the demand to keep the happiness going or to make it last longer than its natural duration is bound to turn that happy state into an unhappy state. Now you are stuck with an unhappy state. You are stuck with misery. You are stuck with pain. And that's all there is to it. You have to live in misery and you have to die in misery.

Madhukar - I am, or perhaps I was, a seeker of bliss.

UG - What is it that you are seeking?

Madhukar - I was seeking enlightenment. I was an enlightenment addict. My spiritual search was something like an addiction.

UG - There is a way and there are methods with which you can free yourself from alcoholism. But there is no way you can free yourself from this drug of enlightenment. You remain addicted all your life. And the gurus and holy men assure you that there is another life to come. If you don't reach the permanent blissful state in this life, you have to wait for another life, that's all.

The demand either for enlightenment or against it are one and the same

Madhukar - Somehow my spiritual search went on automatically. At some point, my body-mind mechanism became possessed with seeking. The seeking went into my system and it stayed there as if it were programmed into it.

UG - That video camera over there is recording what is going on here. The camera has no demand to know what this is all about. The camera has no demand to use the recorded knowledge in order to bring about change. We are really not different from that video camera.

Now you could ask me a very clever question: Would the camera be able to record on its own what is being said here?

Madhukar - Of course not.

UG - Somebody is needed to operate the camera; otherwise it can't record. Therefore, it is the operator of the camera who is the one with a certain demand or intention, because of which he is recording this talk.

As far as the mechanism of recording what is being said here is concerned, the human being is not different from that camera. The camera is not interested at all in replaying its recording after the recording is done.

Madhukar - But I surely am!

UG - That's right. You will later lie on the sofa and indulge in this sort of autoeroticism of watching the recording, if I may use this—for some people—disgusting word. What for? The camera is not interested in finding out what is recorded here. It is not using the recording and its content to achieve something somewhere. Why are you interested in replaying this recording so often? Why?

Every time you look at the screen, you have to tell yourself, "That is a video recording." Why do you have to do that? Nobody is asking you to say what it is. Through such a constant demand to know, you maintain the continuity of the mind.

Madhukar - Now let me come to my main question. As I said earlier, I feel as though I have become an enlightenment addict. Is there any way to get rid of this addiction? Is there anything I can do to detox the system from desiring spirituality? Or does the addiction drop by itself?

UG - Not a thing! You can't do a thing about it. Because the one who wants to be freed from the addiction and the one who made you an addict in the first place are one and same. That is why there is not a damn thing that you can do about it.

Madhukar - It is almost as if I now need a guru and a path or a method for dropping the search for enlightenment. The demands of desiring enlightenment and of dropping the search for it seem to be quite similar in nature.

UG - Both are of the same trip! You tried to use a process to satisfy your demand for enlightenment. What makes you think that by using the same process you can be freed from the demand to end the search? Not a chance! Earlier you were possessed by the demand to be enlightened, and whatever the reason may be, now you are disillusioned. You are no longer interested in becoming enlightened. You want to stop or destroy the momentum of your spiritual search. The demand to stop it now, and the demand which made you begin the spiritual journey, are both a demand of the same mind. So, there is no way out.

It's better to run away with your best friend's beautiful wife than to wait for moksha

Madhukar - If nothing can be done to advance in spirituality, it must mean that there are no good and bad desires, or good and bad actions. Is there such a thing as spirituality at all?

UG - That's the game you want to play. You desire something extraordinary. I tell you, you are not at all interested in a desire. You don't even know what it is that you want. Therefore, you don't even know what you are doing. You are trying to free yourself from all desires. By trying to be desireless, you are simply replacing one desire with another desire.

If your desire is not burning enough, some joker tells you that you should make it more burning. Then you believe you have a burning desire. But the truth is, you don't have a burning desire! You don't even have a desire!

Madhukar - Because wanting to free myself from desire is only a thought? Is that what you mean to say?

UG - That's right. You see something living. The dead structure of the mind, which is interested in freeing itself from desire, can never touch what is alive. The mind and its desires can never touch life and what lives. By wanting to free yourself from desires, you merely replace one desire with another. I don't know why you should be free of desire. Wanting to be free of desire is only a thought—nothing else. Why do you tell yourself you should be free of desire? Why?

Madhukar - Because I believe that being free of desire, I will be lastingly happy.

UG - No! No! Because the holy men tell you, "You should be free from desires!"

But let me tell you the truth: You'll never, ever be free from desires. You will never even know what desire is. What you are doing all the time is being busy with a desire that is not there. You dare not look at an existing desire. You don't dare to touch a real desire. A desire arises and it's gone. But you are interested only in doing something that is not there because some jokers tell you, "You must have a burning desire." A desire simply

burns itself out—not through anything you do, and not because you made it a burning desire.

Madhukar - Do you think that also holds true for the desire for enlightenment?

UG - Absolutely. It doesn't matter if you have a desire for liberation or to become a multimillionaire or to run away with the most-beautiful wife of your best friend. All desires are the same! A desire is a desire. It's better to run away with your best friend's beautiful wife than to wait for moksha and liberation and freedom from births and deaths. I'm not advocating the theft of your best friend's wife. I'm just trying to emphasize that there is no difference among all desires. We're all brainwashed into believing that enlightenment will give us permanent happiness and permanent bliss.

Surely, God—whatever invented Him—is the ultimate pleasure. What do we do when we go to the temple and pray? For what do we ask? We beg for material goodies. We are not ready to place the demand for enlightenment on the same level as the demand for material things.

If you want to get enlightened through me, that's the very worst thing. The worst desire is the desire for enlightenment.

The question “Who am I?” is a stupid one

Madhukar - One more question! Ramana Maharshi . . .

UG - Oh, no! Don't ask anything about Ramana Maharshi!

Madhukar - My question is about happiness. No-thought and happiness . . .

UG - If he was a happy man, he never would have suggested asking the stupid question "Who am I?" The question "Who am I?" implies that there is some "I," the nature of which I do not know. And I have to find out the real "I." As far as I am concerned, the only "I" that I know of is the first-person singular pronoun. I don't know any other "I." Why the hell should I sit there cross-legged and with an erect back and inquire into the nature of the real "I"? First of all, the question is grammatically wrong. You should ask the question "What am I?" You must have a lot of answers for that question!

How can you experience anything if there is no thought?

Madhukar - The Maharshi says, "When there is no thought, the mind experiences happiness."

UG - When there is no thought, how can the mind experience anything? Have you ever asked that question? They put us on a merry-go-round. How can you experience anything when there is no thought? Without mind, there is no experience. We're made to believe that there is a thoughtless state that we can experience. First, why do you want to be in a thoughtless state?

Madhukar - In a moment of contentment or satisfaction —for instance when a strong desire has just been fulfilled —there is no thought containing a further desire or aversion. Perhaps that is what is meant by “thought-free.” In such moments I feel complete and blissful. This is why I want to be thoughtless.

UG - If you were in a thoughtless state, you would drop dead here. Then we could sell your video camera and make some money. [laughter] That is the great use of such thoughtlessness.

A lot of people come and tell me that they have been in a thoughtless state; they have experienced the total absence of thought. Those people were kidding themselves. But they could not fool me! How can you experience a state in which there is no thought? In any experience, thought is very much there.

Madhukar - When happiness occurs, it is being recognized or witnessed as happiness. That's my experience. Is that all there is to it? Do you know something more about the experience of happiness that I don't know?

UG - There is nothing else. There's nothing other than that. We are not ready to accept this fact. We think, “How could all the people who say otherwise be wrong?” We all want to be great sages, saints, and saviors of mankind. The sages and holy men con themselves and they con us all. Why should we allow ourselves to be conned?

That's it for today! Thank you! Bye-bye!

Madhukar - Thank you.

UG - You can do whatever you like with this interview.

The holy men don't fit into their own descriptions

My next meeting with UG occurred some two years later, in May 1996, at his flat in Bangalore. I was visiting K. Ramaswami and his wife, who had been devotees of Ramana Maharshi since 1935. The previous day, UG had come to visit my hosts' home. They were old acquaintances, for in 1969—shortly after the occurrence of what UG called the calamity of enlightenment, when he was stranded without money—he had been invited to live in their home. UG spent about six months with them at that time.

Usually, the enlightened one proclaims that the final spiritual awakening was the ultimate positive event in their life. I wondered why, in contrast, UG's "enlightenment event" was described as a mistake or a calamity by him. Did his spiritual quest come to an end through a process of disillusionment? Was I experiencing a similar course? Was my disillusionment perhaps a necessary stage on the path of awakening?

Fifteen other seekers were present when the following conversation was recorded.

Madhukar - Were you ever interested in enlightenment? Did you have the desire for enlightenment?

UG - Not at all. I never wanted enlightenment. I never wanted enlightenment for myself. But I wanted to find out whether such a thing as enlightenment exists at all. I wanted to find out what such a man “had” who claimed that he was in an enlightened state. What does he have that I don’t have? Tell me!

Madhukar - He has happiness. He has permanent happiness. That’s what is said about him.

UG - They are creating these states by practicing meditations, by sitting in a cave, and by running away from their luxurious homes.

When they had become enlightened at the end of their practice, I asked them the question, “How the hell do you know that you are enlightened? Yesterday you were saying you were not enlightened. Today you say you are enlightened. The same thing —the mind—that told you yesterday that you were not enlightened, tells you today that you are enlightened. That means you are still at square number one.”

Madhukar - They say that something happened to them suddenly from one moment to the next. Actually, enlightenment happens, but it doesn’t happen in time. In any case, they say they are enlightened.

UG - No, they are not enlightened! Now listen! I had no problem with their claims. My problem was their description of how an enlightened man functions. There is a dichotomy. Their conduct of life was different from the description of how an enlightened being is supposed to function—mind

you, according to their own description! The discrepancy between what they preached and how they actually and existentially lived in their day-to-day life bothered me. The holy men don't fit into their own descriptions.

Madhukar - What was your conclusion?

UG - I came to the conclusion that either the description is false or these enlightened ones are false. My

interest was to go to the source. I wanted to know what was false. Their teaching was of no help to me. I repeat, the teaching must be false or they are false. If there is anything true in a teaching, it should produce practical results. If a teaching doesn't produce results, go to the enlightened person or your teacher and tell him, "I have not benefited

in any way from your teaching." And walk away from him! Fast!

Madhukar - To another teacher. [laughter]

UG - No! Don't be an idiot! Don't replace his teaching with another teaching! Don't replace this teacher with another teacher! If you have seen one guru, you have seen them all. That is how I was going about enlightenment at that time. I didn't go around from guru to guru. I went only to two gurus, Shivananda and Ramana Maharshi.

Madhukar - How did you meet Sri Ramana?

UG - Some friends dragged me to see Ramana. At that time I didn't have the rich vocabulary I am using today. Today I can call him an arrogant *#!? [UG uses a derogatory word]. He had said to me, "I can give you what I have. I can give you enlightenment, but can you take it?" What a monumental arrogance of that *#!? to say such a thing: "I can give it to you but can you take it?" He was distributing the same old nonsense.

Madhukar - What can Sri Ramana give?

UG - The same old nonsense!

Madhukar - But what can he actually give?

UG - Whatever he has.

Madhukar - What does he have?

UG - I don't know. That's what I wanted to find out. That's why I asked him, "Whatever you have, can you give it to me?"

"I can give it to you, but can you take it?" the arrogant *#!? said to me.

Then I said to myself, "This is the same old story that I have heard throughout my life. Perhaps I am not ready for that kind of taking. Perhaps I have not done enough sadhana yet to deserve what you can give to me." Then I thought, "I don't care what you have!" That was the end of searching. Finished! I had to meet only these two fellows to come to a conclusion. I didn't need to shop around any longer and visit more of these prostitutes called gurus. That was all.

The hunger for certainty about enlightenment burns itself out

Madhukar - So you were in search of enlightenment at some point in your life. Your account indicates that you had a desire to get answers to your questions from a guru.

UG - Where? When? No! Not to that extent! I did not shop around for gurus.

Madhukar - You said you met Swami Shivananda and that you went to the Ramanashramam to meet Sri Ramana Maharshi.

UG - That's all. My search ended there.

Madhukar - Okay. A visit to only one single guru is enough to prove the fact that you were seeking something. For me, that means you were a seeker

at some point in your life, just like myself. Perhaps your search didn't take as long as mine.

UG - Today I can totally reject all gurus—all of them.

Madhukar - Fine, but . . .

UG - Listen to me! At the time of my search, the certainty [that something like enlightenment exists or not] was missing in me.

Madhukar - I would like to know how you got that certainty.

UG - As I said previously, I came early on to the conclusion that all gurus were fake. On the other hand, to become absolutely certain [about the issue of enlightenment] was the most important demand for me. I had taken the stand that I could not be certain of anything that was said unless I tested its validity. If what was said referred to me, I had to be absolutely sure of its truth and validity.

Madhukar - At a certain time in your life, didn't you find yourself with the demand for absolute certainty within yourself? And at a later point in your life, you found yourself not searching for anything anymore because somehow you had become certain. Because of this certainty, all demands had dropped. Is that what happened?

UG - No, no! Listen! Unfortunately, the hungry people are satisfied with the crumbs. Unfortunately, the seekers are satisfied with the crumbs that all these teachers

are throwing at them. I was not satisfied with crumbs. I wanted the real food, not this spiritual manna [food from the gods]. Then the time came when I realized that no matter what I gained, my hunger would not get satisfied. That's all. So, what happened? The hunger burned itself out. That is exactly the state I am in today.

Madhukar - How did you become certain? Did you get your certainty through answers that were given to you in response to your questions?

UG c No. I didn't get answers to my questions. My hunger was not satisfied. The more food I got, the hungrier I became. I was getting fatter and fatter with knowledge because the answers of the holy people were only adding to my knowledge. That was all that I was doing—nothing else. Their answers had not helped me. But over time, the questioning burned itself out. The questions are not there anymore, although I never got any answers for them.

The questions that remain for me today are very simple. They are questions regarding one's safe and proper functioning in the world. All other questions in which you are interested are born from the answers that you already have. The real reason for your asking questions is to fortify your knowledge.

Madhukar - I would like to know at which specific point your asking questions stopped. Was there an event that made it stop?

UG - Do you want an answer? You don't want the answer to your question! You want a confirmation. You are not satisfied with the answer that you already have—which was given to you by others. That's the reason why you are asking questions. Otherwise, you wouldn't be asking questions. What I am saying is, I don't ask those questions because there are no answers to those questions.

Madhukar - You didn't really answer my question. Let me repeat, was there an event that . . .

UG - [interrupting] If there is any answer to your question, the answer will burn the question out—totally. You keep asking because your question is not burned out yet. Your question is born from the answer that is already there in you. On the other hand, when you burn out the question, the answer burns itself out, too. In that case, there is no need anymore to ask anybody anything. Then there is no need for any answers.

Madhukar - You have said that there is no such thing as enlightenment. On the other hand, you talk about an event that happened to you in 1969. You call the event the calamity. You describe and acknowledge the experience in great detail in your book *Mind Is a Myth*. You call it a very extraordinary event. You say it changed your life. At the same time, you keep denying that the “calamity” has a special meaning.

UG - I understand your question. You see, you are forcing me to say something about something I do not know. You are asking me from the point of view of how an enlightened person is supposed to be. He is supposed to be in a permanent and eternal blissful state. He is supposed to live above and beyond the normal life the ordinary mortal is stuck with. That is the point of view from which you are asking your question.

Madhukar - What's wrong with my viewpoint?

UG - If you are lucky, you may throw that point of view out of your system —completely. If you are fortunate, all that is contained in that viewpoint of yours may evaporate completely. In my case, I realized that I actually didn't want the content of such a view. Rather, it dawned on me that I was actually looking for a man like UG. This man! UG! [he points to himself] The UG of that time was a falsification of this [points again]. For a long time, I wasn't aware that UG was actually looking for this here. [indicates himself again]. I was busy going away from myself. I was going everywhere else. I looked everywhere else. I looked into the scriptures and into all the traditional stuff. I went to those two gurus and to some spiritual institutions. I studied the revelations. I read what the teachers had to say. And I looked into spiritual practices and methods. I wanted to find out why all the spiritual stuff existed, and what it was all about, and why there were different systems.

Madhukar - Perhaps you wanted to know the deeper meaning of what is called spirituality.

UG - I was irritated by the psychological and spiritual slang that is used in dealing with these topics. I believed that there was a deeper meaning hidden behind all the jargon that is used. That is why I needed to test for myself

what was said. Only after testing could I reject what was wrong—if there was something wrong. You see, I was important. I felt that I was important. I thought, “It is important to find out how I am functioning. I have desires. Why should I condemn my desires? I have all those things: desire, aversion, anger, etcetera.”

Madhukar - I suppose you wanted to know why the gurus and teachers were posing as persons who were free from desires and all those things that you had.

UG - Absolutely. I had noticed that the enlightened men were not functioning in the enlightened way that they themselves were describing. Why did they want me to be free of my desires? Why did they want me to be in a desireless state? What for? They were creating a problem for me which didn't exist before I was told about the desireless state.

I don't even know what desire is. I am not even doing anything when I go after a girl. I am practically abused by the charm of a girl like the one over there [points across the room]. By just being there, she is creating an attraction and a desire in me. Am I doing anything here? No, I am not doing anything here. What am I supposed to do here?

Madhukar - Well, perhaps from a perspective of selflessness, any arising desire is not to be immediately acted on.

UG - I am just an ordinary guy functioning exactly like everybody else. I am not condemning myself into being a spiritual man or an enlightened man who is above the ordinary man.

But look at the enlightened man! He says, “I am an enlightened and pious man. How can I be attracted to a girl? I am not attracted to the girl because I have no desires.” Because of his pretense of being enlightened or spiritual, a so-called enlightened person’s action has moved away from the actuality of a given situation. But life initiates constant, automatic, natural movements that result in actions. All actions are stimulated by either attraction or aversion.

In stark contradiction to the facts of life and nature, the enlightened people are telling me that it is my desire when I am attracted to a girl.

Madhukar - And in their eyes such a desire is not helpful on the spiritual path.

UG - Exactly. They are telling me that they are above such an attraction. Come on! They are lying. Whom do they want to fool?

Madhukar - What happens to you when you are attracted to a girl?

UG - Girl or no girl, there is no movement here. You see, I am not moving here. [points to his heart] There is no problem here. But should I say I am above, and detached from, any attraction because of this specific condition of mine? Should I call myself an enlightened or a pious man because of it? I am just the way I am. My specific individual condition doesn’t make me condemn attraction or any other movement in others. How could I condemn anybody else? But the so-called enlightened people are in the habit of condemning other people’s desires.

Madhukar - The gurus say that after enlightenment, there is no personal volition and “doership” anymore in their actions. Without personal doership, there cannot be any desire.

UG - [Shaking his head and laughing] They are fooling you. You cannot experience what is not already known to you. What you don't know, you cannot experience at all. Because of this fact I can say with absolute certainty that the holy men are not free from the desires they condemn.

Madhukar - Do you mean to say that the holy men and gurus know sex, jealousy, greed, anger, etcetera, from their own experiences, but condemn such “defilements” in others? In short, they don't walk their talk.

UG - Absolutely. Let me give you an example.

That joker J. Krishnamurti said on the platform, “The thought of sex never enters my mind.” After his death, it came to light that that hypocrite had a sexual relationship with the wife of his best friend for thirty years! I am not condemning the man. My admiration for the man is very profound. I admire him because he kept the whole thing under the carpet for so long. What a successful man! Two women were sexually involved with J. Krishnamurti. Usually the secrecy of a relationship cannot be kept secret if two women are involved in it. In spite of their jealousy, both women kept silent. Krishnamurti's case is a rare case.

Madhukar - If the calamity of yours was not an enlightenment experience, can we call it just an experience? What did the calamity mean for you?

UG - No, it was not an experience, because it cannot be shared with you. You have a difficulty here.

Madhukar - But for yourself? Was it an experience for you?

UG - An experience can be shared with others. Pleasure can be shared with others. To be able to share an experience, we both need to have similar sets of ideas and concepts about something. We can go for a walk and see the sunset together. You say, "Look at the beautiful sunset!" We both are looking at the same thing because you want to share the pleasure with me.

Madhukar - It is clear to me that no experience—not even a common experience like watching a sunset—can really be shared. Looking at the same sun at the same time, we both will experience the event differently.

UG - Yes, the experiences are different. Not even a

sunset can be shared with anybody else. Therefore, how could something like the calamity be shared with someone else who has nothing to share because he doesn't share the same event? Furthermore, the calamity was not an experience in the sense of experiencing an objective thing. It was an experience of a different category.

You have to take my word for what I am going to tell you now in this room in which we have this nonexistent conversation. In spite of my calamity

experience, the thought that I am different from you never, never, never enters my mind. The thoughts, "I am special," or "I am different from you," or "I am a transformed individual," or "I am an enlightened man" have never crossed my mind. You have to take my word for what I say. Take it or leave it!

Madhukar - But the calamity happened, didn't it? What was it?

UG - The calamity happened. But the calamity was not an event in which this person became enlightened. The calamity was the understanding that I have always been the same bugger. I was still the same bugger who was always attracted to beautiful girls. [laughter] But if I had condemned myself into being a religious man or an enlightened being, it would not have been permissible to be attracted to a woman. I don't condemn myself anymore. The building up is absent now.

Madhukar - Building up of what?

UG - The building up of desire is absent. Now it's much more interesting and much more exciting to embrace and kiss a woman when attraction arises. Let's have some fun and make love!

Madhukar - Let me ask you one more time. If the calamity was not an experience and not enlightenment, what was it then?

UG - It was not an experience that I can share with you. Sharing it with you would mean I start a big organization. And you or some other people will

give me some eighty million dollars or some real estate. And others make a living out of me. The truth is, I don't even know how to survive in this world. [laughter] Why then should I create an opportunity for others to make a living out of me?

Thank you!

The “path of total burnout” must be walked like a lion

That was the last time I visited UG. Although he was quite irreverent, his message was refreshingly different from what I had learned and studied up to that point in time.

The absence of any how-to in his teaching serves not only as the hallmark of UG's “nonteaching,” but it also functions as the most important device in a student's burnout process. As far as I could observe, UG was one of the few people I met who walked his talk in the spiritual realm as well as in his day-to-day life. He spoke and acted from his heart and mind without holding back, or without any “building up of desire,” as he would put it.

One early morning, he displayed his characteristic lightness of being, humor and innocent directness. While he was heatedly challenging my 85-year-young friend K. Ramaswamiji about the latter's high-minded and pious reverence for Sri Ramana Maharshi, UG's eyes caught sight of one of the beautiful female seekers in the room. Addressing her, he suggested, “Allow your beauty more appreciation. Why are you dressing so conservatively? Come on, loosen up, and show your beauty.” The woman blushed. But without replying a word she took off her light sweater,

revealing a bit more of the voluptuous beauty that was hiding under her shirt. “Beautiful, beautiful!” UG exclaimed, “Go on! That’s right, go on! Why don’t you strip for our friend Ramaswami!?” In the face of this looming disaster, my devout friend Ramaswamiji began to visibly tense up while the woman blushed even more. Mischievously smiling and patting the old man on the shoulders, UG called the strip off. Addressing Ramaswamiji he exclaimed, “My dear friend, this is holy! Life as it unfolds is the only holiness I know of.”

As hard as I tried, I couldn’t get clear-cut answers from UG to three of my most important questions: “Does enlightenment exist or not?”; “Was the ‘calamity’ an actual enlightenment occurrence?”; and, “Just how can a seeker reach the point of total burnout?”

On investigating these issues further after my meeting with UG, I heard from several of his long-term admirers (UG despises disciples and devotees) that he frequently affirmed that his burning-out process actually completed itself with what he termed the “mistake” of enlightenment. Yes, that event had occurred; yes, all questions were totally and finally burned out; yes, direct, spontaneous living occurred in his life since then; and he adds, “I am in no way different from you. Call this fact whatever you like.”

By keeping up an aura of mystery around these issues, UG remained an engaging figure for me. He was fun, sweet, outrageous, fresh, original, surprising, obnoxious, and twenty years younger looking than his age. Even though UG denies being a guru, I dare to call him a mystic who propagates the path of surrender and acceptance. Doesn’t his statement, “Life as it is remains when all questions have burned out” remind us of the vaunted “chop wood, carry water” practice—the last and highest “practice” that remains for a Zen adept to the end of his or her life—and of which the old Zen masters have talked down through the ages? Most probably UG will laughingly swear at me and brand me with all sorts of names on hearing me

calling him a teacher of the path of acceptance. But he would certainly smile mischievously about being called a Zen anti-guru.

Not belonging to any sampradaya [traditional teaching lineage], UG is a true mystic. (Incidentally, one of the books attributed to UG carries the title The Mystique of Enlightenment.) His words made it clear to me that his “path of total burnout” must be walked like a lion—alone. Visiting UG I knew that I had already been burning for quite some time, and listening to his words I recognized that “I” [“me,” the ego] was the fuel that powered the quest for enlightenment. Sitting with him I asked myself, “How much longer will it take until ‘I’ is spent completely?”

UG had given me his honest understanding and reactions to the spiritual path and his perspective of its illusions. In many ways, his disgruntled reflections mirrored my own disillusionment. They amused me, and the whole experience helped me begin to release my own struggle and grasping.

A strange sense of timeless emptiness set in after I visited UG. At first, this feeling was more about the emptiness of the world, a sense of void and lack of control over anything, especially my search and my notion of my “self.” There seemed to be nothing real or solid in my experiences. Everything felt adrift in a river of change.

In addition to this uncertainty and instability, I had also developed a serious condition of dysentery that seemed untreatable by conventional methods in India. I decided that I needed to leave and return to the West to heal.

A few months before I was to leave, however, I attended a vipassana meditation retreat at Sri S.N. Goenka's ashram in Igatpuri in Maharashtra state, between Pune and Mumbai in western India. For the first part of the ten-day silent retreat, I was restless, anxious, and quite sick. Then during one afternoon meditation period, after I had been sitting, mostly in silence, on my meditation cushion since four o'clock that morning, a clearing force rushed suddenly through my body. While I was sensing my body inwardly from top to bottom and bottom to top, a blazing energy swept through it from feet to head and head to feet. The force seemed to purify and almost dematerialize my body. In an instant, I became aware that for years I had been distracting myself from meeting my pain and fear. Now I was trapped and couldn't avoid it any longer. First, a huge sense of emptiness and letting go came upon me. Then suddenly all my perceptions and thoughts seemed to implode into this emptiness. There was nothing left to solve. It didn't matter that UG was cursing Ramana Maharshi. It didn't matter that I still had dysentery. Nothing mattered. A huge light consumed everything. I became very still inside. An explosion of bliss consumed my experience and my mind completely stopped. "I" was gone.

After some time, I started to cry incessantly until my whole body was shaking violently. I was crying for joy and sorrow at the same time. All my struggles, everything in my life, seemed now to have led up to this moment. The world and my sense of being an individual self shattered. Everything dropped away. I was nothing and everything. I was free and so light. After more than what I later learned had been two hours, I came back into a sense of the room and the others around me. Everyone was still sitting on their cushion. I looked down at my knees and feet to be sure I still had a body.

For the next three silent days during the retreat, a peace filled my being, and I felt the newness of an elated innocence. I left the retreat with a deeper connection to my Self and a willingness and commitment to open to all dimensions of life.

After that retreat, as if by some grace, my perspective began slowly to shift. The emptiness helped me take a step back and reflect on who it was that was experiencing this. Watching from the space of knowing in which changes arise, I began to feel quite detached from “my” experiences and “my pain.” Often, I was able to watch my struggle from a rather detached witness perspective. I would find myself viewing the world of my experiences as a turbulent yet transparent river flowing over a deep inner silence. Oddly enough, as this detachment increased, my experience of the world—and my quest—began to feel less complicated.

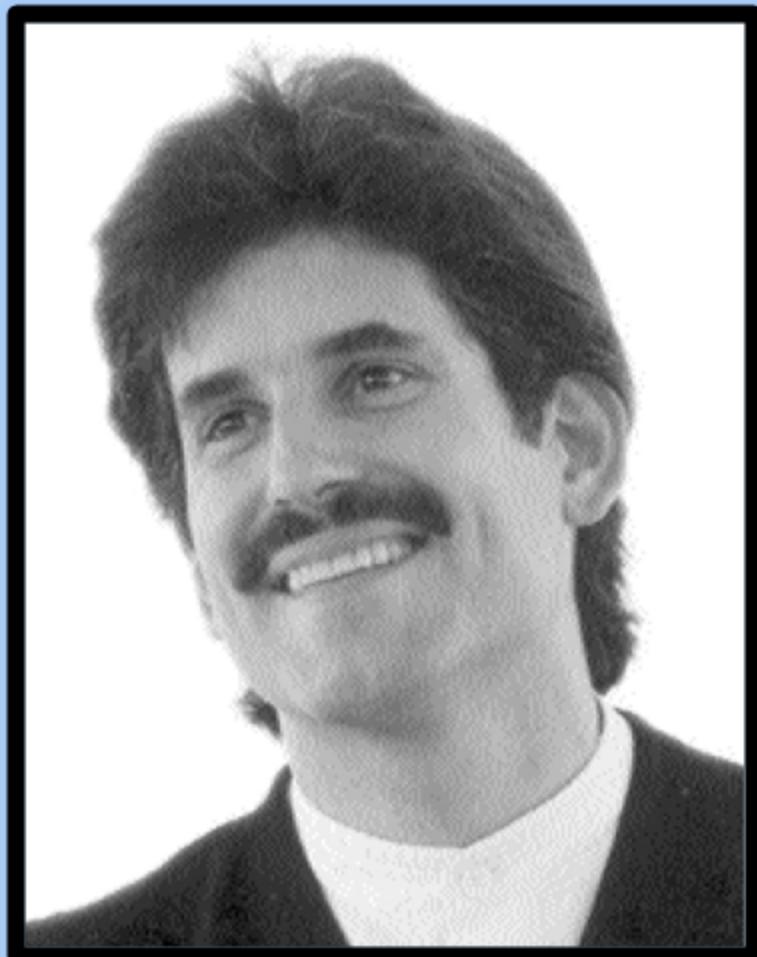
One day it occurred to me that I had been trying to get rid of “spirituality” by seeking out UG’s support in the same way that I had been trying to get rid of my pain, worries, and fears. I realized now that it was just my mind or ego cleverly controlling things by pushing away the present moment through finding something wrong. “Not enlightened fully, not good enough, not worthy . . .”—the list continued. I would find myself feeling trapped in patterns of conditioned reactions that eventually would sabotage my attention and my experiences of awakening.

On occasion, I still felt overwhelmed by my past. Sometimes it even seemed to me that I was being consumed by an inner, needy, energy system. I had heard it called the “fear body.” This needy energy was almost like an entity that had its own agenda. At times it just seemed to need to be fed negative energy. This part of me seemed afraid of the unknown and afraid to trust the present moment and life’s changes. At times it would even run the show until I realized what was happening and compassionately made its (my) fears and needs conscious. I discovered that if at the beginning of my emotional reaction, I could become aware of the needs and fears of my small self with its suffering heart, then this fear body would not take over my experience. I became more willing to listen to this part of myself and found that when I could bring it into the compassion of my heart, I would always see that its higher purpose was to protect me. Often I could trace its origin back to some wound of my childhood. As I became able to allow this

part to be heard in my heart, I found myself less and less agitated and anxious.

More and more, my disillusionment with the spiritual path seemed to give way now to the simplicity of just being—of dispassionately accepting my fears, desires, and pain. I realized that I could often remain present with What Is, with whatever was arising in the moment. I began to become more acquainted with my fear body and to learn to acknowledge it and yet understand that the feelings it generates are only passing events. The feeling that something was still missing in my life would come up from time to time, yet without much conviction now. It seemed to be dissolving into a simple silence beyond the mind. Both the seeker and the sought seemed to have disappeared into Being. There was nothing to get, nothing to do. And yet, my odyssey was not over yet.

Adrew Cohen



Andrew Cohen in Massachusetts in 1995

“I am not interested in bringing people only to a place of individual self-confidence where they can say, ‘Now I have got it. I am free.’ The potential

for egotism and arrogance in that is too vast. For me, what I call personal enlightenment is a secondary matter. What I am teaching, and trying to bring people to, is a place where the ego has been tamed, where the individual has become a deeply passionate human being who really cares about the evolution of consciousness as a whole more than only about themselves and their own liberation.”

Chapter 11

Adrew Cohen

was born in New York in 1955. He describes having experienced a deep spiritual awakening at age sixteen, without any prior spiritual practice. In his early twenties, he began to study and ardently practice the teachings of Buddhism and other spiritual schools. He continued to do so for many years before meeting his final guru, H.W.L. Poonja [ch. 2] in Lucknow, India. Andrew relates that less than a month after his first encounter with Poonja, he experienced another dramatic awakening.

In 1986, Andrew began to offer satsang in London as students gathered around him. He moved his community to Marin County, California, in the early 1990s, and then to Lenox, Massachusetts, where he now resides with his senior students. He also travels widely giving public talks and holding retreats throughout the world.

Cohen has written a number of acclaimed books, including most recently, *Embracing Heaven and Earth: The Liberation Teachings of Andrew Cohen* (Moksha Press, 2000). and *Living Enlightenment: A Guide to Radical Freedom by a Revolutionary Spiritual Teacher* (Moksha Press, 2002). Together with his students, he also publishes twice yearly the award-winning magazine *What Is Enlightenment?* In addition, his followers have created an extensive network of centers in North America, Europe, and Israel.

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The Essence of Enlightenment Is Having Nothing, Knowing Nothing, and Being No One

Shortly after my arrival in Lucknow in October 1991, a friend gave me a copy of Andrew Cohen's inspiring book *My Master Is My Self*, which documents his correspondence with his guru, Papaji. After his first intense encounters with Papaji, Andrew was authorized to carry his master's teachings to people in the West. Along with Gangaji [ch. 4], Andrew Cohen is among the best-known former students of Papaji now teaching in the West. However, it should be noted that Andrew and Papaji long ago parted ways on numerous points of teaching and practice, as you will see in this chapter.

I had wanted to meet Andrew ever since reading his book, but it was not until 1996, after my last visit to UG Krishnamurti, that the opportunity finally presented itself in a brief first meeting in New Delhi in India. My second meeting with Andrew—where this interview occurred—took place in San Francisco in July 2000.

In March 2000, within days of my return from India, during a visit to San Francisco, I was introduced to the man who would become the publisher of this book. He arranged my second meeting with Andrew. I was excited and eager to talk with him, especially since both his enlightenment event and mine had occurred in the presence and under the guidance of our common guru, Papaji. As one might imagine, Andrew and I had much to talk about!

Most important, I wanted to discuss his experience of enlightenment and understand how this state had become permanent for him. How was

Andrew sustaining this state? Was it still a matter of constant vigilance or had he reached a place of freedom and peace where he did not need to continue exerting any effort? Did he have a moment-to-moment practice for remaining aware? Did he experience any resistance or negative emotional reactions to life's stresses?

So in July 2000, I interviewed Andrew in a quiet corner of the upstairs lobby of the Hyatt Hotel in San Francisco. Only he himself, his assistant, my publisher, and I attended. Andrew was in town on a national tour promoting his new book, *Embracing Heaven and Earth*. Just before we left for the interview, my publisher called the hotel to find out Andrew's room number. The hotel operator told him, "Andrew Cohen checked out at 3:30 AM this morning." Our hearts sank into our bellies in disbelief and disappointment. We immediately called the Moksha Foundation, Andrew's headquarters in Massachusetts, but no one knew anything about this surprising turn of events. We decided to head toward the big city anyway to be in time for the interview in case the receptionist's information turned out to be false. Just when we were about to descend onto the magnificent suspension bridge, the Golden Gate, we received a call on our cell phone informing us that Andrew was still at the hotel. How this confusion arose we never found out. But when we got there, Andrew was ready for the interview.

Madhukar - In 1991, during a recognition of my true nature, Poonjaji told me, "You got it! You did your work!" He meant that I had become enlightened. For that moment, his statement was correct. But soon after the experience, I was overcome with doubts and I became what I would describe as unenlightened again. Why would Poonjaji declare me and many others enlightened when it was not true? Was he intentionally misleading me? Misjudging my state? In your opinion, what was he expressing?

Andrew - First of all, Poonjaji was well known for telling just about everybody who had a powerful spiritual experience in his company that they were enlightened, that they were finished with their search. The experience you are referring to must be seen in that light.

I think Poonjaji's gift to the world was that he enabled many people to get a glimpse of their own potential for enlightenment. And that's what many seekers experienced with him. There aren't many teachers in the world who have the power to do what he could do. But in my opinion, most of the time he gave people a false picture of where they were really at.

Madhukar - Why do you say that?

Andrew - Shortly after I had started teaching in India [in 1986], there were only eight or ten of us together in Rishikesh, India, and we were constantly living in the recognition of our true nature. We would stay up all night having satsang. At that time, a young Israeli woman was living with us. She was the first person I met after my enlightenment, and one of my first disciples. As a result of our connection, she had a very powerful awakening almost immediately. She was burning up. For two days she was in bliss and ecstasy, experiencing profound insights into the nature of reality with extraordinary clarity. Her bliss was so powerful that we lovingly called her Ananda Ma ["Bliss Mother"].

Because I knew her very well as a person and as a friend, I knew that she was far from being finished despite her powerful awakening. She was a deeply neurotic young woman who hadn't grown up yet; in many ways she was still a baby. However, even a confused and immature seeker can have very deep insights and may be able to speak powerfully about

enlightenment. Such a person may even initiate a transmission in others in an environment such as I have just described.

One day, I took all eight students with me to Haridwar to introduce them to Poonjaji. When I was alone with him, he looked at me very intensely and said, "This woman is vibrating. You have to send her away or she will get attached to you. And once she is attached to you, she will not be able to help other people." He was basically telling me that this young woman was fully enlightened and ready to be a guru.

While he was telling me this, he was intense and passionate. He expressed his view with great exuberance and strength. I knew he was wrong. I knew the woman was vibrating and I knew she was experiencing a profound awakening. That was obvious and tangible. But I knew she was far from being independent and far from being a teacher of any sort.

Madhukar - How did you react to Poonjaji's statement?

Andrew - I remember that Poonjaji's statement took me aback. I had no doubt that he was completely wrong in his assessment. This occurred early in my relationship with him, when I still believed that he was a perfect master. This was before I experienced my own disillusionment with him.

Eventually, the woman fell from the heights of insight, realization, and joy and tumbled back into a very dualistic, samsaric, deeply divided relationship to life.

Many people who spent time with Poonjaji and experienced deep insights became arrogant and overconfident. He felt this necessity to tell as many people as possible that they were completely enlightened, that they were absolutely finished and had no more work to do. But what actually happened to most of those people was that in his presence they glimpsed their own potential for enlightenment. In other words, they experienced deeply what the goal is. But it wasn't something they had won or achieved. It hadn't become their own. As a result, he created a lot of confusion in the minds of thousands of people as to what the path and the goal are all about.

In spite of arising doubts, enlightenment can remain

Madhukar - Over a two-year period, my doubts about my enlightenment came up again and again. But whenever I was in his presence and had the experience of who I truly am, Poonjaji would repeat in one way or another that I had done my work. These experiences did not last, though. I was in love with the master and I had become one of his right-hand men. However, it was a difficult time for me because I didn't know if I was to believe him that I was enlightened, or myself that I wasn't. Poonjaji didn't like to be challenged. But I did challenge him on the contradictions in his teachings and on his assessment of my enlightenment.

Andrew - You did well.

Madhukar - Poonjaji treated some seekers quite harshly when they complained that they had lost their enlightenment. To others he used to say, "I gave you the jewel and you threw it to the pigs." You must have heard this.

Andrew - Sure.

Madhukar - As far as I know, your enlightenment remained from the moment you experienced it in Poonjaji's presence. Did you ever doubt your enlightenment?

Andrew - Oh, often!

Madhukar - Really! Is that true? To hear you say so is quite surprising to me.

Andrew - Yes, often!

Madhukar - How so? Do you contemplate your enlightened state? How do your doubts dissolve again into enlightenment?

Andrew - You see, the doubts have always proved to be untrue. In spite of all my doubts, the liberation has always revealed itself to be stronger than anything else in me. But the fact that those doubts surfaced from the very beginning—and surface even to this day—is a good thing.

Madhukar - How could doubting one's enlightenment be a good thing? Please explain.

Andrew - Because it shows that there is humility. There is still a part in me that is wondering how it could be true and how I could be doing what I am doing—namely, as a teacher, taking such a bold position in this world. How could it be true? And yet it is. The fact is that doubts arise by themselves. But that doesn't necessarily mean anything about the validity of the enlightenment. What matters is what one's relationship to those doubts is and what happens as a result. There have been many stories about great realizers in history who struggled with doubt too. Since time immemorial, teachers have been tested in the face of such doubts. What one does when one is being tested is what is truly significant.

Madhukar - How do you face those doubts? Are you actively doing something about them?

Andrew - No, I don't do anything.

Madhukar - Are they simply passing by in your consciousness?

Andrew - I just pay attention to them, see them, and reflect on them. Their presence has never in any way inhibited my own liberated spontaneity. They have never inhibited my ability to respond to them from a liberated place in an unselfconscious, unpremeditated way, no matter what I happen to be thinking. And that of course is a big part of understanding what freedom from the thought stream is.

I think it might be dangerous if I didn't have any doubt about myself at all. The presence of some doubt keeps me honest and humble. From the very

beginning of my enlightenment, I have assumed my own bold stance that has caused a lot of people great discomfort.

I have never wavered one bit. I have never backed down from my own passionate, uncompromising response to life, which comes from my deep understanding.

Enlightenment means standing alone with no reference point except the unknown

Madhukar - Why did enlightenment stay in your case, and in the case of other Poonjaji disciples, and not in mine? Could you share your insight about what happened or didn't happen in both our cases?

Andrew - The bottom line is: I don't know the answer. I have no idea. Ultimately there is a great mystery behind this question; I think nobody really knows the answer. That is my fundamental answer to your question. The second part of the answer is that for some reason—maybe it is karma—I was ready to accept enlightenment. For some reason, I was ready at that point in my own evolution to accept the burden.

Madhukar - What is that burden?

Andrew - It's the willingness to be completely independent—to stand completely alone, unsupported by anyone or anything. Forever!

And that's it! There is no going back on that. Once the personal history is over, one is really standing alone with no reference point except the unknown. This is quite a big step, one that most people can't take because they are not at the point of evolution where they are genuinely willing to do that for the long haul. Perhaps in the rush of bliss and ecstasy of their enlightenment experience, they may want to. But what is actually involved in living life from the enlightened perspective is much more serious. It encompasses everything in one's life. What I am saying about this is based on fifteen years of experience as a teacher: I don't believe that most people are karmically ready to carry that profound and delicate state, understand it, and be true to it.

Madhukar - Besides accepting the burden of standing alone, are there any other significant circumstances that may herald the advent of enlightenment?

Andrew - I would like to emphasize another important point. For a couple of years before I met Poonjaji, I was already at the point in my own seeking where I had no doubt that a very big shift had to occur. I knew that something enormous had to happen, and if it didn't, I couldn't go back to living life as I knew it. I knew I could no longer lead the life of compromise that most people were leading.

I was at that point where I wanted to be free more than anything else. I had no doubt about that. And this is a very important ingredient in the spiritual quest.

Madhukar - Could you expand on this idea a bit more? What do you mean by "freedom" in this case?

Andrew - I have thought quite a bit about this question you are asking now. I came to understand that a leap has to be taken in which the individual leaves this world and everyone in it behind forever. We literally say good-bye, never to return again. From then on, the individual is standing alone and unsupported in the unknown. In order to take that leap of enlightenment, and for that leap to be

permanent, we need to have one of two possible motives. The first motive is to be the “only One”—the one without a second. One who is truly enlightened is not separate from that One without a second. That is the position or the role of the enlightened one.

Madhukar - The One without a second is the Self.

Andrew - Yes. That's who the enlightened ones are. And they are there to be that “only One” without a second in this world. But that's not enough, because the result of the intention to be the “only One” would be an enlightened ego.

The second—pure—motivation would be to be no one. In that ultimate act of surrendering the ego, there would be ego-death.

The energy of enlightenment has only one motive —to express itself

Andrew - Let me give you a little bit more background on how I understand this. The energy of enlightenment, the force of Consciousness in this universe, wants to express itself. We could compare this with the way that the sexual energy as a creative force in this universe wants to express itself. Sexual energy does not care about the individual. It has no preferences. It has only one motive —to express itself, to find a way through to complete its own function, which is procreation. It will use any vehicle it can for that.

The procreative energy is wild and untamed. The creative energy of Consciousness—which we can call the energy of enlightenment, for lack of a better term—is wild in the same way. It simply wants to express itself because it is the force of evolution as Consciousness. It is looking for a portal, a way to get through. The way through appears when the individual is at that point where he or she is willing to leave this world, and everybody in it, behind forever.

Madhukar - Can the individual resist that urge of Consciousness?

Andrew - Of course, absolutely! In order for that energy to come through, the individual has to say, “Yes, Thy will be done, not mine!” However, that energy doesn’t care whether the individual is the “only One” or no one.

Madhukar - On which side of the fence did that energy find you when it pushed through?

Andrew - A couple of days after my enlightenment experience with Poonjaji, when I was in my hotel room in New Delhi, I sat up in my bed and said without any premeditation, “My life is Yours. Do with me what

You will.” I wasn’t speaking to my guru personally. I was speaking to this energy that was taking over my physical form and my life. I knew that if this process didn’t stop, there wouldn’t be anything left of me. I knew that my life was over.

At that moment, I saw the image of a whirlpool.

My life, my plans, my karma, all went down into that whirlpool. And I didn’t know what was going to happen next. I didn’t know then about becoming a teacher or about anything else.

Madhukar c We are talking about a final leap into the unknown.

Andrew - The individual has to be at that point in his or her own evolution where he or she is willing to make that leap and take that kind of responsibility. And also, it’s important to understand that the reasons for taking the leap can be either wholesome or unwholesome.

So, I don’t think it is appropriate for most people to assume that kind of responsibility because they have not yet cultivated to a sufficient degree their own integrity of being. They are not able to carry enlightenment in the only way it is meant to be carried—which is to get nothing from it for oneself. That is a very delicate place to be.

When the ego is tamed, one cares about the evolution of consciousness as a whole

Madhukar c Let me ask you then: What is enlightenment? And how does one know that they are irreversibly enlightened?

Andrew - There are many ways to answer that question. Enlightenment may be irreversible when one has come to that point in one's own evolution where one is consistently so awake, and the intention to stay free is so powerful, that one no longer acts out of selfishness, ignorance, or unconsciousness, or in any way that causes suffering to others.

Madhukar - But can the average seeker reach this lofty goal?

Andrew - I speak a lot about this realizable goal. Anybody who is sincere has the potential to get to this point in their own evolution. But it is amazing that very few people have sufficient sincerity to actually arrive there.

Another element needs to be brought into the picture: the element of conscience, what I call spiritual conscience. That means we become aware of the vast context in which everything is occurring, and we feel an absolute obligation to that context. It is this sense of obligation that tames our humanity and humbles our ego. This is what brings us to our knees, and what the guru genuinely represents.

Madhukar - The recognition “I have got it” seems not to be enough for enlightenment to remain permanently.

Andrew - I am not interested in bringing people only to a place of individual self-confidence where they can say, “Now I have got it. I am free.” The potential for egotism and arrogance in that is too vast. For me, what I call personal enlightenment is a secondary matter. What I am teaching, and trying to bring people to, is a place where the ego has been tamed, where the individual has become a deeply passionate human being who really cares about the evolution of consciousness as a whole more than only about themselves and their own liberation.

“I have got it. Now I am free” can be really distasteful; but it is necessary as a starting point. In order to be free, we do need to get to the point where we have confidence in our freedom, where we have confidence in the fact that we are free from our mind and its thought stream, that we are free from our emotions, free from the past and from the future. That’s the foundation of a liberated life—the foundation on which a completely different relationship to life ultimately rests. Liberation is not the end; it is that which makes something else possible.

Madhukar - On this point you differ fundamentally from Poonjaji.

Andrew - Poonjaji was teaching that the blast of liberation is the end in itself. I think the result of this teaching is that quite often people are no less selfish than they were before liberation. “I have got it!” or “You have got it!” Gotten what? It becomes an unnatural bind of grasping at this mystery in a way that feels very unwholesome, and is the opposite of what enlightenment is all about.

This part of Poonjaji’s teaching was one of the main reasons why I finally parted from him. I left him when I realized that we were teaching different things, taking people to different places—and disagreeing about everything

except some of the fundamental questions. Our interpretations of what the enlightenment experience really means and what its actual significance is were radically different.

Purification of the vehicle is more important than the blast of personal enlightenment

Madhukar - Have any of your students achieved complete understanding? Are any of your disciples enlightened?

Andrew - None of my students is at the place I am at. That has to do with the emphasis I put on cultivating the purity of the human being as a vehicle for the enlightened consciousness. Over the years, I've had students who seemed to have had the same awakening I had. The inner experience they were going through was identical to mine. As a result, they were able to speak with powerful clarity about enlightenment. In their presence, transmission would occur. They also had very deep insight into the nature of the ego and personality. They were very perceptive and aware, so they could see deeply into the hearts and minds of others. They were capable of assuming the role of a teacher and guide and all the rest of it. But in all of them there was ego. They were taking pride in their experience. They were assuming a position of superiority in relationship to other people. They were personally getting something out of it.

I could have sent some of these people out to teach. I could have blessed them and given them that authority and they could have pulled it off as well or better than many people who are teaching today. But that is not my way, because to me the purity of the vehicle was and is always more important than the blast of personal enlightenment and the ability to speak about it.

Madhukar - As far as I know, Poonjaji didn't emphasize the purity of the vehicle.

Andrew - That's right. This question of the purity of the vehicle—purity of motivation—had very much to do with my split with Poonjaji. The position I took on this from the very beginning seemed to be tremendously challenging and upsetting for many people, including Poonja. My stand has gotten me into a lot of trouble and caused me a lot of grief, and it continues to do so. What I am calling people to is very powerful and ultimately challenging, far more so than simply riding on a blast of enlightenment, which is not difficult to do if one is arrogant and ambitious.

Madhukar - However, most seekers seem to be satisfied with the blast of enlightenment.

Andrew - Most seekers are not very sophisticated. If they come into the presence of an awakened person who has a powerful personality and receive his or her transmission, they will be so dazzled by the blast of the experience of enlightenment that they will not want to look any further or dig any deeper—at least not in the short term.

One of the things I have learned is that the ego can survive this shift in consciousness and can actually be empowered by the transmission and energy of enlightenment. When that happens, the person puts out a very powerful transmission of enlightenment if he or she starts teaching. The stronger the ego, the more powerful the transmission. But that transmission will have an edge to it. And that edge comes from the pride and ego of the transmitter.

The energy of enlightenment, in and of itself, is not enough

Madhukar - Are you saying that the guru also has to keep purifying him-or herself after enlightenment?

Andrew - If the guru is in a purified state at the moment of enlightenment, there is no need to do so. But if they are not, they should be doing that work. It took me several years until I began to understand that we, as teachers, have to be willing to work hard after enlightenment as well. The energy of enlightenment, of Consciousness in and of itself, is not enough. Our further work is to purify ourselves—the vehicle—to make ourselves fit to carry Consciousness.

I feel that purification is more important than enlightenment because the cultivation of purity of motivation in the individual is ultimately a much greater virtue than the kind of enlightenment you are asking me about here—which is pretty cheap.

Madhukar - It is very personal.

Andrew - Yes, it is very personal and anybody can get it [snaps his fingers] just like that! But looking at it in terms of what it means and what it is calling us to is something altogether different. And not many people have the humility to do that.

The kind of personal enlightenment we're talking about here more often than not leaves the individual in a state of arrogance and self-satisfaction, which is usually a mask and a veil covering the depth of inner division and corruption.

Madhukar - Are you pointing at teachers like Poonjaji?

Andrew - Yes. Poonjaji was such a confusing example as a teacher because at a human level he was a deeply divided man whose personality was an expression of duality in a very gross and extreme way. His personal example created tremendous confusion for many people. And I see a lot of people who are teaching in his name adding to that confusion. Yet his transmission of nonduality was powerful and many people have been touched by it while spending time with him or with those who were with him.

Self-acceptance is not the same thing as enlightenment

Andrew - There was tremendous confusion around Poonjaji in terms of what enlightenment is really supposed to mean. His position was, "Everything is leela [the play of God]; manifestation and life are maya; don't take any of it seriously. The only thing that is real is the Self, the Absolute." What that means is that it doesn't matter what you do and how you do it because karma doesn't exist.

Now that is a very dangerous thing to tell people. Most people are not in a place where you want to say anything like that to them. What I am trying to do is to get people to care more and more about the role of karma. I want

them to be conscious about what they are doing and how they are doing it, and what kind of consequences they are causing firstly, to others, and secondly, to themselves.

Madhukar - Why would some Advaita teachers proclaim, “Understand your true nature and know that you are merely an instrument of God, and then do whatever you like.”?

Andrew - This kind of teaching served Poonja

very well. He was very uncomfortable about many things in his own past. Such a teaching is absurd and ridiculous for anyone who doesn't feel uncomfortable—after assuming a role of an enlightened master—about anything that he or she has done in the past. From my perspective, one wouldn't even want to get near such a teaching! It's a license for self-indulgence and madness.

Madhukar - But this is part of the ancient Vedanta teaching. In recent times, even the widely revered teacher Ramakrishna proclaimed it.

Andrew - You see, we live in a time when a lot of the enlightenment teachings, including Advaita and Neo-Buddhism, are being reduced to a modern form of psychotherapy called self-acceptance. Basically, a lot of baby boomers, people of my generation, suffered greatly from self-hatred. That's why we all went to shrinks when we were kids, and that's why people are still going to shrinks and becoming therapists themselves. Most of us don't like ourselves. Today the fundamental message of many Neo-Buddhist and Advaita teachers is, “Hey, you are wonderful as you are!

Everything is fine the way it is.” What is really happening here is that seekers are being taught self-acceptance in the name of enlightenment.

Madhukar - But I think some people may be a living expression of such a statement.

Andrew - That's right. Someone like Ramana Maharshi could make some of these absolute statements. And they would be true for him because he literally didn't have any history and there wasn't any trace of duality in the man. There were no impure impulses left in him. But he was a very rare specimen. There are not many Ramanas walking on the planet and there hardly ever have been. And in my opinion, Poonja was certainly not in the same category at all. So Ramana's statements may not be true for Poonjaji or you or me or someone else.

Madhukar - So our life example is the yardstick for our enlightenment, right?

Andrew - Yes. We have to prove whether we are actually free from karma. And if the life we are living is a continuous demonstration of the fact that we are free from karma, then we can say that. But if it is not true, then it is not true. And just because we say karma doesn't exist doesn't mean that it doesn't—because either it exists or it doesn't. Just convincing ourselves through some kind of self-hypnosis that karma doesn't exist, or that life and manifestation aren't really real, doesn't automatically free us from it. It is very rare that an individual gets to a point in their evolution where they are really free from karma, where it actually has been completely burned out and destroyed.

Madhukar - So what would a complete teaching proclaim?

Andrew - A perfect and complete teaching doesn't need to make excuses for one's humanity. One doesn't need to use the words "leela" or "maya" as a way to justify that which is really not justifiable. Such a teaching is making excuses for the ego in the name of enlightenment. That's all it is. I've always said that there is a relationship between our enlightenment and our humanity. In opposition to my stand, Poonjaji said there is no relationship between the two.

Madhukar - Because in his understanding, manifestation and life are merely illusions.

Andrew - Exactly. "It's all maya. Don't take it seriously. Don't draw any conclusions about what any of it means. The only truth is the Self."

The way I have always looked at it is that if enlightenment—the recognition of our nondual nature—is going to mean anything, there will have to be a profound transformation in the expression of our humanity in this world. And if our ultimate nature is undivided, then the liberated personality would have to become—with extraordinary consistency—a spontaneous and natural expression of that which is undivided.

Madhukar - That would be true Advaita.

Andrew - That's what my understanding of an absolute view is. And it is true nonduality, because then there is really no difference between this and

that. You no longer have to continue to make distinctions between the relative and absolute. Then you see samsara and nirvana as one. In my view everything is embraced: Both the deepest and profound recognition of our nondual nature and every aspect of our humanity are included in the picture. Nothing is left out.

Madhukar - Then the life the teacher is living is the example of the teaching, and the teacher is living what he is teaching.

Andrew - Not only an example of the teaching but of the awakening, of the enlightenment.

The ‘noneffort’ school makes people arrogant, lazy, and self-satisfied

Madhukar - I would like to change the focus at this point. You teach that the seeker has the will and power to achieve enlightenment. Is that correct?

Andrew - No, I never said that.

Madhukar - Let me reformulate the question. What are seekers supposed to do to optimize the possibility of enlightenment? What practices, if any, do you suggest to them?

Andrew - There are certain things over which we have no control or power. We can call that mystery grace. Grace is a mysterious movement. It has

nothing to do with our will. It has nothing to do with effort. But we do have the power to be responsible for everything else in relation to ourselves. I believe that if we want to be free more than everything else, then we have to get to that point in our own evolution where we are willing to do everything we can possibly do. And if we are ready and willing to do that, we have nothing to fear. Because all we can do is everything we can do. We cannot do one iota more than that. And if we are doing everything we can do, our conscience will be clear.

I am saying that each and every individual has the power to do that much—and that much is everything. However, hardly anybody gets to that point where their intention and their renunciation are that strong and powerful and their sincerity is that great. Such seekers are very, very rare. It usually takes people many years even to recognize what it means to live a completely committed life—where there is no back door, where there is only one possibility in every moment and that's it.

Madhukar - What happens at that point?

Andrew - When we get to that point, what will happen is up to the Unknown. Because if we literally do what we can in every moment—not just with effort but with love, and with all the effort that's needed when it's needed, without doubt and with full commitment—then there is only surrender and "Thy will be done." Whatever happens beyond that point is not up to us; it is the movement of grace.

Madhukar - How does one know that one is blessed with grace?

Andrew - The individuals who go that far and are very consistent begin to feel themselves in the presence of that grace. They begin to mysteriously feel themselves free from karma and the past. They experience themselves as being carried along. A sense of purity and simplicity begins to awaken and reveal itself in them, along with a sense of humility and self-confidence. But as long as someone is not really doing everything they can do, their deeply conditioned, unfree, egotistical, small-minded, self-centered, samsaric mind is running the show.

In my opinion the “noneffort” school makes people arrogant, lazy, and self-satisfied. Such teachings cheapen the true meaning of seeking and enlightenment and what the real demands of a spiritual life are.

Meditation is a metaphor for the enlightened state

Madhukar - Are the meditations that you personally share with your students for the purpose of reinforcing the intention and single-pointedness for finding the final truth?

Andrew - I meditate with my students in order to deepen their surrender. Meditating in the presence of the teacher provides an occasion to experience spontaneous being and the inherent and perfect freedom of one's true nature. In such meditation, the individuals' confidence in their own potential for liberation should deepen. And repeated experiences of this kind help them become more and more aware of their own inherent freedom, of the part in them that is always free. I teach meditation as a metaphor for the enlightened state itself.

Madhukar - In your understanding, does this mean a momentary experience of the enlightened state?

Andrew - There are two forms of meditation. One is spontaneous. Spontaneous meditation is what I am feeling right now in this moment of speaking to you. Perhaps you feel it too. It is the natural movement of grace and presence. In the right context, it moves by itself. Such meditation doesn't take any effort. One feels the spontaneous lightness of being and the natural freedom from mind and from time, and one is untroubled by emotions. One feels the bliss of presence itself. To meditate in the presence of the teacher should provide the context in which this kind of experience deepens.

Madhukar - Please describe the second form of meditation.

Andrew - The second form of meditation is very different. It requires will, effort, intention, and choice. The

individual makes a decision to sit down to meditate and assumes no relationship to thought in order to cultivate his own understanding about the mechanics of the human experience.

In the early years of teaching in the satsang format—which I don't do anymore—people were experiencing spontaneous meditation very often. That is why it seemed absurd to me to teach meditation in the formal way. But I noticed that although they were experiencing a lot of spontaneous meditation in satsang, most people didn't seem to know much about the movement of their own mind when they meditated alone without the

teacher. Many times they had experienced freedom from the mind in the current of spontaneous meditation. But that didn't necessarily mean that this knowledge was automatically their own.

Madhukar - Do you think both kinds of meditation experience are necessary?

Andrew - Certainly. On the one hand, one needs to make the effort to learn how the human organism functions—especially the thought stream, the emotions, or time—by sitting and observing these things and how they work. On the other hand, it is also necessary to have repeated experiences of this spontaneous movement of joy, meditation, and bliss in order to strengthen one's confidence in the deeper reality.

Madhukar - Which meditation is more important? Can the practice of one kind of meditation be sufficient?

Andrew - Except in rare cases, one kind of meditation by itself is not enough. For example, I have met many people who have been meditating in a formal discipline for many years, but they really don't know anything about enlightenment. They know a lot about the movement of the mind, but they are definitely not free. And I know a lot of people who have spent years experiencing spontaneous meditation. These people seem to have a lot of confidence in the reality of the Self and in the movement of grace, but they remain very ignorant people who are lost in many big illusions.

The essence of enlightenment is having nothing, knowing nothing, and being no one

Madhukar - After the seeker experiences his or her true nature, you call that seeker a finder. Because he or she doesn't really find something new, wouldn't it be more appropriate to call him or her a "knower" or "understander" of the truth of their essential being?

Andrew - Maybe. But I would hardly ever tell anybody that they know something, because the minute I do, they become proud. Humility is the most important virtue to be cultivated on this whole journey. For most people, the knowing doesn't last, and secondly, there is always the inherent danger of pride arising in response to some external affirmation. If someone has recognized his true nature, I acknowledge it—but in a very cool way. Then I just wait and see what happens over time. I have seen the nicest people have the most powerful realizations and then betray them in vicious ways later on when they were challenged to be true to them.

Madhukar - So enlightenment must prove itself over time.

Andrew - Yes. What these moments of insight or enlightenment actually mean is ultimately determined over time. Also, the individual has to live up to what they have realized. I challenge them to be true to their own experience. People can become quite nasty when you call them to that. Why? Because the ego feels that all its room, all its back doors, and all its time have been taken away.

Madhukar - It is my experience that moments of deep insight can be remembered at any time. By doing so, they can be made present.

Andrew - Yes. They can never be forgotten. If the experiences are genuine, they make a permanent impression on the consciousness of the individual.

Question everything in the light of the revelation of enlightenment

Madhukar - You say that time will prove how deep a seeker's experience is and how fully he or she is able to live up to it in daily life. What are your students supposed to do after becoming finders?

Andrew - Give all their energy to bridging the gap between what they have realized and how they are as human beings. That's everything. To me there is nothing else to do but that. As we said, there is much more than just the personal blast. Now we have to look into the implications of enlightenment. What does enlightenment have to do with being a man, a woman, a human being, living together with others on this Earth?

We begin to understand what the nondual realization is all about from our own experience. And we begin to inquire into and examine its significance in relationship to the human experience as a whole. This is where enlightenment becomes interesting.

So I am interested in two things. The first is the individual cultivating the heroic interest within themselves to bridge the gap between what they have realized and how they actually are as individuals. This means that the individual continues looking into what it really means to bring this realization into the human experience in the most profound way. And second, what I am also very interested in is looking into the implications of

enlightenment for human life in a way that opens up and questions everything.

Madhukar - Please explain this last point.

Andrew - We all have been brought up in a culture that tells us what life means and how we are supposed to live it. It becomes very interesting when we begin to question everything we have been taught in the light of the revelation of enlightenment, in the light of that nondual picture. Then we begin to question everything that we have been taught about what life means and about how to live it.

We bring the light of enlightenment into the human experience and examine it every moment in a very open-minded way. My life is all about this open-ended inquiry and investigation of what nondual realization means for human life and experience—on every level and dimension.

Transformation is a radical shift in consciousness and conscience

Madhukar - If I may, I would like to change the subject before we end our conversation. Is it beneficial for the seeker to submit himself or herself to many teachers and their teachings?

Andrew - It depends on who the seeker is and who the teacher is. It could be the worst possible mistake or the best decision one ever made. It all depends on the individual and what he or she is looking for. Not all seekers are looking for the same things. To be honest, most seekers are really

looking for affirmation; they are not interested in being challenged to evolve to a much higher level of being. Most people look for ways to feel better about themselves.

In contrast to that, a complete transformation is a radical shift in consciousness and conscience, and getting a blast doesn't have necessarily anything to do with that. There are layers and layers of conditioning and of ego and attachment. They hardly ever disappear in an instant. An open-minded and open-hearted humility and reverence have to be cultivated rather than this urge for the search to be over and finished.

Madhukar - From that point of view, what then would you say is true enlightenment?

Andrew - The essence of true understanding and enlightenment is having nothing, knowing nothing, and being no one. That's it. There is nothing to add to this.

Okay?!

Madhukar - Okay. Thank you very much.

Andrew - Thank you. It was my pleasure.

After the interview, I reflected on Andrew's perspective on spiritual awakening, which felt to me practical and contemporary. I appreciated his emphasis on the importance of purification, cultivating an open-minded and open-hearted humility and reverence rather than getting caught in a desire for a Big Bang experience of enlightenment that ends everything. I also resonated with his focus on ethics and service and appreciated his humility about his ongoing doubts. His commitment to truth felt contagious, as did his resolute commitment to both wakefulness and integrity.

In contrast to Andrew, Papaji's focal tenet was, "Recognize the Self and then do whatever you like." According to him, the blast of awakening is the end of the search. Andrew agrees with his former teacher that the recognition of one's true nature is essential; this he calls an initial awakening of personal enlightenment. But Andrew's teaching goes much further: the recognition of the Self isn't the end—"it is that which makes something else possible." He proclaims that an initial awakening is only a starting point for a deeper and open-ended inquiry into what nondual realization means for human life in a way that "opens up and questions everything."

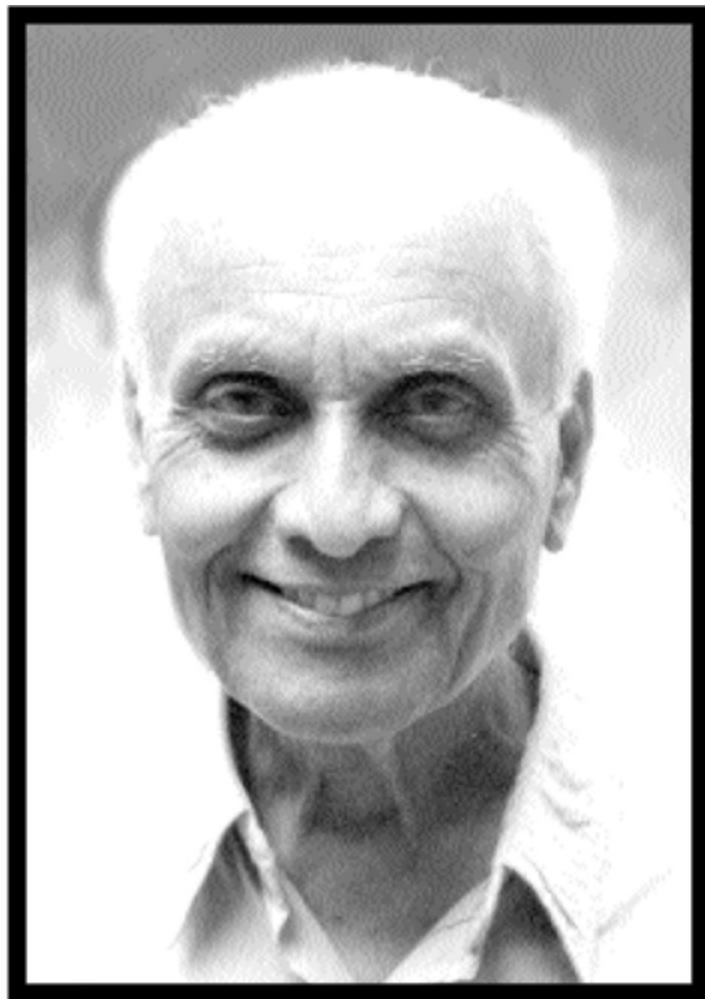
I soon returned to my home on Maui, where I had been living for half a year. I was finally healthy again, and my daily practice was helping me stay balanced. I felt strangely inspired, as though I were touching an ever-present mystery. I realized gradually that I was more and more willing to let go of my pain and my sense that something was wrong or missing. Andrew's perspective that doubt and uncertainty could still arise felt more like a challenge now than a curse.

In the early stages of my odyssey, I had wanted to listen to and be in the presence of external authorities who seemed to have the answers. Now I realized that there was not just one way of awakening, and that I had to listen to the wisdom of my own heart and follow my own path. Andrew had

reminded me to release any demand I still had for enlightenment and simply seek increasing truth and understanding as well as moral integrity.

My spiritual practices continued from day to day, but now the ambition and driving desire had changed. I was releasing my obsessive hold on an idealistic vision of enlightenment. I had clung for so long to the idea that I might be able to instantly eliminate my personal ego, fears, and desires, leaving me in peace and without any further difficulties to face. But now I could see that my journey was not linear. Instead, it was appearing more and more like a spiral, where freedom was occurring not through less suffering but through a progressive shift of identity.

D. B. Gangolli



D.B. Gangolli in Bangalore in 2000

“Advaita Vedanta is the science of our own life. Based on intuition and conscious experience, it leaves no feature of life out. It teaches that our

essential nature of pure Being-Consciousness is the very essence of truth or reality. And that our “I”-notion (the organizing ego sense), the mind, and the world are a false appearance of this Self and hence unreal or untrue.”

Chapter 12

Sri D. B. Gangolli

was born on January 21, 1922, as Sri Devidas Bhavanishanker Gangolli, in Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, a state in southern India. He was one of seven children of a pious, traditional couple who belonged to the community of Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins. Brought up in a religious ambience of bhakti and faith in God, even during his teenage years he used to sing bhajans composed by Kabir and the Maharashtra saints Sant Tukaram, Sant Ekanath, and Sant Jnaneshwar.

After a two-year course in physics, chemistry, and mathematics, combined with the study of Sanskrit at the Inter-mediate College, Bangalore, Sri Gangolli moved to Bombay in 1942, where he completed a four-year course in textile chemistry at a technical institute. Recognizing that a career in a textile mill did not suit his temperament, aptitude, and ambitions, he soon gave it up. In 1952, he switched his profession to journalism. For the next twenty-five years, he worked for India's largest and leading newspaper, The Times of India, as a sportswriter specializing in cricket, badminton, and billiards.

Sri Gangolli's interest in spirituality began when, in 1962, he attended Swami Chinmayananda's discourses on the Bhagawad Gita. In 1965, this initial interest deepened through listening to Swami Poornananda Teertha's lectures on the Yoga Vashishta, a classical, 16th-century text, expounding the fundamental teachings of Advaita Vedanta. In 1964, during a spiritual retreat, Sri Gangolli received his mantra upadesha (spiritual initiation or instruction) from His Holiness Swami Anandashram, the spiritual head of

Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmins. This initiation was a turning point in Sri Gangolli's attitude and approach to life. From then on, he was drawn deeper and deeper into the Vedantic teachings and practices, particularly into karma yoga.

Then in 1968, a profound spiritual understanding occurred to Gangolli while reading *How to Recognize the Method of Vedanta* by Swami Satchidanadendra Saraswati, the founder of Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya, a Vedanta ashram with locations at Holenarsipur and Bangalore. In 1970, Sri Gangolli met this swami in person at Mysore, Karnataka, and became his student. Over the next years, Gangolli underwent a course of study in classical Advaita Vedanta through listening to his guru's discourses and studying the methodology of the teachings expounded in this illustrious teacher's more than two hundred books in three languages.

In 1977, Sri Gangolli gave up his journalistic career to dedicate his life to spirituality and the dissemination of his guru's impeccable methodology. During the past twenty years, Sri Gangolli has translated more than twenty of his guru's books from Kannada [a language spoken in southern India] into English. Also during this period, he has written and published more than fifteen books of his own, several of which have been reviewed in leading Indian newspapers and spiritual magazines. Among his most popular books are *The Magic Jewel of Intuition*, *The Basic Tenets of Shankara's Vedanta*, *The Pristine Pure Advaita Philosophy of Adi Shankara*, *The Scientific Approach of Advaita Vedanta*, *The Essential Gaudapaada*, *The Essential Adi Shankara*, and *The Perfect Method & Unique Method of Shankara's Nondualism* (all distributed by Hind Navotthana Pratishthana; for contact information see page 272, under "At the Kerala Ashram").

Today, Gangolli is known for his teachings of the classical Advaita Vedanta tradition in the lineage of its founder Sri Adi Shankara [eighth century AD]. Because these teachings are solidly based on the methods expounded in

three ancient Indian texts—the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita and the Brahma Sutras—they are presented as being authoritatively based on the scriptures. In this sense, they stand independent of the personality and the teaching style of a specific teacher and her or his personal biases, enlightenment experience, and charismatic power. (In contrast, teachers of Vedanta who teach their own personal sadhana and enlightenment experience are often called Vedantic mystics.)

Besides teaching students and writing and publishing his books, Sri Gangolli spends a great part of his time in meditation and solitude at an ashram in Kerala.

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Vedanta Is the Science of Reality

In April 1997, I was visiting my dear friend, K. Ramaswami, in Bangalore. It was his eighty-fifth birthday. I first met him on my initial visit to the Ramanashramam in summer of 1993. Ramaswami had met Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1935 and became his ardent devotee. After his retirement thirty years ago, he offered his house and energy to the work of Sri Ramana and created a small ashram in Bangalore called the Sri Ramana Kendra Trust.

On one occasion during my five-day stay in his small ashram, Ramaswami pulled me by my arm and drew me close to him. He looked into my eyes for a few moments and then said, “After all you have gone through in your search for truth, Madhukar, you are only left with two options. Either you take the Maharshi (Ramana) as your guru, stick to his teachings, and practice his atma vichara sadhana [self-inquiry practice] or you take to the path of Sri Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta.” Placing a large volume into my hands, he suggested, “Read this book!” I looked down at the book and saw its title: *Vedanta or the Science of Reality* (by K.A. Krishna Swami Iyer; 1930; Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya, Holinarsipur, India). I took it back to my room and began to read it right away. Instantly, I was captivated by the profundity of the teachings that were opening up before me.

I was so delighted and inspired by what I read, that I wrote a letter to the publisher that same day, describing briefly my spiritual search up to then. I explained that the quest for truth and enlightenment was a matter of life and death for me, and that I wanted to meet a genuine teacher who not only proclaimed, but also lived as a direct experience in his or her daily life, what Sri Shankara taught.

A few weeks later, I received a letter that had been posted in Bangalore. D.B. Gangolli wrote that the letter containing my request for a teacher had been forwarded to him because the publisher thought that he was the right teacher for me. Sri Gangolli explained that he didn't have any regular students but was so impressed by my life-and-death quest that he felt he couldn't refuse me.

In July 1997, for the first time, we sat face to face in his niece's apartment in Bombay. Sri Gangolli's penetrating eyes met mine, and his words seemed simultaneously ancient and timeless. He was well over six feet tall, and his slender body moved gracefully and with an ease that belied his seventy-five years. During the next ten days, Sri Gangolli instructed me in traditional Advaita Vedanta in daily morning and afternoon teaching sessions.

Over the following two years, I met Sri Gangolli three more times for further teachings, either in his niece's flat in Bombay or in his flat in Bangalore. As I continued to study with him, I realized that my character and approach as a seeker had changed. By that time, I had been studying in India for more than ten years. For most of that time, I had been consumed with striving—with the overcoming of obstacles, the passion of seeking, and the determination to become permanently enlightened. Now this almost obsessive habit of struggling was beginning to feel one-sided. I started to find myself more interested in living with full awareness in the moment with an open heart rather than in the battling with the commanding aspect of my ego.

In the spring of 2000, I contracted a serious bout of dysentery that after several months compelled me to return to the West. I was feeling so inspired by my studies with Gangolli, that for the purpose of my continuing spiritual study and this book, I arranged to work with him over the Internet. He responded tirelessly to the questions I put to him.

I hoped that Sri Gangolli's answers would assist me in what was most important to me at this point on my odyssey: experiencing fulfillment, cultivating peace, and living in balance. After a decade in India, I found it quite difficult at times to adapt again to the lifestyle of the Western marketplace. Perhaps Advaita Vedanta could help me engage in daily life with more ease and a deeper spiritual understanding. I also hoped that Sri Gangolli could help me integrate the often-scholarly Vedantic teachings into life as it presented itself moment to moment. And I wished to become more deeply anchored in the Self through our exchange.

Sri Gangolli is a teacher of pure traditional Shankara Vedanta. He wrote as he spoke—in a formal, scholarly and sometimes literary way. I bow in deep gratitude to Sri Gangolli for his deep wisdom and remarkable fortitude, which has inspired and supported me throughout the completion of this book.

Vedanta is not a mere philosophy—it is a teaching about our true nature

Classical Vedanta is a vast and intricate spiritual science. It requires study, reflection, and a committed practice that is best to carry out with a true teacher such as Sri Gangolli. For this reason, I have limited Sri Gangolli to three main aspects: (a) What is Advaita Vedanta?; (b) How does a study of classical Vedanta lead one to recognize and become established in the Self?; and (c) How does Advaita Vedanta support one's spirituality in daily life?

Madhukar - What is true Vedanta?

Gangolli - Vedanta is a unique and direct method of Self-realization. It offers a means of immediate Self-knowledge that enables one to resolve the fundamental and universal ignorance about our essential nature. Vedanta is regarded as the science of reality.

Madhukar - Your phrase “science of reality” sounds rather scholarly and intellectual. In your understanding of it, does Vedanta directly address our daily life experiences?

Gangolli - That’s a good question. In fact, based on intuition and conscious experience, it leaves out no feature of life in its totality.

Madhukar - What does the term “Vedanta” mean?

Gangolli - The word “Vedanta” literally means “the end” or “the highest point of all knowledge.” It is composed of two Sanskrit roots: “vid,” which means “to know” and “anta,” which means “end” or “highest point.” Vedanta is based on three fundamental ancient texts: the Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Upanishads. The Gita Bhashya, a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita written circa 800 AD by Sri Adi Shankara, the foremost teacher of Advaita Vedanta, is also an important text.

Madhukar - Starting with the Upanishads, please explain these texts for us. What are the Upanishads? Who wrote them and what do they teach?

Gangolli - The Upanishads are sets of Indian scriptures written between 2500 and 500 BC. They are regarded as the storehouse of knowledge

gathered by ancient sages who remained anonymous and selfless. These sages distilled into writing the spiritual knowledge they attained while in communion with the absolute, transcendental reality. The Upanishads comprise the final portion of each of the four large and famous compilations known as the Vedas—the Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda. These ancient scriptures contain the spiritual knowledge of Brahman, the ground of all Being [God] and atman, the inner Self and presence of God within the individual. These scriptures are regarded by the Hindus as the authoritative, divine, and eternal sources of all comprehensive and consummate human knowledge. The Brahma Sutras, in particular, are concise and logically arranged aphorisms written by Badarayana containing the essence of the Upanishads.

Madhukar - If you will, what in your view is the significance of the Bhagavad Gita? What is the essence of its teaching?

Gangolli c The Bhagavad Gita is, of course, one of Hinduism's most famous and respected texts. It is a portion of the Mahabharata, in which Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, gives instructions to Arjuna. It is an epic that teaches dharma [ethical right livelihood], the eternal principle of right action, moral duty, virtue, religious tradition and divine law.

Madhukar - What are the different schools of Vedanta?

Gangolli - The three most important doctrines included in Vedanta are the Advaita teaching of Adi Shankara [circa 788–820 AD], the Vishishta Advaita [qualified nondualism] teaching of Ramanujam [circa 1200 AD] and the Dwaita [dual] teaching of Madhwa [circa 1300 AD]. The Advaita or nondual school of Shankara is the oldest and most commonly accepted doctrine within Vedanta. We are focusing on the latter teaching only, which

I consider to be the most complete and satisfying. Therefore, when we use the word “Vedanta” in our discussions, we will be referring to the Advaita teachings of Adi Shankara (who is often called Shankaracharya).

Madhukar - Please, explain the word “Advaita.”

Gangolli - The word “Advaita” comes from the Sanskrit word “Dvait” and the prefix “a.” “Dvait” means “two, or dual” and the prefix “a” means “not,” in the sense of negation. So Advaita means “not two, or nondual.” Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankara means the nondual Vedanta of Adi Shankara. The word Advaita then refers to total unity that does not include the possibility of any duality.

Madhukar - Philosophy means “the love and pursuit of wisdom and knowledge.” Is it useful to consider Advaita Vedanta a mere philosophy? Or is there a difference between Vedanta and other philosophies?

Gangolli - This is a very important question. The approach of Vedanta is fundamentally different from that of other philosophies. In Vedanta, the pursuit of truth is not an end in itself; in addition to knowing the truth, we have to live and be the truth. Vedanta is the study of our own true nature, the nature of humankind, and the nature of all creation. Its objective is to resolve and remove the fundamental ignorance into which all human beings are born. This natural ignorance leads to a sense of limitation and inadequacy in each of us. Vedanta offers a resolution to this problem. It is therefore not classified as a mere philosophy or as a school of thought. Rather, it may instead be understood as a direct means of Self-knowledge that resolves human limitation and inadequacy.

Madhukar - Please comment on the three foundational principles of Advaita Vedanta as stated by Shankaracharya:

1. Brahma Satyam: The Ultimate Reality alone is real.
2. Jagat Mithya: The universe is unreal.
3. Jivo Brahmaiva Na Paraha: The individual self [jiva] is not other than the Ultimate Reality [Brahman].

Gangolli - Although the Ultimate Reality is understood to be the causal source of the universe, it is not regarded as an intrinsic part of it. It is useful to consider a classical analogy to understand what this means. If we consider the relationship between the sun and its reflection on a lake, we can understand that the sun is the continuing source of its reflection but is not contained in it. In the same sense that the sun is the only reality behind the reflection, the Ultimate Reality is the only reality behind the universe.

Madhukar - In sum, the reflection on the lake exists but it is relatively unreal because the “true reality” causing the reflection is the sunlight. Is the second statement “The universe is unreal” expressing this same truth?

Gangolli - The second of Shankara’s statements does not claim that the universe does not exist, it just states that the universe only exists in the same sense that the sun’s reflection on the lake exists. Without the sun, there would not be a reflection, and without the Ultimate Reality, there would be no universe. Just as the sun is independent of what happens to its

reflection, so the Ultimate Reality is independent of what happens to the universe, though it is always causal and “behind the scenes.”

Madhukar - Please explain the third statement.

Gangolli - The third of Shankara’s statements reminds us that our individual selves (in fact, there is only one Self!) are direct manifestations of the Ultimate Reality. The Self is the source and cause of the mind and body just as the Ultimate Reality is the source of the universe, that includes our mind and body. The Self is not an intrinsic part of anything, just as the sun is not an intrinsic part of its reflection.

The Self is continuous and present behind all appearances. It is simply veiled by the mental activities or modifications of the mind. These activities, like waves on the sea over our pure consciousness, can be stilled by means of certain meditative spiritual practices. When the veils are calmed and finally removed, the Self is experienced directly. Because the Self is a direct manifestation of the Ultimate Reality, an experience of the Self is the same as a direct experience of the Ultimate Reality.

Brahman is the ultimate truth that leads to immortality

Madhukar - What, then, is the purpose of life, according to Vedanta?

Gangolli - According to Advaita Vedanta, as taught originally by Sri Shankaracharya between 788 and 820 AD, the main aim of life is to experience the nondual transcendental reality of one’s true essential nature.

This reality is the essence and the ground of all Being and is perceivable only by direct intuitive experience. This essence is the substratum of all phenomena of the universe. Although from the empirical viewpoint the universe appears to be real, in truth it is all the Self (or atman), which is the one and only reality and the underlying nature and ground of Being of the universe of multiplicity.

Madhukar - How do you define the Self?

Gangolli - The Self is understood to be both the ground of reality as well as the very substratum of the “I”-notion [organizing ego sense] in all of us. The Self or atman is none other than Brahman, or the Ultimate Reality. It is the subtlest principle and is the essence of all things, animate and inanimate. Ultimately, the Self is the only reality and is the essential nature of the seeker of truth. Brahman is regarded as the ultimate truth that can save the human soul from its cycle of births and deaths and lead it to immortality. The human mind, in its ordinary state, is not capable of knowing this truth because of its tendency to look outwards and its desire for gross objects, which it imagines to be the only source of happiness.

Madhukar - What is Brahman?

Gangolli - The Ultimate Reality, or Brahman, is eternally pure, essential Consciousness, and ever free. Being the only reality, it is the All. One who knows it as his/her very Self becomes Brahman by that very knowledge. Just as Brahman is the All, the knower of Brahman also becomes All. Brahman is a whole without parts, one without a second beside it, and infinite but not as contrasted with something finite. Brahman is fearless, immortal by nature, all-pervading, changeless, and eternal.

Pure Consciousness is the all-pervading and all-illuminating substratum of the “I”-notion

Madhukar - How can the Self be recognized through the Vedantic teaching?

Gangolli - Vedanta teaches that all objects and phenomena, including the delusory “I”-notion is simply a false appearance within the witnessing Pure Consciousness. Only after the “I”-notion is presumed do the other constituents such as the intellect, the memory, the volitional mind, the five gnostic sense organs, the body, and the external objective phenomena of the world come into our awareness.

Madhukar - Are you saying, then, that the entire manifestation, including the “I”-notion, the body-mind, and the senses, is unreal?

Gangolli - That is exactly what Vedanta teaches.

Madhukar - How does the seeker come to understand his unreality, so to speak, and then go on to experience his or her true nature?

Gangolli - The Vedantic science helps the seeker to take a quantum leap from the usual “I”-notion and its paraphernalia, i.e., the body, mind, senses, and the world (God included!) to the witnessing Pure Consciousness that is beyond all duality and time-space-causation categories. Through the teaching of Vedanta, the seeker can come to the steadfast conviction that

Pure Consciousness is eternally nondual and in fact is the substratum of the “I”-awareness whenever the latter manifests. Furthermore, through Vedanta we realize the truth that there are not two phenomena—i.e., Pure Consciousness and the “I”-awareness—Pure Consciousness alone exists! In this recognition, the sense of “I” gets “falsified” or “rescinded” by Pure Consciousness itself. There is no manifoldness in the Absolute, which by its nature is beyond the comprehension of the mind and senses.

Madhukar - What is the central method used in Vedanta?

Gangolli - Traditional, pure Shankaracharya Vedanta teaches a unique method for cognizing here and now one’s true nature as the Self spontaneously, directly, and immediately. This fundamental method for enabling the seeker to intuit the transcendental reality is called superimposition and rescission.

Madhukar - Could you give an example of this method?

Gangolli - Let me tell you an ancient tale that is used to describe the cornerstone of the Vedantic teaching method called “deliberate superimpositions and rescission.”

Along with big assets of immovable property, jewels, gold ornaments, and gold coins, a rich landlord owned seventeen elephants. The rich man had three sons. The youngest was a schoolboy while the oldest was in his early twenties. When the aged landlord suddenly died, his sons were asked to divide the wealth of their father according to his will. As per this will the eldest son was to receive half of the total inheritance, the second son a third,

and the schoolboy a ninth. Assisted by the elders in the family, the sons divided all assets peacefully and harmoniously as per the stipulations of their departed father's will. However, the correct distribution of the elephants seemed to be impossible.

"In regard to the elephants, we cannot follow our father's last wish," the oldest son declared. "I am certain that our father doesn't want us to kill any of the elephants to divide them. How can we fulfill our father's last wish and remain good sons?" he asked his brothers. Confused, the three brothers approached an old friend of their father and asked him to help them to solve their problem. He agreed to do so and came to the brothers' house riding on an elephant of his own. He offered to add his own elephant to their herd, making the number eighteen, and then asked the brothers to divide them now.

The eldest son received nine, the second received six, and the youngest son inherited two elephants. Adding up the total number of distributed elephants, it came to a total of seventeen ($9+6+2=17$)! So their father's wise friend mounted the remaining elephant—his own—and rode back home. Everyone was happy and satisfied.

Madhukar - What bearing does this story have on the Vedantic method of "deliberate superimposition and rescission"?

Gangolli - Dividing seventeen elephants was posing a big problem. How could seventeen living animals be divided according to the father's will without killing any of them? Wisely adding an eighteenth elephant to the father's herd, the family friend found an elegant solution to the problem of dividing them into parts of one-half, one-third, and one-ninth without cutting any of the animals into pieces. The number eighteen was magical.

The eighteenth elephant was only added temporarily in order to solve a practical, transactional problem. As soon as the apparent anomaly caused by wanting to divide the number seventeen into specific parts was solved, the eighteenth elephant could be withdrawn. All elephants remained unscathed and untouched.

In vyavahaara [empirical dealings] we come across all kinds of contradictions, paradoxes and anomalies. Atman, the absolute nondual Reality behind all objective phenomena in the world of duality (atman is analogous to the magical number of eighteen in the story), helps solve all anomalies and contradictions of mundane life. But once the problems are solved with the assistance of a guru or the shastras [Hindu scriptures] (or both), atman remains untouched and unrelated. And the sincere student is led to rise to the intuitive level of pure Being-Consciousness by abrogating all superimposed characteristics alien to his or her innate essence of being. In the story the number eighteen made it possible to solve an apparently unsolvable problem. Similarly, atman or pure Being-Consciousness helps the seeker identify with his true Self by “switching off” his or her natural identification with the body and mind that is entertained by a false notion of “I.”

In the same way, the extroverted “I”-notion in all of us with its concomitant retinue—i.e., mind, body, senses, and manifestation—is acknowledged to be real from the empirical point of view; for that very reason, nobody asks for or seeks any proof for the determination of the reality of this “I”-notion. But when the ultimate objective of this unique Vedantic spiritual science of recognizing one’s absolutely real Self as pure Being-Consciousness is being taught, the earlier superimposition of the “reality” of the “I”-notion is rescinded by demonstrating that our pure Being-Consciousness is the all-pervading and all-illuminating substratum.

Madhukar - Does it take time to understand existentially and permanently the true nature of our being? What is the time factor in Self-realization?

Gangolli - The recognition of our true Self can be, and quite often is, instantaneous—usually on the occasion of simply hearing the truth. However, becoming established in the Self, in most cases requires time, perhaps lifetimes. Over time, in the process of teaching the truth of who we really are, the conviction of the absolute reality of our nondual Self becomes rooted in the student. Thus, the superimposition of the “reality” of our “I”-notion stands canceled or nullified by the direct intuition of the absolute reality of our pure Being-Consciousness or Self.

Madhukar - How does Vedanta facilitate the sustained awareness of the Self?

Gangolli - Once the seeker is able to raise his cognitive faculty to the level of intuitive experience of the witness in Pure Consciousness, various methods of deliberate superimposition and consequent rescission prescribed by the Vedantic texts are recommended. By doing such subtle practical exercises, the seeker develops a true sense of renunciation or detachment in all matters that are noneternal and false. In fact, throughout all mundane actions and transactions, the seeker of enlightenment recognizes more and more a sustaining power as the very substratum of the witnessing Pure Consciousness. Thereon, it becomes simply a matter of “switching on” and “switching off” the viewing point of either [the real] Pure Consciousness or the [false] “I”-notion, depending upon which he or she is utilizing.

Self-knowledge can never be an effect of any kind of practice

Madhukar - In Vedanta, is intuitive knowledge, or jnana, obtained by practice, or grace, or both?

Gangolli c In this spiritual science of Vedanta, the word “jnana” means “intuitive knowledge” or pure Being-Consciousness. This intuitive knowledge is actually everyone's innate, innermost core of being. Since this essential nature of pure Being-Consciousness is eternal and nondual, it is beyond all relativity and relationships. Hence, this jnana or Self-knowledge can never be an effect of any kind of practice. The Self as the pure Being-Consciousness is neither a cause nor an effect. Thus, jnana [wisdom] cannot be obtained, cannot be acquired afresh by any kind of practice by the “I”-notion—i.e., as the practitioner.

Madhukar - In that case, why is it that various spiritual practices are taught in Vedanta?

Gangolli - The proper answer to this question in the light of the above explanation is: The Vedantic texts teach that our focal point as a practitioner—that is, the presumption of our “I”-notion—is a basic misconception. Being full of desires, the “I”-notion is invariably extroverted and focused through an external gaze. Thus it is habitually interested in and motivated towards something or other in the external world. So if Vedanta teaches any spiritual practice or discipline, it can only be with a view to making our mind introverted toward the mind's very source, which is the Self as our innate, innermost pure Being-Consciousness-Bliss.

Madhukar c What are the qualities of the extroverted and the introverted mind, respectively?

Gangolli - It is taught in Vedanta that an extroverted mind is fickle, demanding, and highly materialistic in its pursuits. The mind is whisked away towards objective phenomena through the five-fold outlets of the senses and in this way fritters its energies outward and away. By means of spiritual practices recommended in the Upanishads, the mind becomes single-pointed and ready for deep introspection. By cultivating this inward focusing of attention, the mind becomes cleansed of its demanding, fickle, and extroverted qualities, which reduces its tendency to move out into desires.

Madhukar - Let me repeat my earlier question: Is jnana obtained by grace?

Gangolli - The word “grace” is used by all religions that teach their followers to have faith and devotion toward a supernatural power. They also teach that when the devotee prays to and invokes God’s blessings, grace is bestowed upon them. From this point of view, jnana, or intuitive knowledge, can be looked at as God’s grace. However, from the philosophical point of view of Vedanta, spiritual practices or disciplines help attain jnana through introvertedness followed by intuitive knowledge. Thus the question of whether jnana is obtained through practice or through grace, or both, depends on which viewpoint we take—the religious or the philosophical.

Madhukar - What practices before and after the recognition of the Self help one remain in one’s essential nature?

Gangolli - Before the recognition of the Self as our real essential nature of pure Being-Consciousness, we are all under the spell of a delusory misconception—the “I”-notion. Vedanta teaches karma yoga, or selfless service, to help the seeker get rid of the me-my-mine sense in order to get

the mind one-pointed and introverted. Thereafter, this spiritual science teaches dhyana yoga, or meditation, to enable the practitioner to shift his or her identification from the “I”-notion to the innate pure Being-Consciousness of the Self, which happens to be our essential nature. It becomes quite evident now that if the seeker wishes to “remain” in his or her innate essential nature, regular meditation will have to be repeated until he or she gets “established” in the Pure Consciousness of their essential nature.

Selfless service is a first step in controlling the mind

Madhukar - How does Vedanta teach the cultivation of presence, or full Self-awareness, in daily life?

Gangolli - If a sincere student of Vedanta adopts a spiritual way of life and practices the basic principles of karma yoga assiduously in his daily chores, he will slowly realize the benefits of such teachings. Actually, it is the constant awareness of the Self that acts as the source of strength and confidence for aspirants while they perform all their duties and take care of life’s responsibilities. The individual steadily cultivates the habit of surrendering all actions and pursuits in a worshipful dedication to God, or Self, thereby minimizing egoism. This increasing sense of total surrender unto the Self, from whom all the strength and vigor of the senses and the mind are derived, is called devotion, or bhakti yoga, in Vedanta.

Madhukar - It would seem that karma and bhakti yoga practices pertain to the “outer” or extroverted realms of life. Which practices focus on the cultivation of one’s inner qualities?

Gangolli - In Vedanta, there is a greater stress on the inner aspect of life. If the aspirant cultivates this aspect in daily life, he or she will be more and more in the proximity or presence of his own Self as the pure Being-Consciousness. Eventually, when the seeker is able to “switch over” to full Self-awareness, he/she will realize that the deep-seated identification with the “I”-notion was a mere delusion and will therefore be in a better position to give it up. According to Vedanta, this switchover from a delusory, misconceived identification with the body-mind-senses complex (which is the basis of the “I”-notion) to the identification with one’s own innate essential nature of the Self (Pure Consciousness) is called dhyana yoga, or union through meditative awareness.

Madhukar - What about negative emotions? How does a meditator, for example, work with fear or anger?

Gangolli - As long as our attachment to the body-mind-senses complex continues to have its sway on our “I”-notion, all mental concepts, emotions, and feelings, such as anger or fear, will keep on expressing and erupting in us. In fact, our “I”-notion itself is a clear symbol or symptom of our inherent identification with the body-mind-senses complex. For example, without an attachment to and identification with this complex, no “I”-notion exists, like in deep sleep.

Madhukar - You say all emotions and feelings are expressions of our “I”-notion. Can you give specific examples?

Gangolli - When this “I”-notion aspires or desires to possess or acquire something in the external world and something comes in its way or impedes its attempts, anger manifests and overpowers the discriminative faculty. Similarly, fear is born when what is possessed or acquired by this “I”-notion

is in danger of being taken away. No wonder our attachment to the body is so deep-seated that all human beings view death with the greatest fear. Through intuitive knowledge of our innate essential nature as the Self, we are able to lose our attachment to the body-mind-senses complex and thereby to our delusory “I”-notion.

Madhukar - How does Vedanta teach us to live a balanced life and improve the quality of daily life?

Gangolli - Emotional management or control over the mind is part and parcel of the sterling qualities that an aspirant is directed to cultivate after the sustained practice of karma yoga or jnana yoga, or discrimination between what is eternal and what is noneternal. On the strength of this discrimination, we can cultivate a high sense of detachment and renunciation. Control over the mind in which all emotions and feelings are embedded, followed by control over the senses, which run after the multitudes of objective phenomena, will follow. We can also cultivate introvertedness, forbearance, a steadfast dedication to spiritual pursuits, and finally, mental quietude.

Madhukar - Isn't a life of moderation suggested for the Vedanta student?

Gangolli - The expression “balanced life” in Vedanta signifies a way of living not given to excessive or extreme indulgences either at the sensual level or the mental level. Vedanta teaches about a manner of living, which is guided by moderation and focused toward purposeful activities, by utilizing insight into the three gunas. These are the innate qualities of all Existence and comprise everything in our lives. These qualities are sattva guna [quality of purity or refined, sober, and prudent behavior], rajas guna [quality of dynamic and robust activity], and tamas guna [inertia or a

lethargic, indolent, and callous quality]. Just like the triad of the cognizer, the means of cognition, and the object of cognition, these three qualities are concomitant and inseparable.

In each individual, these three qualities exist in various degrees or proportions, and they come into play according to the predominance of any one of them in both one's overall character and in a given situation.

Madhukar - Can these gunas be cultivated?

Gangolli - Yes, these gunas can be cultivated and controlled by means of various Vedantic practices, or sadhanas. The Bhagavad Gita has devoted one complete chapter to describing the manner in which these three qualities influence and induce our senses, mental faculties, emotions, and feelings. According to Vedanta, rajas and tamas are perennially opposed, and in combination they manifest all kinds of disturbances and distractions in our psyche or soma. But sattva, with its equilibrium and purity, functions to balance these opposing forces. A predominance of sattva guna brings about peace, happiness, and contentment. In fact, the more we cultivate the sattva guna in all our activities and pursuits, the more the quality, texture, and purposefulness of our life are improved.

Madhukar - What is the most direct and efficient means for clearing one's desires, or vasanas, and bringing about full Self-awareness in daily life?

Gangolli - Vasanas are the unfulfilled desires or aspirations lying latent in the mind. Whenever a favorable or convenient situation in the workaday world appears, these vasanas emerge in the form of strong desires. In an

unfavorable or inconvenient situation, they emerge as an aversion. Either of these prompts the “I”-notion to perform an action. According to the Vedantic philosophy, a vicious cycle operates in everyone's life, in the following sequence: First, ajnana [ignorance] gives rise to desire or aversion, which leads to action, or karma. This leads to the fruit of that action and then to the enjoyment of that fruit. This enjoyment leaves a latent impression of itself in the form of a vasana. Thus our “I”-notion, which is full of desires and aversions, is caught in a recurring cycle, or soul's wheel, of births and deaths. From this it becomes quite clear that as long as an individual does not remove the bondage of ignorance through Self-knowledge, this bundle of vasanas cannot be eliminated.

Madhukar - What happens if this recurring cycle is not checked, as is the case with most people living on this planet?

Gangolli - In each round of this cycle, the lurking desires in our mind increase progressively. As a result, one becomes more and more extroverted, fickle-minded, highly materialistic, and ambitious in life. For this reason, Vedanta

recommends karma yoga or selfless service as the first step towards getting rid of ignorance. Selfless service can be practiced in everyone's daily life through nonattachment to the outcome of one's work. This ability to be an

instrument of service without being attached to the fruit of one's effort is something that can be cultivated by anyone. For steady progress on this spiritual path, one has also to develop patience, perseverance, and optimism.

The final step is to dissolve the mind into atman

Madhukar - How does living and working with nonattachment to the fruits of one's actions bring about awareness of the Self in daily life?

Gangolli - A graduated course of discipline is set forth for those who would retrace their steps to the Self. First of all, one has to control the senses and restrain them from fleeing about aimlessly. Then the mind has to be brought back from fluttering in all directions. The third step is to make the mind single-pointed and direct it exclusively towards the Self, or atman. The last step is to dissolve the mind into atman.

Madhukar - How can one control the senses and restrain them from fleeing about aimlessly? How can one minimize the number of desires arising in the mind?

Gangolli - The very first step towards stopping the senses from fleeing from one object to another is what is called karma yoga in the Bhagavad Gita. One way of accomplishing it is explained:

“Him from who the [evolution and activity of all] beings take place, [and] by who all this is pervaded by worshiping Him through [the performance of] duty proper to oneself, man attains the end.” Bhagavad Gita 18–46

Living and working with no attachment to the fruits of one's actions is the external aspect of karma yoga, whereas the internal aspect is to consider work as virtue and offer all actions and work as worship to God. Together,

these two aspects of karma yoga help minimize the number of desires arising in the mind. As a result, qualities like humility, honesty, sincerity, and dedication to spiritual pursuit arise and are supported by a desire to attain liberation.

Madhukar - The external and internal karma yoga practices we have been discussing are followed by further, more refined practices. What are they?

Gangolli - A mind, purified and refined by karma yoga, can be soaked in the awareness of Self by the practice of the direct, intuitive disciplines of shravana, or listening, to the Upanishadic teachings taught by a seasoned, traditionally trained preceptor. Furthermore, reflection, or manana, upon those teachings and deep contemplation, or nididhyasana, create Self-awareness in daily life. The cumulative effect of such daily spiritual practices can help one to become established in the Selfconsciousness, which is everyone's innate essence of pure Being-Consciousness.

Madhukar - What role do virtue, conduct, and values play in Vedanta? Are they to be cultivated? And if so, how and why?

Gangolli - Virtue is the equivalent of righteousness and the opposite of vice or unrighteousness. Conduct means how one behaves in the world of duality, and this is the opposite of misconduct or misbehavior. Values mean the standards by which one judges the worth of things. There are expressions like "human values," meaning human excellences, and "eternal values," or everlasting qualities, as opposed to evanescent values. All such good and positive qualities come under the realm of dharma [ethical right livelihood]. Dharma or dharmic values or virtues are taught by all religions. Vedanta, as a science of religion, investigates virtuous as well as unethical

conduct, but goes beyond this pair of opposites to guide one to the eternal, nondual reality of the Self.

Madhukar - Ethical right livelihood varies for different persons at different times and under varying environmental conditions, does it not?

Gangolli - Yes. Even in the life of the same person, dharma changes according to one's stage in life. When virtuous or righteous qualities are practiced by the "I"-as-practitioner, they enable a person to live predominantly in the purity of sattva guna, which balances the robust, active rajas and the inert tamas. The sattvic mind is invariably purified and discriminative, and is thereby fit to launch itself toward the Self. When we cultivate virtuous qualities, the mind becomes purified. A weak mind is devoid of the divine gift of the discriminative faculty, and invariably such a fickle mind can be whisked away by the five senses towards the worldly objects of enjoyment.

Conversely, a refined, discriminative, purified mind is strong and steadfast. Eventually, such a mind can intuit the Self, which is the substratum of all apparent duality. Unless the extroverted fickle mind is cleansed and made introverted and one-pointed, it cannot possibly discern the Upanishadic teachings. Without the proper faith, reflection, and meditation, one cannot possibly realize the Self.

Madhukar - What do moments of joy, bliss, and laughter mean in Vedanta? Could they be understood as dips into the Self?

Gangolli - In Vedanta, the absolute reality of our innate, innermost Self is said to be of the very essence of sat [pure essence of being], chit [pure consciousness of knowledge] and ananda [pure bliss or happiness]. It is also taught that although these three words are borrowed from the language of duality, they are not adequate to express the ultimate or absolute truth of Brahman or atman. In an empirical context, these three words would have a different connotation, but in Vedanta they are used to communicate a nondual “entity” and hence they mean one and the same reality. So sat is chit, and chit is ananda, and ananda is sat.

Thus, Pure Consciousness is signified by the expression “pure bliss or happiness.” Actually, when our mind

gets highly elated, satisfied, or satiated, it is metaphorically dipping or merging into its very source of the Self. When we experience moments of great joy, elation, or rapturous bliss, this is analogous to the bliss of deep sleep, wherein the mind is said to “merge into its source, or the Self.”

To be established in Pure Consciousness is virtual immortality

Madhukar - How does Vedanta teach one to accept death and prepare oneself to meet both death and life with open eyes?

Gangolli - The waking and dream experiences are universal and holistic. In both of them, there exists the dichotomy of the subjective consciousness and the objective phenomena of the world. But in deep sleep, both of these are totally absent. The presence or manifestation of this is witnessed, intuited and cognized by the Pure Consciousness, which never goes out of

existence and never comes into being. In a manner of speaking, coming back into the body when one awakens can be reckoned as “birth,” and “losing” the body in the deep sleep can be reckoned as “death.” Both these experiences—“birth” in the waking state and “death” in the deep-sleep state—occur daily in one’s life. Vedanta trains us to remain established in Pure Consciousness, which is said to be virtual immortality, meaning beyond both birth and death. For this reason, Vedanta makes a seeker fearless by preparing him to face death—which most common people dread—without any undue sense of fear, anxiety, or agitation.

Madhukar - Fearlessness, then, must be a sign of an advanced level of disidentification from the ego-“I,” or the mind-body and senses, right?

Gangolli - Correct. When the seeker—by virtue of his introspective insights of intuitive experience of Pure Consciousness—acquires this fearlessness, it signifies that his identification with the “I”-notion and its paraphernalia has been negated. Then the seeker lives, let us say, more and more in the Self instead of in its mirage-like replica—the “I”-notion. That person entertains a higher and fuller sense of fulfillment of the goal of life and of all human existence and endeavor. This alone is called realization of the Self while living in this very body and in this very world.

Classical Advaita Vedanta appears often to be highly scholarly, quite abstract and intellectual. That is because these teachings are based on traditional scriptures. The teachings of Sri Gangolli presented here are no exception. However, while in India in his presence, I was frequently guided beyond the mind by his words and teachings to experiences of Pure Consciousness. In those moments, all his explanations and teachings would dissolve into pure presence, and we would simply sit together in the silence, peace, and the beatitude of the Self.

At times, the traditional position of classical Advaita Vedanta that the “I”-notion, mind, body, senses and the whole cosmos were merely a reflection of Brahman, and therefore unreal, seemed to invite me to escape life and living. During my ten years in India, I sometimes did that by neglecting my body and emotions. I instead concentrated mainly on living in a spiritual environment that supported my focus on becoming established in the Self.

But this was only one step along my journey. During my illness, which initially involved severe dysentery and finally verged on a complete personality disintegration, both my body and emotions presented me with the bill: I realized that I was disconnected from them—and from living in the world.

Gradually I began to understand that an important part of my spiritual practice was to not try to escape mundane life but to face it exactly and completely as it arose. Although I appreciated the traditional Vedantic focus on detachment, disidentification, witnessing, and discovering my true nature, I came to understand the value and necessity of paying attention to my deepest feelings. And I slowly began to acknowledge the truth of my body and its physical wisdom. Paradoxically, and as a result, I started to discover that in addition to being born with ignorance, I was also born with—and was able to connect with—my original wholeness.

Residing in the West once again, I wanted to learn to live simply and wisely in the marketplace, and Sri Gangolli's scholarly detachment only heightened my sensitivity to this practical need. He had deepened my insight through his treatises on the importance of recognizing and becoming established in Pure Consciousness (which he speaks of so often and fondly abbreviates as PC). I am therefore grateful for his insistent reminders that I distinguish this pure state of essential nature from the “I”-notion and all its paraphernalia.

However, Sri Gangolli's Vedantic teachings so far did not provide me with sufficient practical applications for living a more illuminated day-to-day life. Because of this perceived shortcoming, I kept practicing Sri Ramana's self-inquiry method side by side with my studies with Sri Gangolli. I found Sri Ramana's simple practice to be a most efficient way to discover the unreality of the "I"-notion and to experience the practical truth of Vedanta at any given time.

Bridging the highly scholarly teachings of classical Advaita Vedanta with their application in daily life continues to be one of my heartfelt endeavors of this lifetime.

Epilogue

For the Self Alone

When asked about the key message in his life's work, Gandhi simply replied, "My life is my message." Truly one of India's greatest spiritual leaders, Gandhi reflected the central insights of Vedanta by stating, "I believe in the essential unity of all that lives. Therefore I believe that if one person gains spiritually, the whole world gains, and if one person falls, the world falls to that extent." When asked how he could dedicate himself so selflessly to serving India, he said, "I do this for my Self alone."

As I look back upon my spiritual odyssey, I feel grateful for the teachers who guided my steps. Just as with Gandhi, it was truly their lives and the power of the Self that was their real message. Whether I had in their presence just a moment of bliss or a momentary awakening, engaged in a spiritual honeymoon or a "marriage" as their devoted student, discovered a fountain of essence or a fatherly fire—each experience illumined my journey. Each teacher assured me in his or her own way that something they called enlightenment is available. And the legacy of their lives reminded me that even after one awakens into timeless grace, the feeling of the hard ground of daily life beneath one's feet, and the experience of the harsh challenges of this disturbed planet, quickly remove any notion that one may somehow retire from one's own odyssey of self-realization or from one's obligation to contribute toward the eventual goal of the enlightenment of all of humankind.

All of these great souls benefited my life; each one planted a seed of sincere intention. I therefore offer my respect and deepest gratitude to all these

beings.

On the road to making these vital discoveries, however, I found some teachers more important for me than others. For example, I feel especially fortunate to have begun studying Sri Ramana's work while I was with Poonjaji in Lucknow in 1991, as this was soon to be reinforced by the counsel of Sri Ramana's disciples Annamalai Swami and Lakshmana Swami. Sri Ramana's book *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (edited by David Godman, the librarian at the sage's ashram), opened up for me the method that has served me continuously since I first went to Arunachala in June of 1993. It was then that I first became deeply involved with Sri Ramana Maharshi's simple practice of self-inquiry: At the very moment in which a thought arises one should, without attempting to complete it, inquire, "To whom does this thought arise?" It will be known, "To me." If one then inquires, "Who am I?" the mind will turn back to its source—the Self—and the thought that arose will subside. By repeatedly inquiring in this way, the power of the mind to abide in its source increases.

David Godman explains the process and value of Sri Ramana's central practice as follows. Allow me to quote this at length, as I want you to carry this essential teaching with you.

Sri Ramana upheld the view that the notion of individuality is only the "I"-thought manifesting itself in different ways. Instead of regarding the different activities of the mind (such as ego, intellect and memory) as separate functions, he preferred to view them all as different forms of the "I"-thought. Since he equated individuality with the mind and the mind with the "I"-thought, it follows that the disappearance of the sense of individuality (i.e., Self-realization) implies the disappearance of both the mind and the "I"-thought. This is confirmed by his frequent statements to the effect that after Self-realization there is no thinker of thoughts, no performer of actions and no awareness of individual existence.

Since he upheld the notion that the Self is the only existing reality, he regarded the “I”-thought as a mistaken assumption which has no real existence of its own. He explained its appearance by saying that it can only appear to exist by identifying with objects. When thoughts arise, the “I”-thought claims ownership of them—“I think,” “I believe,” “I want,” “I am acting”—but there is no separate “I”-thought that exists independently of objects that it is identifying with. It only appears to exist as a real continuous entity because of the incessant flow of identifications, which are continually taking place.

Almost all of these identifications can be traced back to an initial assumption that the “I” is limited to the body, either as an owner-occupant or coexistent with its physical form. This “I am the body” idea is the primary source of all subsequent wrong identifications and its dissolution is the principal aim of self-inquiry.

Sri Ramana maintained that this tendency toward self-limiting identifications could be checked by trying to separate the subject “I” from the objects of thought with which it identified. Since the individual “I”-thought can not exist without an object, if attention is focused on the subjective feeling of “I” or “I am” with such intensity that the thoughts “I am this” or “I am that” do not arise, then the individual “I” will be unable to connect with objects. If this awareness of “I” is sustained, the individual “I” (the “I”-thought) will disappear and in its place there will be a direct experience of the Self. This constant attention to the inner awareness of “I” or “I am” was called self-inquiry (atma vichara) by Sri Ramana, and he constantly recommended it as the most efficient and direct way of discovering the unreality of the “I”-thought.

Through the guidance of both Annamalai Swami and Lakshmana Swami, I was able to refine both my understanding and practice of this approach. I found it to be a most efficient way to discover the unreality of the “I”-thought and to experience the truth of Vedanta practically. This method taught me to draw my mind inward and develop a “communication” with the most simple and profound truth of Self-awakening. With repetition, a process of disidentification with concepts of my own identity began to occur.

According to my current teacher, D.B. Gangolli, these concepts are the coverings of ignorance over the light of the true Self, or Pure Consciousness. This ignorance is considered to be the bondage that we have acquired through faulty but natural perceptions concerning who we really are. As these coverings begin to fall away, we are increasingly able to glimpse our true and essential state of being. It is this progressive dissolution of the concepts of our own identity that gradually leads to freedom from these concepts and to an experience and knowing of the inner true Self.

Over these many years of practice, I have verified to my own satisfaction that the practice of self-inquiry enables me to have immediate experiences of my essential nature. Self-inquiry continues to be for me the most direct and effective practice.

Even so, I feel certain of one thing: I could not have skipped a single teaching or practice on the path that led to this discovery. Each one provided an essential context, a portal, through which I could locate the next uncharted territory of the inner search.

My first teacher, Osho, unlocked for me the treasure chest of living life as a joyful celebration. Through my deep love of the guru's power and presence, he and his Buddhafield opened my heart to ecstasy, bliss, and mystical states. Most important, he led me to accept myself fully and to overcome my post-war Euro-pean social conditioning. I am grateful for his powerful presence in my life and especially for his teaching that we must live with totality, awareness, and joy.

Papaji's gift was his great freedom of spirit. I still can feel the heat of his intense gaze and the light of his joyful laughter. I am grateful for his pure intention and his persistence at waking up his disciples—and his insistence that they accept their awakening despite their protests. Although his fatherly love still reverberates with some echo of paternal fear, I honor him for his relentless courage to help me and so many others recognize the Self.

From Harish Madhukar I learned that devoting oneself to the welfare of others through service is a pure expression of an awakened heart. He gave me his fearlessness; he infused me with the strength of his determination and dedication to God.

Gangaji gently reminded me by her mindfulness and commitment to truth to let go of any idea of a separate self. Her purity touched me deeply and made my own heart sing with joy. The example of this gurubai, who has carried with such courage the torch handed to her by her teacher, has inspired me to teach others as well.

I can still experience Annamalai Swami's flashing eyes meeting the Self in my heart. Embodying a life of humility and moderation, he taught me how to meet each moment with an awakened acceptance. Even at the age of

ninety years, he modeled a pure way of living—simply and honestly—with contentment and reverence to his guru.

Lakshmana Swami was very grounded and fatherly. Although he did not welcome or entertain crowds of seekers, he attracted many by his elusive presence. He helped me to finally accept that practice will always be necessary—that there can be no vacation or retirement from the path of realization.

To Ramesh Balsekar I bow with reverence for the spaciousness and impersonal freedom he offered me. By teaching me again and again to accept What Is and not to be attached to the outcome of my actions, he helped me to realize a new freedom. Through his teachings, I came to recognize that like everyone else, I am an instrument of God, that we are not individual “doers” but part of an impersonal functioning of the totality of What Is.

Dadaji’s teaching woke me up from my lazy man’s dream that enlightenment would be served on a platter by destiny—without my needing to work for it. His firmness, love, and gentleness touched my heart and guided me to the experience of pure presence without thought, where the odyssey actually and paradoxically turns out to be a journey without goal.

Kiran’s message to me centered on cultivating contentment and serene self-acceptance. In the simplicity of his spiritual picnics with his family and friends, he pointed to the magic of ordinary experience. He taught that by living selflessly in the present, we can accept ourselves and meet whatever arises.

For UG Krishnamurti, who reflected in high relief a frustrated aspect of myself, enlightenment was seen as an illusory goal. His gift to me was that of cutting through all the notions surrounding enlightenment, and simply being human—without any philosophy, teaching, or guru. The contrast provided by his radical teachings served as a preparation for a deeper kind of letting go of my self-conceived project to achieve enlightenment.

I appreciated deeply Andrew Cohen’s brilliance and the coherence of his teaching—his emphasis on the importance of purification of the vehicle that would carry enlightenment, and his advocacy of the practice of cultivating moral integrity, clarity of intention, and open-hearted humility—rather than getting caught in an egoistic desire for a supposed Big Bang experience of enlightenment. He made me aware of the overriding importance of humankind’s own path of evolution over and against the smallness of my own personal path toward enlightenment, as well as the importance of engaging in an ever-deeper inquiry into increasingly wider realms of truth and reality.

Sri Gangolli’s refined dedication to scriptural truths and to the possibility of a practical application of the insights made possible by key scholarly distinctions will always tower high in my heart. His brimming knowledge and tireless writing testifies to the flaming truth of the Vedanta scriptures and the noble dedication of a pure and truth-seeking heart.

When all is said and done, I hope that the teachings presented in this book have inspired, rekindled, or intensified your own exploration into the mystery of Self-awakening. If what you have found in these pages has also inspired you to fall in love with a new guru—or get more deeply in touch with your inner guru—I count that as an extra blessing. May you continue

to be gifted with wisdom and encouragement for the quest to realize the truth of who you really are.

An Odyssey without Goal

Looking back on my odyssey, I can recognize a pattern in the evolution in my spiritual quest. It would appear that I proceeded through four different stages: (1) effort directed toward worldly success; (2) striving for the goal of enlightenment through devotion to my teachers and their spiritual practices and teachings; (3) increasing recognition of my true nature through correct knowledge and continued devoted practice; and (4) establishment in the Self through further self-inquiry and listening to, contemplating, and reasoning through the teachings.

My earliest search began with the painful recognition that in spite of my worldly success, I was still not fulfilled or happy. I then found myself on a twenty-year journey—accompanied by many side-glances toward other teachers and teachings—through a series of wholehearted commitments to five key teachers: Osho, Papaji, Ramana Maharshi (through the vehicle of his senior disciples), Ramesh Balsekar, and D.B. Gangolli. Allow me to single out and summarize once again—from a more personal point of view—the unique and diverse contributions to the progress of my odyssey that were provided by these five beloved teachers.

My root guru, Osho, made me aware of the ways in which my social and emotional conditioning blocked the realization of my own buddhahood. Fully exploring the body-mind-emotion complex through therapeutic and meditation techniques was his main emphasis—and as a result my own investigation into nature of the Self took a back seat, especially in the earlier years of my discipleship.

In stark contrast, the teaching of my next guru, Poonjaji, pointed almost exclusively to the true nature of the Self and facilitated experiencing this in his presence and under his direct guidance. Except for sitting in satsang with the master, he said, no other practices were necessary, for he believed that “meditation means the postponement of enlightenment” and that “the body itself is a disease.” Thus the exploration of the body-mind-emotion complex was ignored in his teaching. He declared that the first occurrence of a full recognition of the Self is enlightenment; according to him, no further stabilization and establishment in the Self is necessary. I no doubt experienced that which he referred to as enlightenment, but very soon found that these blissful experiences in no way meant an end to my odyssey.

Third, the practice of the self-inquiry method passed down from Ramana Maharshi through my brief but profound encounters with Sri Ramana’s disciples Annamalai Swami and Lakshmana Swami became a mainstay in my personal practice.

My fourth guru, Ramesh Balsekar, taught that everything is predestined, including my own enlightenment. In his view, practice is actually detrimental to enlightenment. Why, then, I wondered, did he hold satsang and teach at all? For me, this three-year association merely ended in a philosophical conundrum.

Finally, my last teacher, D.B. Gangolli, taught that the recognition of the Self—also called awakening—is indeed crucial but is definitely not the last step on the path to enlightenment. He taught that I still needed to become established in the Self through the threefold Advatic practice of shravana [listening], manana [reasoning] and nididhyasana [contemplating].

Striving had predominated in the early years with these teachers, when with fervent discipline, I pursued the goal of enlightenment, removing obstacles as they arose. But through my steady commitment to Advaitic practices, the dissolution of the notion of a “final solution”—the Big Bang of enlightenment—began. Along with that came a deepening acceptance of What Is. In time, I realized that it was my grasping and straining to be different than I was that had been keeping me out of contact with the ultimacy of the present moment.

As my experience of the Self deepened and firmed, the need to try to change myself or become something or somebody else decreased. I became focused less and less on changing my pain into bliss, and more and more on the peace of the Self in the face of the ever-changing situations of my life; I could simply see what was there. Sometimes it was pain plus awareness; at other times, happiness plus awareness. But no matter what appeared in consciousness, I discovered that my true nature remained always the same.

It eventually became clear to me that awareness, being, and presence continue to coexist with the flaws and idiosyncrasies of the human condition that are their fundamental ground—even after a complete abidance in the Self has occurred. So my journey, which had always had enlightenment as its aim, eventually turned into an odyssey without a goal. I understood once and for all that my true nature—consciousness, presence and being—has no goal.

Through the simple acceptance of What Is, I also started to realize how truth, when embodied, often appears paradoxical. Through the teachings of nonduality, I began to understand how opposites like detachment and connection, or discipline and play, support each other in the manifest world. Gradually, all the worlds I had once held separate came together in me as a whole; with this growing sense of inner unity, I now recognized them merely as different expressions of the Self.

What Is the “Best” Teaching for Me?

No matter which guru I studied with, I felt totally convinced when I met him that I had found the best teacher. With new vigor, I submerged myself in that “ultimate” teaching. I fell in love with the teacher, and I felt so blessed and grateful that I would strive, through offering donations and selfless service, to make his teachings available to as many people as I could.

Whatever path I was on, I was certain it was the best and only path. However, eventually I always discovered that a further level of teaching was waiting for me. I also became aware that at each successive level, my level of spiritual comprehension corresponded perfectly with my current teacher and his teaching.

So, then, do all paths lead to enlightenment, just as all roads led to Rome in the glory days of the Roman Empire? Having looked at and experienced different—and often seemingly opposing—teachings and paths, I have concluded that they do have a common ground: They all point to the truth of the Self. On the other hand, each teacher claimed, “My path worked for me and therefore it will work for you too.” Looking back now, I see that it would have been more honest and sincere if they had said, “If you come to me, I can teach you my path according to my own experience. My path worked for me; therefore, it may work for you too. But let me assure you that other paths may work as well. You must try them in order to find out for yourself.”

However, feeling certain that one is on the “best” path—whether this is true or not—does serve a positive function for the disciple. It inspires you to put your total energy behind the commitment to that path; after all, why would you bother to do that if you thought other paths are perhaps better than yours? But my sense now is that the need to declare one’s path as the best or the only one decreases as one becomes more rooted in the Self. Then it is merely the path that works for you; it doesn’t have to be better than someone else’s, much less the best available—though it is natural to want it to be so. So in a very important sense, the best path is always the one you are on at the present moment.

When one takes that attitude, the arrogance and judgment of thinking that other people’s paths are inferior dissolves, and you no longer feel in separation from or superior to any other true seeker. The Sufi story below illustrates this point.

Unknown to most people in a small town in Eastern Turkey, the local butcher, Ali Mussa, was actually a Sufi Master.

One day, the richest man in town entered that butcher shop, demanding loudly, “I want the best piece of meat you have got.”

Quietly, Ali Mussa answered, “In this shop, every piece is a best piece.”

On hearing and understanding the butcher’s words, the rich man became enlightened.

Each teaching is the “best” teaching; each path taught me what was optimal for my spiritual development at that time. However, each “shopping” experience was also accompanied by the pain and suffering caused by my incessant demand for the “best piece.” As I passed from guru to guru in my search for the best transmission or the pithiest teaching, many of my ex-fellow devotees would judge and condemn me. I often felt the loneliness of being an outcast.

But again, all the perceived inconsistencies, contradictions, controversies, inappropriate conduct, or “wrong” or incomplete teachings I encountered served as useful stepping stones; each actually was the best piece. And today, I know from my own experience that at each step, I was truly taken care of, protected, and guided by the Absolute, or Existence. This was true even when I didn’t feel like I was on any path at all, or felt disillusioned and wanted to drop the search altogether.

Questioning the Power of the Guru’s Transmission

Until I came across the traditional Advaita Vedanta teachings and the methods of D.B. Gangolli, I clung to the notion that the spiritual power and transmission of the guru would somehow mysteriously make me enlightened. What hooked me was the fact that so often in their presence, I was transported into another realm where what I had been so desperately seeking was simply there. This made it difficult not to believe that the teachers themselves were somehow the source of these experiences. Yet to this day, I cannot say for sure. What combination of factors and realities were actually responsible for these experiences? Was it the teachers? Was it me? Was it grace? Was it the Self? Was some measure of destiny involved? These are questions for which all seekers must find their own answers.

Even with these questions left unanswered, my desire for realization induced by a guru's transmission diminished. And I began to feel freed from the clutches of my own concepts and beliefs about their power to induce realization. Now the satisfaction of my love for truth didn't depend anymore on the teacher's personality or teaching style—or whether I got to be a close disciple.

Criteria for the True Teacher

A fundamental question of those who seek wisdom and enlightenment at the feet of a spiritual teacher is: What are the characteristics of a true teacher? At the homecoming of my odyssey, let me summarize what they are for me:

- Above all, a true teacher has to completely walk his talk.
- He or she abides in the Self permanently.
- A true guru is able to use his or her spiritual power and knowledge to assist others toward the goal of Self-realization. His or her teaching points constantly to the Self.
- A real teacher can be in passionate disagreement with other teachers but doesn't stoop to condemning them.

So did I have the good fortune to be with a teacher that met all four of these criteria? To be honest, during my odyssey I didn't meet even one teacher who walked his talk completely—although some did more than others. Furthermore, I realized that it was impossible for me to judge whether an individual was permanently abiding in the Self. Third, although all of them pointed to the same truth—the truth of the Self (the only common ground among them!)—I found that the focus and intensity of that pointing to the true Self differed widely in terms of the teachings themselves and the methods used to instill them. And, finally, one way or the other, all the teachers and gurus I met passionately and vehemently disagreed with other teachings and did make disparaging remarks about them and their proponents.

Dear reader, I invite you to stop here to reflect on the characteristics you consider to be ideal in a teacher. Such a list may contain characteristics that your own teacher satisfies. It may include items that you hope will be fulfilled one day. Perhaps your list is such that you have already given up on the idea of finding a guru that matches your requirements. Whatever the case, becoming aware of your needs and monitoring the changes in your list will tell you much about the shifting nature of your journey and your own evolution on the path. At some point, you may ultimately conclude that you do not want or need a teacher at all.

And for you who are drawn to a Vedanta adept who teaches in the “mystic” style—i.e., one who is operating outside of a teaching lineage—here’s a word or two of caution: First, if the teacher is of Indian origin and residing in India and teaching there, please take note of the ratio of Indian students to Western students sitting at his or her feet. If the ratio favors Indian students, this nearly guarantees that the guru in question is delivering a teaching that is scripture-based and lineage-tested. Having grown up steeped in their traditions, practically all Indians know that mystics without a sampradaya [traditional lineage] based on a classical teaching method backed by the Hindu scriptures are to be considered secondary teachers.

A second note of caution: Most of the teachers presented in this book were led by their own devices to self-proclaim their enlightenment; their attainment was not validated by a lineage-holder or an adequate community of peers. As a seeker, I can assure you that you will not be able to judge whether or not any given teacher is truly abiding permanently in the Self. I certainly could not. I am reminded here of a well-known epigram from Lao Tzu: “Those who know don’t tell [about their enlightenment] and those who tell don’t know.” We as seekers must greet all enlightenment claims with cautious skepticism.

When I had the courage to ask my current Advaita teacher D.B. Gangolli if he considered himself enlightened, he answered, “Instead of proclaiming his or her enlightenment, a teacher should prove their attainment of wisdom by the degree of their ability to instill Self-knowledge in a student. Your own recognition of and establishment in the Self serves as the yardstick for measuring your teacher’s enlightenment.”

Predestination Versus Free Will and Personal Responsibility

As you have witnessed, the apparent conflict between predestination and free will was a frequent theme throughout my odyssey. It fueled an inquiry into one of the most crucial questions every seeker needs to face: Is there a cause-and-effect

relationship between effort and enlightenment, or is the latter predestined and willed by the Absolute? And an important corollary to that question determines how our spiritual search proceeds: Can we in any way hasten (or retard) our spiritual progress? For instance, can we speed up the journey

through practicing hard, or by pleasing the guru, or by traveling halfway around the world to receive the power of the guru's presence and transmission? On the other hand, are situations such as clinging to the guru or wanting to be a guru obstructions to spiritual progress?

Over time, through the prompting and probing by my final teacher, Gangolli, I came to understand that both standpoints—effort and predestination—are based on concepts that invite endless intellectual discussions but can never be objectively validated. Instead, by pointing incessantly to my own Self, Gangolli called me away from the illusory phenomenal appearances of objects—including his and my own body-mind organisms—that I had taken to be real. He used every one of my questions as a stepping stone in a totally uncompromising investigation into the pure, direct experience of my own immediate reality—prior to all phenomenal appearances.

In doing this, my teacher invites me to examine my direct experience and to turn around and face what I really am—pure subjectivity. I discovered that I as the pure subject was not separate from what I had been seeking for so long. In fact, there was and is no separation between the seeker, the seeking, and the sought—there is nothing but Advaita, the nondual Self without a second. I found that this I did not represent the ignorant disciple, who was somehow walled off from an illuminating guru. Such artificial divisions were transcended through a reflective intuition that returned back to That which underlies all concepts of self and other.

I finally understand with my entire being that all concepts pertain to the time/space and cause/effect realities that exist within the realm of phenomenality, whereas that which underlies all thought is/was prior to the arising of all perception and the intervention of any ideas—including predestination or free will.

Why Advaita Vedanta?

And so, it would appear that my journey has brought me into a deep commitment to classical Advaita Vedanta. For me, it is the most complete and comprehensive teaching I have encountered since my odyssey began in the driver's seat of that spattered old Mercedes careening its way madly on the pitted roads of southeastern Europe, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. I honor it as a supreme teaching because:

- I understand that it describes everything that has, does, and will ever exist: all times, all eons and eternities, and the entire universe. It includes all sentient and insentient beings, all teachers, teachings, and seekers, including God and you and me—and all causes and effects.
- Its teaching method allows the seeker to understand, know, and experience beyond doubt his or her true nature.
- Whatever is taught by the teacher can be verified directly and immediately by the seeker's own experience.
- Both the teaching and the teaching method are passed on through a traditional lineage. Since the teaching remains the same (because the truth doesn't change), the teachers are interchangeable, and therefore any tendency toward an infatuated, obsessive, irrational, or compulsive devotion toward a particular individual is avoided; and, the potential of abusive or inappropriate behavior by the teacher is also lessened.

Have I concluded, then, that Advaita Vedanta is the final teaching for me? In considering the concept of the “best” or “only” path, you may wonder, “Is there anything like a final teaching?” This is another crucial question every seeker wants and needs to answer definitively, but I will tell you how I have answered it. In the same way that I considered the path I was on at any given time to be the “best” path, it was also the “final” path for me. But in reading this book, you have witnessed yourself that I went from teacher to teacher because I had not found a final teaching. So will it be different in the case of traditional Advaita Vedanta? Have I actually found the ultimate teaching for myself?

What I can say conclusively is that in stark contrast with my experience of the other teachings I came across, I find myself without one single doubt. The Advaita teachings are—point for point—immediately and directly congruent with my own experiences.

When I look into a mirror, does it take time for it to reflect my face (which is part of the objective world)? No, not at all! Similarly, Advaita Vedanta functions as what we could call a word mirror. Hearing the words of the teachings, one is able directly and immediately to recognize and know—and be!—one’s true eternal nature.

One may ask, “Why does it seem to take such a long time to recognize one’s true nature, whereas the mirroring of the body image is immediate?”

The answer is: The actual recognition itself does not take time; when the truth of Self-nature is perceived, recognition occurs instantly. But because

we don't put our total energy into looking into the mirror and inquiring, "Who am I? What is this I?" we do not recognize our true Self.

This often leads to the question: After we have looked into the mirror of self-inquiry and have recognized our true nature, why do we still mistake the "I"—i.e., the "me"-notion, the ego-self—as the body-mind organism?

Answer: We are so habituated to our initial erroneous assumption that "I" is limited to the body-mind complex as owner-occupant, that we need to repeatedly look into the "word mirror" until we remain irrevocably established in our true nature.

In summary, I can say that in my opinion, no other teaching assists the seeker in mirroring his or her true nature as completely, directly, and incessantly as Advaita Vedanta does. This is why I find it to be a supreme teaching.

Afterword

The Enchantment of the Musk Deer

Living peacefully in a forest in Hawaii as I do today, I perceive my odyssey—and my life—to be much like the predicament of the musk deer.

Once while it was walking in the forest, a musk deer became enchanted by a magical and sweet fragrance. The enchanted deer spent its entire life searching everywhere in the forest for the origin of the fragrance—only to one day fall to the ground, completely exhausted. Lying there curled up, with its head resting on its belly, it realized that the source of the fragrance it had been seeking its whole life was actually the scent of musk coming from within itself.

In a similar way, I have realized after more than twenty years of searching—which at times led to exhaustion and even disillusionment—that the love and the peace I so ardently sought was always there within me. My odyssey was actually a matter of coming back to where I started—and where I am now.

“Is this it?” you may ask yourself, dear reader, in surprise or disbelief. Perhaps you expected my odyssey of enlightenment to conclude with a final, Big Bang event or an outburst of energy like the rising of the kundalini, one thousand suns exploding, or some other kind of supernatural experience. I understand if you feel let down or disappointed after having

lived with me through the intense drama of my journey. But the Zen notion of chopping wood and carrying water sums up the naked truth: There is nothing else to do. And nothing else to come.

What remains when the search “falls out of us” is a spirituality that is simply the spiritualization of the ordinary within our everyday lives. We return home to our moment-to-moment living with the wisdom that life is an expression and manifestation of the unnamable and unfathomable Absolute.

The sadhus [ascetic religious seekers] and holy men I met on the banks of the Ganges more than three decades ago were living in this wisdom. Today I know that it was the peace, contentment, ordinariness, and presence of the eternal and unchanging spirit radiating through their eyes that transfixed me then. But that peace is not the exclusive privilege of those who are living without the pressing demands of daily life in the marketplace. You don’t have to meditate in a cave, sit by a holy river, or devote years on end to a focused, in-depth search the way I did.

Because in fact, that which emanated from those holy men shines in all of us at all times, from and as the spirit, or Source—wherever we are, whatever path we are pursuing, and whatever form our life in the world takes.

These days, I live with my sadhuhood “under my shirt,” knowing with certainty that I am a child of God, or the Absolute, which is nearer to me than my own breath.

Notes to the Chapters

Author's Foreword

1 - By the term “What Is” I mean reality, or that which does not depend on our particular viewpoint. Through our limited bodies and minds, we see particular appearances from different points of view, which change and differ, depending on our perspective. Reality is always the same, no matter how or when we look. It is perceived universally, in the past, present, and future, and everywhere in the physical and mental universe. And it is perceived individually, in each particular moment of each person’s experience. This reality is indistinguishable from consciousness, for both are always present together, throughout experience, underlying all appearances. All there is, is consciousness. This at least is my current view.

Introduction

1 - “Guru” is a Sanskrit term that literally means “dispeller of darkness”; a spiritual teacher who is Self-realized and who is able to use his or her power to assist others towards this goal.

2 - The lineages of the teachers are as follows: Poonjaji, Annamalai Swami, and Lakshmana Swami are or were direct disciples of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Dadaji and UG Krishnamurti met Sri Ramana in person, but both claimed to have had no teacher in particular. Ramesh S. Balsekar is—besides having been a translator of Nisargadatta Maharaj (a renowned Advaita Vedanta teacher who died in 1981 in Bombay)—a lifelong devotee of Sri Ramana too. Gangaji is a disciple of Poonjaji; Andrew Cohen is a former disciple of his. Osho, previously known as Bhagwan Shree

Rajneesh, didn't have a specific guru. Osho was Kiran's guru. Harish Madhukar had been taught according to the traditional Hindu methods of the Saraswati sannyas order. D.B. Gangolli's teacher was Swami Satchidanandendra Saraswati, an Advaita Vedanta teacher in the lineage of Sri Shankara, the founder of the nondual Vedantic path.

3 c-I use Self with a capital "S" to mean the following: "The Self is, contrary to perceptible experience, not an experience of individuality but a nonpersonal, all-inclusive awareness. It is not to be confused with the individual self, which is said to be essentially nonexistent, being a fabrication of the mind, which obscures the true experience of the real Self. The Self is always present and always experienced, but one is only consciously aware of it as it really is when the self-limiting tendencies of the mind have ceased. Permanent and continuous Self-awareness is known as Self-realization." (Quote from *Be As You Are: The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, p. 9, David Godman (ed.), Arkana, London, 1985)

The Teachers and the Teachings

1 - Advaita is a Sanskrit term for "nonduality"; Vedanta means "culmination of knowledge." The philosophy of Advaita Vedanta comes to the conclusion that there is no duality between the subject that knows and an object that is known. No object is ever known apart from the subject. So in truth they are not two but only one.

Chapter 1

1 - “Satori,” a Japanese word used in the Zen Buddhism tradition, consists of the characters for “mind” and for “myself.” It is generally defined as a direct experience of realizing the nature of Mind, this being the same as one’s Buddha nature.

2 - In the Eastern tradition, a seeker’s initiation into discipleship is performed either by the guru’s touch or look, or through silence.

3 - As my story unfolds, the reader will find my name changing, in time, to Dhyan Hareesh and finally to Madhukar.

4 - Until his departure for the USA on June 1, 1981, Osho dressed in a simple white robe. In contrast, his sannyasins were asked to wear red-or orange-colored robes in the ashram, and clothes of similar color in the outside world.

5 - Osho held that we were all buddhas—although unaware of the fact. To him, buddhahood was not something faraway, but it was our very nature, our very being. Buddhahood simply meant a remembering, a recognition of it. All that happens in attaining buddhahood is that we become aware of our true nature.

It is said that the evolution of the New Man is Osho’s whole work. Modern man, he says, is so burdened with the outmoded traditions of the past and the anxieties of modern-day living, that he must go through a cleansing process—supported by regular meditation practice—before he can hope to discover the peaceful, relaxed state of his inner nature. “This is my contribution to humanity: the whole person; to bring the New Man, Zorba

the Buddha, into the world. ‘Zorba’ stands for the body and ‘Buddha’ for the soul. The materialist, Zorba, becomes the awakened one, Buddha. The New Man will be sensuous and spiritual. He will be utterly physical, in the body, in the senses, enjoying the body and all that the body makes possible —and a great consciousness, a great witnessing will be there.”

6 - An introduction to Osho’s teachings can be found in the cartoon postcard book *The Path of Celebration* (Madhukar Thompson, Neti Neti Press, Haiku, Hawaii, USA, 2000). For more information visit www.neti-neti.org.

7 - My two direct encounters with Osho are verbatim transcriptions with minimal editing. Except for those, however, all other quotations and dialogues in this chapter are not exact transcriptions of Osho’s words. Rather, they are my own recollections of what I heard the master say. In other words, all passages in quotes are reconstructed from my memory.

8 - In early summer 1982, I joined Osho’s commune in Rajneeshpuram, Oregon, USA. Because English-speaking sannyasins there had trouble pronouncing my German/Sanskrit name Bertl, I asked Osho for a new name that would be easier to pronounce. He renamed me Dhyan Hareesh, meaning “God steals away with you in meditation.” Literally translated from Sanskrit, Hari means “God,” eesh means “thief” and dhyan means “meditation.”

Chapter 2

1 - Books on Papaji: David Godman (ed.), Papaji, Avadhuta Foundation, Boulder, CO, USA, 1993; Eli Jaxon-Bear (ed.), Wake Up And Roar (Vols. 1 & 2), Pacific Center Press, Kula, Hawaii, USA, 1993; Yudishtara (ed.), The Truth Is, Self-Published, Lucknow, India, 1995; David Godman (ed.) Nothing Ever Happened (Vols. 1–3), Avadhuta Foundation, Boulder, Colorado, USA, 1998.

2 - My life with Papaji and his teachings are documented in my cartoon postcard book Satsang. (Neti Neti Press; Haiku, Hawaii, USA, 2000)

3 - Books and video films on Papaji's life and teaching, as well as audio and video recordings of his satsangs, can be obtained from Papaji Satsang Bhavan in Lucknow.

4 - For such feasts, the Papaji Satsang Bhavan and Papaji's home were exuberantly decorated with fresh flower arrangements, involving a full pickup load of flowers each time. On these occasions, we used to serve a free five-course lunch or/and dinner for up to 450 people.

5 - Guru purnima occurs on a full moon (purnima) day, sometime in July-August each year. The exact day is calculated through the lunar calendar.

6 - For the next eight years, I followed the master's command. According to his own habit, I shaved my complete head almost daily from then on. I finally grew hair again only when I returned to the West in March of 2000.

1 - Swami Harish Madhukar is the author of four books: Reflections of Moment, Moments in Eternity, Sense and Sensibility, and Stirrings of Spontaneity. (Tripura Publications; Pune, India)

Chapter 4

1 c Someone who postpones his or her own entry into nirvana or final liberation in order to help others attain enlightenment.

2 - She is the author of You Are That (Vols.1 & 2), (The Gangaji Foundation, 1998).

3 - Sri Ramana Maharshi considered the mountain itself to be his teacher.

Chapter 5

1 - An excellent account of Annamalai Swami can be found in David Godman's book Living by the Words of Bhagavan (Sri Annamalai Swami Trust; Tiruvannamalai, India, 1994). Written on the Swami's behalf in the first person, the book has three parts. In the first part, Sri Annamalai Swami gives a wonderful account of his life with his master. Because of the intense controversy surrounding this part of the book, approximately twelve pages have been dropped from the second edition. The second part, "Diary Extract," contains Sri Ramana's answers to a series of questions. The third

part documents conversations between Sri Annamalai Swami and a number of visiting seekers and devotees.

2 - A one-hour meditation (in standing position) containing five stages; ideally practiced in the morning with the assistance of an original Osho Dynamic Meditation audio tape or video tape. The first stage (15 minutes): rapid, hyperventilational breathing through the nose; the second stage (15 minutes): cathartic let-go in which all possible sounds and body movements can be expressed; the third stage (10 minutes): with raised arms, jumping into the air, and on landing on the heels, shouting the sound “hoo!” from deep inside the guts; the fourth stage (10 minutes): begins with a complete arrest of all movement and sound and is spent in complete silence, “frozen” in position; the fifth stage (10 minutes): dancing and celebration of the new day.

Chapter 6

1 - Biographies of both Lakshmana Swami and Sarada can be found in the book *No Mind: I Am the Self* by David Godman. (Sri Lakshmana Swami Ashram; Tiruvannamalai, India, 1993) The book also contains Lakshmana Swami’s answers to a series of questions about practice, enlightenment, and the spiritual search in general.

2 - According to Sri Ramana, Annamalai Swami, and Lakshmana Swami, the duality-concept, percepts, and the whole of manifestation—can appear only after the “I”-thought has arisen from pure consciousness, the Self. Therefore, “I” is called the first thought. We all experience the arising of the “I”-thought after waking up from deep sleep. In the self-inquiry practice, all percepts [objects], concepts [thoughts] and feelings are funneled back into the original “I”-thought from which they arose. In the process of this

practice, the “I”-thought becomes the last thought before ending the inquiry in the revelation of the nondual Self. Lakshmana Swami says that all the seeker can do to reach enlightenment is to “hold on to the ‘I’-thought.” He suggests that the seeker, through the practice of self-inquiry, return again and again to the last (first) thought (i.e., the “I”-thought) until he finds out what or who this I really is, and abides as That.

Chapter 7

1 - His three most recent books are Who Cares?!, Your Head in the Tiger’s Mouth, and Consciousness Speaks. Advaita Press, Redondo Beach, CA 90277, USA, and Zen Publications, Bombay 400034, India. I created four books on Ramesh’s wisdom. A brief introduction to his teachings can be found in Gentle Hammer, Friendly Sword, Silent Arrow (Neti Neti Press, Haiku, Hawaii, USA, 1999). The companion volumes Enlightenment May or May Not Happen and Enlightenment? Who Cares! (Neti Neti Press, 1999) provide fuller documentation, containing his answers to questions regarding the spiritual search, enlightenment, and related issues. Selected highlights of the lively and lighthearted cartoons that illustrate these two books are gathered in the full-color postcard cartoon books Enlightenment by Airmail and Enlightenment a la Carte, respectively (both Neti Neti Press, 2000).

2 - During my three-year association with Ramesh, I had the good fortune to meet with five of his proclaimed enlightened disciples. In an absorbing series of interviews and intimate conversations, Ramesh Balsekar and five of his enlightened disciples (Henry Swift, Mark Beuret, Margarete Beuret, Wayne Liquorman, and Elke von der Osten) describe their spiritual search and its culmination in enlightenment in Enlightenment: An Outbreak (Madhukar Thompson, Neti Neti Press, Maui, USA, 1998)

3 - I had met one of Papaji's earlier disciples, who had introduced Papaji to Maharaj. This disciple recounted that for more than forty years after his enlightenment, Papaji was still in the habit of visiting other teachers and gurus to discuss spirituality and enlightenment. According to this individual, the conversation between the two teachers was terminated very quickly on the day Papaji first came to Maharaj. The seekers present objected to Papaji's presuming to speak on their behalf to Maharaj. They asked him to either speak for himself or not to speak at all. Papaji chose to be silent. Ramesh was not present during this encounter. At that time, he wasn't yet associated with Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Chapter 8

1 - Dadaji is the author of Beyond the Mind (Dada Center, 13665 Foothill Avenue, San Martin, CA 95046, USA, 1977), Towards the Unknown, Intuitive Intelligence and Mukta Jeevan Ki Aur (in Hindi) (Madhusagar, Mahabaleshwar 412 866, India, 1992).

Chapter 9

1 - Kiran was instrumental in the publication of the first book of UG Krishnamurti's teachings, Mind Is a Myth, by Dinesh Vaghela, in the early 1980s.

2 - Kiran has since moved to another neighborhood in Pune.

Epilogue

1 - Be As You Are, The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Edited by David Godman, Arkana, Penguin Group 1985, p. 47.

Glossary

Advaita - Nonduality (“A” means “non,” “dvaita” means duality), or absolute unity. The school of Advaita Vedanta philosophy; specifically the nondualistic, nontheistic interpretation of the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita given by Shankara (788–820 AD). This teaching comes to the conclusion that there is no duality between the subject that knows and an object that is known. No object is ever known apart from the subject that knows it. So in truth they are not two, but only one.

ajnana - Ignorance. The opposite of jnana.

Arunachala - The holy mountain in Tiruvannamalai, in Tamil Nadu, southern India, where Sri Ramana Maharshi spent his entire adult life.

ashram - A place for meditation and spiritual growth, centered around the teachings of a guru.

atma vichara - Self-inquiry; philosophical questioning into the nature of one’s own Self, not to be confused with psychological exploration of the personality. The aim of self-inquiry is not to explore the changing appearances of personality, but to investigate the underlying reality of the Self.

atman - The Self; the immortal soul of human beings—as opposed to the empirical self, the body-mind. Ultimately, atman is identical with Brahman, the Supreme Self.

baba - A term of respect for ascetics or holy men.

baksheesh - An extra payment or tip; often, a bribe.

Bhagavad Gita - A portion of the Mahabharata in which Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, gives instructions to Arjuna. It is one of Hinduism's most famous and respected texts.

Bhagawan, Bhagavan, Bhagwan - Literally, Lord or God. One of the titles given to gurus and holy men in India.

bhajan - Song of devotion. Also a devotional practice consisting of prayers and songs.

bhakti - Devotion.

bhakti yoga - The path of love and devotion for a god or guru who represents the ultimate truth. A bhakta is a devotee who follows a path of selfless love in which all traces of separate ego must be dissolved.

bodhisattva - In Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is a highly evolved being who postpones his or her own entry into nirvana [enlightenment] in order to help others attain their enlightenment.

Brahma - The Hindu god who is the creator of the universe; one of the three principal deities of Hinduism.

Brahma Sutras - Concise and logically arranged aphorisms written by Badrayana containing the essence of the Upanishads; one of the three starting points of Vedantic philosophy.

brahma nishta - Literally, the ultimate weapon. Sri Ramana Maharshi used this expression synonymously for atma vichara, the self-inquiry practice, to describe its effectiveness in destroying a student's false identification with the body, mind, and senses.

Brahman - The impersonal supreme being in Hinduism.

chakras - In yoga, the seven psychic energy centers located along the spinal column.

darshan - Literally, seeing. Especially used when one is permitted to "see," or to be in the presence of, a guru, enlightened being, or god. The devotee "has" darshan, and the god or guru "gives" it.

dharma - The eternal principle of right action; moral duty; virtue; religious tradition; divine law.

dhyana - Meditation, or the practice of directing attention. When meditation deepens, it becomes spontaneous, without the meditator interfering to direct it or achieve something from the meditation.

dhyana yoga - The path of meditation.

diksha - Initiation, or the gift of enlightenment from a guru.

Diwali - The Hindu Festival of Lights.

dwaita - Dual.

gunas - The three qualities of all manifestation—sattva, rajas and tamas. [See definitions for sattva, rajas, and tamas.]

guru - Literally, dispeller of darkness; “gu” means “darkness,” “ru” means “the dispeller of darkness.” A spiritual teacher who has realized the Self and who is able to use his or her power to assist others toward the goal of Self-realization.

guru purnima - The day traditionally prescribed for renewing a disciple's dedication to the guru. Its date is calculated through the lunar calendar to be on a full moon [purnima] in July or August each year.

gurubhai - Fellow disciple of the same guru.

japa - Literally, "muttering." Abbreviated form of nama-japa [repetition of the name of God] or mantra-japa [repetition of a mantra]. Japa is a form of meditation practiced as a means of stilling the mind and invoking grace or enlightenment.

jnana - Incontrovertible, permanent, absolute knowledge. Knowledge of the Self. It is a synonym for the Self since there is no knower of the Self after Self-realization.

jnana yoga - The path of wisdom.

jnani - An enlightened sage.

karma - Action; consequences of action; destiny; the principle of causality. In Hinduism, karma is the law of retributive action, which brings back upon the individual, in this or a future life, good or evil consequences for acts committed. Followers of the path of karma aim to reach enlightenment through selfless acts and deeds.

karma yoga - The path of action, as described in the Bhagavad Gita. The approach is not to give up action, but instead to carry it out wholeheartedly with full absorption in the practical work to be done, while cultivating an attitude of nonattachment to the results [see karma, sannyas].

Kartigai Deepam - The oldest, most elaborate, and most important festival of southern India, drawing hundreds of thousands of worshippers to Tiruvannamalai for two weeks each year. It is celebrated on the full moon day in the Tamil month Kartigai (in January) when the star Kartigai is on the ascendent, according to the lunar calendar. Each year on Kartigai Deepam a light is lit on top of the mountain Arunachala (Arunachala is considered to be a manifestation of Lord Shiva) in Tamil Nadu. During the festival, it is believed that Arunachala opens up the heart of his beloved ones and reveals himself as the Supreme Being.

kundalini - Yogic power. In tantric yoga, the creative energy latent within a person is conceived as a serpent called kundalini. When unaroused, it lies coiled at the base of the spine; when aroused, it may rise up through the spine toward the pinnacle of experience at the top of the head. In the course of arising, it may produce extraordinary displays of power and energy. The deliberate arousing of kundalini can be dangerous.

kurta - Indian-style, long-sleeved shirt worn loosely over pajama-style pants.

leela, lila - Divine play. In Hinduism, this divine play is a way of conceiving how Consciousness or the Absolute is spontaneously expressed in all phenomena of nature and in all that happens in the world.

lunghi - A man's sarong.

mahasamadhi - The physical death of a saintly or enlightened person.

mahatma - Great soul (as in Mahatma Gandhi).

mala - A garland. In Hinduism, a necklace of 108 beads used in the practice of *japa*.

manana - Literally, reflection. A part of the learning process of *shravana* [listening], *manana* [reflecting], and *nididhyasana* [meditating] prescribed for the student of *Vedanta*. In the second stage of the learning process, it refers to resolving doubts in a student's mind that are caused by the teachings.

mandir - Temple or hall.

manna - Divine food from the gods. It is believed to give permanent freedom from food consumption and provide supernatural powers.

mantra - A word or a phrase given to a disciple by a guru. The repetition of a mantra, called *mantra-japa*, is one of the most common forms of *sadhana* [spiritual practice].

mantra upadesha - Spiritual initiation or instruction.

masala tea - Spiced oriental tea.

maya - Literally, a phantom image or illusion. In Vedanta philosophy, it refers to the misconception whereby the ephemeral world of appearances is taken to be real.

moksha - Spiritual liberation or enlightenment.

motor-rikshaw - A three-wheeled open taxi.

Navaratri - A major nine-day Hindu festival, also known as Dasara, which occurs between the middle of September and middle of October, according to the lunar calendar. It is a festival that celebrates the victory of Devi, a consort of Shiva, over Mahishasura, a buffalo demon who symbolizes spiritual ignorance.

neo-sannyas - Discipleship with the guru Osho, focused on the commitment to dedicate one's life to the sole aim of finding truth and enlightenment. Usually shortened to "sannyas." Osho broke away from the original concept of sannyas as a form of renunciation, and his use of the term "sannyasins" for his disciples often angered the traditionalists.

neti–neti - Literally, not this-not that. Neti is a compound of “na,” meaning “not,” and “iti,” meaning “this that is said or conceived.” Thus neti-neti describes a progressive removal of all concepts from truth until a final truth is reached where no trace of conception or perception remains.

nididhyasana - Literally, meditation. A part of the learning process of shravana [listening], manana [reflecting], and nididhyasana [meditating] prescribed for the student of Vedanta. In the third stage of the learning process, the student is asked to meditate in order to repeatedly feel and experience some of the Vedanta teachings that have been heard in order to clear oneself of intellectual doubts.

nirvana - Literally, blown out or extinguished. Refers to enlightenment—the complete extinction of ego and all desires.

Nisargadatta Maharaj - Renowned Vedantic teacher of jnana yoga who lived in Bombay from 1897 to 1981. His teachings are presented in Ramesh S. Balsekar’s book Pointers from Nisargadatta Maharaj (Chetana, Bombay, 1983) and in Maurice Frydman’s I Am That (Chetana, Bombay, 1973).

Om - According to Hinduism, the primordial sound from which all creation springs. It is the most important element in many mantras.

pradakshina - The practice of circumambulating a person or holy object as an act of veneration. The person or object is always kept on the right.

pranayama - *Breath control. Breathing exercises in yoga designed to control the vital breath (prana). Yoga philosophy holds that the mind and the breath are connected; control of one therefore leads to control of the other.*

puja - *Ceremonial worship; ritual worship of a Hindu religious image, deity, or guru.*

pundit - *A priest or scholar.*

rajas guna - *One of the three qualities of all manifestation: the quality of activity or excitability.*

Ramana Maharshi - *Advaitin sage (1879–1950) who settled at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, India. He recommended the path of self-inquiry (atma vichara), and was famous for the profound sense of silence, calm, and clarity that was conveyed to people by his very presence.*

rikshaw - *A three-wheeled bicycle “taxi.”*

rudraksha - *A seed sacred to Shiva. Shiva is usually depicted wearing a necklace of these seeds, and many Shiva devotees use them as rosaries. They are often worn around the neck and believed to purify the body.*

rudraksha mala - *A 108-bead rosary worn by traditional Hindu sannyasins.*

sadhana - Spiritual practice or efforts performed in the course of the spiritual search. Traditional sadhanas are meditation [dhyana], inquiry [jnana], devotion [bhakti] and selfless service [seva]. Different people are suited to different kinds of sadhana.

sadhu - Literally, noble person. Used to describe people who have renounced the world in order to become full-time religious seekers. An ascetic or holy man whose sadhana involves living in abstinence and seclusion.

samadhi - 1. An intensely blissful state or trance; the highest condition of human consciousness, in which the subject-object (seer-seen) distinction is transcended. A state in which the Self is experienced as it really is. - 2. The tomb of a saint.

sampradaya - Traditional lineage, in which knowledge has been passed down through a continuing chain of teachers and disciples.

samsara - Worldly illusion. The empirical world of names and form, as it appears to the unenlightened mind; the continuous cycle of birth and death until the occurrence of enlightenment.

sangha - An association or assembly; the community living in the presence a guru or teacher.

sannyas - In its original, traditional form, sannyas is renunciation. Specifically, the monastic rite enacting the vow to renounce all worldly pursuits, with freedom [moksha] as the sole aim of life. Also, the fourth stage [ashrama] in orthodox Hinduism in which normal relationships and activities in ordinary society are formally renounced. Members of this ashrama normally wear orange as a symbol of their renunciation. (See neo-sannyas for the distinction between the traditional definition and Osho's conception of sannyas.)

sannyasin - One who has renounced the world to devote himself to the pursuit of spiritual truth or enlightenment; a member of the fourth ashrama [see sannyas and neo-sannyas].

sat - Truth, or pure existence.

sat-chit-ananda - Existence-consciousness-peace. “Sat” is pure existence, the principle of reality that contrasts all action and life. “Chit” is pure consciousness, the knowing principle that lights all perception and thought. “Ananda” is pure peace and happiness, the motivating principle that inspires all value and feeling. The three are only different ways at looking at one single truth.

satori - A Japanese word used in the Zen Buddhism tradition, consisting of the characters for “mind” and “myself.” It is generally defined as a direct experience of realizing the nature of Mind, this being the same as one’s Buddha nature, or the Self in Vedanta.

satsang - Association with truth; being in the presence of a guru or saint who embodies the Ultimate Reality.

sattva guna - One of the three qualities of all manifestation: the quality of purity, peace, and harmony.

sattvic - Pure; one of the three primal qualities; having the quality of peace and harmony.

seva - Service, or karma yoga.

shakti - Cosmic energy or spiritual power. In Shaivism, Shakti is personified as the female consort of Lord Shiva. Shiva is synonymous with the Self, and Shakti is held to be his dynamic or creative aspect.

Shankara, Adi - Also known as Shankaracharya (788–820 AD). A great Hindu scholar-saint who wrote commentaries on the classical Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Brahma Sutras and established and popularized Advaita Vedanta, thereby reviving orthodox Hinduism.

shanti - Peace, a fundamental aspect or property of the Self.

shastras - Hindu scriptures.

sheikh - Oriental nobleman.

shishya - Disciple.

Shiva - The god of destruction; one of the three principle Hindu deities.

Shivaratri - Literally, the night [ratri] of Shiva. The most auspicious, holiest night of the year for invoking Lord Shiva's benevolence through worshipping Him. The festival occurs just before the new moon, between mid-February and mid-March.

shravana - Literally, listening. A part of the learning process shravana [listening], manana [reflecting], and nididhyasana [meditating], prescribed for the student of Vedanta. In the first stage of the process, the student is being exposed to the teachings by listening to the teacher and undergoing a process of self-inquiry, guided by the teachings.

soma - Rejuvenating juice made from herbs grown in the Himalayas. Its consumption is believed to give immortality, as mentioned in the Upanishads.

Swami - Literally, Lord. A term of respect given to many spiritual figures, and also to temple images. A person who has control over his mind, body, and senses.

Swamiji - Appending the suffix “ji” to anyone’s name indicates that one has great respect for that person.

tamas guna - One of the three qualities of all manifestation: the quality of inertia, dullness, sloth, or sluggishness.

tapas, tapasya - Intense ascetic practice of self-denial or bodily mortification; depriving oneself of bodily comforts in order to speed up one’s spiritual progress. Also penance, religious austerity, heat.

thakt - A small, slightly raised platform upon which teachers sit to give discourse.

Upanishads - Philosophical portions of the teachings found at the end of the four Vedas and collectively also called Vedanta; a unique means of Self-knowledge.

vasanas - The impressions of anything remaining unconscious in the mind; the present consciousness of past perceptions; latent tendencies of the mind formed by former actions, thought, and speech.

Vashishta Advaita - Qualified nondualism.

Vedanta - Literally, the end of the Vedas or the culmination of knowledge. Vedanta is a name given to schools of philosophy that explain the final

knowledge expressed in the concise statements of the Upanishads. Some schools of Vedanta are dualistic or maintain a qualified dualism, in order to allow for the “I” and “Thou” of religious worship. The school of Advaita Vedanta is nondualistic. [See Advaita.]

Vedas - Four collections of scriptures dating from 2000 to 500 BC; the founding texts of the Hindu tradition and the ultimate source of authority for most Hindus. They are considered to contain sacred revelations, from which all knowledge is derived. The Vedas start as mythical, religious and ritual texts and end with the Upanishads, which are philosophical.

vichara - Self-inquiry. Denotes the practice of inquiry into the source of the “I”-thought.

vipassana - Literally, discernment or clear-seeing. The term is used for a form of meditation (developed in Theravada Buddhism) where mental and physical appearances are witnessed as coming and going, without the meditator becoming involved with them. The aim is to arrive at a clear knowledge that all phenomenal appearances are impermanent. Thus one is meant to give up all futile attachment to what keeps arising and passing away, so that one finally comes to a position of unshakable calm and clarity, quite undisturbed by anything that may occur. This is said to be the chief meditation that helped the Buddha to attain enlightenment.

vyavahaara - Empirical dealings.

Notes About The Author

Berthold Madhukar Thompson, spiritual teacher and guide, acclaimed author, highly esteemed international citizen, founder of Neti Neti Press, spoke to spiritual seekers around the world, responding to the deepest spiritual quests and questions of our time. He first began to write about his experiences on the spiritual path in 1997. During the next four years he created 13 books (including postcard cartoon books). He offered his wisdom based on his own experiences and on the nondual teachings of his preceptors Osho, Poonja (Papaji), Sri Ramana Maharshi, Ramesh Balsekar and D. B. Gangolli. Madhukar assisted seekers to end all outward searching and discover and experience directly within their own hearts, the nameless and formless Truth of who they truly are! His spiritual search on earth ended on May 24, 2011, reposing his soul to the hands of his beloved mother INDIA.

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(For details about madhukar and his work you get in touch with Dr. Joji Valli. Joji took the initiative of retaining his life's work and published all his

books into digital format for the benefit of future generations.

Madhukar was a seeker all through his life. Most of his works are first hand accounts about gurus or leaders spirituality. Certainly, his works will be useful for any seeker to quench spiritual quest and find relevance for spirituality and spiritual quest.)

Other Books by Madhukar Thompson:

- Enlightenment: An Outbreak
- Enlightenment May Or May Not Happen
- Enlightenment? Who Cares!
- Teachings en Route to Freedom
- Gentle Hammer, Friendly Sword, Silent Arrow

Postcard Books

(Sets of cards taking a lighthearted look at different aspects of spirituality and the search for Truth)

- Enlightenment by Airmail
- Enlightenment à la Carte
- Satsang
- The Path of Celebration
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- Meditation
- Enlightenment
- Master!

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Wishing you all blessings of life.

Dr. Joji Valli

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