

# AGHORA

At the Left Hand of God

ROBERT E. SVOBODA



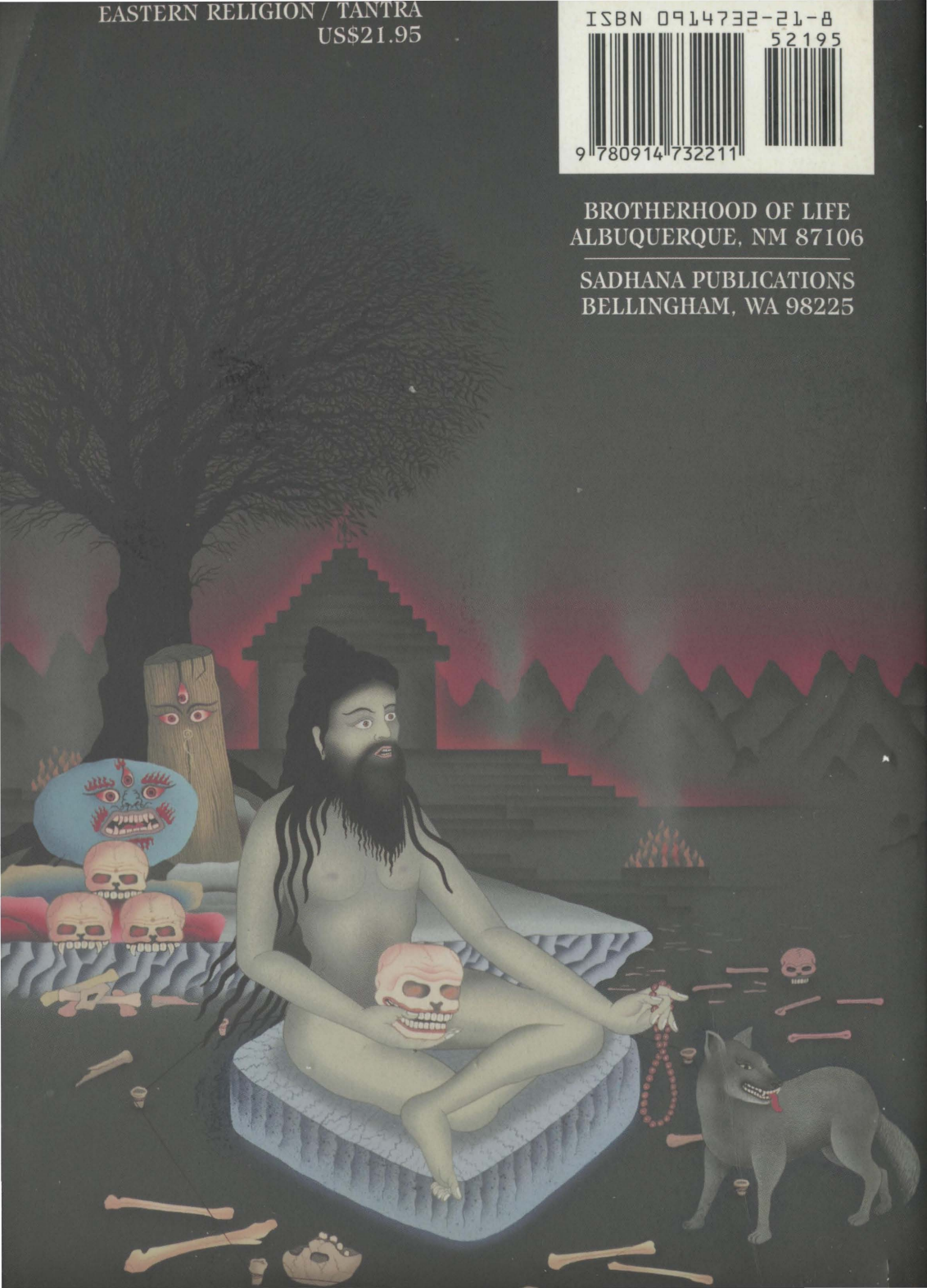
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Robert E. Svoboda

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VIMALANANDA'S DEDICATION  
FOR THIS BOOK

*Dedicated to One who is the source of life*  
*The Dynamic Cosmic Energy which pervades the entire*  
*universe perennially*  
*The fountainhead of supreme joy, divinity, and magnanimity:*

**My Mother Tara**



Vimalananda, the subject of this book, designed the cover and dictated to the author the following regarding its symbolic meaning:

“*Ghora* is darkness, the darkness of ignorance. *Aghora* means light, the absence of darkness. Under the Tree of Knowledge is an Aghori, a follower of the path of Aghora. He has gone beyond ignorance thanks to the Flame of Knowledge which billows from the funeral pyre. The funeral pyre is the ultimate reality, a continual reminder that everyone has to die. Knowledge of the ultimate reality of Death has taken the Aghori beyond the Eight Snares of Existence: lust, anger, greed, delusion, envy, shame, disgust and fear which bind all beings. The Aghori plays with a human skull, astonished by the uselessness of limited existence, knowing the whole world to be within him though he is not in the world. His spiritual practices have awakened within him the power of Kundalini, which takes the form of the goddess dancing on the funeral pyre: Smashan Tara. He is bewildered to think that all is within him, not external to him; that he sees it not with the physical eyes but with the sense of perception. The Flame of Knowledge is that which preserves life, the Eternal Flame, the Supreme Ego, the Motherhood of God which creates the whole Maya of the universe and thanks only to Whose grace the Aghori has become immortal.”

The contents of this book have been encapsulated on its cover: the breadth, the power, the majesty and the divine delirium of Aghora.

(Further descriptions may be found on pages 50 & 63; Wrap around cover art: With deep appreciation to Robert Beer.)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	7
Introduction .....	21
Chapter One: Ma	
Ma .....	41
Chapter Two: Shakti	
Maya Shakti .....	59
Kali and Kalidasa .....	65
Vidyaranya.....	69
Sarvananda and Purnananda .....	71
The Motherhood of the Goddess.....	73
The Vision of the Goddess .....	77
Chapter Three: Shiva	
Mahakala .....	83
Death and the Smashan .....	86
Anjaneya .....	102
Sagal Shah .....	103
Chapter Four: Rnanubandhana	
The Primal Debt .....	109
Fate and Rnanubandhana .....	114
Ranu .....	119
Author's Postscript .....	126

Chapter Five: Mentors	
My Three Mentors .....	131
Devotion to the Guru .....	151
Guru and Disciple .....	156
Chapter Six: Aghora	
The True and the Real .....	167
Restrictions .....	171
Intoxicants .....	173
To Die While Still Alive .....	180
The Left-Hand Path .....	182
Chapter Seven: Spirits	
Spirits .....	187
Chapter Eight: Avishkara	
Avishkara .....	211
Chapter Nine: Sex	
Man and Woman .....	237
The Nature of Sex .....	244
The Rnanubandhana of Sex .....	247
Marriage .....	251
Creation and Procreation .....	256
Ojas .....	260
Conservation .....	261
Svapneshvari Siddhi and Shiva Lata Mudra .....	270
Amrita .....	276
Vairoli .....	279
Bhairavi .....	290
Chapter Ten: Girnar	
Girnar .....	297
Devotion .....	309
Glossary .....	323

## PREFACE

My teacher, the Aghori Vimalananda, spent many years perfecting his knowledge of Tantra and its advanced discipline Aghora. He distilled his experiences and presented me with the essence. My comprehension of Tantra is due entirely to his instruction and is redolent of the influence of his personality.

*Tantra* is the science of personality. Just as *Ayurveda* was promulgated by the ancient sages of India as a truly holistic way to maintain the physical body, and just as *Ashtanga Yoga* is meant to optimize one's spiritual nature, *Tantra* is a mental science, a meta-psychology, a method for exploring the mind and developing the range of one's perceptions.

It is said that the state of undifferentiated unity is the only absolute reality, and that the cosmos possesses only a relative reality because it is not permanent and unchanging. The universe possesses all possible qualities and attributes, and each being within the universe possesses a limited number of qualities and attributes. Personality is the self-identification of the ego with a set of attributes. All beings possess egos and therefore all beings have personalities. The cosmos Herself possesses the ultimate personality, the supreme expression of the totality of manifested existence: the *Adishakti*, or *Adya*.

To state that humans, animals, trees and flowers possess their



own individualities and idiosyncrasies is less apt to induce controversy than to assert that even beings which are disembodied or which are embodied, but are less individualized than we, also possess personality. The issue of disease is a good example. Diseases are beings with parasitical intentions. Some have collective bodies, like worms, bacteria or viruses, just as bees and ants show signs of collective consciousness. Other diseases, bereft of their own bodies, arise within organ systems of some animal or plant due to metabolic malfunctions.

When the intruding personality differs significantly in sophistication of organization from its host, physical disease is likely for then the attacker's ego will be insufficiently developed to assume control of all essential physiological functions. Conversely when the spirit of a dead human enters the body of a living human it will feel right at home and the disease will display predominantly mental symptoms such as altered values and habit patterns.

Whatever the intruder, cure is the expelling of the alien and the return of the normal personality. An individual's immunity exists on the physical levels in white blood cells and in anti bodies, and on the mental level in the degree of personality integration; the cause of immunity is the ego's power of self-identifying with body and mind. The word "ego" is used here not in a Freudian sense but as an indicator for the force of individual identity in the organism. The stronger the self-identification the greater the immunity to attack from another personality which might usurp some area of the ego's domination. Every cell is ceaselessly remembered by the ego as being part of its organism. When the organism dies the cells are free, in the absence of the ego's grip, to go their separate ways. If a cell rebels against the ego's domination and seeks to proliferate itself into a new personality, the result is a cancer. Be the predator external or internal, disease is its onslaught on one's personality.

According to Tantra everyone is ill who is doomed to live with a limited personality. Only those who go beyond time, space and causation to become immortal can be said to be truly in harmony with the cosmos and therefore truly healthy,

since health is derived both from internal balance and from harmony with the environment. Hence one significant area of Tantric research has always been methods for prolonging one's life. In one sense the added years are significant mainly because they indicate the degree of successful achievement of the rituals.

Ayurveda is also concerned with longevity, but its approach is to strengthen the individual's innate personality. Yoga, recognizing the essential impermanence of the human personality seeks to efface it entirely to permit one to return directly to the unlimited Absolute. Tantra aims to replace the limited personality with an unlimited, permanent one.

An individual may fail to become eternal but may in the course of Tantric practice accumulate sufficient energy (Shakti) to obtain some extra-ordinary power, called a *Siddhi*. Wisely used, Siddhis can accelerate one's spiritual evolution. Commercialized, Siddhis bind one down more firmly to the wheel of cause and effect.

One simple sort of Siddhi involves the collection of some particular herb at the astrologically appropriate moment with the appropriate ritual. After further preparation such plants can bestow superphysical powers on their users. The plant species selected is one known to have an affinity for the sort of power desired. The ritual draws that power into the plant at the moment when it is available in the cosmos to be tapped. The herb's own personality is then overshadowed by the personality of the force drawn into it.

Metals and gems are also used in Tantric alchemy. Indian alchemists like their Western counterparts searched for the Philosopher's Stone, the way to turn base metal into gold. While exoterically this base metal referred to iron, bronze, brass and copper, the esoteric reference was to the transmutation of the base metal of the individual's limited consciousness into the gold of enlightenment, a state of unlimited consciousness. An alternative meaning suggests the transmutation of the base metal of the body into the gold of immortality via the touchstone of *Amrita*, the elixir of life.

It is said that herbal-based preparations can prolong one's life for 400 to 500 years, but that through the use of mercury there

is no end to how long one can live. Mercury is regarded as the ultimate metal because it is the sole element which can be brought to life. Repeated herbal applications and treatments with fire bring the mercury to life. It is then treated like a child: its appetite is awakened and it is fed. At an appropriate point it is sacrificed. The personality thus created is thereupon liberated to display its attributes; and with its assistance one can create gold, fly in the air, or live eternally—or rather the new personality can take over one's body and live eternally through it. Mercury which is less efficiently prepared cannot bestow immortality but can cure disease and increase longevity. Insoluble preparations of mercury and sulfur are widely used in Ayurvedic medicine; such compounds are by-products of alchemical experimentation.

Immortality is a desirable goal in the context of the Indian belief in reincarnation. If one has a long list of karmic connections to be lived through it is infinitely more convenient to live through them all in one lifetime rather than be forced to endure rebirth again and again. Herbs and minerals are only two methods for achieving immortality, however. Another method is practiced by *Aghoris*, Tantrics who have superseded all ritual limitations. When they find themselves near death (any good Yogi will know of his impending death six months in advance as his *Prana* or life-force begins to flow out of his body), *Aghoris* deliberately leave their bodies and enter the bodies of corpses, taking them over and making them live for as long as they please, until they decide to change bodies again.

Most dead personalities cannot move about so freely on their own, and some Tantrics worship in graveyards and charnel-grounds simply to catch hold of human spirits to force them to perform work. This is also a sort of Siddhi. The sort of work possible depends upon the power of the captured personality. This method produces quick results but it is dangerous, for a minor error in ritual may result in insanity, death, or worse.

Other ethereal beings who never took human form can also be bound by Tantra and their tremendous power harnessed. The most puissant are the deities, personifications of various cos-

mic forces. The ultimate Siddhi is control of *Adya*, the personification of the entire cosmos.

Essential to the production of any Siddhi are *Mantra*, *Yantra*, and *Tantra*. In the journey toward Siddhi, *Mantra* is the energy which moves your vehicle (the *Yantra*) according to the road map (*Tantra*). In an industrial analogy the finished product (*Siddhi*) emerges when the raw material (*Mantra*) is fed into the milling machines (*Yantra*) according to a fixed process (*Tantra*).

A *Mantra* is a collection of sounds. When pronounced their vibrations provide energy to the *Yantra*. Sound appears on the electromagnetic spectrum as one variety of energy which can be manipulated by the Tantric. There are three main types of *Mantra*:

- a) Descriptive—usually in Sanskrit, these *Mantras* describe either the process undergone, the desired goal, or both.
- b) Meaningless—aggregations of sounds which have no known meaning in any human language.
- c) *Bijas*—individual nasalized syllables.

*Bija* means seed, and these "seed-sounds" produce fruit according to the *Bijavrksha Nyaya*, or the Law of Seed and Tree. The frequent repetition of these *Bijas* eventually results in a sort of standing wave, permanently energizing either an external *Yantra* or some area of the aspirant's brain, resulting in the continuous production of a specific effect, one which is coherent with the personality invoked. Four types of *Vani* or speech exist for the pronunciation of *Mantra*:

- a) *Vaikhari*—vocal speech
- b) *Madhyama*—nasalized speech
- c) *Pashyanti*—purely mental repetition
- d) *Para*—telepathic speech, in which only the intention but not the sound is conveyed.

The more subtle the speech, the deeper its effect on both the individual and the surrounding environment. Just as a laser produces coherent light, a human brain can produce coherent energy when a single frequency (*Bija*) is selected and is amplified appropriately with *Yantra* and *Tantra*.

The *Yantra* is the crucible in which the herb, mineral, animal, or human is prepared through the *Mantra's* energy. The



Yantra contains the energy, reflecting it back upon itself until it can accumulate to that point when as in a laser it, of its own accord, projects itself. The projection assumes the form of the deity appurtenant to the Bija repeated. When Mantras other than Bijas are employed the energy will continue to accumulate until it is used or is otherwise discharged. Here the Yantra acts something like a capacitor. Yantras are frequently diagrams drawn on birchbark, crystals or copper plates, or they can be drawn with powder or sand. Images may be used as Yantras, but the best Yantra is said to be the human body.

Tantras are the three main varieties according to the aspirant's capabilities: external, internal and mixed. The *Pashu* or animalistic type of aspirant is by nature greatly attached to the enjoyment of external sense objects and so should perform external worship to control these urges to outwardness. The *Divya* or divine type tends to be introverted and need not bother with external ritual. These aspirants require *Antaryaga*, internal sacrificial rites.

The *Vira* or heroic type can perform both external and internal worship competently with thorough attention to detail. Everyday life becomes a sacrificial rite for a *Vira* with each act an act of worship hidden at all times from the casual observer. For a *Vira* the entire world is a graveyard, filled with the dead. A true Tantric regards every human being (including himself) as already dead since the fact of birth makes death inevitable. For a Tantric, and even more so for an Aghori, the entire world is his playground and his temple.

Still, rituals which make use of literal corpses and skulls are available for those who wish to get quick results. Such practices are part of the *Vama Marga*, or Left-Hand Path, which is the violent counterpart of the *Dakshina Marga*, or Right-Hand Path. The *Dakshina Marga* is meant for those who seek steady progress with reduced danger of setbacks. The *Vama Marga* is described as "Shighra, Ugra and Tivra," or "fast, terrible and intense." On this path the chances for catastrophe are great unless a powerful guru's protection is provided. The sexual rituals which have made Tantra notorious are part of *Vama Marga*.

The ritual in which sex appears, which is known as *Panch-*

*amakara*, is actually of three types depending again upon the class of the celebrant, and in only one type does actual sexual intercourse occur. That version is meant only for Tamasic people, *Tamas* being mental inertia or dullness. The intensity of the five (*Pancha* means five) articles of worship—meat, fish, parched grain, wine and sex—overwhelms the dullness of the mind with stimulation. If the aspirant has been properly prepared, this increased mental energy can assist his or her spiritual evolution. An ill-prepared aspirant will be overcome by stimulation and will descend into debauchery.

Rajasic people (*Rajas* means mental activity) have active minds which must be properly channeled. They need less stimulation and more control, and use ginger, radish, boiled (as opposed to parched) grain, coconut milk and flowers in their *Panchamakara*. Sattvic people naturally enjoy ample *Sattva* (balance of mind and alertness) and do not require external aids to worship. They utilize the meat of silence, the fish of breath control, the grain of concentration techniques, the wine of God intoxication, and the coitus of one's ego with the Absolute.

The Sanskrit terminology used to describe the *Panchamakara* hides this meaning beneath its exterior. For example, "fish" stands for breath control because one's two nostrils are referred to in Yogic terminology as rivers since they are continuously flowing (the right is called the *Ganga* and the left the *Yamuna*). Just as fish swim in rivers, the breath swims through the nostrils, and holding the breath (*Kevala Kumbhaka*) is equivalent to "eating" the "fish."

*Panchamakara* is only one of many Tantric rituals but it illustrates well a fundamental Tantric concept: *Bhutashuddhi*. The physical universe is a permutation of five Great Elements: Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Ether, equivalent respectively to the solid, liquid, and gaseous states of matter, heat (which transforms matter from one state into another), and the field in which all activity takes place. To achieve universal harmony these Five Elements must be harmonized. *Panchamakara* is a fast, intense way to do this: meat stands for Earth, fish for Water, wine for Fire, grain for Air, and sex for Ether. When one reaches the

stage of balance in which these inputs cause no disequilibrium of consciousness or metabolism it is much less likely that any other fluctuation in the Five Elements will cause disharmony, and a state of health has been reached, since health is balance and disease is imbalance. This health is infinitely more permanent than ordinary health.

To deal with only Five Elements, though essential in every Tantric sadhana, would be too mechanistic, and Tantric authorities advocate personification in accompaniment. Rather than seek to extirpate their emotions entirely as Yogic practitioners do, Tantrics magnify their emotions and transfer them entirely to a deity, a personified cosmic force. All the aspirant's natural propensities can spend themselves in this devotee-deity relationship, avoiding suppression of any desires which might erupt later to disrupt the harmony.

Thus Tantra insists, "There is no *Mukti* (freedom from delusion) without *Bhukti* (enjoyment)." "Enjoyment" refers to the acceptance of all phenomena which may occur to an individual, be they "good" (enjoyable) or "bad" (painful). The aspirant relies on the magnanimity of Nature (personified as the deity) to protect and provide. Yoga and Vedanta aim directly at *Mukti*, which was appropriate in earlier ages when the mundane world was less demanding. Tantra is more practical for today's world. Ayurveda is meant for those who desire only *Bhukti*, or unrestricted sensory enjoyments. It was promulgated as a separate doctrine because many today cannot comprehend health's spiritual aspects.

The doctrine of Kundalini and the Chakras is associated with that of the Five Great Elements. When the Elements have been thoroughly purified in an individual then the Kundalini Shakti, a goddess in her own right, has a free path upwards through the Chakras to meet and mate with Her Shiva in the brain. Each of the five lower Chakras is the seat of the subtle form of one Element, and only when they are purified and harmonized can the Kundalini free Herself from their grasp. Herbs can be useful to assist in this process, as can mercury. Even disembodied spirits can be useful since they churn the nervous system to the high pitch necessary to withstand the tremendous

might of Kundalini, who is the individual equivalent of the cosmic Adya. Each aspirant's perception of Kundalini will differ according to their innate emotional make-up, and therefore many forms of the Goddess are available for worship.

Whatever the form, the aspirant must interact with Kundalini on a personal basis. Some treat Her as sister, some as friend, advisor or wife. A few regard Her as a sixteen-year-old daughter, and the Aghoris treat Her as a servant. But my teacher Vimalananda opined that it is best to treat Her as a mother. In Her aspect as Adya She is Mother of all worlds and all beings. We emerge from Her, exist in Her and eventually dissolve into Her again. Moreover, a friend may fail you, a wife may quarrel with you, and a servant might rebel against you, but your mother will never desert you. Vimalananda told me, "Always sit in the lap of the Divine Mother. Let Her do everything for you, rely on Her totally, and She will never forsake you. If you try to do things on your own you will fall and hurt yourself. Only She can take care of you. The greater your *Bhakti* (devotional love) for Her the faster will be your progress."

*Bhakti* is essential because She is really *you*—you are a minuscule part of Her—and you must love yourself to make progress. Even the masculine deities are all part of Her. Whether the Tantric aspirant worships a male or female deity depends on the guru, but the outcome will be the same: Kundalini will reunite with her Shiva. First Mantra, Yantra and Tantra will be used to create the form of the deity in the aspirant's consciousness. Then the devotee and the deity will be together continuously, observing their stipulated relationship (son-mother, husband-wife or whatever). This is called *Tanmayata*. Eventually *Tadrapata* occurs in which all but a few vestiges of the devotee's original personality are eliminated and only the deity's personality remains.

For the Panchamakara ritual to be successful a couple who seek to perform it must first perfect *Shiva Lata Mudra*, a practice in which all sexual desire is eliminated. The male identifies entirely with Shiva and the female with Shakti, and this attitude must be held for three hours at a time to ensure success. The Tantras say, "Shivo bhutva shivam yajet": First



become Shiva and then you will be able to worship Shiva properly. When this self-identification with the deities is complete then the consumption of fish, meat, grain, wine and the sexual act are no longer acts of indulgence but become sacraments because the deities themselves partake directly.

The merely curious have no business dabbling in Tantra, but some so-called gurus in the West encourage their half-baked followers to do so. Such self-delusive activity reinforces the crystallizations of the personality which prevent spiritual progress. Tantric rituals are sacrificial rites. Though herbs, minerals, and animals are used as offerings, they are secondary to the true offering, the sacrifice of one's limited self into the sacrificial fires of penance. In the Panchamakara ritual the female is the fire into which the male offers semen, just as clarified butter is offered in orthodox fire worship.

Ordinary sex is no sacrifice. When two people come together to copulate they usually seek gratification for themselves, the slaking of their lust. Perhaps indirectly they will try to satisfy their partners. Tantric sex becomes possible only when one has totally effaced one's own personality and offers oneself for the gratification of the deity, the universe incarnate.

This is one reason Tantra has always been a closely guarded secret. The danger of abusable knowledge falling into the hands of the unworthy has limited its spread. One should never seek to practice classical Tantra without a guru because no Tantric texts exist which provide thoroughly accurate details of any ritual. Each text omits an essential step, or includes false information, and only through a guru can the reality, handed down from teacher to disciple over generations, be known.

Even if pure Tantra is beyond the reach of most Westerners the Tantric attitude has much to offer. To consider some of the topics already considered, Western psychology can learn much from the Tantric concepts of personality and ego. The concept of individual constitution—not merely in the Ayurvedic sense of Vata, Pitta and Kapha but also the mental constitution of Sattva (Divya), Rajas (Vira), and Tamas (Pashu)—suggests that people can be categorized according to what sort of approach will suit their temperament and would therefore be more

likely to work. Tantric herbal and mineral preparations are part of Ayurveda and can be evaluated for their efficacy. The whole physiology of sound and light can be revolutionized by examination of Mantra and of visualization.

Some of these Tantric attitudes are already being employed in the West, perhaps unknowingly. For example, cancer patients are sometimes instructed to visualize to encourage remission. One such visualization might be a school of piranha devouring the dead meat of the tumor mass. This is Tantric in nature; the sacrifice of an undesirable personality (the cancer) to an objectified projection of nature (the piranha). Such visualizations are often effective but because they are inherently combative they are not as useful for promoting health, which is non-aggressive, as they may be for cure. Tantra can suggest new and better visualizations which could positively increase the individual's stamina, vigor and happiness while simultaneously eliminating the disease.

Visualization can also be extended to other auto-immune diseases besides cancer, since auto-immune disease occurs when the ego loses its ability to distinguish what is part of its organism and what is alien to it. Psychologically this process is already being used in Neurolinguistic Programming. Undesirable habits or personality quirks can be altered thereby without analysis, guilt or trauma, and new traits can be added. Because there is no limit for self-improvement Tantra can be repeatedly employed to assist in adjustments.

For those who are already relatively healthy, Tantra can create deeper levels of harmony and health. Immortality may be generally unobtainable but a long healthy life is not, for which good immunity is required. In Sanskrit, immunity is *Vyadhikshamatva*, which means literally "forgiveness of the disease." By improper lifestyle and attitudes we create conditions in our bodies and minds which are agreeable to certain beings, which accept our (unspoken) invitation and move in. Most of us despise the disease without realizing that we have invited it to ourselves. When one learns to forgive oneself, and to forgive the disease its deprivations, then the disease's return is effectively barred.

Unfortunately, even the Tantric attitude can be dangerous. As one accumulates power, the ego will balloon out unless the personality is continuously incinerated simultaneously. Hence Tantra's insistence that power be objectified and personified. Since Tantric ritual can be used to create emotions which did not previously exist, perhaps adoption of the Tantric attitude can prove therapeutic for those many today who suffer from emotional paralysis. Hence Vimalananda's insistence on the greatness of motherly love.

From the strictly spiritual point of view a study of true Tantra would provide Westerners a proper perspective with which to consider their own spiritual practices. For example, they might begin to regard Kundalini with greater respect after learning of the effects of Her complete awakening. Or, consider the millions who repeat Mantras daily. Most are ignorant of the requirements for Mantra Siddhi and so will repeat the Mantra sincerely for years with very little result, whereas with a little attention to Tantric teachings they could make quick progress by learning such things as:

- a) The location in the vocal apparatus where the Mantra should be recited along with its proper pronunciation.
- b) The process of Bhuta Shuddhi and the practice of Nyasa (which prepares the body and mind to act as a fit receptacle for the deity).
- c) The Dhyana Vidhi, or specific visualization appropriate to the Mantra.
- d) The five great restrictions, which are reciting the Mantra daily the same number of times, at the same place, at the same time, with the same offering, while observing strict sexual continence during whatever period is set aside for this purpose.
- e) The total number of repetitions required, which differs for each Mantra (100,000 is often cited), plus the appropriate number and variety of offerings to the Five Great Elements.

Though Tantra may sometimes seem hopelessly complex and impractical one is unavoidably filled with awe at the amazing thoroughness and attention to detail which the ancient sages

showed while promulgating this science. Even if it cannot be instantly commercialized or otherwise exploited in some mundane fashion, surely Tantra deserves appreciation for its very existence.

The greatest benefit of the study of Tantra and Aghora is perhaps an enhanced appreciation for motherliness. The doctor who cannot take a motherly attitude toward his patients is a mere pill pusher. My teacher insisted that all males should learn motherly love. Tantra is the worship of Mother; it is the most advanced method for inculcating maternal feelings. It is undeniable that as you look to the world, so the world will look to you. If the world is your Mother and all its inhabitants your family there is never need for loneliness, fear or despair. As my teacher Vimalananda observed frequently, when speaking of the Mother, "What more does one need to do once the Mother has accepted him? She will do everything without being asked. *She* is the being to be realized."

# INTRODUCTION

This is the story of the Aghori Vimalananda. An Aghori is a practitioner of the spiritual discipline known as Aghora. The word *aghora* can be interpreted as "deeper than deep," or as "gentle," or "filled with light, illumined." Aghora is the apotheosis of Tantra, the Indian religion whose Supreme Deity is the Mother Goddess.

Tantra has thus far been glimpsed in the West only in its most vulgar and debased forms, promulgated by unscrupulous scoundrels who equate sex with superconsciousness. Sex is indeed central to Tantra, the cosmic sexual union of universal dualities. The aim of Tantra is Laya, return of the seeker to the state of undifferentiated existence. Actually Tantra cannot be termed a religion, because it is bereft of tenets and dogma. It consists only of methods for achieving this Laya, or union of the individual with the infinite. This union is described with a sexual metaphor: the union of the personal ego (which is female) with the absolute (male). Under special circumstances sexual rituals are employed in Tantra to hasten spiritual progress, but the concept of licentiousness is totally foreign to the Tantric tradition.

Tantra has been divided into Right-Hand and Left-Hand Paths. The Right-Hand Path involves a search for the Unlimited Reality via the road of external imposition of purity. While its practices may seem strange to some, its emphasis on personal purity

will be familiar to those in the West who know of Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Raja Yoga, all of which conform more or less to orthodox ideals of religious discipline.

The Left-Hand Path has attracted attention to itself by the actions of those unwise souls who seek quick and easy spiritual development without any preliminary renunciation of sensory gratification. The result of such rashness is invariably indulgence of the worst and most blatant sort, which has damaged the Left-Hand Path's reputation.

The Left-Hand Path relies on its practitioners' absolute internal purity to protect them while they practice rituals which may involve necromancy, intoxicants, sex, or other "forbidden" practices. Most serious aspirants automatically shun the Left-Hand Path because of its potential for misuse, which is indeed great. It is truly treacherous for the unwary: one text observes that "walking on swords or riding a tiger is child's play by comparison." Ironically, those undisciplined individuals who cannot succeed at the Left-Hand Path are naturally attracted to it by the potential for unbridled indulgence it seems to proffer, while those sincere seekers who might eventually succeed at it are frightened away by its temptations.

There are a few, though, who do dare and who successfully complete the rigorous Left-Hand training of Tantra and Aghora. Strict renunciation is the prerequisite, extreme enough to purify the aspirant through and through. Only when purity is perfected is the aspirant assigned rituals which to the untutored observer might seem hedonistic or "sinful." Aghora is not indulgence; it is the forcible transformation of darkness into light, of the opacity of the limited individual personality into the luminescence of the Absolute. Renunciation disappears once you arrive at the Absolute because then nothing remains to renounce. An Aghori goes so deeply into darkness, into all things undreamable to ordinary mortals, that he comes out into light. Sects in India are often distinguished by color of turban or drape of robe. Popularly, Aghoris have been stereotyped as ash-swathed ascetics with long matted hair who walk through life wild-eyed, skulking about in charnel grounds, wrestling

with jackals for carcasses. The title *Aghori* is claimed by some groups who even assert an exclusive right to it.

Vimalananda had his own definition of Aghori which was independent of any doctrine or dogma. Indeed, his usage of terms like *Vedic* and *Tantric* may also be devoid of detectable textual support, for he never cared for texts. He believed — and it is a noble Indian tradition to do so — that a lineage's practices prevail over textual injunctions. Whatever you believe yourself to be you are, if you are sincere and honest enough. You are responsible for yourself, and your opinion of yourself is authoritative. This attitude often irritates those who have invested heavily in the infallibility of any one text or group of texts, but then Vimalananda had no use for organized religion anyway. As you read his story, remember that what he called Vedic might not necessarily be Vedic to a temple priest, but that both opinions might be equally valid, according to context.

Throughout his life Vimalananda resisted any attempt to fit him into any mold. He guarded his originality jealously. He was without doubt distinctly individual, but simultaneously he was exceedingly difficult to pin down and define. What we speak of in this book as *Aghora* is solely according to Vimalananda's teachings. He studied many systems and selected elements from each — Bhakti Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, and others — and melded them into a tool which he employed to advance himself. He believed that each individual should "carve out his own niche": study what he or she could understand, select those practices which they could sincerely do, and do them faithfully. So by this definition Aghora would always be different for everyone; only the Aghori's attitude would be held in common. Each Aghori would follow different practices, but all Aghoris follow them with the same intensity and disregard for self-preservation.

To Vimalananda, the true Aghori cannot be recognized by any external sign or mark. Experience in the world of ascetics had taught him that many fake Aghoris lurk under outward appurtenances. And he stoutly maintained that the true Aghora is wholly internal. Sectarian Aghoris might well take issue with this opinion, but Vimalananda lived up to it. He lived in an



ordinary flat in Bombay and went about his business inconspicuously. Inside, he was pure Aghori: as hard as diamonds or as soft as wax, as the situation demanded. To his spiritual "children" he was the perfect mother — a combination of friend, philosopher, and guide. To those with inflated spiritual egos he was merciless.

One immutable tenet of Aghora is that death is to be personified and deified. Aghoris crave not for physical death but for destruction of all their limitations, "killing" themselves by internal or external processes. Aghoris do not fear death; once embarked upon a course of action the true Aghori either succeeds or dies trying, for there is no middle ground and no retreat. Aghoris love to spend time in cemeteries and burning grounds (collectively called *smashan* in Hindi). An Aghori is never happier than when he is seated intoxicated in the *smashan* performing a ritual near a funeral pyre, flames shooting up to lick the midnight blackness. Vimalananda, so concerned with external propriety in other ways, never hesitated to visit the *smashan* when he had rituals to perform.

Some of the events described in this book may well offend the reader's sensitivities. Part of this was Vimalananda's intention. He wanted Western holier-than-thou renunciates to know that "filth and orgies in the graveyard" (as one American once described Aghora) can be as conducive to spiritual advancement as can asanas, pranayama, and other "purer" disciplines. But another part is intrinsic to Aghora. In many ways it is and must remain totally incomprehensible to the ordinary person, and for some people no amount of explanation will satisfy when they question the wisdom or the spiritual benefit inherent in, say, consumption of human brain. Aghora is mysterious and deep — deeper than deep, in fact — and only those who can lay aside all their cultural clothing and plunge into it naked can dive into its depths.

When Vimalananda and I were in America one of my friends asked him, "As much as I have read about you and heard about you and now listened to you, I still cannot understand what an Aghori is. Would you please try to explain it to me?"

Vimalananda told me later, "She asked me so honestly and

earnestly that I felt I had to reply eloquently, even though this is really not something you can put into so many words."

He told her, "An Aghori is beyond the bound of the earthly shackles; nay, something above the elements which shape the universe, and you. He takes a sort of intoxicant and thus gets intoxicated in Supreme Love which emanates from the innermost recesses of his heart. Shall I call it interiority? It is that which is beyond awareness. He gives off the best part of love. Why part? Part of the Supreme, Universal Love, where one experiences, with the help of perception, All-in-One/One-in-All. When you, the finite, merge into infinity what dost thou not know? During this stage he merges with his own deity so that he becomes Him — capital H. That is why he is said to have gone from darkness to divine enlightenment. This is an Aghori."

Vimalananda was an extremist. He was certain that anything worth doing was worth doing well, and he was ready to stake his all to ensure that whatever he began was completed. For him, Aghora was the doctrine of no return, a personal creed which demanded relinquishing all in exchange for divine love. He wanted to warn spiritual dilettantes in the West that the frivolity with which they treat discipline and the self-delusion they attempt to pass off as enlightenment is merely a cheating of their own consciousness which leads only to the pit. For example, when I was once unwise enough to comment that a certain guru was supposedly awakening his disciples' Kundalini by boffing them with a peacock feather duster, Vimalananda exploded in reply: "Has the Kundalini Shakti become so cheap that some so-called godman can awaken it in multitudes of people all at once? Oh, no! Were our Rishis (ancient seers) fools to spend decades out in the jungles working at hard penances to awaken Kundalini and to perfect Aghora? No, the people who think they can buy Kundalini are the fools. Westerners think they can purchase knowledge, but all they get for their money is fake teachers from India who dish out any slop to them and get rich on their gullibility."

Vimalananda conformed to none of the usual "guru" stereotypes. When at the races he dressed like the horse owner he was, and when at home he dressed like an ordinary Indian. He

ate meat on occasion, used intoxicants frequently, and smoked cigarettes incessantly. He did all these things for specific, but hidden, reasons. Most of the people who knew him only formally never suspected that he might be of a spiritual bent. He cultivated this carefree image deliberately to avoid attracting attention to himself. This led me to early skepticism of his spiritual prowess, for I had been brainwashed by "spiritual authorities" to expect a certain role from a guru.

Fortunately for me I soon learned that Vimalananda's revulsion toward hypocrisy and posturing was exceeded in strength only by his obstinacy. At one time he had actively attempted to speed certain persons along the spiritual path but was unsuccessful with them due to their unpreparedness. He thereupon determined to provide real tools for spiritual cultivation only to those students whom he had first thoroughly tested and prepared. Hence, he never referred to himself as a guru, nor did he act in the way we have come to expect gurus to act. For example, when he chose to call me Ravi he did so because it is cognate with my nickname, Robby, and it was more convenient to use while speaking in an Indian language. It was not because he wanted to impress me by giving me some Sanskrit name.

He made a show of complete disinterest in teaching while actually spending much time evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each of his spiritual "children." This Indian tradition is known as *Kurma Guru* (literally, "Tortoise Teacher"). After a mother tortoise buries her eggs on a sandy beach it is said that she retreats a certain distance and then concentrates on those eggs with such an intense current of love that the warmth of her love reaches the eggs and causes them to hatch. In the same way, a *Kurma Guru* seems to pay no attention to his disciples' progress but in reality monitors them closely and sometimes pulls their strings from afar.

Vimalananda's entire life was teaching and being taught. He was always ready to learn something new, and always ready to teach — in his own way — if a student was sincerely willing to learn. His day-to-day life was a lesson for whoever could understand it, a continual resubmission of his will to the Divine Will.

He was not easy to fathom, and he deliberately made his lessons hard to understand. When he decided I should learn something he would deftly insert it into a flood of mundane trivialities directed at others in the room and would expect me to be alert enough to pick it out. Weeks or months later he would question me about it, suddenly and without warning. I would be expected not only to have noted and remembered the datum but to have processed it internally to fit my own situation as best I could. He often observed, "What sort of educational system do we have nowadays? They announce their examinations in advance so that any idiot can mug up a bunch of notes in preparation. The key to testing someone is to test them when they least expect it and are least prepared for it. Then you have an accurate idea of how much they really know."

Sometimes just keeping up with Vimalananda's talks was test enough. Depending on his mood and audience he might speak in very fluent high British English, in colloquial Gujarati, or (most commonly) in Hindi. When the mood struck him he could switch to high-flown Urdu, and sometimes stabbed at Marathi or Bengali. He was an actor by inclination and he had an incredible command over a wide variety of language styles, which he could permute at will to obtain precisely the right effect on his audience. Over the eight years and nine months that I was privileged to know him he repeated each of his favorite stories a dozen times or more, but never the same way each time. Each repetition was uniquely flavored by his delivery.

Translation was thus no easy task. I have rendered all his words into English, approximating in his usual English style the intent which flowed through whatever vocabulary, syntax, and diction he was employing in whatever language he was speaking at the time. Working from memory and from the brief notes I would jot down after our conversations I decided it would be most effective to leave the narrative in his own words throughout, so that readers can imagine if they like that they, too, sat with Vimalananda and heard him tell his tales.

There is another reason for presenting his words as they were spoken. Vimalananda's impression on people was achieved primarily not by what he did, but by how he did it; not by what

he said (though this was important), but by how he said it. Who he was was more significant than what he did, but he made people dig for his interior reality and most often they would come up empty-handed. Those few who knew him well — at least superficially — could never agree with each other on who he was, because his personality differed for each of his friends. He was a multitude of different people, all in one body. Once, before he had met me, he had a desire to jot down his musings and to accompany them with testimonies from his close acquaintances. He asked several of his friends, "If you had to write down something about me what would you write?" One replied with a single word, "Versatile." Another said, "Words just cannot express the reality." A third opined, "I would just turn in a blank sheet of paper because by saying nothing everything is said." His foster daughter had the last word by informing him, "No one has any business to read about you because unless they have experienced you they could never know the reality."

She was motivated by possessiveness, no doubt, and in fact knew him no better than did any of the rest of us, but her point is well-taken: How does one convey in two-dimensional print a multidimensional being? And it was not that he had anything to hide. There was nothing inscrutable about him; he never put on airs. He was available for everyone's scrutiny. He would talk to us in the way a child talks to its mother, neglecting to alter or hold back anything for the sake of self-image. He was a true innocent at heart, a child in many ways, never ashamed to display his innocent wonderment or admit to his mistakes. And like a child, he could equally well be a bad loser at games; the Aghori in him expected to win.

Perhaps it was because of this "child" within him that he could be such a good "mother" to all those around him. Or perhaps his concentration on the Divine Mother engendered the child in him. Whatever the causation, he was like a truly incorrigible child, a prankster from birth, always out for a gentle practical joke, ready to laugh at anything funny and to make anyone else laugh if he could. Nothing was bland around him. He could be miserable, overjoyed, or profoundly taciturn; he was never merely sad, happy, or quiet. His Aghora training had

taught him to succeed or die. He never played any role half-heartedly but threw himself fully into everything he did, no matter how minor. There was not a phony bone in his body.

The personality "Vimalananda" was indeed amazingly versatile. His family once owned most of Bombay, and his early life was princely, but the life of idle riches never tempted him. He knew by turns fabulous wealth and wretched poverty, and served variously as an army officer, textile machinery manufacturer, dairy owner, quarry operator, race course gambler, and anchorite. He achieved high academic qualifications and observed strict spiritual disciplines.

Experts at Indian music regarded him as both an instrumental and vocal maestro. Among those who knew him he was renowned for his expertise at astrology, his ability to diagnose disease by merely looking at a patient's face, and his capacity to interpret the body markings on horses and elephants. In his youth he was a semipro wrestler and won his last bout at age 38, defeating a boy half his age. I never saw him beaten at arm wrestling even when his opponent was a powerful young wrestler one-third his age. His friends regularly demanded that he cook for them, so tasty and unique were his culinary concoctions. He could move each and every muscle in his body, including his ears and eyebrows, in time to music, as a result of his training in Indian dance.

He was an artist. He liked to say, "Here in India we believe in watching the artist at work, not in looking at the work of the artist. Artistry is not what the artist produces but is the artist himself, producing. A great composer's music may be transmitted from generation to generation in the West. Our great musicians do not concentrate on creating compositions; they create new musicians to maintain the progression of the artistry."

How can one then transmit Vimalananda's artistry to anyone who has not seen it at work? The use of his words is transmission of his art, but only alert readers will be able to detect the subtlety of his artistry at work there beneath.

Vimalananda could learn from anyone and would make whatever he learned more artistic. He put the stamp of his person-

ality on everything he said, did, and created, and it is my hope that this stamp appears on these pages as well. He was charming and profound, and sometimes it may seem that he was in awe of himself. In a way, he was. He was not conceited; he was in awe of what was within him. Chapter Eight on Avishkara explains this more fully.

He could be egotistical, and some of that ego is reflected in these pages. He maintained that death of the ego meant certain death of the organism and so never tried to expunge his ego, preferring to keep it tightly under his control. He equated the ego, the individual's power of self-identification, with the much misunderstood Kundalini Shakti. His control of his Kundalini enabled him to disengage his consciousness from his own limited (if versatile) personality so that he could self-identify with unlimited, divine personalities. Often when he spoke it was with the awesome confidence of divinity speaking through him, and this sometimes seemed arrogant to those humans who heard but could not or would not comprehend it.

He could be maddening to deal with when he thought he was right but happened to be mistaken. There were times I found it difficult to respect Vimalananda, and other times when it was difficult to like him very much. But it was never difficult to love him. When first we met I analyzed him, dissected his opinions, and attempted to preserve the objective aloofness I felt was appropriate for a Western scientist. All in vain, for the current of warmth which flowed continuously over whoever he took into his circle of "children" was irresistible. My distrustful Western nature balked at first but eventually my doubt dissolved in spite of itself, and he and I settled into the seemingly preordained role of father and son. Or perhaps I should say "father and mother" and son, for never did his love lose its motherliness.

Two principles guided his teaching: compassion for all beings, including the seemingly insentient such as rocks; and perpetual awareness of *rnanubandhana*, the bondage of karmic debt. His compassion for his friends led him to ruin his health and exhaust his wealth to insulate them as far as possible from their own karmic debts. His shoulders were unusually wide, perhaps

from his wrestling, and he used to say, "Since Nature has given me such broad shoulders I should support whomever I can. Why should any child worry about rnanubandhana when its mother or father is there to repay its debts?" He treated all who came before him, even the buffoons, as a fond and indulgent mother would treat her beloved children. Women found him irresistible because he projected onto every female the same tremendous devotion which he directed in his worship toward the Mother Goddess. Until his dying day Vimalananda's sole refuge was the Motherhood of God.

He and I selected the name "Vimalananda" for use in his book from the many names he used during this lifetime. Its variety of meanings makes it appropriately representative of who he was. In Sanskrit *Vimalananda* equals "Vimala" (pure) plus "Ananda" (joy, bliss), or, literally, "the bliss of purity." "Malam vidvamsayati iti vimalah": The absolute annihilation of filth is Vimala. "Filth" is here the filth of attribution, the limitations imposed upon pure existence as a result of its incarnation. When the cosmic play of creation, preservation, and destruction is transcended all limitation is transcended, and that state is Vimala.

Or, when an aspirant has gone beyond the ego's flaws, when the ego is completely naked, cleansed of its accretions of personality and its stains of desire, then it perceives pure consciousness and knows that pure consciousness to be both "Thyself" and "Myself," and that is Vimala. Or, the "Ananda" an Aghori receives from his rituals cannot be purer (Vimala) because he sees the face of his beloved deity in everything and everyone.

"Vimalananda" can be derived in many different ways in Sanskrit, but its special significance here is that Vimalananda's physical mother was named Vimala. Vimala + Nanda = "son of Vimala." Vimalananda told me, "When I was a wandering ascetic I thought it would be wonderful to appear at my home one day and have the servant announce to my mother, 'Vimalananda has come.' What joy it would have given her!"

So 'Vimalananda' it was for this book, in lieu of such other names as Aghora Nath (master of Aghora), Shah-e-mauj (king of bliss), or even Bandal-e-aftaab (sun among exaggerators). This



last is significant in that Vimalananda was, well, "larger" than life, and some of his stories may seem expanded beyond the bounds of plausibility. We Westerners ordinarily equate truth with the "objective" reality of sense perception. Vimalananda was concerned only that the subjective reality of the stories he told exert specific effects on the subjective realities of his listeners, for he held that objective reality is continuously being altered by our perceptions of it. Thus it is immaterial if, for example, someone really does cut off his limbs and throw them into a blazing fire, only to have them reattach spontaneously after several hours, or whether he merely visualizes the scenario so intensely that he thoroughly convinces himself that the events did indeed occur. The result, increased stability of mind regardless of external irritant, will create increased physical stability as well. For the mind, reality is defined by its perceptions. Aghora is total control of perception.

When Vimalananda felt it essential to make a point to some "child" he would unhesitatingly exaggerate or magnify his stories, just as we might do for real children. Also, Vimalananda spoke mainly for Indians, who often inflate the content of events they report. Indian listeners have learned to automatically compensate for this expansion by mentally scaling down whatever is said. Thus Vimalananda's exaggeration would be perceived approximately accurately by an Indian listener.

I mention this because I was continuously aware of this cultural trait and have accounted for it. The stories you read here have been calibrated for maximum veracity, at least in the system of reality in which Vimalananda lived. Also, the language of this book has been slightly sanitized at his own request. He used to make regular use of vulgarity, but only when he spoke with people whose normal speech is vulgar, in order to be coherent with them. In addition, each cuss word was spoken with a hidden meaning behind it, a hoary Tantric tradition called *Sandhya Bhasha*. But that is another story.

No idle tale ever escaped his lips. Each was aimed at a specific listener and might change its form according to the lesson he felt the listener needed to learn, though all his stories were based on incidents which actually "happened" to him, at

least subjectively. As noted above, however, he transcended the blasé factuality of objective reality and ascended to the mythic. His tales were carefully textured with deep meanings available to the clever pupil who could properly interpret the words and the intonation and emotion with which they were spoken, ignoring the minor detail which Vimalananda himself scorned.

Vimalananda would unveil a story and present it to an assembly of people in his living room when the conversation seemed completely innocuous, and someone in that company would hear it and realize that it referred to a situation about which he had intended to ask Vimalananda but had thus far been unable to do so. There was a thrill in sitting quietly and suddenly realizing that a story was being directed at you. Vimalananda would not often target anyone by name, but a word here or a clue there would give his intention away. Vimalananda loved to play consciously with his "children" just as a mother plays abstractedly with hers, all the while maintaining awareness of the pot on the stove.

Vimalananda likewise manifested "otherness" continually: an eternal sense of other spheres of activity and other levels of awareness which operated in him simultaneously. He acknowledged this and often said, "To be really aware you must be able to know simultaneously what is going on thousands of miles away today, what may have happened here centuries ago, what will happen anywhere in the world decades from now, and what is occurring, has occurred, or will occur on other planes of existence. And you must still act as if you know nothing. You must just sit and talk with other people and play the part which Nature has assigned to you." In his music, his conversation, his chess, and even his sleep, he was always aware both of what was going on around him and also, effortlessly, of some "other" reality.

Or at least he made it seem effortless, though it surely involved tremendous strain which occasionally showed through. He credited tobacco with his ability to function in several planes of being at once. After close observation of him for years I can state confidently that though he was addicted to cigarettes, a

fact he made no attempt to conceal, tobacco certainly did seem to exert a markedly beneficial effect on his consciousness, infinitely more than I have seen in any other smoker. Modern scientific research has demonstrated that small doses of nicotine have a positive influence on brain function, and Vimalananda was such a veteran of intoxicants that he could easily imbibe more nicotine than anyone else without deleterious effect.

Smoking did eventually kill him, or so his doctors said, from cardiac failure. Those of us who knew him knew he decided exactly six months before dying that he intended to die. His excuse was that he had finished everything in this life that he was expected to do, and to live any longer would be to attract new karmas. He also predicted, for years, that the day he gave up smoking would be the day he died. For as long as I knew him he smoked at least one cigarette daily until December 11, 1983, a day on which he refused a cigarette whenever it was offered, fully aware of what he was doing. The next morning he died. At sunset I cremated him.

From the day we met, Vimalananda had been telling me I would cremate him, in spite of his natural son who still lives in Bombay and who, according to Hindu tradition, should have cremated his father. But Vimalananda always said, even eight years before the fact, "My son will not even come to the smashan to watch me burn, nor will my wife." Indeed, they did not. When once I asked him about this he told me, "There is no escaping the Law of Karma. I have told everyone the truth, that you are destined to cremate me, and all of them have become jealous of you because they think they deserve to be involved themselves somehow. They don't know what they are talking about or else they wouldn't act that way. I may have a physical son, but you are my spiritual son, and I will have my death my way. Do you know what is an Aghori's profoundest expression of love? It is these four words: 'You will cremate me.'

"You will assist me to return to my Beloved. And when I am burning I only desire one thing: play a tape recording of Jim Reeves singing 'Precious Lord, Take My Hand.' I know all the Hindus will think it is a sacrilege, but pay no attention to

them. That's all I desire, no rituals, no phoniness. I only want to go back to where I belong, and to have my Big Daddy take me there by the hand."

Vimalananda was cremated on the same pyre which had previously hosted his father, his mother, and his young son, Ranu, years before. Jim Reeves's voice did sing at his funeral to help release him from his "earthly shackles." Most of his ashes were consigned to the Arabian Sea, whose surf pounds the outer wall of the Banganga Smashan in Bombay; the rest were collected for ritual immersion in India's sacred rivers.

This has been a difficult book for me to write. I have spent months groping for direction, writing and rewriting, hoping to locate the best angle from which to approach to freeze Vimalananda in prose. Eventually I realized that he cannot be portrayed justly from a single angle, just as it was never possible to capture him definitively on film. He always avoided the camera, and none of his photographs which do exist resemble each other. In fact, it was always difficult to recognize the living Vimalananda from his pictures, because his entire face would change moment by moment according to his state of consciousness at the moment. He was loathe to part with photos of himself, which is why none adorns this book. He would say, "My friends will not like it if you don't take care of my photo. They will view it as a sign of disrespect. I don't care; I am just a nobody. But some of my ethereal friends are very orthodox and very strict and will not think twice before they punish for disrespect."

He certainly was not confined by the restrictions which confine most mortals. His eyes, for example, refused to remain the same color at all times. Sometimes they were a light blue; often they were light green, the color of the grape known as *anab-eshahi*. At some moments they could become nearly colorless. People meeting him for the first time would point it out to him incredulously and he would disclaim in agreement, "How ridiculous! Is it possible for anyone's eyes to change colors?" At other times when he was feeling playful he would adjust his eye color to match mine and would then call everyone in the room over to see and comment. He loved to watch people

react to an out-of-the-ordinary event because he felt he could gauge them better when they were caught off guard.

An enigma, a puzzle, a paradox, a riddle, a "mark of interrogation," as he himself put it: Who was Vimalananda? The more I remained in his company the less I knew about him. He really was "no-body": there was no one personality present perpetually in his body which could be pinned down and categorically identified as his. He could be hard and soft by turns, alternately refined and coarse according to his environs. One memorable night we started off dining elegantly at a posh Turf Club party and ended up, as fate would have it, listening to music in the middle of Bombay's red light district. Vimalananda finally took up an instrument himself and taught the delighted prostitutes a new song, just for fun!

Psychiatrists would probably classify Vimalananda as schizophrenic. Vimalananda himself used to say, "Either I must be mad or everyone else is; there are no two ways about it." Though no psychiatrist I am a licensed physician, and, in my opinion (an opinion shared by those who lived with him for many years before I met him), he was far saner than the rest of the world. Facile formulae cannot describe him.

I wrote this book knowing well that some of what is written will be offensive or at least incomprehensible to some, and that other passages will impel the curiosity of others to try out some of the more daring procedures. The natural reticence I felt for permitting Vimalananda to be introduced to an unprepared audience would have prevented this material from any publication had I not had clear instructions to do so. It began years ago when a man dressed as a medieval Rajput warrior was invited to Vimalananda's home in Bombay. After some preliminaries the spirit of a hero centuries dead, Kalaji Rathod, entered this man's body, broke open coconuts with a cavalry saber, and made predictions from the pieces thus formed. He advised me, when my turn came, to note down everything Vimalananda spoke. Vimalananda, who was not usually impressed with such performances and who had assiduously refused to allow anyone to record any of his words up to this time, mysteriously agreed and even encouraged me in this. He never read any of my writ-

ings on him until the first draft of this manuscript was ready. When I presented it to him he turned through a few pages, made a few comments, and lapsed quickly into his former seeming disinterest.

Vimalananda cloaked his meanings more thoroughly than ever before after making this assignment. His asking me from time to time if I had noted down some particularly intricate comment suggested to me that he still expected me to continue in my role as scribe. He continued to engineer situations, a pastime at which he was expert, and he would make use of the situations which developed spontaneously around him in his home, which was a veritable circus. During and after the unfolding of the situation he would test me on what I had learned.

As soon as Vimalananda felt he had dispelled my major doubts on a subject he would usually refuse to talk about it any longer, expecting me to learn more about it from direct experience. He explained that this would preserve the keenness of my spiritual hunger, to prevent me from ever losing my alertness or pausing in my pondering. He never spoon-fed me.

Gradually I accumulated a heap of information, enough to fill at least four books. The writing and rewriting of this book has enabled me to digest Vimalananda's teachings more efficiently, and I understood that Vimalananda's real intention in making me write was for the writing to act as a *sadhana* (spiritual exercise) for me.

Summaries and conclusions are supposed to close the books they serve, but I am listing mine here in the introduction. I cannot summarize Vimalananda, nor can I conclude anything at all about him. During the last visit of the Emperor Akbar's personality into Vimalananda's body, His Majesty told us, "Do you think you know the possessor of this body? You know nothing! If he is your friend and loved one, well, we spirits love him too. But don't be so stupid and insolent to think you can comprehend him. I do not know him, you cannot know him, no one knows him. This is the sort of man who allows you to play about with him, you fools! Apart from knowing him in his entirety you will never, never be able to know a single hair from the head of Vimalananda!"

Vimalananda himself requested me to compile my notes into this book and publish it now. He wanted Westerners to be exposed to Aghora. In his own words, "I once wanted to go to the West to demonstrate the practical uses of Aghora, the real spiritual science of India. I know I can deliver the goods, but whenever I tried to go my mentors always prevented me. They didn't want me to be tempted by glamour and power. They knew I could be a better businessman than anyone else — it is in my genes, after all — but they didn't want to watch me fall so low. I am not destined for commercialization; I am destined for something different.

"It is not necessary to publish this while I am alive. I have not achieved all I have achieved in this life merely to capitalize on it. I don't want the last years of my life to be spoiled by curiosity-seekers who want to meet me to find out if I am for real. I know who I am and don't care what anyone else thinks.

"Besides that, if I become too well known I'll have to sit on a throne and say things like, 'Blessings be upon you,' which is bull because you can't give blessings away like that. I won't be able to move about freely in society and play about as I do now. No more jokes, no more laughing sprees. I'll have to become stern and solemn. Why should I give up what little peace and quiet I have now, just to be worshipped by a bunch of people who don't even know what they are doing? How do all these so-called saints stand it, I wonder?

"Publish this book after I am gone. Let people know the truth. Let them know what is what. Out of the thousands who may read it at least a few will be sincere. They will try to learn more, and then Nature Herself will make arrangements for them to learn just as She did for me, and they will be taught according to their capabilities. The progression will go on; there is nothing to fear.

"I have never gone out and tried to attract anyone to me. People have come and gone. I don't ask them to come and I don't object when they go. What is it to me? I only want a few. If I love one or a few I can love well. If I try to love all I will just be cheating myself. Only Jesus could love all."

From Vimalananda's select circle of loved ones I was award-

ed the commission to try to explain to those who never met him just who and what he was. Hence this book. No one can disturb him now. His story can be told and his privacy will be preserved. I am pleased to offer this volume to those who can read it: I regard it as an offering to him, an offering which is also a promise I have kept, an obligation I have requited, a long-standing desire of his I have finally fulfilled.

Here is Vimalananda as I knew him. Even after hundreds of meetings he could baffle me with the incredible variegation of his knowledge, charm me with his ever-present effluence, and infect me into a smile with his good humor. I even almost got used to his anger. But having charmed and enthralled me and his other listeners he never tired of telling us, "Don't take anything I say as gospel truth. I am human, I make mistakes. Test on yourselves what I've told you. Try it out, experience it, and then you will know whether or not I'm telling you the truth. When you examine a gem you must evaluate it from all its facets before you can decide on its value."

Here then is Vimalananda, for your evaluation.

# CHAPTER ONE

## MA

*To be a guru you have to say, "I know and I can teach you." But if I say that, well, I'm finished. I can never learn anything else. I have shut myself off from anything new. If I remain a student all my life, though, I will always be ready to learn new things.*

I never call any of the people who come to me for spiritual guidance "disciples." I am just an ordinary person. I have lived unknown and I will die unknown, except to a few. I am not interested in anything the world can offer me and even if I die tomorrow I have no regrets. I have lived my life to the fullest; I have done enough. I'll always be thankful to Nature for permitting me to achieve so much. I will never have disciples, only "children," because that is the way a real guru should treat a disciple: as a spiritual son or daughter. And the bond between them is far more intense than that between a physical parent and child.

Even if the child is wicked or wayward, do the parents stop loving it? No! In fact if they are true parents they will love the child all the more, because that child gives them an opportunity to demonstrate their generosity and love, just as in the case of the Prodigal Son. The parents have a chance to forgive the child, and that feeds the ego. So no matter what a child

might do, its parents are always bound to love it — if they are true parents.

It is the same way with a guru and his disciples. No matter where the “child” goes or how much he curses the guru, the mentor knows the child must return eventually. Where will he go? The guru can afford to wait for the child and forgive him when he returns.

Once there was a guru who made one of his disciples put on a loincloth and then sent him out into the world. Tying on a loincloth symbolized that the boy was meant to be a celibate mendicant. Everything went fine for the boy until one day when he washed his loincloth, and while it was hanging up to dry a mouse came along and chewed up part of it. The boy said to himself, “This will never do. I need a cat.” So he got a cat to save his loincloth from mice. But then the cat had to eat, so he made arrangements for a cow to provide milk for the cat. Who will look after the cow? A cowherd was engaged to cut grass to feed the cow. But then how to pay for the cowherd? A field was taken and farming was begun so there would be produce with which to pay the cowherd. The farm in turn required labor, and in addition the boy had to live nearby in order to oversee it. So a house was constructed. Who is to run the house? A wife is necessary. So the boy married and threw away the loincloth, which was the cause of the whole mess in the first place.

When the guru returned to that area after some time to check on his disciple’s progress he was amazed to see a large farmhouse and cultivated fields where he had expected to find jungle. Outside the gate of the house was a watchman who asked the guru what business he had in the neighborhood. When the guru asked where his boy might be the watchman replied, “Sahib? Oh, he is in his house.” The guru said to himself, “Wah, wah, my boy, so you have become a great man, a sahib,” and went into the house to meet the boy. After the usual greetings he told his disciple, “Look how you have got yourself reentangled in the world. Now don’t worry, I am here to save you. Forget all this and come back with me to the jungle.”

The boy replied, “Oh, no, Maharaj, this is much more to my liking; I intend to stay here.”

The guru didn’t say anything else, but just went off a little distance to meditate. Within a short time the disciple’s mind changed completely. He realized the cage he had created for himself, and he left everything and returned to his guru. This is the kind of guru to have: one who once he accepts you as his disciple never forsakes you until the end, come what may. The bond between guru and disciple is stronger than any other, which is why the guru is to be respected even before God.

People come to me for many reasons, you know. Basically, though, they come because they are miserable. Most of them have worldly miseries and are satisfied with worldly happiness, which is why I don’t talk to most people about spirituality. Most people are just not interested in experiencing anything other than food, sleep, and sex, no matter what they may claim. I’m sorry, but it’s true. And the few who are after more in life are mainly after the happiness which the world can provide them: fame, money, possessions, children, whatever. Very, very few are really interested in spirituality.

And this is the way it should be. If everyone became spiritual and lost interest in the world all our society would grind to a halt. So the Yoga which teaches you to go out into the jungle is not meant to be taught to everyone. This is why I have not been able to find language foul enough to express how I feel about the so-called Yogis, Swamis, and godmen who India has been exporting to the West to teach spirituality. Yoga is not a system of physical jerks; know it once and for all. Yoga is meant to make every home a happy home. When every family member is giving out his or her best to unite the family and make it a success, that is real Yoga. And I don’t mean the family you were born into or married into, necessarily. Whoever you live with is your family. As we say in Sanskrit, “vasudeva kutumbam” — we are all members of God’s family.

So when people come to me for instruction I don’t tell them to do exercises or to pay priests to do some rituals on their behalf or to go on pilgrimage or anything else like that. I tell them to first clear up their personal lives. Most people are not destined to become truly spiritual in this lifetime and there is no use in trying to force them to; they will just become miserable. If they



are downright materialistic, well, I always say, "For those who believe in God no proof of His existence is necessary; for those who do not believe in God no proof is possible." If they are partly materialistic and partly spiritual, the true guru will see that they marry happily and live contentedly and observe simple spiritual practices. This will ensure their progression for future lives. The ones who are destined for it, the ones who have already done plenty of preparation in past existences, will be taught fully.

The guru does not need his physical body to guide you, remember. He may use other teachers or he may work directly through Nature. The first year of my life I took mother's milk; the next five years, nothing but cow's milk. For the next eight years I lived on nothing but three fistfuls of chickpeas. I would soak them overnight in water and then take one fistful morning, afternoon, and evening. No one told me to do it; it just seemed to me to be the right thing to do. Then for three and a half years I ate nothing but green chilies and water. When I finally started eating what people would call "normal" food I began by taking only raw vegetables because I wanted something crunchy, something to bite; you know how animals always prefer their food to be raw. For twenty-three years I never tasted salt, just because I didn't want to.

One day during my boyhood I was standing alone doing nothing in particular when suddenly, like a bolt of lightning, I heard a mantra. I liked it and started to repeat it. No one told me to do so, but I got such a good feeling from it that soon I was repeating it most of the time. You see how Nature works?

When I was in the first year of college my classmates and I went to Benares on a university tour. I met two saints while I was there. One was Bhaskarananda Saraswati, the sadhu who predicted to Lady Willingdon that she would become Vicereine of India. He was honored with a formal reception by the grateful lady when this occurred. Imagine — a naked ascetic, walking through a cordon of honor composed of troopers with drawn swords!

The other saint I met was Telang Swami. He has now left his body, after a life of more than 370 years. He weighed only

about 300 pounds, and he had short white hair and a short beard; he never had anything to do with clothing except for a 1,008-bead rosary. He is the only person in the history of Benares ever to perform a ritual bath of Kashi Vishveshvara, the presiding deity of Benares, with his own urine and feces. When he did this one of the temple priests was so outraged that he came over and slapped Telang Swami, who didn't bother in the least about it and merely went off. That night the King of Benares saw Kashi Vishveshvara in a dream. The god told him, "Telang Swami is my very essence; how dare anyone insult him?" The next day the King tried to locate the priest to punish him, but learned he had died suddenly during the night. Telang Swami was a wonderful Aghori.

When I met him, he motioned to me to come over and sit next to him — he never spoke for almost 100 years — and he started playing with my hair and rubbing the back of my head. I left, and I don't know what he did to me but back in Bombay I began experiencing some queer things. One night Telang Swami came to me in a dream and requested me to return to Benares to visit him again, which I did. At that time I had no inkling of the nature of the relationship between us; later when I met my Junior Guru Maharaj I learned that Telang Swami was his disciple. This made us guru-brothers, and in his magnanimity he was helping to prepare me for what was to happen next.

After some time a few of my classmates took me to see a Jain ascetic by the name of Jina Chandra Suri. The old man peered at me and after a close inspection requested me to bring my horoscope to him the next day. I did, and, after carefully perusing it, he inquired about my willingness to learn astrology, palmistry, and physiognomy from him. I don't know what made me agree, but I agreed, and I studied with him for three years. He taught me how to construct Yantras and perform rituals; I enjoyed it.

One day he casually asked me to accompany him on a trip outside Bombay. He took me to Janakpur, up in the erstwhile Darbhanga State which is now part of Bihar. I thought we were just on a holiday, and for two or three days I had a fine time. The villagers were very hospitable, and I enjoyed a good rest.

On the new-moon night, though, everything went wrong. Jina Chandra Suri came and met me and started speaking very sweetly to me. I wondered what had come over him. There was certainly no need for such ingratiating behavior. I now know he was just fattening me up for the kill, because after all the preliminaries he told me, "Now you are going to do Shava Sadhana."

I had no idea what he was talking about. When I asked him he explained that a fresh corpse, or Shava, had been obtained and that I was to sit on the corpse and perform a ritual. Apparently he had looked into my horoscope and realized that I could succeed at this sort of sadhana. He must have planned out the whole drama over the last three years.

Well, I told him I had no intention of doing anything like sitting on a corpse and performing sadhana. I had done some Yoga before, but our family worships Krishna, and for us it is unthinkable to have anything to do with dead bodies or spirits or anything like them.

Besides, since childhood I could never see a corpse without breaking out in a sweat and falling into a faint, all because I so strongly self-identified with the dead individual. Once or twice when I was out driving I met a funeral procession and actually lost control of the car and allowed it to run onto the footpath; it was very dangerous. So I couldn't even imagine what would happen to me were I to sit on a corpse.

Jina Chandra Suri started to try to convince me, but I was adamant. Finally he lost his temper; it was the first time I had ever seen the old man get angry. He told me, "If you refuse to do it I'll perform the ritual myself on *your* corpse!"

I flared up: "Who do you think you are threatening?" I assumed he was talking through his hat. To show he meant business he motioned to a group of drunken tribals who were standing nearby, holding knives, clubs, and other weapons. At his signal they walked over and surrounded me.

I was really in a fix. If I did the sadhana there was a very good chance I'd die of sheer terror, or because some spirit would catch hold of me, or maybe the deity Herself would decide to take me as a sacrifice. But if I didn't do it, it was definite I would

die. I decided that if I was going to die either way then I might as well perform the ritual, since there would be at least some minor chance of survival that way.

When I informed the old man that I would do it he immediately brightened up and became cheerful again. He started explaining the details of the ritual to me: how to position the corpse, how to sit on it, how to tie the lifeless thumbs and toes. Then he made me drink a full bottle of country liquor. I am the son of a Hindu merchant, and until that moment in my life I had never even touched an egg, much less a piece of meat or a drop of alcohol. But there was no choice; I took a big pull from the bottle. My God! I thought my throat was on fire! Tears came to my eyes; after all, it was my first time. Jina Chandra Suri was so overjoyed by my agreeing to do the sadhana that he became very solicitous about my condition. Seeing the effect of the moonshine on me he was so concerned he actually picked up the bottle and started feeding it to me a little at a time.

By the time I had finished the whole bottle all my fear had gone. This was the first time I had ever felt real fear in my entire life and, let me tell you, I was really scared. The only thing left for me was to foul my pants, I was so desperate. I was sweating, my hands were shaking, I was overwhelmed with terror. By the end of that bottle, though, I had lost every iota of my fear. I had made up my mind that I would either succeed at that sadhana or die trying: there was no way out. Challenge and response, the law of the jungle. I was ready.

This is the beautiful effect of alcohol: you never fear or hesitate once you've taken it. It has a number of side effects, no doubt, and very few people use it for the right purposes. But for certain practices it is essential. It was really a good thing that I drank that moonshine, because it helped me out in several ways.

Then I was taken to the corpse. It was that of a young girl of about fifteen, very pretty. She belonged to a tribe whose members pressed oil from seeds to earn a living. She had been dead only a few hours and was so lovely that I forgot the ritual, the danger, the fear, and everything else and started thinking only of her. She was beautiful in the way only primitive people can

be beautiful. Not an ounce of excess fat, not a wrinkle on her skin. Her thighs? Solid like trees. Her breasts? Absolutely firm. I found myself wishing she were still alive so I could take her off alone to a quiet place and we could enjoy together. I was even ready to marry her, she looked so lovely. This was not necrophilia or anything perverted; I was just very drunk and I was sorry she was dead and unable to play about with me. I am telling you the truth about all this so you'll have some idea of what it was like.

While I was drinking they had taken her to the appropriate spot and pointed her head in the correct direction. Jina Chandra Suri, who was looking very pleased with himself, handed me an object and explained: "I am giving you my Yantra which I worshipped for forty years in Assam. It will take care of you. There is nothing to worry about. I am going to sit over there," he said, motioning to a spot about a hundred yards away, "and repeat mantras for your protection."

He then took a black thread and did Kilana in a big circle around me. *Kila* means nail, and *Kilana* is meant to "nail off" or seal off an area to prevent any troublemaking spirit from disturbing your concentration. As long as you remain within the circle you are safe. The moment you step outside the circle you've had it: you become a spirit yourself unless there is some ethereal being nearby who can come to your rescue, which is highly unlikely.

After the Kilana the old man told me which mantra to recite, gave me a *japamala*, or rosary, to count the repetitions, and shoved a dish of raw meat and a bowl of wine in front of me. The idea was that when the Goddess appeared, in the form of an animal, I should offer the meat and wine to please Her. Satisfied with my worship, She would tell me to ask for a boon, and I should reply, "Do whatever my guru says to do," meaning Jina Chandra Suri. This was all the old man's idea, of course, and I had no intention of saying anything like that. First I wanted to see whether or not the sadhana would actually work, and then if it did I would think about what to ask Her for.

Jina Chandra Suri walked off and sat down to start doing japa for my protection, and I knelt on the corpse in the manner I

had been shown. The supine girl's mouth was open and had been filled with oil. The old man had showed me how to make a wick of raw cotton, and I lit my wick from one of the torches the tribals were carrying. Since it was a new moon night there was absolute blackness except for this lamp, and I could see nothing but the poor girl's face, which looked ghastly, grotesque in the flickering light of the flame. All my previous desire for enjoyment with her melted away as I peered down into her open, fixed, unstarling eyes. Both of us were stark naked, and her cold body underneath mine caused a sort of creepy feeling to spread through my body and mind.

Here again the alcohol saved me. Being drunk I was able to shake off the dread and begin my japa, gazing full into her face to concentrate my mind there. The old man had warned me that if she tried to get up I should knock her down and pin her firmly, so I was intently watching for the least twitch or flinch in her body to alert me to the danger. I suppose this is the most terrifying part of Shava Sadhana, because it is an immense strain on your nerves if the corpse suddenly tries to sit up and begins to growl and scream at you. Many people have died of fright at this stage. One old fellow died right in front of me. He was trying to show off and challenged me to a contest. We procured two corpses. The idea was to see who could bring life into one most quickly and control it most firmly. I warned him that he was too old to be trying such stunts but he was beyond reasoning with. As soon as the corpse started to sit up and he tried to control it, the spirit which had been forced to sit in the corpse caught hold of him. His nerves failed, his heart failed, and he died.

But I didn't have this problem on that first night, which is good since otherwise I probably would not be sitting here telling you this story now. I sat and did my japa. I don't know how many I did, but it can't have been too many before I suddenly began to get a very eerie, extremely queer feeling, and I saw a pair of eyes watching me from the darkness.

The animal, a jackal, approached me, snarling and baring its teeth. I don't know what came over me — it must have been the alcohol, because I was so drunk I didn't care for man or

beast — but I became furious. I forgot everything I had been told to do, I forgot the wine and meat I was supposed to offer. I reached out of the circle which had been drawn on the ground to protect me and I grabbed the jackal. I was really incensed, and said to it: "So, you want blood, do you? Take this!" And I stuck my hand into its mouth. That liquor really did me immense good; I don't know what I would have done without it.

The Goddess, who was temporarily in the form of the jackal, was interested only in blood. One of the beast's teeth pricked my hand between the thumb and index finger, and the jackal licked up the drop of blood that oozed out — and then all of a sudden there was Smashan Tara standing before me, smiling, asking what I wanted from Her.

Tears come to my eyes whenever I remember that scene. For years the scar remained on my hand as a reminder of the night when I was there in that cemetery sitting on that corpse, and I caught my first glimpse of Smashan Tara. I don't know what your condition would be if you were to catch sight of Her. You might even die of shock. She is very tall, and Her skin is a beautiful deep midnight-blue color. Her eyes are beautiful; that's the only way I know to describe them. She has a long red tongue lolling from Her mouth. Blood, the blood She is eternally drinking, drips slowly from the tip. She is *ghatastani*, or pot-breasted, and *lambodari*, or full-bellied. Around Her neck there is a garland of freshly severed human heads which are freshly bleeding. She wears wristlets and armllets of bones, and anklets of snakes. Her four hands grasp a pair of scissors, a sword, a noose, and a skull. She wears a skirt of human arms, and to me She is one of the loveliest beings in the universe, because She is my Mother.

I suppose I should have been frightened at this terrific vision, but actually when I saw Ma for the first time I felt as if I had known Her before, perhaps in some previous birth, and that this was just a continuation of that previous sadhana. I am sure this is the case because otherwise it would have been impossible for me to achieve so quickly.

Anyway, She asked me what I wanted and I told Her, "Look, I never did this for myself. I never wanted to do anything like

this. That fellow sitting over there made me do it. I don't want anything except to go back to Bombay."

"Don't worry," Tara assured me, "I'll see that you get to Bombay, but first you have to ask for something."

"But I don't want anything except to go back to Bombay."

"But you have to ask for something," Tara insisted, smiling.

"Just get me out of here first. Take me to Bombay and then I'll ask for something."

Tara laughed and told me to close my eyes. I did, and when I opened them again I was in my bedroom in our family mansion in Bombay, soaked in sweat from fear and shock. I was stunned for at least fifteen minutes and did not even know where I was. I walked from room to room like a zombie, trying to convince myself I was really back home. Gradually I realized that I had indeed returned to Bombay, and that thought gave me some relief. I was still drunk, so there was nothing to do but go to sleep.

When I woke up at 11 A.M. I had a terrible hangover. Of course I didn't know then it was a hangover because I had never experienced one before. All I knew was that my head was splitting open, bursting at the seams. I called my servant Dhondu and told him to bring me some Bayer aspirin. It came as a powder back then, so I took two teaspoonsful, and after half an hour or so I started sweating and my headache disappeared.

I felt good enough to start planning my revenge on Jina Chandra Suri for daring to lie to me about the purpose of our jaunt and getting me into such a situation: "I'll never see his face again. No — I'll butcher him. Let him return to Bombay and we'll see how long his head remains on his shoulders."

Thinking in this way I suddenly remembered the Yantra and rosary which were still with me. I said to myself, "Wait, I'm safe here in my own home. Let me try this out." There was some doubt in my mind that I had imagined or dreamed the whole thing. Just as an experiment I sat down and started doing japa. I had not finished even one hundred repetitions when Tara appeared in front of me again and asked me what I wanted from Her.

I said, "Ma, I really never had any intention of doing Shava Sadhana, and I don't want anything."

Again She smiled and said, "Ask Me for something." When Ma wants to give you something She creates a situation so that you must accept it. I finally had to tell Her, "Ma, I never wanted any of this, but now that I've succeeded I would most like for You to come to me every day and permit me to worship You."

She said, "But I can't come here. You will have to go daily to the smashan."

And that is just what I did. At that time Bombay was not so crowded as it is today, and the smashans were very lonely places. I began with the Worli smashan. A friend of mine would drive me there every night and wait in the car while I did my work. I had arranged for a man to provide me with fresh coconut water nightly. After offering it to Ma I would drink the rest as Her prasad, a gift from Her to me. There was an old fakir, a Muslim ascetic, named Mishkin Shah, who lived nearby and who knew why I visited the cemetery nightly. After we met we became good friends and I would have tea with him every night.

Ma would come to me nightly and we'd talk. After some time, when I knew Her better, I asked Her to show me all Her forms: Chinnamasta, who carries Her head in Her hands and drinks Her own blood as it gushes from Her neck; Bagalamukhi, who has the head of a crane, or heron; and all the rest of the Great Goddesses. Many rituals were involved in achieving success at the sadhanas for them all. I also had to perform Shava Sadhana twice more, each time with a different technique. For instance, the second time I did Shava Sadhana I did it on the corpse of a man instead of a woman, and the third time I did it on the corpse of a woman who had died while pregnant.

Jina Chandra Suri was not there to "assist" me those next two times I did Shava Sadhana. A few days after my experience in Janakpur he returned to Bombay and came to meet me. He began by praising me: "I am so pleased with you, my boy. I knew you could do it from the first time I saw your horoscope.

Now do just as I say and we'll be able to collect plenty of money from all the maharajas and merchants."

I told him, "I will do nothing of the sort. You forced me to go and do a sadhana which I never would have done willingly. I will allow you to leave with your life only because you introduced me to my Mother. I must show my appreciation to you for such a boon, even though your wicked, dirty mind had different plans for me. Were it not for this I would ask Her to make a nice mince of you, just as you had planned to do to me. Now please get out."

First he pleaded a little. Then when he saw I was intransigent he got wild: "I'll perform a death ritual on you!"

I lost my temper, but I just laughed in his face and said, "Now I spend twenty-four hours of the day in the lap of my Mother, so your puny threats do not worry me at all. But my Mother may not like to hear you abusing Her son; I suggest you keep quiet."

This only infuriated him further: "Give me back my Yantra!" he shouted. I told him firmly, "I am not going to give you anything. It is time for you to leave," and I had him bodily ejected from my house. And what happened? After some time he raped a little teenaged girl, and that was the end of all his spiritual power. Thereafter he earned his living by making Yantras for rich Jain merchants, charging them 10,000 or 15,000 rupees each (about \$1,000 to \$1,500).

We kept up our relationship, however. I guess it was because he knew the power of Smashan Tara, since he had worshipped Her for forty years, and he probably still thought he might be able to get some benefit from Her through me. Sometimes he would come and meet me at my house, but the connection between us was strained.

He was unique, really, in his own way. As far as astrology, palmistry, and physiognomy are concerned he was a master. He had been able to dig up a number of buried treasures and texts. I have never met anyone in this world who could exceed his ability to make other people rich. "Why do you want to waste your time on spiritual things?" he would always tell me. "Do your penance, then cash in on it, make money, and enjoy

your life. You are from a merchant's family, which means you are meant to make money, not be spiritual. Spirituality is for Brahmins."

He had himself owned tea estates earlier in his life and had fallen in love with an English girl, the daughter of a fellow tea planter. Everyone was against them and succeeded in breaking up the relationship. He was so disgusted with the whole situation that he left everything and became an ascetic.

Although he had worshipped Smashan Tara for forty years he never dared try to perform Shava Sadhana himself; he knew he could never succeed. He did attempt to make one Rati Bhai do Shava Sadhana, but as soon as Rati Bhai reached the smashan he got such a fright that he fouled his pants and then fainted. He has not fully recovered from the effect, even today.

Unfortunately for Jina Chandra Suri, I was a very different sort and paid no attention to him. I was listening only to my Mother, Smashan Tara. It is only by Her grace that I have achieved whatever I have achieved in this life.

I never told Ma that he should rape that little girl, mind you. I don't like rape; it makes me furious. It is one of the three acts which supposedly can't be atoned for or forgiven, along with murder of your guru, and gambling. What happened to Jina Chandra Suri was that Ma withdrew Her protection from him, and his mind was overcome with desire. He could have satisfied his desire in other ways but he could not restrain himself and this is what resulted. And besides, there must have been some karmic connection there, otherwise there never would have been an opportunity for him to be alone with her long enough to rape her. Had this old man been in his senses he could have postponed the repayment of this karmic debt for some future lifetime, but because his balance of mind was lost, his natural underlying lust which had been suppressed all those years suddenly spurted out. It is a fine thing to collect great spiritual power, but you are headed for trouble if you ever lose control over it.

You know, one person may do sadhana for years and years and still get no result, whereas someone else may only do a very small amount of penance and get a very great result, as

was the case with me and my Shava Sadhana. It looks unfair, doesn't it? But the person who achieves easily in this lifetime must have spent many, many lifetimes of tough austerities, just as Kalidasa did, to reach the point where only a small further effort will bring results. Someday I'll tell you the story of Kalidasa. Right now I have a better story for you. Listen!

One time an Aghori decided to perform Shava Sadhana. Naturally he couldn't do it in the city because the people there would be scandalized and would accuse him of black magic and attack him. To avoid this he procured a corpse, carried it out into the deep jungle, sat on top of it, and began to do his japa.

A woodcutter happened to pass nearby and, seeing the Aghori and the corpse, took fright and climbed a tree to hide. While he was in the tree the woodcutter overheard the mantra which the Aghori was repeating. He was repeating it aloud to improve his pronunciation, which was proof he was still raw, because a real Aghori never speaks a mantra aloud.

Suddenly from out of nowhere a tiger appeared and with one cuff from its paw killed the Aghori. Immediately it began to lap up the freely flowing blood. Tigers always do that to a fresh kill. While it was busily engaged in slaking its thirst for blood, the tiger was frightened by a sound nearby and plunged into the deep underbrush.

The woodcutter knew well that a tiger always returns to its kill, but he had become curious about the whole thing and in spite of the danger got down from the tree to investigate. Then he wondered to himself, "Why shouldn't I try this out?" He sat on the fresh corpse of the Aghori and started to repeat the mantra he had overheard. After less than a hundred repetitions the deity suddenly appeared in front of him and said, "Ask for a boon!"

The woodcutter told Her, "Ma, I have only done this out of curiosity."

Ma told him, "That doesn't matter. What does matter is that I have come to you. Now ask for something."

He said, "All right then, tell me which law states that this



fellow should not succeed even after long penance and that I should achieve within seconds?"

Ma smiled and said, "Close your eyes." When he did he saw that he had been doing this same sadhana for the past ten births. Ma continued: "Do you understand now? If you hadn't done this before, how could you have remembered the mantra? How would you have developed the courage to attempt the sadhana knowing the tiger would return at any moment? I was the tiger who killed this Aghori. I made him come here, where I knew you would be waiting. I gave you the intelligence to remember the mantra and do the sadhana. You had only a few japas left remaining from your past birth in order to get Siddhi, and now you have it. This Aghori must still go through two more lives before he gets an opportunity like this. Now ask me for something!"

The woodcutter said, "Ma, all that I desire is that you should keep me forever in Your sweet gaze." In that instant, he was made.

When I said he was made, I mean he obtained Siddhi. Not *Kaya Siddhi*, which is immortality, or *Maya Siddhi*, which is control over the mundane world. When you have one of these, of course, you have the other as well. No, I mean the Siddhi of having Ma with him twenty-four hours a day. Ma took possession of him. Not of his body, because if She had come for his body he would have become immortal. She possessed his mind; She plugged him into the Universal Computer so that he was able to get answers for any question, and could continuously play about with Her.

Ma came to me in the same way. Only because of the efforts of my past lives did I get the desire to study with Jina Chandra Suri; I could have easily refused. And unless I had done it in some previous existence I would never have agreed to do Shava Sadhana, even under threat of death. Ma wanted me to do it, that's all. And what I have gained by succeeding at Her sadhana is beyond speech. She taught me how to move around in my subtle body; She made me clairaudient and clairvoyant. I can go anywhere in the world without leaving my chair; nothing can be hidden from me.

I am talking as if I do these things, but in fact it is beyond me to do anything. Only Ma can do it; She does it all. When someone who is afflicted by disease comes to me Ma tells me the treatment. Sometimes She will tell me, "This person does not deserve to get well," or, "It is not in this person's destiny to be cured." Whereupon I ask Her, "Then why did you send this particular individual to me, if you didn't want them to be benefited in some way?" And then Her compassion flows and something incomprehensible occurs and the person is cured. I always pray to Her, "Ma, make me a leper, ruin me, do whatever You like but don't ever remove me from Your lap." And I know She hears me. This is the foundation of all my confidence in my abilities. Do I have any capabilities? Ha! Everything is from Ma.

My ideas are individual, no one else knows about them. People sometimes ask me, "How can you have learned so much in such a short span of sixty years?" I tell them, "I studied at Jnanaganj at Manasarovara." *Jnanaganj* — heap of knowledge. *Manasarovara* — ocean of the mind. My knowledge is all *Nijajnana*, knowledge from within, from Ma. My mentor has taught me a wonderful method of being able to tune in on knowledge from anywhere, with Ma's help.

Other people have wondered, "How can you treat someone as terrifying as Smashan Tara as your Mother?" They can ask such stupid questions only because they are ignorant. Once you know the meaning of the form in which you see Smashan Tara you will be able to understand why She is the Universal Mother.

## CHAPTER TWO

# SHAKTI

*When I'm disgusted, fed up with the world, I always turn to my Mother. She comes to me in any form I request, and we play that way. Sometimes She comes as my Mother, sometimes as my wife, sometimes as my child. She's always with me; She'll never go away. Long ago we promised each other to stay together always. If She ever leaves me I will not live even an instant longer. Who is She? My ego, the Shakti which self-identifies with my body. If She leaves me I have to die. Most people don't know the true value of the ego, and they misuse Her. But I think I am the luckiest man in the world, because my Smashan Tara has taught me all about my own ego, and how to realize Her as Adya, the Original Shakti. She is the being to be realized.*

## MAYA SHAKTI

Ma is the source of all knowledge, the source of both delusion and release from delusion. She is the foundation and supporter of this universe and of all possible universes. She is called *Adya* because *Adya* means "that which is first and which is therefore eternal, which has no beginning and no end, which

is ever-existent." This is the only way She can form the base of the cosmos. If She too were subject to creation and destruction, what sort of foundation would She be? No. She is beyond everything, and She is the source of everything.

Though She is without beginning and without end, She may exist in either the manifested or the unmanifested state. When manifested She acts as the source of the universe in Her kinetic form; when the universe dissolves She becomes quiescent, She ceases to exist. Energy is equally energetic whether it is kinetic or potential; only its form differs.

And remember, you may eventually learn a few things if you work hard enough, but you will never be able to discover the origin of the Universal Mother, Adya. You should not even try to find out about it, because it is not to be known. It is just not knowable. But when you become Ma Herself, then there is no question of any distinction between the knower and the known. How can there be any knowledge of Ma when you have become Ma Herself?

Ma, Shakti, Maya: These three words describe Her. But each emphasizes a different attribute. *Maya* is Her delusive aspect, Her capacity to bind one to limited forms. *Shakti* is Her aspect of power and energy. And Ma? *Ma* indicates Her maternal aspect, the Motherhood of God.

Everyone is afraid of Maya because her job is to entice, entrap, enthrall, to prevent people from escaping the cycle of birth and death. Why should they be afraid of Her unless they are not confident that they can resist Her blandishments? It is not as if She feels hatred or envy or any other selfish emotion for the beings She enslaves; how can She? She is just doing Her job.

All these so-called swamis who say that Maya is evil are absolutely wrong. How can She be evil? She is the Mother of all worlds. I shouldn't even call these charlatans swamis, because *swami* means "owner" or "master." A real swami is the owner or master of himself, and if you are really master of yourself, Maya cannot have any effect on you and you would have no reason to fear or hate Her. These cheats make such a mess of a thing that it becomes difficult to untangle the mess and explain the reality.

You must try to understand that Maya can exist only where there is duality. The universe is full of pairs of basic principles: male and female, positive and negative, active and passive. Our philosophy maintains that the Soul is only one, indivisible, in the state of *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (existence-consciousness-bliss). But the Soul cannot enjoy itself unless there is some observer, someone who can perceive the Reality. Observers cannot exist when the whole universe is in a state of nonduality because all is one; no distinction between observer and observed would be possible. To satisfy this urge for an observer, Shakti projects Herself. This Shakti is *Adya*, the undifferentiated form, the totality of all universes. She is as unbounded and absolute as is the Universal Soul or Atman, and the only difference between them is that She feels Herself to be separated from Him, the male principle, the unchanging Atman, and this gives Her the impetus to try to locate Him and reunite with Him.

Adya is Herself unaware of how She projects. The whole projection is spontaneous because of joy, the overwhelming joy of existence or *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. Because the process of this projection is unknown to everyone it is called Maya.

Eventually Adya Herself begins to become individualized. Within Her, separate egos develop and become individuals. At some point these proliferated forms begin to grope for the Ultimate; at this point the Universal Soul gets the observers He had yearned for. Every individual begins this quest hesitantly, but every individual will one day or another reunite with the Unmanifest. Separately the Soul and Adya are impotent; together they create a beautiful play. When the play is over the projection is reabsorbed into the "projector" until the next cycle of creation. Isn't it wonderful?

People still ask me, "Why does Maya entice us if She is supposed to be part and parcel of the Divine Motherhood of God?" It is not so difficult to understand. Each man and woman are part of the Cosmic Male and Female Principles. In each human, buried down deep inside, is the remembrance of the indescribable bliss of Unity, of the joy which caused the projection in the first place. However, this originally pure impulse of joy must pass through the causal, subtle, and gross physical bodies, which

are like sheaths surrounding the indwelling Soul. As the impulse passes through each sheath on its way to our waking consciousness, it is slightly refracted or perverted by our limitations. The purity is deflected slightly in each passage so that by the time the impulse becomes conscious it is more or less impure, depending on the individual. That is the true Maya: a pure impulse filtered down into our limited conscious minds which incites us to perform karmas which, in turn, tighten our bondage to the samsara.

The individual personality, when it is overcome by joy, creates multiple thought waves which project for their own fulfillment. It is like the cosmic projection, but, because of impurities, it is limited. These thought waves are projected from the causal body as a result of past karmas and are therefore imperfect. Most people forget that these thoughts are simply temporary manifestations and they try to cling to them, or avoid them altogether should they be uncomfortable. But if you know something about them you can choose the way that they are destroyed. That is why my mentor taught me that complete gratification of desire is the only way to become free of Maya. When all the imperfect projections are eliminated then only can you see the real thing.

Maya is very terrifying, it is true. In fact, to frighten is really the function of Maya. Maya will always frighten you, or try to, but She will never hit you if you try to come near. People are afraid they'll be finished if they leave off whatever they are doing in their lives: "If I lose all my money, what will become of me?" But everyone is going to be finished sooner or later. If you tell Maya, "I came into the world naked and I will go out naked. Do whatever you please, I don't care," then you can succeed at sadhana. A spiritual aspirant must be fearless, because then no harm can come to him; all danger arises from his own fear. This is especially true in Aghora. The spirits in the smashan will try to terrify you, and believe me they know how to do it. As long as you keep your wits about you they can't do anything to you. One little doubt, though, and you are very likely to make a mistake in your sadhana, and even the slightest error

may mean excruciating death, and then perennial membership in the fraternity of spirits.

Maya is the external garb of the universe. When a lady is well-dressed, ornamented, and made-up she may appear to be beautiful, but if you strip her naked you will be able to count all her flaws, scars, marks, excess hair, or whatever. When you see Maya, you must look underneath to find out Her real nature.

A green mango is very pleasing to the eye but quite sour to the tongue. However, with a little discrimination you realize the green mango is just a stage in its development. And when you see the golden ripe mango you know it must be sweet. You must become aware of the impermanence of the green state and not rely on it to remain.

The projection is dynamic; thus it is called *Shakti*. Shakti is energy. It emanates spontaneously and is then controlled. Shakti must always be controlled, otherwise it is worthless or dangerous, just like uncontrolled electricity. Shakti is of value only when it has been conditioned. Lord Shiva is the conditioner, the male aspect of the Universal Soul. He is always depicted with three eyes. As long as his third eye is closed Maya can exist because then Shiva has but two eyes, duality; and Maya is the essence of duality. But when the third eye (the eye of *Jnana* — transcendent wisdom) opens, He sees only unity. That third eye cannot differentiate in any way and so the cosmos, which can exist only through duality, must be dissolved. As long as Lord Shiva's third eye is open, nothing can exist but the undifferentiated condition. When it again closes then Shiva becomes subject to duality, and the cosmos can again arise.

And this is why Smashan Tara has three eyes. She is both the manifestation of duality and the possessor of *Jnana*, so loving Her will never bring you grief. That is why She is called Tara: She makes you cross over the sea of duality and reach Unity. Tara will never fail you — far from it! But if you love Maya, who is pure duality, you will become trapped in the manifested world for millions of births to come. You have the choice of loving Maya or Ma, the superficial or the deep. You can't do both. Ma is never cruel; She always gives you what you desire.

If you want Maya, Ma's skin, you get it. And Ma will see that you get it until you are satiated with it.

Ma believes in giving you what you want. She gives it directly from Her own being, because She is a Mother. A mother feeds her own essence to her child in the form of milk. When you ask Ma for gratification of your mundane desires, that is just what you will get. She will keep you in the mundane world drinking the milk of Maya as long as you ask to remain there.

If you dream of sex daily throughout your life it is likely that you'll be craving sex at the moment of death too, so Ma will say, "All right, my child, if you want sex take as much as you can." And She will help you enjoy plenty of sex by seeing that you are born as a pigeon or a cock or a sparrow. And when you have had enough, when you are thoroughly satisfied, when you cry, "Stop it! Please stop it!" then Ma will make you move on to new things.

Ma wants you to learn your lesson. That is why you find a meat-eater reborn either as a predator or prey or as both in succession. Human beings cry a lot at funerals of their own kind but they have absolutely no thought for the sufferings of the animals they slaughter. They never hesitate to kill and eat. Just think, first they kill the chicken. Often they will cut its throat and let it bleed to death, which is a most painful way to die. Then it will be cleaned, cooked, and eaten, and if it happens to be tough everyone will curse it for not satisfying their palates. How many humans would give beautiful tender lean meat if they were slaughtered, dressed, prepared, and served?

Meat-eaters conveniently forget that animal mothers too love their children. Do they ever think of the agony a hen goes through when her chicks are slain in front of her eyes? Or a cow, the embodiment of motherliness, do they consider how much she suffers when she sees the slaughter of her beloved calf whom she has grown in her own body and nourished with her milk, whom she loves more than her own life? Do these so-called humans ever think of the terrible pain they cause to the mother cow? Could they endure their own children being murdered before their own eyes?

How is Ma to teach such donkeys? They are not humans,

whose intellect is subtle enough to self-identify with another being of a different species and experience its personal joys and sorrows. Ma has no alternative but to make them suffer as they have made other beings suffer, allowing the animals they have tortured to torture them in return. Fair's fair, after all. If I cut your throat in this birth you have every right to cut mine in the next or in some succeeding birth. Experience is the best teacher, and a fool will learn from no other.

Actually Ma is not enticing us at all; we are enticing ourselves. We look at Ma and see what we want to see. All these deities are our own projections, and our existences are our own projections. If we project the desire for flesh onto Ma, She will provide us with flesh, whether it's for eating or copulation. That's why I say about most so-called humans today, that their entire cultural refinement consists of eating flesh and putting flesh into flesh. I believe in going beyond the skin, beyond the flesh, the bone, the marrow, and everything else, and getting to the essence.

If you want to progress spiritually you must forget everything except the face of the Mother. She will offer you the entire cosmos to make sure you have no desires left. But when you arrive at the stage where you can pass up all temptations, when you succeed and She accepts you as Her own child, then you never again have anything to worry about. Once when Ma came to me She told me, "I'll make you ruler of the world!" I laughed and said, "Ma, thanks to Thy grace I know some of my previous births, and I know I've already attained the most the world can offer. I don't need to do it again. All I want is Thee." And She smiled and accepted me.

## KALI AND KALIDASA

Ma taught me well. She let me know about some of my previous births, the ones that mattered most to my present existence. But she didn't want me to learn everything at once. For a play to be well acted sometimes it is better that the actors have no idea of what they are doing. In this way they act out

their parts with greater spontaneity and feeling. When you know who you are, it changes everything.

Kalidasa's poetry is taught in schools and colleges all over India, but only a few people know the story of his life, even though he was India's greatest classical poet. He was a great devotee of Ma, as his name suggests: "servant (*dasa*) of Kali." For nine incarnations he worshipped Ma, and he ended each life by sacrificing himself. He would cut off his own head and let the blood spill over Ma's feet out of his intense love for Her.

In his tenth birth he was born amazingly stupid and horribly ugly. He couldn't even take proper care of himself, much less worship the Goddess Kali. He was a woodcutter, and since everyone knew what a dud he was they would take advantage of him by buying his wood for two rupees when the other woodcutters would sell the same quantity for ten. But he was happy to have plenty of customers, and he had enough to eat, so he was satisfied.

Now, the king of the country had a daughter who was as clever as she was beautiful, and when the time came for her to marry she announced that she would only marry the man who could defeat her at debate. Anyone who tried and failed would be executed. Many princes saw her face and fell in love with her, and all of them were beheaded when they failed to outargue her.

The king lost his temper one day and called for his minister and told him to find for him the stupidest man in the kingdom. Just to teach her a lesson he announced, "I am going to marry my daughter to him."

The minister knew better than to protest, so off he went in search of the stupidest man in the kingdom. It did not take him long to locate Kalidasa, who was busily chopping off the branch on which he was sitting when the minister walked by. He told Kalidasa that the king wanted to meet him.

Kalidasa said, "Why? I haven't done anything wrong. Why should I meet the king?" This is the way he used to talk; he was something like a fakir, always in his own mood.

The minister said, "No, no. The king wants to meet you to present you with something." When Kalidasa replied, "If the king is so anxious to meet me, he can come here," the minis-

ter ordered the two soldiers who had accompanied him to grab Kalidasa and drag him to the palace.

When the king saw Kalidasa, he was amazed that such a stupid man could exist. He told him, "I want you to marry my daughter."

Kalidasa said, "Why should I marry your daughter? There are plenty of other girls in the kingdom to choose from."

The king was not amused and said, "If you don't agree to marry my daughter your head will be chopped off." Kalidasa shrugged his shoulders.

During the wedding ceremony the princess was veiled so she couldn't see her husband properly. Afterward she went to the bedroom which had been prepared for the honeymoon. It was a beautiful rainy night, with a light drizzle falling as she looked out the open window. It was the rutting season and many of the forest animals were giving full throat to their mating calls. She saw her husband sitting quietly nearby, and thinking him to be shy she considered how to awaken in him the urge for love play. Just then a camel delivered his peculiar rasping mating call, and she coyly asked her husband, "Who is calling for his mate?" Her idea was that he should realize she wanted him to come to her like the animals do, for sex.

The Sanskrit word for camel is *ushtra*, but even that single word was beyond the ability of poor Kalidasa to pronounce and he replied, "Utru, utru." His wife lost all her erotic intoxication in that instant and thought to herself, "Can my father have really done this to me?" Then she said to Kalidasa, "You can't speak Sanskrit; you can converse only in degraded language. And you couldn't even comprehend the reason for my question. Get out, you're not fit for me." For the first time in his life Kalidasa felt hurt and insulted. It was all Ma's doing, of course; She was calling him. He was so disgusted with his condition that he left his house and wandered into a Kali temple. He started beating his head against the feet of the image — remember the influence of his nine previous births — until a few drops of blood fell onto the Goddess's feet. That was enough; the Goddess Kali Herself appeared outside the temple and

banged on the door. "Let me in," She cried, "I am Kali! Ask for anything!"

Kalidasa got up and stood behind the door so She wouldn't be able to open it and shouted, "I don't trust you!" He had suddenly become vaguely aware of his previous births, and now he was afraid that Kali would again refuse to save him.

Kali said, "No, you don't understand! Trust me!"

Kalidasa said in a hurt voice. "No, why should I trust you? I trusted you nine times before and look at me now!"

Ma said sweetly, "Trust me. Just open the door a crack and see that it is really your Kali."

Kalidasa said, "I will stick my tongue out the door, that's all." And when he did, Ma struck his tongue and immediately he received divine speech. Not only that; but he became tall and handsome. You may not believe that; I don't care. But it's true. From that time forward Ma was with him twenty-four hours a day. Spontaneously, a beautiful verse in praise of Ma fell from his lips.

When Kalidasa returned to the palace, no one recognized him. But it was easy enough to gain entry to the king by reciting a poem. Back then kings loved poetry. So Kalidasa recited a poem praising the great beauty of the princess. He described the wrinkles in her hips when she turned, her high projecting breasts, the curvature of her waist, her navel. Kalidasa is famous for his similes and metaphors, so he compared each part of her body to an appropriate image from nature. And during the recitation itself the king's daughter happened to come onto the women's balcony behind the throne, and when she beheld Kalidasa she instantly fell in love with him.

When Kalidasa lifted his eyes and saw the princess, he didn't bother to speak; he expressed his emotions with a look and a smile. What subtlety there is in the old ways of expression! When the princess saw this, she could no longer control herself and she said to her father, "I must marry this man; he is the only man in the world who is fit for me!"

The king indignantly replied, "Do you realize what you are saying? You are already married."

The princess said, "I don't care, I must have this man."

Imagine the surprise in the court when Kalidasa said quietly, "I am your husband." Kalidasa thanked the king for giving him his daughter in marriage. The king in turn offered Kalidasa vast lands, which were politely declined. Then the princess came down to her father's throne and in front of the entire assembly kissed her father and said, "I thank you, father, for having given me a husband worthy of my qualities." And the king, heaving a sigh of relief, was vindicated for marrying his daughter off to that poor "idiot" Kalidasa.

Kalidasa left that kingdom and went to Ujjain, where he embellished the court of King Vikramaditya. Do you know his poem *Meghaduta* in which a lonely *Yaksha* (angel) pines for the wife who has been separated from him? Kalidasa based that poem on the experience of his wedding night. In his previous condition he had been unable to express all the misery of his rejection. But thanks to the grace of Ma he took his unfortunate experience and converted it into sublime verse. If he had not been ignorant in the beginning he would never have been selected to marry the princess, he would never have been driven by desperation to pound his head on the rock, and he might never have been saved by Ma so he could win the princess back.

Ma wanted him to live for a while in the world and provide us with his sublime poetry. Suppose he had realized Her right away; would he have had the idea to get married and live a householder's life? Never. The bliss of living with Ma is billions of times greater than all mundane pleasures. She wanted to entangle him partially in Her Maya and then to save him, so that while he was working out his entanglements he would amaze the world as Her tongue, Her mouthpiece. At other times Ma will let someone worship Her for years until circumstances force that person to relinquish the bondage of Maya, and then She comes to him. It is all Her play.

## VIDYARANYA

About 600 years ago, in the time of the Vijayanagara empire in South India, the prime minister of one of the kings was named



Vidyaranya, who was a great devotee of Ma. It came to pass that in the course of time Vidyaranya was ruined. He lost his position and was reduced to almost nothing. All his power and most of his wealth were taken away, and as a result his family began to hate and abuse him. He became so fed up with everything that he decided to renounce the world and become a hermit.

He went out into the forest and made a pledge to this effect. Then he worshipped Ma one last time. At the height of his power, the zenith of his glory, he worshipped with the best items available. Solid gold dishes were set aside for Ma's use, priceless jewels adorned Her, She was offered only the choicest foods. Now, reduced to poverty, he could do nothing but prepare unleavened bread out of mud and offer it to Her saying, "I'm sorry, Ma. Now I have nothing, and I can no longer worship you as I did before."

Suddenly Ma stood before him, and said, "Speak your wish."

He looked at Her quizzically and said, "Ma, what are You talking about? If You had really wanted to give me something, You should have arrived five minutes ago. Then I could have accepted something. Now I have vowed to renounce worldly things, so I don't want anything, not even You. I want only God."

Ma smiled at him and said, "Don't you understand yet? Close your eyes." When he did, he saw mountains and mountains of ashes — and a small pile of something that was still emitting smoke. He still couldn't understand, so Ma explained it to him: "You have been worshipping me for many years," She said, "and by my grace all the karmas of your previous births have been burned to ashes except that little pile, which is all that remains. If you had not lost your position you would never have renounced life, so it was essential for you to be ruined. Do you see?"

Vidyaranya did full prostration to Her, and immediately went into a state of divine intoxication. Afterward, he wrote a famous Sanskrit treatise called *Jivanmuktiviveka*. That is what grace can do for you.

You see, when you have learned your lesson and have only the desire for Ma remaining in your heart, She will come to

you. Then you have a chance to achieve. But when Ma does come to you, don't ask for grace. Grace is Hers to give, according to Her own sweet will. You can't get it on your own. Ask for compassion, learning, Jnana, and when you get Jnana you will know how to obtain grace.

## SARVANANDA AND PURNANANDA

In the entire world so far only two people, when Ma came to them, asked for *Sarvavidya*, the knowledge of each and every aspect of Shakti. One was Sarvananda Thakur of Bengal. I can't tell you about the other. Sarvananda was a Brahmin, the son of the court astrologer of the king of Tripura. The astrologer was able to get a son only after long years of penance of Shiva, and the boy was actually something like Shiva incarnate, but he didn't realize it until later.

One day when Sarvananda was still a young boy, his father took him to the court to show him off to the king, in hopes of some largess because of his precocity. There was an assemblage of astrologers there in the court, debating on the lunar day. Actually it was the new-moon day, but when Sarvananda was asked he opined that it was the full-moon day. This drew guffaws from the conclave of astrologers, and a slap from the embarrassed father, who was concerned about his position and how to save his face. He forgot that his son was the gift of Lord Shiva; would he have dared to slap Shiva?

The boy became angry and ran home. His old servant, Purnananda, saw the condition of his young master and, wiping his tears, consoled him a bit. Then Purnananda sent the boy out into the jungle with a knife to gather palm leaves onto which he would copy part of some astrological texts and teach the boy himself. At that time all writing was done on palm leaves.

Sarvananda climbed a palm tree, carrying the knife, and let his anger boil over by slashing at the palm leaves. Meanwhile, Nature had sent an ethereal being of a very high order to look after Sarvananda. This Siddha took a physical body and then

created an illusory cobra and sent it up into the tree in which Sarvananda was sitting.

When the boy saw the snake, all his anger focused on it: "So you want to bite me," he said to the snake. "OK, but I'm going to cut you first. How do you like that?" And saying these words he hacked the snake in two by rubbing it against a sharp palm leaf. He then threw the pieces down at the base of the tree.

Now, the Siddha was sitting there, and when he felt the blood and flesh of the dead cobra fall onto his matted locks he said, "Hm-*mmm!* What's this? Come down here!" The boy descended, expecting the worst, but the Siddha merely stroked his head and said, "I know all about it, my boy, and I want to help you out." Using the snake's blood he wrote the details of the type of Shava Sadhana which would please Ma if properly performed.

Then Sarvananda returned to Purnananda and told him the whole story. Purnananda read the details and then told him, "This must be performed on a new-moon night, which is tonight. Let's do this: we'll go together to the smashan. You kill me and then sit on my corpse and do as I tell you. Then Ma will come and ask you what you want. Tell Her, 'Please revive Purnananda and do as he says.' That way Ma will appear to us both."

That night they went to the smashan and the boy cut the old man's throat and sat on his body, repeating the mantra given to him. After a few repetitions Ma appeared and asked the boy what he desired. He told Her as Purnananda had instructed him. She revived Purnananda and he too saw Her. Then She again asked, "What do you want?"

Purnananda replied, "All the so-called great astrologers ridiculed my boy for saying tonight was the full-moon night. Preserve my boy's honor."

Ma smiled, and from the nail of Her little finger a ball of light emerged which was so bright that for miles around it seemed a full moon. All the astrologers back at the court were wonderstruck.

Sarvananda was just a child, innocent of the ways of sadhanas, but he was so overcome with love for Tara that he told Her, "Ma, You have been so kind to show me Your form, but I want

to see You in all Your forms, all Your manifestations, because I want to know You completely so I can love You properly." Tara smiled at him again, and agreed. Sarvananda had no idea of the meaning of Sarvavidya, but by asking for all the forms of Ma, Sarvavidya was what he received. If Nature wants you to succeed at something a situation will be created whereby you will request the right thing, knowingly or not. Purnananda actually became Sarvananda's disciple and became himself a great pandit and scholar. It was in fact Purnananda's works that inspired the late Justice Sir John Woodroffe of the Calcutta High Court to introduce the subject of Kundalini to the West under the pen name of Arthur Avalon.

And Sarvananda? He became a householder and then one day he disappeared. No one knows what became of him.

Normally you will not even think to ask for Sarvavidya; that is part of Ma's play. But even so when She gives you knowledge you become the expert, the gem in your own field.

## THE MOTHERHOOD OF THE GODDESS

Sarvananda was very lucky. Ma came to him while he was still a boy so he automatically treated Her like a mother. Only one person out of millions develops a desire to experience the Motherhood of God. There is nothing higher than the worship of the Mother because only the Mother can show the child the face of its Father. Just as a child is taught by its physical mother the identity of its father, grandparents, and other relatives, even so the Divine Mother shows Her child the face of its Father: Shiva, the Universal Soul. That is why you should try to succeed at the worship of God with attributes first, and your chosen deity will then lead you on to the attributeless Ultimate Reality. Who is the source of all attributes, after all? Ma.

Not all Aghoris treat Ma as Mother, you understand. But I think it is wisest to do so. Always remember, to control any Shakti properly is not easy, and to control Cosmic Shaktis is almost impossibly difficult. To catch hold of Kali by the hair and tell Her, "Come to me right now!" is rather dangerous.

That makes it a contest of wills, and, unless your will is stronger, Kali will frighten you into insanity or heart failure. Not because She hates you; oh no, She never hates anyone, though of course no one likes to be ordered around. No, She loves you and wants to play with you, but if an elephant wrestles with a mosquito, what will be the outcome?

If you treat Ma like your wife — and I'm not saying it's impossible; I knew one saint who did it, who projected his worship onto a statue of Ma and worshipped Her as his spouse, and eventually succeeded — and then one day find a human woman who seems attractive to you because of some connection from a past lifetime, you might suddenly find yourself projecting your worship onto the Maya, onto the flesh and blood instead of into the essence. Because your worship has built up so much energy your descent into Maya will be all the deeper, and who knows how long it might take to drag you out?

The best way to treat Shakti is as a Mother. It can save you from so many karmas also. If you look at all women as your mother would you ever think of raping or cheating or deceiving one? And if you see the Divine Mother in all beings can you ever intentionally injure anyone? No, and this automatically draws you away from the cycle of action and reaction. Ramakrishna Paramahansa saw the Divine Mother in everyone, including even his own wife, and look what it did for him!

You can go into all the world's religions but nowhere can you find anything so sublime as our vision of the Motherhood of God. Christianity has it to some extent with the worship of the Virgin Mary, but the worship of the Mother has been perfected only in India because India is herself a mother. India has sheltered so many foreign races and religions, Jews, Zoroastrians, Christians, Muslims, etc., and has allowed them to flourish in their own ways. Has any other country ever done this? Because of this the cow is the symbol of India.

The cow is the perfect mother. She has four teats: one for her calf, one for guests including birds and animals, one for use in rituals, and one for her master. The milk is automatically divided into four equal portions; everyone is provided for. And the cow is passionately devoted to her calf, just as a real

mother must be to her child. Sometimes the mere sight of the calf makes milk flow from the cow's udders; not drip — flow. I have seen this more than once when I owned a dairy. And if the calf dies the cow refuses to give milk — not like our water buffaloes who can be tricked with the head of a calf on a stick. The buffalo is the symbol of Tamas, stupidity, dullness; the cow is pure Sattva, mental brightness.

And not just buffaloes, even your Western cows will give milk whether or not the calf is still alive. When I always say that this is the fundamental difference between East and West I am not just talking through my hat. What is so great about giving milk? All animals do it. The greatness in our Indian cows is that they give milk only out of an outpouring of love. That is the value of cow's milk. Won't at least a little of that love come through into the milk? It must. That emotion separates cows from other animals. So how are we wrong to worship cows? We are not worshipping the hide, hooves, and tail; we worship the essence. A few years ago I read in the newspaper that an American cow suddenly devoured five dozen baby chicks who happened to be playing about in front of her. No Indian cow would do that; Indian cows mother little animals.

You know that Lord Krishna was called Gopala when he was a baby. *Gopala* literally means "protector of cows." There are many esoteric meanings to this word, but even the obvious meaning is beautiful. Gopala was such a lovable little baby that all the cows in the vicinity loved him more than they loved their own calves. This is why I always say that you should treat God as your Mother. The baby is the best controller of Shakti because there is no desire, no desire at all except for the mother, and, therefore, the mother will be perfectly, continuously attentive to the child.

Always sit in the Mother's lap. When you get out of Her lap and try to protect yourself She says, "All right, go on. Go ruin yourself." How can you take care of yourself? You cannot. The Law of Karma is too big for anyone to tackle alone. But if you stay in the Mother's lap and always rely on Her for everything you need She will always provide it. Can any real mother ever neglect her child, or not try to make it happy? As long as you

treat Ma as your own Mother She will treat you as Her own child.

How does a mother know when her child is hungry? It cries. Whenever it cries in a particular way the mother knows, "Yes, time for feeding." I know this from my own experience. When I am really angry, disgusted with the world, Ma comes to me and taps me on the shoulder, as it were, and says, "Forget all about that. Do you know . . . ?" And She proceeds to teach me something new, something I had never dreamt of, something so amazing that I become speechless and forget my anger completely. What compassion! Was there ever a mother such as She?

When the baby is not crying, however, its mother knows that its little tummy is full, and she does not bother about it. It is the same way in the world. As long as you are quietly enjoying your life as a human, Ma thinks, "Well, he is satisfied. Let him be. What use does he have for me?" And when you decide you are finished with life and want to get out of the unending cycle of birth and death, then there is only one thing to do: scream, cry out, demand that Ma should come and take care of you. And that is the only way that Ma will ever come to you. You have to desire Her much more than anything else — and there are so many obstacles to that in this dark age, in this Kali Yuga.

But if you can identify yourself with the newborn baby, then what desires remain? A baby is too innocent to be aware of any but the simplest and most essential desires. In that state there is no question of temptation. If you give a baby a choice between a chocolate and a diamond, which will it take? The chocolate, of course. A diamond has no value for a baby. And if you learn that the world has no value you will never be tempted by anything and you will be able to avoid all the obstacles which crop up in Kali Yuga. But only a baby can do that. That is why I love the baby Gopala and the baby Jesus so much.

You know, we Vedics believe that the same Rishi who incarnated on the Earth as Rama, and later as Krishna, also incarnated as Jesus. We take Jesus as one of us. But look what has happened to Christianity, to the beautiful teachings of Jesus. They have slaughtered so many millions in the name of Christ,

when Christ preached that one must always turn the other cheek. But Jesus! His eyes! And the image of the Mother and Child: the baby Jesus playing with His Shakti. It is so sublime. Christians are just such fools to have received such a teaching and then to make such hash of it. But this is the thing, as Kipling said, "East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet." In a way he was right. We Easterners have value only for emotion. You Westerners, like your cows, are basically materialistic. Of course there are exceptions, mind you. But when Nature Herself has created such differences in people, how can the one race understand the other? It takes a lot of effort.

## THE VISION OF THE GODDESS

There is another good reason to become a baby in front of Ma. Babies love their mothers no matter how vicious or ugly they may be. To talk idly about Ma's form is one thing, but to actually see Her dripping with blood, Her fangs ready to devour you, is quite another. Your reaction to Her determines what She can do for you. If you don't react with fear, She will do anything for you, out of love. If you react with fear or disgust, She will become all the more fearsome and disgusting, and then where will you be?

Kali and all Her manifestations — Smashan Tara, Chinna-masta, Bagalamukhi, and the others — are not bad. No one wants to love them; everyone is afraid. Kali can't understand why everyone is afraid of Her. If you love Her enough, you will change Her natural destructiveness to such an extent that even the underlying thirst for butchery will vanish.

People think that Smashan Tara is the most terrifying of the Goddesses — and She is. One of Her names is Bhayankari, that is, "the Terrifier." But if you go to Her with a heart full of love for Lord Krishna, She becomes Radha, Krishna's greatest lover. If you treat Her as a mother, She loves you as a mother loves her child. But if you have no faith in Ma, the Great Goddess,

and if you fail, then there remains nothing for you but to be born over and over again until you get it right.

You may go to an image of Ma and tell Her, "Wah, Ma, how lovely you are!" or "How frightening!" or whatever, but the emotion you feel is only a reaction to Her outer form. You must know what sort of being you are worshipping if you ever want to develop a real relationship with Her, if you ever want to get underneath Her skin and reach Her inner being.

Without knowing Her inner being, how can you know Her? And before trying to go inside you must first understand Her external form, because it is actually *your* external form. The Atman or Universal Soul is the orb of the sun, and you are the reflection. Just as the moon can be reflected in thousands of pools of water at once, the Atman can appear in millions of humans and still remain aloof, untouched. Most humans are imperfect reflections because they are enmeshed in the Three Gunas, the three principal qualities of existence. If a lake is disturbed it cannot reproduce truthfully the image of the moon. But when it is calm the image is perfect. When you see Ma you are seeing Her through the veil, the film of the Three Gunas, which explains why you cannot see Her in Her true form in the beginning.

Why is She blue? First ask that, and once you've understood it you'll be able to comprehend the rest. Why is the sky or the sea blue? If you pick up a handful of sea water it is clear, but the sea as a whole seems blue. Air is colorless but the sky is not. These are optical illusions, and the fact that you see Ma — or even Krishna for that matter — as blue is also an optical illusion, because you are seeing them with your physical eye. Were you able to see with the divine eye, you would see something quite different. But to you now, Smashan Tara is *Shyama*, a deep, rich, luminous, midnight blue.

Around Her neck is a garland of freshly severed human heads, what we call in Sanskrit a *Runda Mala*. There are eight grinning heads on this garland. They represent the eight "nooses," the emotions which cloud the mind and incite one to perform karmas, thereby creating a tighter bondage to the ever-spinning wheel of birth and death. These eight nooses or snares, *pashas*

in Sanskrit, with which you could hang yourself are lust, anger, greed, delusion, envy, shame, fear, and disgust. While you are in a state of ignorance you possess one or many or all of these emotions or grinning heads. Smashan Tara tells you, "I chop off your head to cure you of this malady, to free you from the grip of these snares." Most people, unfortunately, are so attached to their snares that they shrink from Smashan Tara in fear, thinking She wants to kill them. She does want to kill you — the false you, the limited personality which has accrued over so many births. You fear Her because you identify yourself with this mediocre personality when your true personality is something quite different. When She cuts off your head, your mind becomes firm, unwavering in its concentration, which enables you to succeed at Aghora Sadhanas.

Smashan Tara is *ghatastani* or "pot-breasted." What is a more appropriate symbol of motherhood than the female breast? Motherhood is inherent in all women. Take a tiny girl of two or three and give her a doll. How she will mother it! She will fuss over it, feed it, put it to bed; you will rarely find any boy who will bother so much about a doll. Women are meant to be mothers; the instinct is inborn. But it is only potential until the woman actually bears a child herself or adopts one. Then the motherliness fully manifests.

Even this realization does not develop spontaneously. It develops along with the child. In the case of humans, as the child develops in the womb, the mother's breasts enlarge and the nipples darken. The breasts actually double in size and weight during pregnancy. Milk also begins to form. The body is preparing food for the child even before its birth. Isn't Nature magnanimous? Most men see the breast and think of sex, but you'll ruin yourself if you try to treat Smashan Tara as your sex partner; you are just not strong enough to do so. Only a handful are. So you must realize She is coming to you as a mother, to love and protect you, and welcome Her in that way. She is *lambodari* or "big-bellied" because She consumes and digests all beings in the universe: She brings them into Her before sending them out again.

Around Her waist She wears a skirt of human arms, freshly

severed. One of the Sanskrit words for hand or arm is *kara*, which is related to the word *karma*. These arms represent all the karmas of all your millions of births. There are both left and right arms, so they include all karmas, auspicious and inauspicious. Most people clothe themselves in their karmas, and She wants to cut them off, remove them from you completely. Why does She wear them as a skirt? Because they cover the navel and pubis. And are these not the two things for which the majority of karmas are performed, the belly and the genitals? Won't most people do anything for food and sex?

As anklets Smashan Tara does not wear silver jewelry, but tiny cobras. The cobra is always the symbol of the deceased ancestors. When you do sadhana you must always remember you are not doing it for yourself alone, but for all your progenitors, since had it not been for them you could never have taken a human rebirth. She tells you, "These are your ancestors who have come to me and taken the shelter of my lotus feet."

Smashan Tara has four hands. In one there is a skull, which symbolizes the coating of the Three Gunas which surrounds the individual soul. The noose in another hand represents the noose which Yama's messengers of death use to snatch the living from the world. By seizing this noose from Yama, the King of the dead, She grants you the boon of immortality, because then there is no way for Yama to take you. With immortality comes fearlessness, since the basis of all fears is the fear of death. The third hand holds a pair of scissors, with which She cuts the three Gordian knots that bind you to embodied existence. This is connected with Kundalini Yoga. And finally, in Her fourth hand She carries a sharp sword, called a *Khadga*, which is symbolic of the eternal play of destruction and creation of the universe. To you it means destruction of your doubts, your false ideas, and impressions. She strikes through them all with Her sword. And because people die of doubt, this ensures you will never die.

Finally, Her face. I think it's the most beautiful I have ever seen. She has lotus eyes. Remember, the lotus is the symbol of discrimination. And Her tongue lolls from Her mouth, dripping blood. All creatures, no matter how tiny, have some sort

of blood-like substance. When She takes it from them She purifies the blood, as they say in Tantra, through the process known as *Rakta Shuddhi*. What this means is that She removes so many of the karmas which have forced the individual to be born into a particular womb that a higher rebirth is guaranteed. She actually alters the patterns of your personality, which is merely the aggregate of all your countless karmas in myriads of births. This is the *Adhidaivika Rakta Shuddhi*, that is, Tara's purification of your personality.

When you have realized — not just mentally comprehended but realized through your own experience in sadhana — all the qualities of Smashan Tara, then She is no longer blue to you. She loses all color, all attributes. When you come and rest on Her lap all your wrong ideas about Her are removed. You see Her as She really is. You can't see Her with the physical eye. In Sanskrit and most Indian languages the eye taken as a whole is a feminine noun, the eyeball is masculine, the pupil is feminine, and the retina, called the *pardah*, or curtain in Hindi, is masculine. So you see the dual nature of the external universe is mirrored in the physical eye. With the physical eye you cannot hope to see anything but duality. But when the "curtain" is lifted you see the absolute, undifferentiated Reality, what we call in Sanskrit the *Nirakara Tattva*. Not even the shreds of distinction remain. Can a blind man tell the sex of someone in front of him? Only if he gropes. The state in which you see Smashan Tara in the Nirakara form is *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, self-identification with formlessness.

So, you begin with ignorance, unable to distinguish "e-y-e" from "I." You see Smashan Tara in Her terrifying form because you are possessed of the eight nooses, of eons of karmas, and all the rest of the filth of your false personality, and She wants to disconnect it from you in the fastest way possible. Then, you see both you and Her as one; when all differences disappear, you cannot be different from Her. Finally, if you are meant for it, you again return to Her lap, and see Her in Her old form — but how different it will look to you then! You can't imagine it, you simply have to experience it. You go from duality

to unity and back to duality, just as Paramahansa Ramakrishna did.

My Tara always stands on Shiva, Who is deep in samadhi. One foot is flat on His body while the other is prodding Him, "Wake up! Wake up! Come dance with me."

Why is Shiva in samadhi? Shiva here is actually Jiva, the Individual Soul plus its coverings of the Three Gunas and all the rest. Because of the heavy overlay of karmas and Gunas and what-have-you, the Jiva is always in a state of deep sleep, unaware. When because of hard penances and stiff sadhana you realize Shiva, the Jiva becomes Shiva. Then you can say, "Shivoham, Shivoham": "I am Shiva, I am Shiva." Then you see there is not the slightest difference between Jiva and Shiva. Some gurus tell their disciples to repeat "Shivoham, Shivoham," but it is really useless. They begin imagining they are Shiva without having any of His qualities.

Once Shiva awakens, He and His Shakti begin to dance together, and the dance ends with Her merging into Him again. When the projection of the Shakti occurs, Shiva sleeps because He has lost the part of Him which was aware of Himself, His true self. After Shakti wakes Shiva She ceases to exist. It is only when your ego forgets all the eight nooses and the rest which force it to self-identify with the body (the physical e-y-e, eye) and identify with Smashan Tara, because your ego is simply your own personal Shakti, that the ego awakens the Shiva (capital I) and the dance begins.

One final thing: Do you know why Smashan Tara is always depicted in the smashan near a roaring funeral pyre? It is not your physical body She is burning on that pyre, it is your causal body. She cremates all the billions of karmas filled in the storehouse which is your causal body, thereby freeing you from further obligation of being born in the world.

See Ma, evaluate Her from all Her facets, find out about Her yourself, and find out the way you can love Her best. Most humans are such idiots that they are terrified of Ma, because they are afraid to disengage themselves from their filth. You must see Her in Her playful form, Her terrifying form, all Her forms, and love Her.

## CHAPTER THREE

# SHIVA

*The world considers You inauspicious, O Destroyer of Lust who plays in the smashan smeared with the ash from funeral pyres, wearing a necklace of human skulls, with ghouls for comrades. But for those who remember You with devotion, O Bestower of Boons, You are supremely auspicious.*

*(Shiva Mahimna Stotra, 24)*

## MAHAKALA

One day I said to Smashan Tara, "You are my Ma, my Mother, but who is my Father? I know the Mother always shows the child the face of its Father, so won't You show me mine?" We have a saying in Hindi: "Only your conscience knows all your sins, and only a child's mother knows its true father." Without Smashan Tara I could never have succeeded at the sadhana for Her Grand Consort, Lord Shiva. Tantrikas and Aghoris work this way: First they achieve success at sadhana for Shakti and then use that Shakti to move on to the Universal Soul, Shiva.

I spent three years at the Worli smashan in Bombay performing rituals before my Tara would finally agree to show me the sadhana for Mahakala, the Destroyer of the Cosmos. That



sadhana was impossible to perform in Bombay. First I went to Neemtolla Ghat in Calcutta, and then I spent ten months on Manikarnika Ghat in Benares.

Manikarnika Ghat is called *Mahasmashan*, the Greatest Smashan. Not even one second passes there in idleness; there is at least one body burning at all times, around the clock. This has been going on for untold thousands of years. The fire which is used to ignite the pyres has been maintained continuously for centuries; it is never allowed to go out. People come for thousands of miles to Benaras just so they can die there and be burned on Manikarnika Ghat. Every day dozens of bodies arrive by train, the bodies of those who died outside Benaras but yearned to be cremated there. There are too many bodies for them to burn down all the way to ash, so as soon as the skull pops open and most of the flesh is incinerated the priests recite the appropriate verses and push the corpse into the Ganges River to make way for another one. As soon as the body hits the river, packs of dogs fight each other for remaining morsels, and then the turtles and fish devour whatever is left. If you were to stay there ten months at a stretch like I did, and still not realize that you are going to die, well, then, there is no hope for you. You'll never realize it; you'll die in ignorance.

I used to sit there all day and all night. I would cook my rice in a fresh skull each day, without even cleaning out the bits of brain. The smashan is the ideal place for the worship of Lord Shiva because death is the eternal reality and Lord Shiva is the Destroyer, the very embodiment of death. You will always find Him among the dead, amidst spirits, corpses, and the ashes of burnt bodies. Manikarnika Ghat is Shiva's favorite haunt.

While I was doing this sadhana of Mahakala there eventually came a time when I began to hear someone laughing in my ear and telling me, "You fool! Do you realize what you are doing? If I come and stand in front of you, you will have to die; there is no escape. No one can see Me and live because no one can see Me except at the moment of death."

I laughed and said, "I don't care. I have to die some day, so why not now? I am ready to die, but I want to see You."

This went on for several days. Then the voice said, "Listen,

I'm serious. If you keep this up it will mean your end." Again I explained, "I am ready to die; life means nothing to me. I am waiting for You."

Finally Mahakala became pleased with my sadhana and told me, "I know you want Me to come and stand before you but you will not be able to endure seeing Me and still continue to live. I will come and stand behind you, and I will always remain with you at your back."

Since that day I have never been afraid of death. How can I be, with the Destroyer Himself to back me up? I now know what death is and when it comes to me I will embrace it, because it is my own beloved deity Mahakala.

I started out talking about Shiva and then began to call Him Mahakala. Shiva and Mahakala are two aspects of the same being. Call Him Atma, Purusha, Universal Soul, Ultimate Reality, God the Father or what you will, Shiva is the One, the Absolute, the One without a Second, the embodiment of pure consciousness. All duality exists in the manifested universe, and Shiva is beyond all that.

Or rather, almost beyond all that. Shiva has a form, which means that His personality exists within Nature, created from Adya. Lord Shiva is not absolutely absolute because out of compassion He has taken on an attribute or two to enable us to comprehend Him. These attributes, though, do give Him certain limitations; very subtle ones, of course. So subtle that from our point of view they are no limitations at all. But they are sufficient to distinguish Him from Mahakala.

Mahakala has no limitation of any kind whatsoever, at least in the universe we know. He has no form at all, none. At least Shiva manifests a form we can concentrate on. Mahakala is utterly formless, which means He can assume all forms at will.

Mahakala is the God of Time. He is *Satya Sri Akala*: True, Auspicious, Beyond Time. He is Time: How can He be subject to it? Since time exists only for mortals, Mahakala must be immortal, which makes Him true because He is absolute, free of any taint of Maya. This makes Him auspicious, in the true sense of the word. Mahakala is the only being of all possible beings in the universe who never falls prey to Maya. Even Lord

Shiva, the same essence as Mahakala in a different manifestation with a different job to do, fell once or twice. But Mahakala never even looks at Maya. No one can persuade Him to. When He comes for you, no matter how hard you beg for five minutes just to put your affairs in order, "no" is the only answer you will get. When even Lord Krishna Himself could not induce death to wait for even a moment how will you be able to do it?

Why is this? Because Mahakala is the pivot on which the entire universe turns. On the one hand there is the Saguna Brahman, the samsara, which is the infinity of forms, endless. On the other, the Nirguna Brahman, which is formless infinity, absolutely no form, zero as far as form is concerned. Between these two, connecting them together, is Mahakala. He is the fulcrum, the tangent between Infinity and Zero.

## DEATH AND THE SMASHAN

If you know about birth you know about death, and vice versa. The best place to learn about death is the smashan. The smashan is the true temple, the place of Eternal Reality. When you go into an ordinary temple you go to ask for some benefit — and if you see a pretty girl or a handsome man there in the temple you will forget about the deity and start thinking about how to get hold of that attractive but very impermanent human body. In the smashan, though, all you know is sadness and tears. If a man sees a woman he has to think, "Yes, she will die and be burned or buried like everyone else."

When you go to live in the smashan you first lose repugnance as you get used to living among corpses and bones and all sorts of other filthy things. After repugnance goes, fear goes, because when you know what a thing is you are no longer afraid of it. You learn about death, and it can scare you no longer. After fear goes, shame goes, because you are no longer afraid to walk about nude or to do what must be done there. You care for nothing then. Little by little all the Eight Snares disappear.

Most people go to the smashan for only a day. For the next week or so they will have no taste for the things of the world,

but gradually that taste will return. This is what we call *smashan renunciation*. It is false, fleeting, easy to forget. Mahakala causes them to forget. If you stay in the smashan long enough Mahakala will cause you to forget the world permanently. You will forget your family, your friends, everything, and everyone. All you will be able to remember is that you are going to die. This is true renunciation, which Lord Shiva alone can give you, no one else.

One day when I was sitting in the Banganga Smashan in Bombay I saw the state funeral for the Governor of Bombay, Girija Shankar Bajpai. Soldiers were firing rifles, politicians were making speeches: It was a big show. Right next to the Governor's body was the body of a washerman burning quietly on its own pyre. I thought to myself, "No matter what your position in life, everyone ends up here sooner or later." Another time I saw an old Jain sadhu on one pyre and a young child on another. "Age makes no difference to Mahakala," I mused. "When your time is up you pass away." After so many experiences of death you forget all about life; your renunciation is complete.

The smashan is called *Shahr-e-Khamosh*, the City of Silence. No one goes there to sing or dance or laugh or enjoy themselves. No one goes there without being forced to do so, and all those who do go there cry for their loved ones who have left their bodies. Everyone cries — except the corpses. They laugh, because at last they have been set free from their earthly shackles.

Many people are terribly surprised to discover they have died. It's not unusual; suppose you had been at work doing what you like best, and you had a heart attack and died. Your mind would still be engaged in your work and would take some time to disentangle itself from its worldly attachments.

When death comes very suddenly like this, from a sudden heart attack or an accident or whatever, the deceased becomes very confused after death and must hover about as a spirit until he or she can figure out where to go. This is why I always say that even though there may be great physical agony it is better for the individual to be alert at the time of death or even to be asleep and dreaming, to permit the personality to project inward and search out the desires which will determine the next rebirth.

My mother was well aware of her impending death; my father had many weeks to prepare for his. But for most people even the act of dying is full of terrifying uncertainty.

You may do your best to communicate with dying people but it will not help much. They have already entered a different world. You will notice that a stage comes when the eyes begin to move rapidly and the lips form unintelligible words. If you know about death you will know that the individual is seeing Chitragupta's account book. What a beautiful word: *Chitra*, which means picture, plus *Gupta*, which means secret. Secret pictures, images no one else can see. And what is it? Only the subconscious memory, the causal body, the record of all the life's karmas. While you are in there in the subconscious seeing all the activities of your life flash before your eyes like a movie, as you review all your past mistakes, can you be at all conscious of the outside world? No. Your ego, which up until then has projected outward through your sense organs into the external world, self-identifying with the body, now projects inward into the subconscious, trying to find something to self-identify with, selecting the karmas for the next birth. So, the son or daughter may be wailing, "Oh, mother, mother, mother, please forgive me, I never knew," but it is too late, because the mother is entirely unaware of what is being said. She has had to leave all connections with her physical body.

There is a way to force a person to be alert at the moment of death. You can actually force the ego back into the conscious mind and then communicate with the dying person for a few minutes. But it is very difficult to do.

It is always best to have gone through the process of dying while you are still alive. This happens, for example, when someone dies on the operating table and is then brought back to life. The scientists who are studying death nowadays have interviewed a bunch of these people, and they have identified some of the sensations which one experiences at death: the movement of the consciousness through a dark tunnel, the roaring noise, and what-have-you.

My foster daughter Roshni once experienced this. She used to drink *bhang* (a preparation of milk and cannabis) every day.

One day I was in a queer mood, and I gave her the *bhang* personally. She drank it, sat down in the armchair, and closed her eyes. Within a few minutes her pulse and her breathing had both stopped. She came out of it after a bit, and I asked her what had happened.

"I was sitting in the armchair and flying through a long tunnel. It took a long time to get to the other end, and when I got there I started to go higher and higher. I was so scared I held onto the armchair very tightly. It was a very big space, an immense space, that we — the chair and I — were flying through, and I could see so many stars and other things that I can't express in words. I felt myself being attracted to a source of divinity, of love, and just then someone made me come back to my body."

And ever since that day she has been different. In fact she complains to me, "Why did you have to bring me back?" It was just like death, and now she knows what it will be like to die, just as those other people who have already experienced death know. And all of them will be much better prepared for death than the ordinary person, and their deaths will be much easier and better, because they know there is nothing to fear. Death is not to be feared; birth is to be feared.

"*Ante mati sa gatih*" — whatever you are thinking about at the moment of death determines your next rebirth. If you are aware at the moment you die and you remember God you will definitely go to Him, there is no doubt about it. It is much more likely that you will remember God at the moment of your death if you have been remembering Him regularly all during your life. This is why you must lose yourself in love for your deity so that you'll die with His or Her name on your lips. So many of our holy books advise that in today's world the greatest worship is the simple remembering of God's name. The Sufis do it this way also. But do you think it is so easy to remember God at the moment of death? Oh no!

Once there was a guru sitting under a tree with his pet disciple. As he was relaxing the guru saw a mango growing on the tree, very near the ground, and thought to himself, "How much

I would like that mango!" And just in the act of asking his disciple to pluck the mango for him, he died.

The disciple didn't know what to do. He was distraught: "Guruji is gone! Now who will look after me and teach me?" Suddenly he had a thought: If it is true that you go to whatever you were thinking of at the moment of death, and since his guruji had asked him for a mango just as he died, then he must still be somewhere around the area trying to get at the mango to fulfill that last desire.

So the boy plucked the mango, and, not knowing precisely what he was looking for, inspected it carefully. He found an ant crawling on it, and from nowhere, seemingly, another thought came to him: "Why shouldn't guruji be in this insect?" He took the ant between his thumb and forefinger and crushed it.

Immediately his mentor was standing in front of him. "Thank you, my beloved boy, for what you have done for me. I was indeed trapped in that ant, desirous of tasting a mango. You have saved me from many lives of groping about in Maya." And he blessed the boy and disappeared.

This does not mean that you should go around squashing ants. You had better know what you are doing before you play around like this. The boy in this story was just lucky — or perhaps you might say destined for it. How did he know that the ant was his teacher? In fact, how did he even get the idea to investigate where his mentor might have gone? It was all the play of his guru. His guru inserted these two thoughts into the boy's mind. This is the beautiful play of guru and disciple. The guru always knows what is going on but pretends to be ignorant; the disciple is expected only to be sincere.

But if you are not in a position to know about these things then don't fool about with them. In this case the guru himself was lucky. Suppose the boy had been a dullard, or ignored his intuition? The guru might easily have become entangled in Maya again, through even such a small desire.

Here is another story: There was an old woman who was truly pious. She worshipped God regularly, daily for several hours, and in fact didn't do much else. Toward the end of her

life she became blind and had to grope from place to place, but this made her worship all the more perfectly since she lost most of the distractions of the outside world along with her sight.

She was purely a vegetarian and ate very little. One day as she was preparing her food she accidentally stepped on a baby mouse, which she was unable to see, of course. The mouse died with a squeal. She was softhearted and thought immediately, "What has happened? I have killed something!" And with this in her mind she suddenly died.

Well, "ante mati sa gatih." That last thought at the time of death was for the mouse, so she had to be reborn as a mouse. Then, because of the eternal fight for food, greed and anger returned to her, and she was back on the downward spiral through the samsara.

So, even the slightest attachment can do you in. On the other hand, even the slightest attachment to God can save you. There was a man named Ajamila who had performed plenty of bad karmas in his lifetime. As he lay dying he could remember nothing but the name of his son Narayana. Now, Narayana is the name of Vishnu, the Preserver of the Cosmos. And at the moment of death the name of Narayana was on Ajamila's lips.

Two demons came to drag his soul down into hell so that he could atone for some of his karmas, but an angel stopped them and said, "How dare you try to carry this man away? Don't you know he died with the name 'Narayana' on his lips?"

The demons laughed and said, "Oh sure, he was calling his son. Is that devotion?"

"The fact is, he remembered Narayana, who exists in every human anyway. He is coming with me," said the angel, and Ajamila did get into heaven. Of course he must have done plenty of penance in earlier births to get an opportunity like that, but that shows the power of God's name.

Almost no one knows the time of their death. But, thanks to Mahakala, I can know everything about how my friends will die, when they are due to die, how death will occur, how many people will be present to witness it, under what conditions the death will occur. Since now I have a special relationship with Mahakala, sometimes He can be induced to show His magna-

nimity to them. Suppose someone's destiny mentions a lingering death after an accident. Mahakala can arrange to finish that person off immediately at the time of the accident — no suffering.

You cannot outwit Mahakala, but you may be able to prolong life. Mahakala always needs an excuse to take you, a concomitant cause. If you avoid the specific situation which is fated to cause your death you can go on and on — but very few can avoid it. Mahakala's effect on the mind is just too intense.

Just recently one of my friends decided to go to Talegaon, a town near Poona, on a holiday. I told him, "The next fortnight is extremely crucial for you; don't leave Bombay if you value your life." But he insisted upon going. When he got to the railway station the lines were blocked and no trains were moving. Instead of interpreting it as a bad omen and going home, he and his wife sat on the platform and waited several hours until they could get a train. They went to Talegaon, and a few days later he died. No matter how long you are able to evade it, death becomes inevitable eventually. You can't cheat death.

Only one person is excepted: the Yogi. If he knows enough he will know about his own death six months before it occurs, because then the *prana* will start to leave his body. Then, if he likes, he can decide the best day and time to leave his body, and when he is ready he will call all his "children" together to receive his last blessings. After he says good-bye to each one, and the auspicious moment he has waited for has arrived, he sits in the Lotus Posture and goes into a trance. Suddenly there is a loud pop — Phat! — and a jet of blood spurts up from his *Shivarandhra* (posterior fontanelle of the skull). That is it; he is gone, free.

Remember what Kabir says: "When you come into the world you are crying, and the world is laughing. You must live your life in such a way that when you go the whole world will cry, and you will laugh." And he did it too.

But it is very uncommon to die aware like a Yogi does.

If people could only know what happens at death and after death they would not make so many mistakes. My Ravi and I burned my father at Banganga, in the same place where I burned

my mother and my son, Ranu, and where I will be burned one day. When my father's body was in flames, don't you think his spirit must have been hovering about it somewhere? Of course it would have. Suppose you came home from work one day to find that your landlord had thrown you out of your flat, and the building had been condemned by the city and then demolished. Wouldn't you hang around the area for a few hours or a few days to reorient yourself? Every dead person hovers about the body, wondering what to do next. Why do you think the Hindus cremate their dead only a few hours after death? Because the spirit may have some hope of returning to the body as long as the body exists. When that body has been reduced to ashes, though, the spirit has to find its own path. Burial encourages the spirit to hover about for quite a long time, especially if the body is well preserved. Muslims hold a forty-day reading of the Koran to which the spirit is specifically invited, but this is not good because it makes the spirit linger. The sooner the spirit leaves and begins to find its own way, the better.

The poor dead person wants to let everyone know he is still alive and may become quite perturbed when no one around his body is listening to him, which is only reasonable, of course. You too would feel offended if all your relatives suddenly started to act as if you weren't there, when it is obvious to you that you are quite present. You can't blame the friends and relatives for failing to respond to the deceased's calls. Humans, except those few who possess very subtle perception, cannot see or hear the dead.

This is why I say that very few death rituals in any religion have any significance at all for the dead person. The priests invented most of the ceremonies as a means of making money from people's gullibility, which is bad enough except that almost none of the priests know anything at all about spirits, nor can they see and converse with them. The Vedic religion is not composed of useless rituals; those which are meaningless were added later by greedy priests.

After death the corpse is to be bathed, according to tradition. This is a good example of a meaningless ritual. Is there any use in bathing a corpse? Have you ever heard of anything more

ridiculous? What is the use in cleaning it when in a few hours it will become ash, or worm or vulture food? Is the deceased worried about feeling clean when he no longer has a body?

You know, one day I had an interesting thought: We Indians are mostly vegetarian, and when we die we are eaten by vegetables; that is, we are consumed by wood, which is a plant material. We eat plants all during our lives and when we die the plants eat us in return. This is the Law of Karma. Muslims and Christians are predominantly meat-eaters, and when they die they are buried and become meat for worms to eat. Parsis are also meat-eaters, and when they die they are exposed on the Towers of Silence, and the vultures come and feast on them. I tell you, there is no escaping karma at all, except by grace.

What is even more amazing to me than the way people hold tightly to tradition is the changes which come over the deceased's loved ones. I will never cease to be in awe of Nature, of the power She has over the human mind. Five minutes before he dies a man's wife hugs him, kisses him, and cries over him. Five minutes after he dies she is afraid to touch the dead body; that peculiar feeling is there. Of course she feels peculiar. Even when they used to enjoy sex and thought they were getting enjoyment from the body, they were really enjoying something else: each other. You never feel like cuddling or fondling a dead person because there is nothing within to cuddle or fondle; only the outer shell remains.

Shall I go further? After the husband dies his corpse is removed from the house, and even after his cremation the ashes are never brought home. Why? Because his spirit might come and trouble his wife. How absurd! Don't people have any common sense? They have been married for years, and they must have made love hundreds of times. If the spirit does come he will love her, he will try to help her out; isn't it logical? But when it comes to death, very few do what is logical.

When Roshni's father died I warned all his relatives not to waste money on any rituals. I told them frankly that there was no use and whatever could be done for him was up to me to do. His sister said to me, "You are a Hindu; what do you know

about our Parsi religion? All the rituals will be performed and the family will pay for it; that is our way."

I told her, "This has nothing to do with religion; this is a case of looting my poor children of part of the money their father left and that too for something which is useless. If it could do some good I would never object."

But she wouldn't listen to me. Eventually I lost my temper and said, "Go ahead and do it and face the consequences." They did, and within a few months this lady and all the relatives who had abetted her injured their left legs. She broke hers so badly it had to be put back together with screws and a metal plate. Only my foster daughter, Roshni, was spared; I've always been fond of her.

When one of my Guru Maharaj's disciples died I was told that he was going to be burned on a sandalwood funeral pyre which would cost about \$3,000. Isn't it the stupidest thing? When the spirit has left the body, is burning it on sandalwood going to make any difference? When you finally leave your body you see so many new things, you experience so many unique things, that you have no time to bother about how your old body is being destroyed.

At the time of cremation a *Pinda* (ball of rice flour) is put out for crows to eat. The crow is a very smart bird. If a good observer is nearby he will notice that sometimes no crow will take the *Pinda*. Now, crows are always hungry and they would like to take it, but that spirit is hovering around the *Pinda* and is refusing to allow any crow to eat it. The spirit is very frustrated. He has been calling and calling but no one can hear him. This is the only way in which he can draw attention to himself.

When you notice that the crows are not eating the *Pinda*, you must understand that the spirit has some *Vasana* remaining, some earnest desire that was left unfulfilled during his lifetime. Then, if you care for the peace of the spirit you must go to the *Pinda* and say, "If you have some unfulfilled desire, come to me in a dream or tell me in some other way," and the spirit will try to contact you.

This very thing happened to one of my "children" not too long ago. He did not talk to the *Pinda*, but one of his recently

deceased friends came to him in a peculiar sort of dream and asked him to help provide a better home for his now fatherless children. And he is going to do that now, to satisfy the spirit.

Both the Hindus and the Parsis offer food to their departed loved ones, who consume it ethereally by smelling rather than tasting it. The external form of the food doesn't change. I caution everyone I know never to eat food offered to a dead person. Such food has been polluted by the spirit's intense desire to return to physical life, which has a ruinous effect on the mind. You can even make a practical demonstration of this. Find a saint in samadhi and put some of this food into his mouth; he will directly come down from his samadhi, the pull of the physical is so strong. Priests are well known for eating such food, and this explains why their intellects are so materialistic even though they worship continuously.

The rituals of death in their simplest forms have been pounded because there is some value in doing them. But you need to know what you are doing. Do you have any idea why we Hindus always lay the corpse out on the ground with the head to the north? You know that the magnetic lines of force of the earth run north and south. There are three important benefits in this practice. First, rigor mortis sets in quickly and decomposition is hastened. Second, the magnetic field reacts with the body in such a way that the spirit cannot reenter the body even if it tries. Third, in this position it is easier to perform *Kilana* on the spirit and do *Pitri Tarpana* immediately, which will help the spirit find its way to a new womb much faster and easier. After death the spirit is confused, uncertain of what to do. It is up to you as a loved one to do your utmost to give some direction to the after-death experiences to minimize the feelings of loneliness and terror of the unknown.

*Pitri Tarpana* is one of the after-death rituals which is *really* useful, if you perform it correctly. It is a process by which you invite your dead ancestors and attempt to satisfy their lingering desires which prevent them from making their way higher in the hierarchy of existence. Did you know that this can actually alter your genes and chromosomes for the better? Suppose one of your ancestors was a debauchee, very fond of sex. When

he dies his lust will not disappear, he will carry it along with him. He will long for sex, but since his body no longer exists he will have no way in which to satisfy his desire.

However, his genes and chromosomes still exist. They have been passed down to his children and grandchildren and so on. There is no real difference between seed and tree, is there? One is in an unmanifested form and one is fully manifested. So this old geezer's lust will be felt by his descendants; so long as they have some of his genetic material in them they will vibrate at his wavelength, at least to some extent. You have millions of genes; not all of them work at once. How does the body decide which ones work? This is one way.

Now, if *Pitri Tarpana* is performed and this ancestor is made to take birth in a new womb — probably an animal womb since he is so overcome with the animalistic desire to copulate — he will have a nice new body with which to enjoy sex. He will self-identify with his new genes and chromosomes and will forget his old ones. Then you will be free of his influence on your own genes and chromosomes, because he won't be there broadcasting lust for you to resonate with. This will make your mind firmer, less sexy.

Your ancestor will bless you for giving him a means through which to fulfill his desires. Besides, you owe a debt to all your ancestors for having provided your physical body to you, and this is one way to pay off that debt and eliminate the karmic bond. Isn't this wonderful? Everyone is happy.

This is one of the many reasons I hate communism. Communists are taught to forget their parents, to denounce them if they work against the state. If you destroy your parents, who are your roots, how do you ever expect to prosper? On the contrary, you'll degenerate, become more primitive and barbaric. I hate communism!

Your ancestors are one of the reasons it is troublesome to be reborn. Every time you are reborn you have to cope with the idiosyncracies and whims of all your dead forebears, and by the time you are finished overcoming all those limitations your life is over. That is why once you reach a certain stage in your *sadhana* you begin to crave for freedom from the obligation of



being reborn. And let me tell you: salvation, Moksha, freedom from rebirth, or whatever you want to call it is Shiva's grace, nothing else. Lord Shiva tells His Shakti, "All these fools You have created to play with should be put to sleep; make them unaware of the truth and let them grope about. Only a few will I allow to reach for Me and come to Me, and then merge into Me when they are perfectly aware."

This is why everyone who goes to the cemetery cries; in fact the smashan is also known as *Rudra Bhumi*, the place where tears flow. Ordinary people cry because they are deluded by Maya and are self-identifying with the relative or friend who has just died. Saints and immortal beings cry tears of joy because it is in the smashan that they see their true personalities, their true selves; because what is Lord Shiva but pure consciousness?

What state is Shiva in? *Samadhi nishto*: permanent samadhi, eternal oneness with the universe. Shiva's samadhi is different from ordinary states of samadhi because Shiva is aware of everything at all times. In ordinary samadhi you may lose your awareness of external reality: Shiva, though, is perfect awareness.

Shiva is almost never touched by Maya. He is the creator of Maya and allows Her to play about as She wishes. He can never die, because all other gods and celestial beings in the universe are subject to His jurisdiction; if He were to die how could He take them when their time came to cease to exist? The God of Death is the only being in the universe with the authority to take life; without that authority even He could not do it. An ordinary policeman can arrest a governor or a prime minister on the strength of his badge; without his badge he is powerless. Shiva has the right to kill.

Since Shiva cannot die He was never born, because everything which was born must die. Death treats all beings alike. This is why Shiva is called *Swayambhu* or self-existent, not subject to birth and death. You may have seen the icon of Shiva as Nataraja, Lord of Dance, where He is surrounded by the flames of dissolution as His dance creates, preserves, and destroys innumerable universes simultaneously according to the

rhythm of His two-headed drum. Shiva is the source of that sound. He is pure rhythm.

You see, Shiva is absolute. Any form you worship is only a form, and your worship is worship of the absoluteness behind it. For example, take the Shiva Linga, the most commonly worshipped image in India for thousands of years. What is it really? It is absolute firmness, stability. What is firmer than a rock? You may beat on it, shake it or do whatever you please to it but it will never budge.

The Shiva Linga is Shiva's penis, and the base in which it is mounted is His wife Parvati's vagina. There is a saying in Sanskrit: "Bhagamukhe linga, agnimukhe parada," which means "no matter how well you discipline the penis or solidify mercury alchemically, the penis will always ejaculate when placed into the vagina, and mercury will always melt when put into fire." But this is not true of Shiva. He has completely burned lust from His consciousness. His penis forever resides in Parvati's vagina and yet He never loses control. This is why the Tantric alchemists worship Shiva, because mercury is Shiva's semen and only through His grace can they achieve the ability to solidify it so that it will not melt even when cast into fire.

Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas is said to be Shiva's abode. Why? Because it is intensely cold. Where there is no heat there is no mental turmoil. Heat is turmoil, which arises from desire. Lord Shiva has gone beyond all desire — but that is not so easy.

Life is only a memory. It may be a sweet memory or a bitter memory, but it is only a memory. As long as you remember that you are such-and-such a person with such-and-such an address and you have relatives and friends and whatnot, you can stay alive. When you forget — when your karmic debts have been paid and your warehouse of karmas is empty — you can no longer self-identify with anything. Without memory there is no life. In Sanskrit the word for memory and the word for the God of lust is the same: *Smara*. Desire is the cause of karma, and when desire is destroyed memory too will go, and you will be free. This is why Lord Shiva is called *Smarahara* (meaning Destroyer of Lust as well as Destroyer of Memory). *Sma* in grammar means "past." Memory is only of the past.

*Sma-rahara* is He who transforms you from present tense to past tense, He who kills you. *Sma-shan* is the place where you go from present to past, where you are transformed from existence into a memory.

What happens at death? During life the body is sustained by the ego, which self-identifies with the body, the relatives, the personality, and so on. Your ego is nothing but your Kundalini Shakti, your own personal fragment of Adya. All during life your ego tries to find Her mate, Her controller — Lord Shiva — and because we have forgotten the truth we find evidence of Shiva in other people, and convince ourselves that we have located what we have been searching for.

When Mahakala comes to a person He calls to the Shakti to come and unite with Him. This is why Mahakala has no form; He has every form. Every created being is only half and spends its entire life trying to reunite with its missing half, to return to the state of unity. Mahakala is like a master key which temporarily provides that perfect missing half, long enough for the individual to forget his or her previous existence and start on the road to a new existence.

When Mahakala comes to a person and the ego-Shakti sees Him face to face She suddenly realizes, "Oh, no! I am not the body, I am not this limited personality, I am the Grand Consort of my Lord, the unlimited, eternal Personality!" Because of overwhelming love the Shakti leaves the body to unite with Her Lord, and forgets who She had been self-identifying with. As soon as the ego forgets to self-identify with the body, the individual dies.

Some Yogis and some other higher beings exist in the Sada-shiva form: Their individual ego-Shaktis are merged together with Shiva at all times, but they are not fully united since if they were, individual existence would have to be terminated. This is very rare, no doubt, but when it happens you can go beyond death.

Mahakala is a Rudra; He makes everyone cry. Do you know that He also cries, out of joy, whenever He takes anyone? He thinks, "By my magnanimity I have removed this individual from all the pains and miseries of existence, and the fellow

was not even aware of my presence. Now he is truly at peace. People are fools to cry for their dead; they should cry for themselves."

Lord Shiva is Bholenath, the Lord of Compassion. He has not one atom of cruelty in His person. He is the kindest being there is because He relieves you of all your earthly agonies. Can anyone ever think of asking for more than that?

Everyone is afraid of dying, which explains why no one is willing to love Mahakala. Only two persons in all our scriptures have loved Mahakala and both of them became immortal: Markandeya and Nachiketas. Destruction is necessary, but, unfortunately, no one is willing to face death. Even for Rama and Krishna who were real incarnations of God there was one moment of shock, one tremor, when Mahakala appeared before Them. Some slight Maya was there, a momentary remembrance of Their children or whoever. So, you see, the sight of Mahakala is so terrible that even God incarnate quails before Him. Even Jesus had a moment on the cross when His faith almost failed Him.

Of course the sight of Mahakala is not terrible; it is wonderful. But the ego *sees* Him as terrible because He has come to rip Her away from all Her attachments, and some attachments go very deep. When She is free, She realizes who She is and who Mahakala is. To remain alert at the moment of death is the achievement of a lifetime.

People think death is to be feared. It just isn't so. Birth is to be feared, because when you are born you forget all about what you did in your past lives and you go out and ruin yourself. But death is release from your physical shackles.

When Shiva comes to take someone He is very gentle, especially to innocent and harmless people. And children! How He hates to take children! He'll do almost anything for a child just so it won't feel any fear; just so He can release it from its suffering. Why does He love children so much? Because of their innocence. They remind him of Gopala, Vishnu in the form of a baby. Shiva cannot do without Vishnu, nor Vishnu without Shiva; preservation and destruction go hand in hand.

## ANJANEYA

Once upon a time Shiva and Parvati were on Mount Kailasa in the High Himalayas enjoying the night air, the stars, and the intense cold. Parvati decided that it was a propitious time to ask a question. "Lord," she whispered, "on whom do you meditate?" Lord Shiva smiled and said, "O Goddess, my mind is always turned to Vishnu, and even now I am thinking that He is going to be born into the world as Rama. I have decided to be born along with Him to help Him out." And that is why Anjaneya was born, and why He was the servant of Rama.

Anjaneya is called Hanuman. Some say this is because Indra, the king of the gods, once broke Anjaneya's jaw (*hanu*) with a thunderbolt, but there is a hidden meaning there. Hanuman should be read as *Anuman* because he is the atomic force (*anu* means atom), the force which moves all matter in the universe. That is why He is called *Pavana Putra* or *Vayu Suta* (Son of Wind, wind being personified as the motile force). And we all know the power of nuclear energy! That is the power of Anjaneya.

You can also read His name as Hanaman. *Hana* means to kill, and as Maharudra, the manifestation of the God of Death, Anjaneya is a killer. He is called the *Ekadasha Rudra* (the Eleventh Rudra) because He has perfect knowledge of both the dual and nondual aspects of Reality. Eleven is 11,  $1 + 1 = 2$ , duality. Once Anjaneya said to Rama, "If I look at you from the point of view of Jnana (absolute knowledge), there is absolutely no difference between me and you. But when I see you through the dual viewpoint, from the standpoint of a devotee, then I am your servant."

Anjaneya is extremely clever. On one occasion He was throwing stones into the water, and they would float; but when Rama tried to do it the stones would sink. When Rama asked why that was, Anjaneya replied, "Master, I throw stones in your name and they float, but you are God incarnate, and if you throw something down how can that thing ever stop until it reaches the bottom?" And Rama was amazed at his answer.

No one can match Anjaneya in *Vira Bhava* or in *Dasya Bhava*.

He is the perfect hero and the perfect servant. That is why His devotees call Him Mahavir, the Great Hero. He could easily have taken Sita Himself and returned her to Rama without any war; after all, He burned down the entire city of Lanka. But no, the play had to go on.

It is always better for you to worship Anjaneya in His aspect as the perfect servant, because your qualities of service will develop and automatically your ego will be kept under control. If you try to worship Him in His heroic aspect you will have to endure great difficulties. It's worth it, though. I can't describe to you the feeling I experienced when I first saw Anjaneya. I was in a smashan late at night, and as my ritual reached its climax a tremendous electrical storm began. The lightning came closer and closer, striking the ground near me, and it seemed as if the thunderbolts were going to fall right on top of my head. The noise of the thunderclaps — *Meghanada* — was almost unbearable. Even the best of ascetics would run away; who would not try to avoid being struck by lightning? But, no! You have to sit. Thanks to His grace I was able to endure it, and I was able to see Him face to face. In fact, as the thunder worsened my mood became more exalted: "Ah! Now He is finally going to come to me!"

Anjaneya is high, no doubt, but there is no manifestation of Shiva higher than Mahakala. He is the *Adirudra*, the First of all the Rudras, the Ultimate.

## SAGAL SHAH

When someone in India feels some overpowering emotion or has a fright he will touch his chest and say "Rama Rama Rama." He will never say, "Hara Hara Hara," because Rama is part of Vishnu and so preserves life, and Hara, being Shiva, takes it away. Only a very few ever say "Hara" under such circumstances. Whenever I think of this I think of my own mother. As she lay dying she was repeating the name of her guru Hara-nath Thakur: "Hara, Hara, Hara, come to me." How many people have ever died with the name of the God of Death on their

lips, even inadvertently as in my mother's case? That is why I always say I am most fortunate to have had her for my mother.

The word *Hara* comes from the root "Hr," which means to snatch. Mahakala is He who snatches your life away. He has also been described as Lord of Thieves, because He robs you of your most precious possession: your life.

What is life, anyway? The worlds, the gods, the demons, everything has been created by the Rishis; it is all their play. New creation can only appear when the old disappears, which is why the Rishis never allow Death to cease to exist. Otherwise, their play would suffer. Death is essential for life. The Rishis don't like to interfere directly — even if your child is a criminal do you destroy it? Never! — so Mahakala is there to do the dirty work of disposing of all the old forms.

The Rishis are actually in charge, though; they pull the strings, and the universe dances. For example, they give Lord Shiva the badge which allows Him to kill. Even Mahakala, who comes as close as any being can to existence without manifestation, exists at the whim of the Rishis. And the Rishis are beyond human comprehension, totally.

I have always advocated worship of God with form. But you should realize that when I say this I mean that you should worship the One who manifests through the deity. All deities, all forms of God are mere aspects of the One, so instead of saying, for example, "Wah, Lord Shiva, how compassionate You are," wouldn't it be subtler to say, "Wah, Lord, Your creation Lord Shiva is the epitome of compassion." All deities are merely playing their assigned roles in the great cosmic drama. You should respect them for how well they play their roles, and love the One who manifests through them. It is so much easier to get to the One by worshipping God with form.

Mahakala is the absolute manifestation of Shiva, but there are others who are almost as terrifying as Mahakala. I had to perform Shava Sadhana twice more before I was able to complete the sadhanas for all of Shiva's manifestations. The last time I did Shava Sadhana was in the Sunderbans, the jungle islands which form the delta of the Ganges. I went there not out of curiosity but in response to a telepathic request. I ignored

it for a few days until it proved too strong for me, and I had to make my way to the jungles.

The Sunderbans jungles are impenetrably thick. They are the home of the Royal Bengal tiger, "Mr. Stripe," who can grow to a length of twelve feet. Tigers make a jungle exciting. While I was there I was well looked after by the Santhal tribe. They would bring me fruits to eat; occasionally I would even get a hunk of raw meat. I learned some useful things from them also. Primitive people are really wonderful in some ways. These Santhals act together as Bhairava and Bhairavi; can you believe it? And they have the utmost respect for their guru; they treat him as God himself.

Although I was enjoying myself I began to become restless after two or three days, and one night I decided to return to Bombay the next day; whoever had called me probably would not show up. That night while I was sitting at my dhuni he came: It was Purnananda, the same Purnananda who was the disciple of Sarvananda and later initiated Justice Woodroffe. It was at the insistence of Purnananda that I did Shava Sadhana again. By this time I had done it a fourth time after the three I had done for Shakti, and I was an old hand at it; it was just a formality to me. But it was essential for Batuka Bhairava. Batuka is a little boy only about eight years old in appearance, although he can be terrifying when he wants to be. The corpse was that of a handsome young man, and I succeeded without any ado. I am still thankful to Purnananda for enabling me to complete my sadhanas of all the manifestations of Mahakala.

Perhaps I was meant to do sadhana of Mahakala. I have always felt very lucky that I am a descendant of Sagal Shah, who was a merchant and a devotee of Lord Shiva. He had a little son who, you may believe it or not as you wish, was actually Mahakala in disguise.

Sagal Shah had taken a vow that he would not eat each day until he had fed a sadhu. One day during the rainy season he had not eaten for three days, because he lived on an island and no sadhu would venture out there during a heavy storm. On the fourth day he learned that an Aghori, who was really Lord Shiva in disguise, had come to visit the island. Sagal Shah

accompanied the sadhu to his home. The Aghori declared that he had not had food for three days and demanded something to eat.

"Of course, Maharaj," said Sagal Shah. "Will you have some sweetened milk or yogurt, or . . . ?"

"You fool of a merchant! I am an Aghori. Am I meant for sweets? I eat meat. Bring me meat." Aghoris are always wild and uncontrollable.

Sagal Shah, remembering the old proverb "atithi devo bhava" (treat your guest as God), said to himself, "Lord, who have you brought into my house today?" because he had never even brought meat into his house before, much less cooked it there. But the guest must be satisfied. That was part of his vow.

The Aghori continued: "And I don't want mutton or chicken. I want human flesh."

Sagal Shah, resigned to his fate, said "All right, Maharaj, I will have myself killed and cooked and served to you."

This only made the Aghori wilder. "Dunce! You are an old man. Think how stringy and tough your meat will be. I want a young child. Take his brains and fry them for me."

Sagal Shah said, "I have a young son who is in school right now. I will go and bring him and have his brains cooked for you." His wife, who was pregnant, also realized that it had to be done, to fulfill the vow.

Sagal Shah went and found Chelayya, his son, and asked him to come home with him. Before he could explain why, Chelayya told him, "So that old fellow wants to fry my brains and eat them? All right, let us go there and I will see how he does it."

His father should have suspected something when Chelayya knew all about the Aghori before being told. But Sagal Shah was too distraught over his son's impending death to notice. How could Chelayya know about it? He was something different; his own father had not realized who he was.

They went to Sagal Shah's house and Chelayya told the Aghori, "So you're trying to be funny, eh? All right, *do it!* Go ahead!"

And he was slaughtered and his brains pulverized, and the

dish was prepared. The mortar and pestle in which his brains were mashed can still be seen on that island.

When the meat was set before the Aghori, he became wilder still and refused to eat it, saying, "How can you expect me to eat food prepared by a barren woman? Shameless wretch!"

This was too much for Sagal Shah's wife, who said to him, "You damned Aghori! Who do you think you are? I am pregnant, so you dare not call me barren. Now I am going to make you eat and I am going to watch and see how you do it!" Ma in Her kinetic, Shakti form.

Suddenly the Aghori said to the corpse of the boy, "Get up!" and immediately the boy was standing there alive saying, "So?"

Then the Aghori instantly bowed to Chelayya — the Aghori bowed to Chelayya, mind you — and said to Sagal Shah, "Request a boon!" Sagal Shah replied, "Lord, what can I ask for? In Kali Yuga no one is tested like this, and you have graced me by being born into my family. Now all that I can ask is that all in my family and all of my descendants should have pure minds. Anyone who develops *Durbuddhi*, perverted intellect, should be destroyed."

And so it has been until today. For fifteen generations in my family no one did any work, but the family was fabulously wealthy. And anyone, like my father's own brother, who tried to act funny and become a criminal, died. Our family was the agent for the East India Company and we used to own all of Bombay. Because we would not cheat at business we have lost much of what we once had. But that doesn't matter one bit because we still have the real treasure: the blessing of God. Take the example of my father. Just before he died, no one could tell the difference between him and his guru; he had concentrated on the form of his guru for so long that his own form had changed. He must have done billions of japas in his life; so did my mother. And that is just one effect of japa and meditation. With such a background is it so amazing I turned out like this?

## CHAPTER FOUR

# RNANUBANDHANA

*Punarapi jananam, punarapi maranam, punarapi matrdareshayanam: Birth and death and living in a womb, over and over and over again.*

### THE PRIMAL DEBT

What is the purpose of being born? To recognize yourself, to realize that you are neither the body nor the mind but rather the Eternal Soul which is the Ultimate Unity — call it Atma, Parampurusha, Brahman, or what you like.

How is one born into the world, though? What makes an individual take birth? Some say that karma is at the root of everything, but when they are asked the origin of karma they say that karma is eternal.

But how is that possible? If karma was eternal how could anyone ever escape from it? Actually the Law of Karma is nothing else but Newton's Law of Motion: Each action causes an equal but opposite reaction. There is no fundamental difference between action and reaction since their relationship is such that whenever one occurs the other has to follow; this is simple cause and effect. This is why I always say, "Cause is Effect concealed, and Effect is Cause revealed." When you know one you know the other. If you know the potentiality inherent

in the seed you can predict what sort of tree it will produce. If you know the egg, you know the bird.

If there is no end to action and reaction how could anyone ever hope to get out of the whirlpool of life? How could you ever hope to realize yourself? There must be a way out, and there is. God is never cruel or unjust; humans are, and we project our limitations onto Him. To get out of the grip of karma you must first realize that all karma is due to *rna* (debt). Karma can occur between two individuals only if there is some bondage of debt between them. I call this *rnanubandhana* (from the Sanskrit *rna* "debt" + *anubandhana* "bondage"). For example, if I steal something from you in this lifetime the opportunity for me to steal from you can arise only if a debt exists between you and me; only if you owe me something. If there is no bondage, I will not be able to locate your home, or will not find what I want even if I do burgle it. And if I steal from you, instead of receiving from you as a gift the thing I want, of your own free will, it is highly likely that you must have stolen from me in the past. Your past action creates a like attitude in me. This is a very much simplified example, of course, but you can get the idea from it.

My theft from you is not a karma: it becomes a karma only when I identify myself with the act of stealing. As long as I do not self-identify myself with the robbery it is not a karma for me. It may be unwise — it will hurt your feelings, it may land me in jail, you may beat me up or shoot me in return — but it is no karma: It is only a past *rna* working its way out. Self-identification with one's actions converts them into karmas by binding the ego down more tightly to the limited, temporary personality.

If I write a check for 10 million rupees and fail to sign it, it is valueless, even though I performed the action of writing it and giving it to you. Once I sign it, though, and you present it to my bank to be honored, well, I'm in trouble unless I have at least 10 million rupees in my account.

Remember, only the ego has the power to self-identify. Your ego is continuously self-identifying with your body and your personality: "I have black hair, I like race horses," whatever.

Thanks to the ego we are all able to remain alive because as soon as the ego ceases to self-identify with the body an individual dies.

The difficulty is that the ego not only self-identifies with the body, it also self-identifies with all the actions performed by the body. The ego tries to protect itself by preventing the repaying of karmic debts which have fallen due. Thus, new karmas are created.

Suppose I know I have a *rnanubandhana* with you. If I am wise I will ensure that the debt is paid off; it will mean one less bondage to the world and will bring me closer to my goal of self-realization. People enjoy being repaid but usually balk when it comes to paying out. The result is karma.

In my case I am very anxious to finish off my cycle of births and deaths so I allow every person who has any *rnanubandhana* with me to take from me whatever they are entitled to. Whether they are destined to make my life miserable, or to make me poor, or whatever, I don't mind. Let them do it; they cannot take from me any more than the value of the debt I owe them. The moment I object in any way, even mentally, then karma has begun. Likewise, if I have to take from someone I take only what I know I am entitled to, no more and no less.

Now, I know I have the advantage of knowing about my *rnanubandhanas*. But anyone, even someone who has no idea at all about whom he owes and who owes him, can make good use of this attitude. The more you scheme and plot to snatch from others the farther you bind yourself down in karmas. The freer you are, accepting when it is given and giving when it is requested, the more of your *rnanubandhanas* are effaced and the closer you come to your goal.

This is why I always say that life is only a memory. It is the memory of all one's *rnanubandhanas* of countless births. This memory is stored in your causal body, from which the *rnanubandhanas* project for their fulfillment at the appropriate moment. If you have given a lot in your past births then you will have many people to act as your debtors in this birth and you will have "sweet memories." If you have taken ruthlessly from everyone in the past they will take from you ruthlessly this



time around and your life will be filled with "bitter memories." However you look at it, life is nothing but a memory, be it bitter or sweet.

And remember that the sweet memories can also get you into karmic trouble. Suppose someone owes me money and I demand it from him, or kill him for it, instead of permitting him to pay me in his own time, according to his own sweet will. Or suppose a woman owes me sex, and when the rna is over and she wants to leave me I try to force her to remain, or I rape her if she refuses to provide me with immediate gratification. Or suppose I am a doctor, and a loyal patient suddenly stops coming and I react with indignation or with insulting behavior. The moment you act to protect what you feel to be your self-interest, your ego, karma adheres to you like mud.

People ask me, "But how did all this start? How could there be a first rnanubandhana, a first debt to start the whole ball rolling?" The first rna, the source of rnanubandhana, occurs when Shakti has emanated from Shiva. After emanating She feels She must return and reunite with Him. She owes Her existence to Him and because She feels incomplete without Him She craves reunion. The period between the emanation and the reunion is the time when karma is performed. When the union is complete there can be no karma; there is no individuality left to self-identify.

The job of Shakti is to irritate, prod, awaken Her Shiva. Once Shakti has emanated, Shiva becomes quiescent. Shakti incites Him to action so They can dance together and by Their dance create the play of existence. Shakti provides the energy for the sublime cosmic dance, Shiva provides the control and rhythm. This is the meaning of the pictures in which you see Kali dancing on the prostrate body of Shiva: She is awakening Him out of samadhi so He can dance with Her. My Tara does the same thing.

Look at the atom. The protons are like Shiva; they remain still at the center, attracting the electrons to themselves passively. The electrons, forms of Shakti, whirl incessantly about the nucleus trying desperately to reunite with the protons. Shakti is dynamic because it is She who emanates; She moves

outward and then tries to move back, like the protons. The neutrons represent what happens when Shiva and Shakti reunite. All dualities like polarity and charge are finished; the manifestation is dissolved. This is why the authorities say that the Absolute Reality has no gender or attributes. All the attributes are contained within it — otherwise how could they manifest? — but in the absolute state they are only in potential form. When a neutron splits to form a proton and an electron then the manifestation begins all over again: Duality has been created out of unity. If a physicist is asked why this happens he can only answer that it is in the nature of matter to manifest and redissolve like this. And we Vedics say the same thing, that it is simply in the nature of the universe to manifest and redissolve periodically.

But why the atom? Consider human beings. Birth and death, death and birth: two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. If you know birth you know death, and vice versa. Birth came first: Shakti emanated from the Unified Unmanifested Reality. When Shakti returns to Her controller, Lord Shiva, that is death. Birth and death occur only so long as the causal body exists, because only when there are sufficient karmas with which the ego has self-identified will there be enough impetus for birth to take place to create situations in which the karmas can be worked out.

All the karmas in storage in the causal body must be burned away before one gains exemption from rebirth. But it is so rare for the causal body to burn that only a few over the course of centuries and millennia ever get to experience it. Besides, out of a million people perhaps only one even wants to experience it. Why? Because most of your karmas must first be burned away before you can even develop the desire to do away with desire. And, as long as even a few karmas remain, your body will remain and your ego will continue to self-identify with your form and will continue to relate to the universe in terms of form.

The Ultimate Shiva has no form, no attributes, nothing. When you aim for the ultimate you can't expect to carry form along with you. Remember, all forms, even the form of Shiva, exist

within the manifested universe, which is nothing but the Adya Shakti. When you are ready to go beyond Shakti to Shiva you must be willing to turn from form and go beyond everything. Which is another reason I say over and over again: Worship God with form first and only then go for the Formless Absolute. Convert your own self into your deity so your ego self-identifies with the deity's form and not your own, and then your deity can carry you across to the Ultimate.

## FATE AND RNANUBANDHANA

Unless you work very, very hard and obtain immortality you can be certain you are mortal. All created beings are mortal, because they are merely projections of energy, of Shakti. When Shiva and Shakti unite, millions of beings and universes are created by the overflowing of their bliss: This is on the cosmic scale. On the small scale a man and a woman copulate, and when the sperm and the ovum unite, they, two cells, proliferate into billions of cells out of the exuberance of their joy. Men and women procreate; Shiva and Shakti create.

Whether it is creation or procreation, every projection is limited. The limitation is one of time. Even at the creation of the universe the projection of Shakti is limited; otherwise how could any forms be created? The idea of form is nothing but the idea of limit. Shakti is the force of limitation, which is why some so-called holy men fear and despise Her. But they don't realize how limited they are themselves.

The moment anything is created its life span is determined. Call it trajectory or atomic clock or anything you please, but the seeds of destruction are planted at the instant of creation and grow at a fixed rate. And that is why I always say, the moment of death is fixed at the moment of birth.

Some people say, "Oh, but you can always commit suicide and cheat death," but it's not true. If you decide to commit suicide it is because you are meant to commit suicide. As they say in Sanskrit, "Purvadatteshu maranam": you get the same death again and again, for at least seven births in succession. If

you are meant to die by your own hand the idea of suicide will come to you just at the time that Mahakala is ready to come for you. So it is not as if you have any free will over selecting your time of death. Every death, in whatever circumstances, is decided at the time of birth; you may do your best to avoid it but you will be unable to do so.

Even if you could know when you would die — and only a few Yogis can know — there is no likelihood that you'd be able to alter the time or the circumstances because even if you try to make some changes Mahakala will make use of your rnanubandhanas to create the situation as He desires it. He will pervert your mind and the minds of those around you to force events to occur as He pleases.

Here's an example. Once there was a childless couple who prayed to Shiva for many years before being blessed with a son. When the father, who was the local king's astrologer, cast his son's horoscope he was horrified to learn that the boy would die on his ninth birthday after paying his parents 100,000 rupees. This was the rnanubandhana between the boy and his parents, the reason why he had been born into that family.

The boy's father was mystified as well: Where could a nine-year-old boy come up with 100,000 rupees? He felt secure in the absurdity of the situation but just to make sure, he never let the boy out of the house, even to go to school, so he could never amass any money. Still, the boy learned something of astrology almost by default, because his father was an expert and people came regularly to consult with him. Off and on the man would warn his wife, "Never take anything from this boy!" and his wife would assure him she wouldn't.

When the boy became eight years old the astrologer warned her again: "Make sure you never accept anything whatsoever from him!" His wife replied, "I told you once, I will never take anything." At age eight years and eleven months the astrologer delivered yet another warning to his wife and received the same assurance.

Three days left. The father thought, "When this period passes the dangerous conjunction will not recur for at least 100 years. Nothing to worry about." One day left: again he cau-

tioned his wife. But he didn't realize that he was living in a fool's paradise. Mahakala always possesses His victim six months before the appointed time of death and makes the individual perform the actions which cause death to occur in the prescribed manner. It was no different in this case.

The wife of that country's king had finally become pregnant after many years of barrenness. Just before the delivery was to occur the astrologer's son was strolling through the palace garden when he saw a gardener's wife collecting flowers. He asked her in childish innocence, "Where are you going with all these flowers?"

She replied, "I am to take them to decorate the queen's bed-chamber, where she is about to give birth to a child." The little boy said, "I am coming along with you." The lady told him, "Only women are allowed." The boy said, "Make me wear a sari so I can come too," and looked at her so mournfully that she had to agree. Mahakala had taken possession of him and was ordering her; otherwise the gardener's wife would never have dared to take him along, knowing the stiff penalty she would have to face if the deception were discovered. Some rnanubandhana had to exist between the boy and the gardener's wife, of course, to give Mahakala a field in which to operate.

Off they went to the palace like mother and daughter. There, just at the moment of the child's birth the little boy got inspiration — from Mahakala — and took a twig and wrote on the wall in the blood-red juice of the *paan* (betel nut and betel leaf mixture) he was chewing: "This boy will surpass his father in every way and will live for 125 years." Then he and the gardener's wife left.

Ten minutes after the delivery all the royal astrologers came, led by the little boy's father, and when they cast the horoscope they all agreed: "If the father ever sees the face of this child the father must die."

Well, what to do? The king could not afford to allow that to happen, because the welfare of the kingdom was at stake, so he called two butchers and told them, "Take this child out and kill him." The queen felt grief, but consoled herself with the

thought that her husband would continue to live and she could have more children.

When the two butchers had taken the baby out into the forest they said to one another, "What has this child done that he should be murdered on the day he is born?" They could not do the deed so they left the child under a tree. They killed a deer instead and took its eyes to the king to prove that they had done the job. How could two bloodthirsty butchers become so compassionate? Mahakala, the god of death, and a complex rnanubandhana connecting the baby, the butchers, and the luckless animal.

By now the king was feeling remorseful — guilty of the murder of an infant and his own son at that — and he was wondering what to do. The remorse? Mahakala's doing. He went to the queen and told her, "I've done a terrible thing." She said, "You? What have you lost? I've lost my baby." Suddenly the king saw the horoscope written on the wall. When he read the words he was so astonished that he called all his guards and ordered them to find out who had written it. They interrogated everyone who had been there and when they reached the gardener's wife, she admitted that the chief astrologer's young son had come in disguise and done so.

Meanwhile the boy had gone happily to his home and had had his nice food and was resting, as if he knew what was going to happen next. Suddenly officers arrived and escorted him to the palace. The king confronted him with the writing on the wall, and the boy boldly told him, "What I have written cannot be wrong. The baby cannot be dead." A nine-year-old boy could never be so confident; Mahakala was speaking.

At this the king called in the two butchers, who confessed after a good hiding that they had not killed the infant. The king and his whole court rushed to the tree and found the baby alive, honey from an overhead honeycomb dripping into his mouth to satisfy his hunger. The astrologer's son told the king, "You have seen your son's face and yet you live." The king was wonderstruck and asked, "How could you be right when all my astrologers were wrong?" The boy told him, "I was present at the precise moment of birth; my father and all the rest

were ten minutes late." The king was so pleased that he wrote on a slip of paper, "Pay the bearer of this note 100,000 rupees from the royal treasury."

The boy ran home as fast as he could, calling for his mother: "Ma, Ma, Ma!" When he got to his house his mother met him at the door. He jumped into her arms, thrust the note into her hand, and died.

His father came home a few minutes later, having heard the whole story at court, and found his wife cradling their son's dead body. He shouted, "You stupid wife! I told you never to take any money from him!" But she said, "How could I have known that the scrap of paper in his hand was a receipt?" And then, of course, there was nothing to do about it.

So there is no way to escape death unless you go beyond it. Please remember, the time of death is fixed for everyone. Even if you want to die earlier or later you will not be able to. I remember a newspaper report: As soon as some young bride left her new home to visit her mother her husband became so depressed that he decided to commit suicide. First he swallowed all the poison in the house. Then he sealed all the doors and windows and turned on the gas. Since he didn't like the smell of gas, he went and bought some cigarettes and returned to the kitchen where he lit one, and bang! He was so frightened by the noise and fire that he vomited out all the poison and ran for his life. He was miraculously unscathed by the explosion, and his wife had to get him out of jail for trying to burn down the house.

And then there was another true story not too long ago. Some primary school teacher had been so fed up with his life for the past ten years that he kept wanting to die but had never been able to do so. Then one day he was found dead in a Shiva temple, embracing the Linga. He had searched for Mahakala for so long, and had finally found Him. Why didn't he succeed for ten years? Because it was not yet time for him to die. No other explanation is possible. I have spent many long years of my life in the smashan and I think I have found out a little something about death.

You know, it is really a blessing that we do not have full

knowledge of fate and rnanubandhana, the workings of birth and death. If we did, a mother who knew that a certain son would take more from her than he would give would never love him; she would neglect him and might even try to kill him. We would be prejudiced against other people from the start and that would only increase our self-identification with our bodies, which exist solely because of rnanubandhana. And all this would only add to our already heavy load of karmas. That is why one does not get remembrance of past lives until a later stage.

## RANU

I have experienced all this myself, you know, which is why I can talk about it. I lost my first son, Ranu, in spite of every precaution; and I did not understand what was going on until much later, when my Guru Maharaj literally beat it into my head.

Ranu was meant to die young, that is all there was to it. I had plenty of warnings, I had my own suspicions, I did all I could, but there was no way to avoid Mahakala.

Jina Chandra Suri, the Jain ascetic who forced me to do Shava Sadhana the first time, was also involved in this drama. See how strange are the workings of rnanubandhana? My wife had had several miscarriages, and I was wondering if she would ever be able to have a child. Once when she was at her parents' home in Gwalior, Jina Chandra Suri came to me and said, "There is an ethereal being who has been coming to me daily and bothering me: 'I want to come to the world of mortals and play. Let me come. Let me come.' I have decided that he should be born into your family." Right in front of me the old man wrote out the horoscope and described exactly how the boy would look. He told me, "Your wife will conceive on such-and-such a day."

I thought it was all a big joke, and told him so: "Look, Maharaj, my wife is in Gwalior; how can she conceive there?" He didn't bother to reply but just left. I knew that even in his miserable condition he still had a few tricks up his sleeves, so I

sent a telegram to my wife telling her there was no need for her to return to Bombay; she should continue her vacation with her family indefinitely.

But it's not so easy to prevent the unfolding of your destiny. Someone in Gwalior told my wife, "Your husband has just been operated on for his tonsils and he is hiding it from you." She took fright and caught the next train for Bombay. When I met her at the station I realized that it would all take place as Jina Chandra Suri had predicted. My wife conceived on the specified day, the pregnancy was uneventful, and the boy was born at the exact time required by the horoscope the old man had written out. What's more, the baby fit the physical description perfectly.

And so I have Jina Chandra Suri to thank both for introducing me to my Mother Tara, and for giving me a unique son. You know, Jina Chandra Suri's fate was somehow connected with that of Ranu. Three months before Ranu's death the old man came to me and said, "Your child is going to make you cry; he'll make you miserable." And three months after my son was cremated, the old man passed away himself. One day he was delivering a lecture on the Jain religion in one of their temples, and in the middle of the discourse he just keeled over dead.

What a boy Ranu was! My God, if he had lived he would have been the best! Sports, studies, you name it, he was tops in all of them. Not only that, he had innate spiritual powers. Sometimes when people would come to me to get some work done Ranu would meet them first and say, "Give me some chocolate and I'll see that your work gets done." And it would be done! No one ever understood how, and even I only found out how after he was gone.

Everyone who met him loved him. He was my father's favorite. And my mother! Here in India it is a tradition that when you take initiation from a guru you give up one food for the rest of your life; you dedicate that food to your guru. My mother refused to eat mangoes after Ranu's death, because mangoes had been his favorite food — even though obviously he was not her guru.

And even my gurus loved him! One day when Ranu was being too mischievous I raised my hand as if to slap him. I would not have done it; I never hit my children. I just wanted to scare him. But my Junior Guru Maharaj was in the room. He caught my hand and with real pain in his voice he said, "Haven't you ever looked in his palm and seen how short his life line is? Promise me you will never strike him." And of course I did promise it. Actually I had known from Ranu's horoscope that his life would be in danger early on, and as soon as my second son was born and I looked at *his* horoscope I saw that it predicted he would be the eldest child in the family. This certainly suggested that Ranu had to die.

So I decided to give him the happiest childhood I could. When he was wild and naughty I would tell him, just to punish him a little bit, "If you don't behave, your Papa will go to where Gopala lives," meaning that I would die. But Ranu would always tell me, "No, Papa, I will be going before you do." He knew, he knew!

Well, Ranu died at age nine. As the time approached my Senior Guru Maharaj decided to visit Bombay. Now I know that he came to say good-bye to Ranu; back then I was still hopeful that something could be done.

One day a couple of friends and I were sitting with my Senior Guru Maharaj and one friend said to me in English, "Why don't we try to get your Guru Maharaj to go to the cinema?" This fellow knew that my Senior Guru Maharaj would never patronize any thing like that because he hates the British, which mean to him Westerners in general. He used to say, "What have the Westerners ever done for us except to teach us to urinate standing up like donkeys?"

Anyway, my friend was still talking: "Let's take him to a really hot picture." My old man was just looking at him with his piercing stare — his eyes never blink — and then suddenly he said in Hindi, "Why don't we go to see a picture today? I'd like to see that new picture with Rita Hayworth in it."

I got the shock of my lifetime. I couldn't understand it. Why should he want to go see something he hates? And how could he possibly know or care who Rita Hayworth was? But we went.

And during the picture my Senior Guru Maharaj didn't even look at the screen. He sat with his head on his chest, covered by his arms, with his elbows together at the waist. Very strange. I didn't know what to make of any of this.

If you ever get the opportunity, see that picture. It was called *Down to Earth*. Danny is a piano player whose dancer quits him. He is in bad shape so his mother, who has died, gets permission to come down from heaven to help him. She becomes his dancer — of course he does not know who she really is — and then he rockets to fame. They are doing very well together when the first dancer Danny had employed comes back and asks to be rehired. Although his mother tells him, "But Danny, I only want to help you," he sends her away and rehires the first dancer — and straightaway plummets. Then he realizes his mistake and asks his mother to come back. She does, and up he goes again.

His mother is finally called back up above. There is a limit to everything, after all. She begs, she pleads, "No, I can't go, I have to look after my son," but then we see a big Gandharva or some kind of angel smiling at her, and he moves his hand and she leaves the earth and is drawn back up above.

As she is about to go she sees her son and cries, "Danny! Danny! Don't you hear me? Can't you hear me? I want to help you. Listen to me!" But Danny is drinking at a cocktail party in some producer's house and he can't hear her because she has become ethereal.

Up in heaven she is very unhappy — "My Danny, what will become of him?" — and someone comes along to talk with her about it. She is completely despondent, and he just strokes the back of her head and suddenly she says, "Oh, it was all a dream, wasn't it?" And she becomes happy again. But still for some time the memory is there, like the morning recollection of a dream.

After the picture was over my Senior Guru Maharaj asked us, "Did you understand?" I said, "No," because I couldn't understand. My old man left Bombay and sometime later Ranu died. About two months thereafter he returned to Bombay and asked me again, "Now, did you understand that film?" I still

can't tell you how he knew that film was worth seeing to remind me of the story of Ranu's life.

Look how Mahakala works. I had gone out of Bombay to Mathruli near Surat in the Konkan for a short while with a certain sadhu — my wife's own guru, in fact; he was named Shankargiriji and lived to be about 125, though he was not quite 100 at this time and still looked like a sixteen-year-old boy — and I told my wife in no uncertain terms not to have Ranu operated on for his tonsils while I was away. But she ignored my advice and did it anyway. I had a peculiar feeling that something terrible was going to happen. Then when I learned of the operation I told her specifically that if she let him go to school while I was gone that it would be the end of him. Well, she didn't listen to me. She — or rather Mahakala — sent him to school and he developed polio. He was sick only four days.

While I was sitting out in the jungle I started seeing something funny. I saw that Ranu was dying. I told Shankargiriji that I had to go back to Bombay, but he said, "Don't be stupid, it's all your imagination; don't go back." I waited there for some more time and then I saw the same thing again. This time I forced Shankargiriji to come back with me to Bombay. By the time I got back it was almost too late. I quickly put Aghori Baba's stick under the mattress and laid my boy on the bed on top of it.

I then thought that everything would be all right, because if Aghori Baba's stick had stayed underneath him Ranu could never have died. That is the power of the stick. Aghori Baba gave it to me long ago, and I have used its miraculous powers on so many people. My foster daughter used it on me when I had my heart attack. I used to ask her, "Why is my bed so lumpy?"

But look how Mahakala works! Dinkar, my friend who was with me there, told me to go down and get some coconut water for Ranu. While I was gone Ranu — remember, it was Mahakala speaking through Ranu — asked Dinkar to put him on the other bed. Dinkar never knew about Aghori Baba's stick, and didn't move it along with Ranu. When I came back my boy was gasping. I lifted him in my arms, he said "Gopala," and he was gone.

He knew he would die. He even told the principal of his

school, "Now it is time for me to leave. I won't be meeting you again. I'm going to a place where it is very cold," meaning he would be reborn in America. And even my intellect had become perverted. At one point I had prayed, "Let my boy die rather than become a cripple," because he had been so good at sports like badminton that his spirit would have been crushed if he had been forced to limp around for the rest of his life; that is what polio does to you, you know.

In any case after my Ranu died I went mad. My position was pitiable. I actually had to borrow money to burn him. For six months I sat in the smashan with one small bone and some ash which I had retrieved from his funeral pyre. I was trying to revive him in the same body. Eventually someone promised me that he would come back to me after being born to different parents, carrying certain signs on his body so that I could recognize him.

I refused to meet my Junior Guru Maharaj for four years after my son's death. When I finally did go to visit him I gave him such a barrage of curses that he had no option but to sit and listen to me for two hours. I used all the foul language I know; in addition I was telling him things like, "You are a sadhu so you never had any children; what can you know of the grief of a father who loses his son?"

He listened to me patiently until I was through and then said quietly, "Wah, Babuji, wah; now I know how strong is the love of human beings. If you really loved your son so much how is it that you are still alive after his death? Why didn't you die of shock at the moment of his death or throw yourself on the funeral pyre with him? You are eating and drinking as if nothing had happened. You are going to the races and enjoying your life. So I understand that this was not real love but only rnanubandhana, just a debt which had to be paid."

I was ashamed, because I knew that what he said was the truth. Then he told me, "Come here," and he pressed a certain nerve on the back of my head, and suddenly I understood the rnanubandhana between me and my son, and why he had to die. Guru Maharaj told me, "There is no need for you to cry.

You know God exists in everyone's heart. If you see your Ranu in everyone you meet, you will have so many Ranus."

So, I lost one son but gained millions. Wasn't it worth it? And later I realized that by continuing to live I had been able to do some things for Ranu which benefited him immensely. I saw to it that he underwent thousands of births during the four years between his death and his reincarnation in human form. Thousands of births, in which millions of karmas were wiped out. And in so many of those births he was sacrificed. It is not necessary for the spirit to enter the womb and actually grow with the fetus. It is sufficient if the spirit enters the animal just a few minutes or hours or days before the sacrifice occurs. And the nice thing about it is that once you are sacrificed in one womb you never have to take rebirth in that womb again; never.

I can predict one characteristic of my son's personality in his new body, wherever he may be. He will never want to injure any animals; and there will be some species of animal of which he will be so fond that he will never be able to endure it if he sees them in pain; all because he has been sacrificed in those forms.

When you see a dead animal on the road and a shiver suddenly and involuntarily goes up your spine, somewhere in some previous birth you must have endured something like that. Perhaps it was not a car; you might have been crushed by anything, even an elephant or a boulder. But subconsciously the agony is still present. You "remember" the past experience and shiver uncontrollably.

And once you develop yourself spiritually you feel not only your own pain but you empathize with the pain of the being who is suffering. When you see God in every human, every animal, even the tiniest insect, and even in the vegetables you eat every day, you cannot bear to see their torment, because it becomes your torment. You see God suffering, and it is unbearable.

Whenever I drive past a certain mutton shop near Poona I see rows of goat carcasses, and I feel pity for the goats who were slaughtered merely to please someone's tongue. One day I got so wild that I said to myself, "I'll see to it that everyone in this

city is burned alive!" just to make up for the sufferings of the little kid goats who are tethered near the carcasses. Animals can smell imminent slaughter, and they fear death like any other living being. How cruel it is to force baby goats to spend twenty-four hours with the dead bodies of their own kind, knowing all the while that in the morning they too will end up on the meat hooks!

I was so wild that day that I was ready to invoke any spirit just to finish off everyone in the town and teach them a good lesson in sensitivity. Suddenly some ethereal being sneered at me, "You fool! Who are you to pity them? At least they know when they are going to die; their suffering is limited to a day. But you have no idea when you are going to die, or how much you will have to suffer. Who deserves pity: they or you?" And then I had to keep quiet, because every word was true.

Let me assure you, though, that it is better not to know when you are going to die unless you are an advanced Yogi, and sometimes not even then. If I had not known Ranu was going to die I would still have felt the hurt at his death, no doubt, but how much more did I feel it when I knew it all beforehand and could do absolutely nothing about it? It is a real blessing from Nature that when we are born we forget our rnanubandhanas; otherwise most people would not be able to endure the misery of existence. Only those who need to know are finally permitted to know, so that they can go beyond rnanubandhana. And for those few who do know there is nothing more relieving than the grip of Mahakala, the grip which signals that soon they will be free of the responsibility of remaining alive, swimming in the shark-filled ocean of the material world.

## AUTHOR'S POSTSCRIPT

Ranu's story exemplifies Vimalananda's whole teaching about rnanubandhana, a true tale of how a being takes birth, plays about, pays off debts, and departs, once those debts have been paid. The story of Ranu would not be complete, however, without appending the story of Vimalananda's father to it. Since

this tale involves me personally I have deliberately written it in first person from my point of view.

During the summer of 1978 Vimalananda predicted that his father would die in his sleep before the end of the year. I had already experienced Vimalananda's accuracy in predicting the date and time of an individual's demise. It surprised me then when the year was ending and the foretold death had not yet occurred.

We were in Bombay to celebrate Christmas and New Year's when on the night of December 30 I told Vimalananda, "You assured me your papa would pass on during this year. What happened? He is still alive."

Vimalananda replied, "There is still one day left in the year, isn't there? Let it go by first and then tell me anything you like." Suddenly, for no apparent reason, a dog began to howl piteously in the street below. We later discovered that he had been locked in the post office located in our building on the ground floor and was howling to try to attract attention to his plight. According to the science of omens, however, the mournful baying of a dog in the night is an exceedingly inauspicious sign.

The phone rang at 5 A.M. the next morning to announce that Vimalananda's father had died in his sleep during the night, about the same time the dog had begun to wail. As Vimalananda hung up the phone he turned to me with a big I-told-you-so grin and said, "Now what do you have to say?"

As we entered the old man's room to pay our last respects Vimalananda sighed contentedly and whispered to me, "Look at that face!" Then he pointed to a picture on the wall which was obviously one of the old man done just a short while before his demise, for the features tallied almost precisely with those of the dead face before me. "That fellow on the wall is Haranath Thakur, our family guru," Vimalananda continued. "My father concentrated on his picture for so many years that he became like his guru even in physical form. This is a practical demonstration of the Kita Bhramari Nyaya, the Law of Caterpillar and Butterfly: Whatever you concentrate on you will eventually become.



"Actually there is a better reason for this," he mused on. "In 1927 my father came down with meningitis and died. Yes, he died; I can show you death certificates signed by three different doctors. We received a message from Haranath immediately: 'Don't remove the body for twelve hours after death.' All our relatives said, 'Don't be stupid. He's dead now, let's cremate him.' But my mother had implicit faith in her guru and she was adamant. After six hours the corpse sat up. He lived for another fifty-one years.

"A few days later my father received a letter from Haranath: 'My son, you will have a long life, but you will never see your Haranath any more. Look after my boy,' meaning me; I was eleven at the time. A cover letter from Haranath's son was enclosed which stated that on such-and-such a day at such-and-such a time his father had gone to sleep in his garden after mentioning that he felt my father needed his help. Haranath never woke from that sleep. The time he went to sleep turned out to be exactly the moment my father revived.

"After this experience my father was a changed man. Although he had not had much interest in his business before, after this incident he lost all interest in business and would spend his time doing japa or discussing spiritual subjects with my mother. I think there must have been some connection between his revival and his guru's death."

Vimalananda made some further observations about his father's corpse, noting that there were no flies around the body and that abstemious living had made the body itself almost as light as that of a child. Both things he attributed to the old man's purity.

At the Banganga smashan Vimalananda insisted on arranging the pyre himself: "I always arrange the pyres for my family's funerals. It's my job; the smashan is my home. I think I should know best how it is to be done." After igniting the pyre Vimalananda called me over and he and I made offerings of clarified butter into it as if we were worshipping a sacrificial fire according to the traditional ritual. No one dared stop us, though there was visible agitation in the audience at the scandal of a

son openly performing ritual worship on his own father's funeral pyre.

Later as we sat quietly smoking and watching the pyre burn I mentioned this to Vimalananda. He laughed a hearty laugh and said, "What does my family know about me? I have never shirked from doing anything I felt I needed to do. I don't know why it is, but I will do most anything just for the experience of it. I'll do it once or twice just so I know I can do it well and then quit so it doesn't become a habit. Aghora is my life, though. I have always lived in the smashan, and as an Aghori I cannot afford to distinguish between the funeral pyre of my mother or my father and that of anyone else. How can I? No; sadhana means sadhana, however you look at it. You must be ready to forget *everything* to become an Aghori."

"I had the same idea at my mother's funeral. In fact I asked my friends, 'Shall I perform a little sadhana here? It will give us great material benefits.' But they turned me down."

He fell silent. For a couple of hours we chatted intermittently. Apart from voices, only the hiss of the dying pyre's flames, the cawing of a few raucous purple and black jungle crows, and the splash of ocean breakers just beyond the retaining wall disturbed the stillness of the smashan. Eventually Vimalananda said jauntily, "Let's go see if the old man has turned to ash yet." On inspection only a few bone slivers remained among the piles of ash. After collecting some of these splinters for later rituals we walked back to the car to drive home. A broad smile illumined his face as Vimalananda told me, "Tonight we'll celebrate New Year's Eve with champagne! I feel I really have some reason to celebrate. My father has succeeded at his sadhana and had a fine death. As we head into the new year he has got a good head start into a new life, a life those of us who live in the smashan know very, very well."

## CHAPTER FIVE

# MENTORS

*Nature is very kind to me; in fact, as my friend Faram used to say, Nature is cockeyed to me. And that is because of my mentors. My mentors were very good. That's all I can say; my mentors were very good. Maybe it's true I was meant by Nature to succeed at all my sadhanas, but my mentors triggered me up and made me succeed. They were too good.*

### MY THREE MENTORS

You know, I met my Senior Guru Maharaj after I left Benares where I had been doing sadhana of Mahakala on Manikarnika Ghat. I had heard that in Girnar (a mountain in the Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarat), Dattatreya (an immortal ascetic) was still living, and that if you tried hard enough and were destined for it you could meet him. I had to go and find out if it could be true.

I went to Junagadh by train, and when I arrived at the foot of the mountain I decided to stay at the Nawab's guest house. At that time the Nawab of Junagadh had jurisdiction over Girnar. I would go out on the mountain during the day and return for my food and rest to the guest house. That is the sort of luxury I was used to; after all, I am a billionaire's son.

Then I decided that I should move out onto the mountain itself since I had not come to Girnar for a holiday but to do sadhana. I located an old deserted Shiva temple and moved in there. It was situated in such a way that by sitting in front of it no animal could surprise me from behind. In front of me I would build my *dhuni* (the sadhu's fire) so I was protected all round, because animals won't come near a fire.

I started eating only what the sadhus ate at the *Sadavarats*. These are places established by rich merchants to feed whoever comes by, as a sort of service. I took off all my clothes and walked around without a stitch. At first I covered myself with my hands, but after a while I lost all my shame.

Eventually I quit eating with the other sadhus and started eating nothing but fruit from trees in the jungle. Before long I realized that I was harming the trees by plucking their fruit, so I ate only what fell. Then, I ate the leaves from the wood I would cut for my dhuni; then only fallen leaves, then only water, and finally I was living on nothing but air until afterward an ethereal being told me to start eating again.

Just as I had been doing in Bombay and Benares I spent most of my time in the smashan. One day, a funeral party had brought the body of a young man to be burnt. While I was watching the tearful relatives arranging the pyre, I noticed a thin fakir standing nearby. Very thin; just like a skeleton. As I watched he walked over to the boy's parents and said, "What do you people think you are doing? This boy is not dead, he is just asleep."

The boy's father looked at him and said, "Why are you trying to interfere? Are you God or something that you can bring the dead back to life? Get out of here before I have you thrown out." But the fakir insisted that the boy was not dead, and I suppose that he insisted a little too much because then the boy's father hit him across the side of the head and a few drops of blood trickled down.

The old fakir wiped his forehead, saw the blood, looked at the man, and said, "So, you've made me red. Now I'll make this a red-letter day for you!" He walked over to the corpse and said, "Get up!" He gave it a nice kick. The corpse sat up.

Well, you should have seen the condition of the members of that funeral party. They ran as if they were being pursued by ghosts. I said to myself, "Oh, this fellow has something." The old man came over to me and took out his chillum and filled it with *ganja* (marijuana flowers). He offered it to me first, but I requested him to ignite it. When he inhaled, a flame a foot high leapt from the chillum.

When you are wandering as a sadhu you run into all types of people. Many criminals masquerade as sadhus or fakirs in order to escape the police, and the police in order to catch such criminals masquerade in the same way. Then there are men who run away from nagging wives or heavy debts or some other responsibility. There are magicians, and men who cheat barren couples with promises of children, and the whole flotsam and jetsam of society. When you become a sadhu, you must be able to know who is genuine and who is not. And the best way to do that is with a chillum of charas or ganja, because most sadhus are forbidden to drink.

Be sure to let that fellow light the chillum and take the first puff. You will be benefited in so many ways. First, he will get the fire going for you so that you don't have to inhale too hard. Second, by his technique of holding the chillum and inhaling you will know whether he is an old crony, or a beginner, or just what. And as soon as he starts to get into his intoxication everything will come out: who he is, why he is moving about as a sadhu, where he is going.

I'll give you an example. Once I was out in Girnar and I happened to meet a strange sadhu. As usual we sat down to smoke, and before long I began to collect information from him. When he told me he was from Rajasthan I immediately suspected something because people from that state are well known as misers instead of sadhus.

I shifted the conversation slightly and came up with the information that he hated to beg. Another clue: Would someone who had plenty of money and position in society ever stoop to beg? So he must have been a prosperous merchant, since people from Rajasthan are good at business.

My last bit of data was obtained when he told me, "This ganja

has made me hungry; let's go down and get something to eat." I was convinced; here was a businessman who had left his family, perhaps because he lost his money, though that was not certain. I decided to rid Girnar of one more false sadhu and told him, "Swamiji, I am so pleased to have met you. I want to give you something in return. Take this number and bet on it."

He did, and he won a packet. He left Girnar and returned to his family and business. Would a real sadhu ever think of gambling? Never.

Anyway, when a foot-high flame rose from this sadhu's chillum I knew he was a veteran. He said to me, "So, you have come from Bombay," and then he went on to tell me about my family, my life, and most everything else, and then asked, "Do you know who I am?"

Now someone, some ethereal being, had told me who he was. And when I told the old man who he was, he was so amazed that he had to keep quiet. I became his disciple.

He eats sometimes, but only when he feels like it; he does love to drink tea, though. His eyes, which never blink, are the only things which would give him away; they are much sharper than an eagle's. Otherwise he looks completely nondescript. And he is the shrewdest old man possible. If he wants to trick you he'll do it in such a way that he'll have you admiring him for it. And if he wants to make you rich nothing can stand in his way.

There was a friend of mine who owned three cars and was a well-to-do businessman. As his destiny would have it he fell on hard times and had to hock all three of his automobiles. My Senior Guru Maharaj had come to Bombay then, and one fine day decided he wanted to go for a drive. I immediately thought of my friend and told him, "This is your golden opportunity. Take my Senior Guru Maharaj out for a drive and then he'll do anything for you."

My friend laughed and said, "I don't have a car anymore." I told him, "Beg, borrow, or steal, but locate one." Somehow he was able to redeem one of his cars, and we got it onto the road — without any fuel in it. He told me, "Look, I've come to the end of my money; how can we drive without any gas?" We

considered the possibilities, then got in touch with someone we knew who had an account at a filling station. We drove over there and filled the tank on credit. Ready to go!

After his ride, my old man was feeling expansive, as I knew he would be, and he looked over to my friend and asked him, "How much money do you need?" He replied, "300,000 rupees." My Senior Guru Maharaj twirled his mustache for a moment, and then pulled off one of the rings on his fingers. He said to my friend, "This ring is for Saturn. Put it on and go to sleep for an hour, and then let me know what you see or hear." My friend and I had a low opinion of the whole drama, but he went off to sleep in the next room.

Meanwhile the old man and I were having a discussion. He was telling me, "I want you to go out and borrow as much money as you can at any rate of interest, even 1,000 percent per day." I thought he was up to his old tricks again. One of his peculiarities is that you can give him any amount of money, even 10 million rupees, and within half an hour he'll come back to you and tell you he has spent all of it and needs more. The last time he was in Bombay, I warned a certain Maharani about him. I told her, "Give him anything he wants to eat — meat, fish, anything he wants. If he wants clothes, give him clothes. Give him perfume, give him flowers, give him anything you please, but don't give him any money." I had to leave Bombay for some time, and when I returned she told me, "I lost 10,000 rupees." I told her, "Look, I even took an oath from you that you wouldn't give him a paise." She said, "I don't know what came over me." I know what came over her — but that's a different story.

So, I thought he just wanted some money and was going to leave me in the lurch again. You have no idea how I pacified the Maharani and eventually arranged to have her reimbursed; and I had no intention of doing it all over again. I told him as much, and he told me there was nothing to worry about, and while we were arguing in this fashion my friend came back from his sleep and announced, "I've seen two numbers."

At that time people used to bet on the opening and closing quotations of the New York Cotton Exchange. They would bet

on the two numbers to the right of the decimal point, so we knew what the two numbers stood for. They happened to be the same double-digit number. My friend was impressed, because someone had told him the number over and over until he couldn't forget it. I was still doubtful.

My Guru Maharaj told me to go out and not to return until I had borrowed at least 10,000 rupees. I went to a moneylender, who explained all the interest rates and what-have-you to me, and I walked out of his shop with 9,000 rupees. That's the way they do things: They keep 10 percent as the first payment while they're charging you interest on the whole amount. When I got back to him my Senior Guru Maharaj told me to put all of it on the numbers. I flatly refused. Wasn't it enough to have contracted a debt of 10,000 rupees? If I was to lose all the money, I would be in a truly pitiable plight. My old man told me, "All right, I know you have no faith. Do one thing: bet 5,000 rupees, and 1,000 rupees more for me." "You?" I asked. "What is the guaranty I'll ever be paid again? I know all about you."

He looked at me and twirled his mustache, and said, "I still have this, don't I?" My Senior Guru Maharaj was an emperor at one time, in this same body, long, long ago. I've seen his sword; I've seen coins with the imprint of his face stamped on them. And in this part of the world, a king's mustache or beard is equivalent to his honor; so to swear to me on his mustache that he would repay me showed the seriousness of the whole thing.

Still, I warned him: "Listen, if you are just going to mess everything up again I am going to cut your throat from ear to ear; this time I've had enough." He told me, "My child, I will cut my own throat if I fail to deliver for you."

There was nothing else left to say. I bet 6,000 rupees at 90 to 1. We sat around waiting for the results. I had lost all hope until the news came: The first number had come correct. I felt relieved and immediately said, "Let's cancel the bet," because you could get paid 7 to 1 or something like that if the first number alone came. The old man told me, "No, we've done it, now we're going to see it through to the end."

When the second number came my astonishment knew no

bounds: more than half a million rupees! Immediately my Senior Guru Maharaj said, "Repay your loan." After that, and after giving my friend what he needed and pocketing my share because I was also broke at the time, I tried to give him his part of the winnings. "Now do you believe I kept my word?" he taunted me. "Take the 1,000 rupees which were in question and hire a musician so I can enjoy a nice night. That's all I want." We had beautiful music all night long, and the next day my friend, who had been impressed with the old man's power, told him, "My sister has been in bed between sandbags for the past six months with a broken spine. Can you do anything about it?" The old man went to see her and gave her a hard slap — and in that instant she became well, perfectly healed.

After finishing all the work my Senior Guru Maharaj took his ring back from my friend — he is very careful about such useful objects — and then he told him, "I'll see that you get heaps and heaps of wealth, more than you can even dream of, but you must stop your whoring and wining." My friend looked at him and said, "What would I do with heaps and heaps of money? How would I spend it? No thanks; I prefer to enjoy." And then it was the old man's turn to be astonished at how perverse human beings can be!

Once he and my foster daughter and I and a few others were all sitting talking together. My foster daughter had been pestering him for days to show her his true form; and when she would ask, he would tell her, "I know who has been putting such things into your head," with a pointed glance at me. "Don't pay any attention to him; are such things possible? My real form is the one you see right here." But a woman never gives up once she has set her mind to something, and this girl pestered him and pestered him until finally he said to her, "How big was your father?" Now, her father was a very hefty man and fairly tall as well. When she told him all this he said, "Bring me one of your father's coats." She did, and he put it on. It fit him terribly, or rather we thought it would because he is so thin, but then we saw he had filled up the entire coat until it was bursting at the seams and he had become so tall his head was near the ceiling. Then he caught himself and said to her,

"If I show you fully, your ceiling will break, and you will not be able to exist," and he became his normal size again. But she had had her glimpse. Then he told her, "By seeing this have you been helped in any way? Ask me for something that is of some use to you."

Usually, however, you cannot convince him to do anything. Even if you throw the filthiest language at him he will say, "Those are all old words; why not try to think of some new ones?" He loves to play about and can be really jolly sometimes, but look out when he means business. For giving spiritual knowledge, there is no one to beat him anywhere in the world; even my Junior Guru Maharaj admits it. And if you ask him for spiritual knowledge, he will ask you in return, "Are you ready to be flayed alive?" meaning, are you ready for all your karmas to be ripped from you? If you say yes, you will suffer more terribly than you could ever dream you could suffer, but when you come through it you will be ready. Put through the fire, gold becomes impervious to everything, and so will you.

No one can fool him unless they play music for him. People have made millions out of him just as they have from me simply by making him hear music. When he is overwhelmed by emotion he might even give you the results of thousands of years of his penance; then later he will realize what he has done and beg some favor from you in return. He's really very sweet that way. He should be generous, having been a king. Even now some of that regality, that kingliness remains, despite the fact that when he left his throne for his sadhana he renounced everything. Nowadays, you can't even meet him if you want to; no one knows where he has gone, except me. He is by himself, and he is no longer in his normal senses. He has gone mad with love for Krishna.

He was the one to tell me that I would have to go to a guru from the south, my Junior Guru Maharaj. I call him my Junior Guru Maharaj because he is a disciple of my Senior Guru Maharaj. So I am not only his disciple, I am his *gurubhai* (co-disciple) also. He says frankly that when he was young my

Senior Guru Maharaj used to feed him and look after him. So imagine how old my Senior Guru Maharaj must be.

No one knows how old either of them are, but if you look in my Junior Guru Maharaj's mouth you will see two full sets of teeth, one row right behind the other. They say you grow a new tooth after every 100 years; I don't know. If I tell you his origin you won't believe me. When Lord Curzon was Viceroy of India at the turn of the century, archaeological excavations were going on in the state of Orissa, and in a cave in one hill they discovered the perfectly preserved body of an old sadhu. Someone thought to call a man from the Jagannath temple in Puri who knew about samadhi and such things, and after massage, and oil rubs, and I don't know what else he was able to bring the sadhu down from his samadhi and back into consciousness of the world. That sadhu is my Junior Guru Maharaj. I have met people who have known him ever since then and they say his looks have not changed in the least up to the present day, except that in some places his hair has grayed.

How I met him is a story in itself. I have always been fond of Maharajas, Emirs, and other rulers, and they have always been fond of me; there must be some link. I was trying to help a certain prince succeed his father as Maharaja, and one day I happened to ask an acquaintance if he knew of any sadhu who could help us out with his spiritual powers. He brought this sadhu to us.

At first glance he didn't look like much to me. Driving home from the railway station this prince was telling the old sadhu about how his father was ruining the administration of the state, and how well he would be able to rule if given an opportunity. Finally, the old man spoke: "So you want your father to die, eh?" And as soon as we got down from the car and crossed the threshold into the house, word arrived from Delhi that the prince's father had died very suddenly. I thought to myself, "Yes, this man has some power!"

I was broke at the time, and desperate, and there were races that day. I had decided to go and bet on the horses and sink or swim. When I told this to the sadhu he took my wallet from me and put a pinch of ash into it, and said to me, "Keep this

with you and bet on whatever you see and hear." I laughed in his face and told him, "Maharaj, this is Bombay, people are not such fools here to believe such nonsense." See and hear, indeed! Still, I kept the envelope in my pocket and left for the races.

Because he had insisted on sitting and chatting with me, I was late to arrive and missed the first three races. I started cursing him because my choices had won two of those races. Unnecessarily I had wasted my opportunity to make money just because of some old fool and his ash! I decided to go back to him in the evening and beat him black and blue.

While I was mired in this depression, I was standing under a tree near the bookies' enclosure, and I suddenly heard something telling me to bet on a certain horse. At first I didn't believe I was hearing it, but once I believed, I decided to see what sort of a horse it was. Well, on the racing form it was hopeless; besides that, the jockey, Ghuman Singh, had never won a race in his life. I thought, "When he doesn't know what he's doing, why should the old man try to show off? How can I waste money on his guesswork?" I decided to bet on another horse, my own choice, and told the number, which was seven, to the clerk in the betting window. He accidentally gave me six fifty-rupee tickets on the horse whose number I had heard; his number was eight. When I realized this mistake I bellowed to change the tickets but it was too late; the race had started and the shutters on the betting windows had slammed down.

I started cursing the old man more vehemently than before: "My last 300 rupees, which I've been saving for an emergency, and I've wasted it! What did I do to be introduced to such an unlucky old man?" Running this thought over and over in my mind, I sat and watched the horse win. I couldn't believe it; I was rich! He paid 70 to 1. Incidentally, that was the one and only race Ghuman Singh ever won in his entire life.

I had to admit my mistake, and I started listening to the voice much more seriously. Over the whole day I made 59,000 rupees, and after the last race I went to a bar on Charni Road and had a few more than my quota of drinks. I had made up my mind: "I must keep a tight grip on this sadhu; he can make millions for me!"

It sounds ludicrous, doesn't it? But I was desperate for money. Of course I could have gone to the smashan and collected millions without working up a sweat, but I will never ask money from a spirit. Here was an old man, though, who seemed ready to provide me with winners just for the asking, and he would bear the karma! It seemed too good to be true.

When I got back to the sadhu he became wild with me the moment I stepped through the door: "Ha, how dare you drink, what do you think of yourself?" and so on. I coolly took the money I had made, laid it at his feet, and told him, "Maharaj, please take as much as you like; just agree to help me again next week."

This only made him wilder. He told my friends, "Go make him vomit and give him an enema." They worked me over so well that by midnight I was almost sober again. When I went back into the sadhu's presence he was still so infuriated that he took his fire tongs and gave me two whacks squarely across the right temple: ptak! ptak! And then he told me, "Did you take birth for things like this?"

I had to tell him no, because those two blows gave me partial memory of my previous births, and I understood why I had been born where I was and what was expected of me in this life. This is why I respect him as my guru: not because he initiated me into a mantra, but because he helped me remember who I am.

Maybe I should explain one thing here. Gambling has a catastrophic effect on the mind. Meat, alcohol, sex: these all cause temporary ruination of the consciousness, but the effects of gambling are permanent. If a man earns money at gambling what does he spend it on? Rich food, alcohol and other intoxications, and women. If he loses money what happens? Envy, hatred: "That fellow cheated me, he was out to get me, now I'll show him, I'll ruin him." The man becomes a cutthroat, literally, if he is of the lower class of men, because he kills to regain his losses. Or, if he is more refined he kills his enemy economically. Gambling is one of the three karmas which cannot be obliterated in the same lifetime. The other two are murder of the guru and rape.

This being the case, how can both my Junior and Senior Guru Maharajs have helped me through gambling? First of all, they never encouraged me to gamble, and they have always done their best to prevent me from doing so. But in both these instances they knew I was out of money and this was the most convenient way for them to help me; and they wanted to convince me of their abilities as well. And don't forget: this was really nothing like gambling. They knew ahead of time what was going to happen, and they just handed that information over to me. It's more like collecting interest on an investment than gambling. They do have to suffer for using their powers for such trivial things, of course, because no one is exempt from the Law of Karma. But they know how to minimize the penalty, and they don't bother about such minor troubles. And besides, they are not in the habit of doing it daily; once only, to serve their purposes. And very strange indeed are their purposes.

By doing this they saved me from an evil fate. I just told you that gambling is a permanent disease, and it was as true for me as for anyone else. But they cured me of it. Not that I gave it up altogether; I still bet whenever I see a good thing, or when one of my own horses is running, and I enjoy directing how my horses work and deciding which races to run them in. It's a wonderful sport — horse racing.

But I was an inveterate gambler, uncontrollable; and my Junior Guru Maharaj brought me under control. I gamble now, but gambling doesn't control me like it once did; I control it. This does not mean you should gamble. I have known only a handful of people to enter the racecourse and then leave it again before losing their money, character, or balance of mind. I was exceedingly lucky, because my Guru Maharaj was willing to take my evil karmas on himself. He knew exactly how to deal with them. Truly, my mentors are wonderful, and they have always been so gentle and kind to me, I don't know why.

My Junior Guru Maharaj can also be extremely strict when necessary; no mistake about it. There was one Behari Das who lived near him several years ago. Behari Das was a good Aghori, but something of a bully: he would trouble all the other sadhus in the area. They would come down with diseases, and Guru

Maharaj would cure them. Behari Das came to know what Guru Maharaj was doing and his ego was hurt: "Who is this fellow trying to undo what I do? I must kill him." But how to kill him? Guru Maharaj doesn't eat or drink, so there was no possibility of poisoning him that way. Does he smoke ganja? Yes.

So, one day Behari Das came to meet Guru Maharaj and told him, "Maharaj, I have decided that I must make you smoke this chillum of ganja as a token of my respect for you." I happened to be there at the time and I immediately knew what Behari Das had in mind. I said, "Why should Guru Maharaj take anything from you? I will smoke it."

Behari Das got wild: "Who are you to interfere? My desire is to see Maharaj smoke this chillum." Guru Maharaj said to me, "Don't worry, Babuji, I'll smoke it." The chillum was lit, and in two puffs — only two — Guru Maharaj finished the whole thing and then put it big end down on the ground.

Then Guru Maharaj said to Behari Das, "Behari Das, I know why you wanted me to smoke that chillum; I know what sort of love you have for me. Unfortunately for you your time is up. You have only five minutes left. Now get out of this ashram." And in five minutes he was dead. As for Guru Maharaj, he had to suffer terribly for six months: boils on his body, dimness of vision, and so on.

I have also been troubled by such people. There is a fellow in Bombay who has tried to poison me three times with ganja mixed with arsenic, aconite, and so on, and each time he lands himself in the hospital and then begs me to cure him. But I also have to suffer for some time; that is just the way things work.

My Junior Guru Maharaj is really an unusual old man. He has roamed all over the world, but no one knows how he does it. When one fellow asked if he had been to London he replied, "Yes, they have a railway there that goes under the ground; I've seen all those things." And when this fellow asked him how long ago he was there he told him, "Four hundred years." What can you say about that?

He is a type entirely different from my Senior Guru Maharaj: a miser. He will not let anything out; he is just like a stone. In



fact, he will advise you, "Become just like a Shiva Linga." What he means is, don't let anything affect you. No happiness, no sorrow, nothing: absolutely firm. When he goes anywhere he will sit in one room only, never going out or moving around. Sometimes he stays in one place for twelve years at a time. He never eats or drinks; at the most he takes cow's milk if you really force him to. And once he leaves a place he will never go back there. He is still very old-fashioned and believes strongly in purity and impurity, because he is still doing his sadhana every day. You see, he has done terrific sadhana all his life. He has done such penances that even my Senior Guru Maharaj has admitted that there is no one in India, and that means in the world, to beat him at doing penances.

He is very strict, but he loves to play about in his own way. His play is of a different age. He believes in sacrifice and he expects everyone else to also, so he will frequently cause trouble for someone in order to pull that person out of some entanglement. Of course, he doesn't actually cause the trouble. He just causes certain karmas to come out of that person's causal body and be projected. Since he always causes the bad karmas to be projected, to purge the causal body of all its evil influences, this will always lead to misery.

No one wants to accept responsibility. They want to enjoy all their good karmas and avoid all the bad ones. One day a man had a nice dinner of very spicy food full of chilies, followed by ice cream. Next morning when he squatted to defecate, he screamed, "Ice cream first! Ice cream first!" Only when you are miserable will you remember God; you will never think of Him otherwise, unless you are a true saint. Guru Maharaj is here to make people remember God, not to make them rich or famous. I will give you a written guaranty, if you like, to the effect that after you meet Guru Maharaj *everything* will start going wrong in your life. That's just the way he works, the old, crude way. But that's the way he is.

Once a friend of mine came and asked me to take him to Guru Maharaj. I knew what sort of person this fellow was. He was called *Bala Yogi* ("Child Yogi") or *Kaviraj* ("King of Poets") and he used to sing devotional songs in praise of the Divine

Mother: "Jaya Ambe, Jaya Ambe" and so on. He liked most to have plenty of female disciples: you know what I'm getting at. His brother was dead, and he made a big show out of taking care of his brother's wife. Actually, he developed an illicit relationship with her. I thought it only fair to warn him: "Watch out — Guru Maharaj may do something." He told me, "Ha, you only want to keep him for yourself; why not let other people get the benefit of his powers? I'm sure he'll give me something." I had warned him; my job was over.

You know, when I visit my Guru Maharaj I don't say anything. I sit in one corner. When I feel like it I get up and walk out. Everyone else thinks that I am very rude and insolent and very foolish for not sitting with him. Only he and I know what is going on. When he was last in Bombay he would make everyone go to sleep and then we would exchange the notes in our own way, a way in which words are not required.

I am most shameless; I fight with my Guru Maharaj. I tell him, "What is the use of an ashram? The whole world should be your ashram." Then he gets wild on me. It is only in the past few years that he has had an ashram, and only now his hair is starting to turn grey. It was always jet black before.

So, this friend and I went to Guru Maharaj, who was in Bombay at the time, in 1959. Now, you don't need to tell anything to Guru Maharaj: all he has to do is look at you and he knows every bit. And this fellow made another mistake; he started to recite Sanskrit verses to Guru Maharaj, trying to show off his wisdom. Guru Maharaj is a man who after being dug out of that cave spent twelve years on the branch of a tree doing japa, never touching the ground even once; could this man teach him anything?

Suddenly Guru Maharaj smiled, scribbled something down on a piece of paper, and handed it to my friend, telling him, "Keep this with you always. Wave incense before it daily, when you sit for worship, sit on top of it, then put it under your pillow when you sleep." As we left, my friend smiled knowingly at me and said, "So Guru Maharaj did something good for me after all." But I knew better. I could see that Guru Maharaj was going to have this man's hide.

What happened? Kaviraj went directly to his sister-in-law's house to celebrate with a little sex. But as soon as she saw him she shouted, "How dare you drink bhang and come here? Get out!"

He looked at her and said, "But I never drank any bhang today." She screamed, "Don't say anything to me, just get out. I never want to see you here again!" and she gave him a beautiful pair of slaps, and shut him out of the house. He spent the night on the front steps and had to do without his morning tea as well.

The next morning he came crying to me: "Look what that Guru Maharaj of yours has done to me!"

I told him, "What did I tell you before?"

He replied, "You must take me back to Guru Maharaj so he can free me from this."

We went back to Guru Maharaj, who heard all the complaints and then said to Kaviraj, "I did it to clean out your karmas." Kaviraj said, "But I never asked to have my karmas cleaned out!" Then Guru Maharaj told him, "If you are tired now, take that piece of paper and throw it into the sea." He did, and afterward he was reconciled with his sister-in-law and continued with his life as before. And whenever anyone would ask him about Guru Maharaj, he would say, "Please, he really put me in the soup. I don't want to hear about him."

After Kaviraj left the room, I asked Guru Maharaj, "When you know these people can't take it, why do you do such things?"

Guru Maharaj laughed and said to me. "No, Babuji, that was a Yantra I gave him. If he had kept it he would have broken off from that lady for good and would have quit all his evil ways. Then he would have had to turn to God. He knew so many verses and sang such nice songs, he should have been made a saint."

It's useless trying to argue with Guru Maharaj. He thinks he is still living in a previous era, and he expects everyone else to act accordingly. It is true that when your plans go wrong you have to turn to God, but that is the old, crude method; no one will put up with it today. Nowadays only those people who can't be successful at anything else turn to God: "Asamartho

bhaves sadhuh" (A man fit for nothing else becomes a sadhu), but what is the use of that? Still, Guru Maharaj goes on feeding bitter medicine to whoever comes to him. People curse him, but he never bothers about it. Very few will ever be able to understand his play.

In spite of all this, I still fight with my Guru Maharaj. Once when I went to meet Guru Maharaj, he was talking to a businessman from Bombay. The businessman was sitting there with his mistress, ignoring the fact that Guru Maharaj is very strict about those things. His morality is of another age. Why, when he came to Bombay and saw a woman driving a car, he was so shocked that he told me, "Babuji, now I know Kali Yuga is really here." I don't know what he would do if he ever saw a woman flying an airplane.

As I was about to enter I saw a lady crying on the steps outside the room. I have done sadhana of Ma all my life, and I just cannot bear to see a woman cry; it is as if my own Mother is crying. So I asked her, "Ma, why are you crying?" She told me, "Sadhuguru (meaning Guru Maharaj) will not allow me to enter his presence today." It was because she was in her periods.

Then I lost my temper. I stormed into the room and asked Guru Maharaj what he meant by forcing the lady to sit outside like that. I told him, "She is only menstruating. I am an Aghori. I worship menstrual fluid because it has the power to create. Though you have performed Aghora sadhanas you seem to have forgotten all that. A woman cannot conceive before her periods commence or after they cease, so the power of creation lies in that only. Can you create?"

"Not only that, you are sitting here with a woman who is no better than a prostitute, and you have the nerve to tell this poor lady who has come so many miles to see you that she may not enter the room. Who do you think you are?"

The fellow whose mistress I had insulted tried to protest, but Guru Maharaj told him to be quiet and said to me, "Wah, Babuji, you have really become a true Aghori now. Your Aghora has become perfect. I only told her to wait outside because I am doing a certain ritual for which I needed to observe purity, that is the only reason. Please don't misunderstand." He just

smiled at me and shook his head, and then I lost all my anger also. He is really a wonderful old man.

I can afford to argue with my Senior Guru Maharaj as well as with my Junior Guru Maharaj because they are something different from all the saints and sadhus that you will ever find in India. But even they have to respect my real mentor. I won't tell you His name; I will just call Him "my Mahapurusha," because I love Him as my own. Even though I have treated those two as my gurus, they have never given me a Guru Mantra. My Mahapurusha is my real guru.

You know, I have seen all the big so-called saints, but none of them interests me after knowing Him. If you ask my Junior Guru Maharaj about my Mahapurusha, Guru Maharaj will say, "He is God Himself." If you ask my Senior Guru Maharaj about Him, tears will come from his eyes and he will say, "If you can give me only a glimpse of Him, I will make you the richest man in the world" — and he can do it, too. My Mahapurusha is thirty feet tall — yes, thirty feet. His eyes are the size of your hand. His head is as wide as your chest. I used to sit in the palm of His hand very comfortably, as if I were a pygmy, and we would play together — at a time when I weighed 210 pounds. Once He said to me, "I want to sit on your lap." My God, what a fright I got; I was afraid my bones would break! But when He sat down He did not have the weight of even a rose petal; it was just as if a feather was there.

My Mahapurusha believes in gratification, satisfaction, so that no stain of desire is left. Sometimes we would be sitting in Girnar and He would say, "Let's have lunch at Maxim's. Close your eyes." I would close my eyes, and when I would open them we would be at a good table in Maxim's in Paris appropriately dressed, He reduced to ordinary human size. We would have a delicious twelve-course lunch there, and then — back to Girnar.

One day I had just finished a tough ritual, and I was sitting around kind of bored when He came up and said to me, "What are you doing, moping around like that? Come on! Let us have our worldly enjoyments!"

I asked, "Where are we going?" He said, "You be quiet and

close your eyes." I did, and when I opened them we were in Spain. I got the shock of my lifetime. We were both dressed like Spaniards, and we went to a night club. So many beautiful *senoritas* were there. We danced the tango with them all night long. All the men gathered at the sides of the club and glared at us! So jealous they were! And *La Paloma* was playing. After tangoing for some time, my Mahapurusha looked at me warningly, and then we went outside and zip! Back to Girnar. Worldly enjoyments along with *sadhanas*; what a guru!

He is far, far ahead. I used to smoke twenty pounds of ganja a day, because I know the mantra which nullifies the bad effects. But He has no need of mantras. No one can know Him. Don't even talk about it. When He would sit with the sadhus in Girnar, He would take His pipe — an elephant's tusk — and fill it full of ganja. He would light it and finish the whole pipe-full in one puff, throw the pipe high into the air, shout "Jai Girnari!" and vanish. He has no limits at all.

Once we were sitting together in a circle, and one old fakir began to complain that there was no one around who could do miracles like the great saints of the old days could, especially the art of creating gold.

My Mahapurusha didn't say anything to him, but pointed at the Nandi of a nearby Shiva temple and said, "Get up!" The bull, which was made of stone, stood up. My Mahapurusha told him, "You've been hungry for so many ages. Now eat!" And the bull ate some of the green grass growing near him. Then, "Drink!" The bull took a long drink of water. Finally the bull was told, "Go over to that old fakir and give him what he wants!" The bull ambled over to the fakir, who had opened his mouth wide in amazement in the first place. He turned his behind to that astonished old man and defecated — pure gold. When he had finished he was told, "Now go back and wait," and he went back to his pedestal, sat, and became completely stone again, waiting for the next time he would be awakened.

The old fakir had tears in his eyes, but my Mahapurusha was gone. His method of teaching is something else also; something quite different. First He makes you sit down, tells you to close your eyes and then gives you a good slap with His left

hand. You go into a trance and when you wake up, after a few hours or a few days, He is gone, but you have learned everything about the subject He was teaching you. Don't ask me how. Of course He never eats or drinks; His only enjoyment in life is to smoke ganja. Once a poor girl came to Him. Her parents had been beating her because she was hungry and had been stealing food from them. He told her, "Ma, why do you worry? Take this, and you will never have to eat or drink again." He gave her a pinch of ash from His bag, and what He had said happened. When I was in Girnar, I met her, and she had never eaten or drunk anything from that day onward.

But my Mahapurusha has left Girnar, and no one knows where to find Him, except me. He belongs to me, and I belong to Him; we are pals.

It is thanks to my Mahapurusha that I have achieved whatever I have achieved in this lifetime. He has looked after me well since I was born, through the medium of Haranath Thakur, my parents' guru. Years before he ever met my parents or became a guru, Haranath was traveling in a one-horse shay through Kashmir when at a stop along the way he suddenly fell down. He knew he was dying, and he did die.

When he was dead my Mahapurusha came to him. He never knew who my Mahapurusha was; I was told the whole story later by my "Big Daddy." My Mahapurusha said to him, "Do you know you are dead?"

He said, "Yes."

"Do you have any desires left?"

"Yes, I want to meet my Mother."

Then my Mahapurusha cut his body into sixty-four pieces and threw three pieces away. Can you guess which three pieces were thrown away? The Three Gunas: *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. He put the other sixty-one pieces together again and suddenly the man came back to life, and was given instructions by my Mahapurusha. Eventually he became my parents' guru, and in that way my Mahapurusha could look after me while I was growing up. Haranath always used to tell my parents, "My boy," meaning me, "will move about in fine suits of clothes and no one will ever know him."

It is only thanks to my Mahapurusha that I have survived for so long here in the world. It was He who sent me back here from Girnar, otherwise I would never have left. And now, whenever I hear "La Paloma" I am reminded of Him. People have made millions of rupees out of me just by playing "La Paloma," because whenever I hear it I am overcome with love for my Mahapurusha, and in that outpouring of longing for Him somehow the work gets done. I could not bear living for even a moment in the world if it were not for Him supporting me. If you had ever lived the free life of a sadhu you would know what I mean. To have lived free and then to be caged up is enough to kill most wild animals; it would have killed me, had not my Mahapurusha had some work He wanted me to do. Let any other being in the universe come to me and I don't bother with them; for me, only my Mahapurusha exists.

## DEVOTION TO THE GURU

Do you know the story of Meera, the great devotee of Krishna? When Krishna stood before her in all his bewitching beauty, as a result of the method she had been taught by her guru Raidas, she composed a lovely Hindi couplet on the spot: "My guru and my beloved deity Govinda both stand before me; to whom shall I first prostrate myself? I must pay my first respects to my guru, because it was he who showed me Govinda." Such devotion always pays dividends. Meera understood how important it is to have a guru; how much the disciple owes the guru. Most knowledge you can pick up from somewhere, but until you put it into practice it remains as a mere intellectual understanding. The guru forces you to learn it, he rubs your face into the ground until you learn it, if he is a real guru. That is why I say that none of the people you have in America can be classified as gurus. They teach a little to the students who come to them, and they collect money for it.

If you are interested in making money out of someone you can't afford to offend them or else they'll immediately run away to someone else. A real guru doesn't care for money: he wants

a disciple he can be proud of. And he will tear that disciple to pieces if necessary in order to make sure that certain lessons get learned. Then when that disciple gets an opportunity to meet a deity, or a Siddha, or some other Mahapurusha, there is no question of the disciple making the wrong choice. The disciple's own personality has been so effaced by the guru, the false e-y-e (eye) consciousness has been so thoroughly crushed, that the disciple must make the right choice, and then he or she is made; there is no question of a doubt.

Eknath Maharaj was one of the greatest saints Maharashtra has ever produced. His guru's name was Janardan Swami, and in fact today people only know the name of Janardan Swami because he was Eknath's guru. This is the play of guru and disciple.

*Eknath* literally means "one master," and that fit Eknath perfectly. He was totally devoted to Janardan Swami. While still a boy Eknath had heard a voice from the sky telling him to go to Janardan Swami, so he walked the 200 miles from his hometown to Deogarh where Janardan Swami was the ruler of the fort. For a number of years Eknath served Janardan Swami faithfully without being taught anything at all about spirituality. He never objected, never complained.

After some time Janardan Swami put Eknath in charge of the treasury. One night Eknath had some trouble balancing the books. His accounts were off by a single pie (a fraction of a cent). Late into the night he sat, trying his best to locate his error. When he suddenly discovered the elusive pie his joy was so great he shouted. This woke up Janardan Swami who came in and demanded to know what the boy was doing up so late at night. When he was told the story Janardan Swami said to Eknath, "My son, if the discovery of a single pie which has been lost can cause you such great joy, can you imagine what your joy would be if you discovered God?"

Eknath replied humbly, "Maharaj, I don't know how to go about looking for God. Will you teach me?"

A few days later Janardan Swami told Eknath to accompany him on a trip outside Deogarh. The Swami was riding a horse, and Eknath had to run along behind it for fifty-five miles, dur-

ing which time he did not get the opportunity to drink even a drop of water. Eknath did not complain.

Late that night as Janardan Swami and his disciple sat quietly together in a lonely place, an unkempt man trailed by a dog came up to them. Handing a bowl to Eknath he held him to milk the bitch and bring him the milk to drink. Even though Eknath had had nothing to quench his thirst all day long he was not tempted and brought the bowl back to the man, who drank it down. He then made Eknath milk the bitch again, and this milk he gave to Janardan Swami. When the bowl was empty he told Eknath to go and wash it in a nearby stream.

Eknath had not been told anything, but he was convinced that the man was none other than Guru Dattatreya, the guru of the Naths, because Dattatreya is always accompanied by a dog and always affects a wild appearance, to scare away ordinary mortals. So Eknath poured a little water into the bowl to wash all the remaining drops of milk into the bottom and then drank down the mixture. Immediately he could see the man in his true form, and yes: it was Dattatreya himself. Dattatreya was pleased with Eknath's cleverness and blessed him. That was enough; Dattatreya's blessing was precious to Lord Shiva Himself, so what effect must it have had on Eknath? And this was all thanks to his unflinching devotion to his guru.

If you are out to locate a guru it is best to look for a real one instead of all the fakes that are around nowadays, but it is not essential. If your desire is strong enough and your heart is pure enough Nature will teach you Herself if need be. Remember the story of Ekalavya from the *Mahabharata* (the great Indian epic poem)? Dronacharya refused to teach him archery so Ekalavya went out and made a statue of Dronacharya and worshipped it as his guru. He worshipped it so hard and so well that the statue began to teach him, and he actually became a better archer than any of the direct pupils of Dronacharya. Dattatreya himself had twenty-four gurus: birds, animals, beings who didn't know they were teaching him. By observation alone he learned what they had to teach.

However, it is much easier to have a human guru. You must test your guru thoroughly to make sure he can teach you, but

once you accept him as your teacher you must stick with him. There is no use in running from guru to guru; you will end up falling between two stools. Find one and stick to him. Don't be like the swan, who when her pond dries up flies off to find another one. Be like the moss, which dries up along with the stone which it covers. The moss sticks to the stone in good times and in bad times, without trying to calculate whether it is profitable or not.

Remember that when you love a guru you are not loving his external personality; you have to love his perennial personality, the Shiva-consciousness which he is trying to instill into you. That means that you are actually loving yourself; the Self is loving the Self. Instead of attempting to love the entire universe you try to learn to love one person properly, because the Atma is the same in every being. And remember that no matter how much you love, or think you love, your guru, he loves you much, much more because he has already learned how to love the Infinite. He is trying to make you into his own guru: the One.

Once a moth, circling around a lamp about to make the fatal plunge, spoke to the flame: "What do you know of love? All you do is stand there as I whirl about you until I can no longer bear to remain separated from you and I embrace you. And in the moment I embrace you I am consumed, burned into nothingness."

The flame smiled and replied, "You fool! Do you call that love? Look at me; I am burning. You burn only when you embrace me, but in my longing for you the pain of my separation from you has transmuted me into fire itself."

This is what should happen in real life. A disciple may think he really loves his guru and has done a lot for him, but the disciple is too stupid to realize that his guru is absolutely burning to give something to him, to give his essence to the disciple. At first a disciple is nothing better than a prostitute; he flits from object to object, teaching to teaching, guru to guru, like a fly who enjoys sweets and filth equally. Little by little the "child" loses his taste for other things and slowly develops devotion to his mentor. Only then does he realize that his

guru is his all-in-one, one-in-all. Only then can the "child" merge with the mentor and receive what the mentor wants so intensely to give.

How many people can understand the play of guru and disciple? Almost no one. If the disciple himself can't understand it, how will some outsider be able to? And this is true of all disciples, even those who may be great saints on their own, like Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The first time Ramakrishna Paramahansa visited Benaras he exclaimed that he saw heaps of gold in the city. He did not mean metallic gold, of course; he meant the gold of minds filled with the power of discrimination. When he visited Telang Swami, Ramakrishna was overcome with spiritual bliss and said openly, "I see before me the incarnation of Shiva," meaning that Telang Swami had so perfected himself that there was no false personality remaining; all had become Shiva-consciousness.

Then he tried to speak with Telang Swami, but Telang Swami was observing complete silence, though he did deign to answer Ramakrishna's questions by means of gestures alone. Ramakrishna repeated, "I see before me the incarnation of Shiva, but this is a selfish Shiva," meaning that he was unwilling to part with any of his knowledge, to teach it to others. Ramakrishna was blind to say this. Can God ever be selfish? God is always magnanimous; if He isn't, he isn't God. That's all there is to it. Telang Swami did not bat an eyelid, but decided to teach Ramakrishna Paramahansa a lesson. After Ramakrishna returned to his home in Dakshineswar, a village near Calcutta, he began to become restless. Now, Ramakrishna was one of the greatest saints the world has ever produced. He achieved success at sadhanas of Jesus, of Mohammed, of so many forms of God, but his success started with sadhana of a form of Kali called *Bhavatarini*.

He became very restless, so he asked Bhavatarini Ma, "Ma, You have showed me so many sadhanas of God with form, and also of God without form, but You have never showed me anything of Tantra. I want to learn about Tantra. Send me someone to teach me about Tantra." And thereafter, one day, a woman called the Bhairavi Brahmani arrived in Dakshineswar

and proceeded to teach Ramakrishna a bit about Tantra. And who was she? A little disciple of Telang Swami.

When all of Ramakrishna's Tantric sadhanas were over he had occasion to go back to Benaras. Telang Swami dragged him without his knowing it. Ramakrishna had one of his devotees cook up an immense quantity of rice pudding, about ten gallons, and with his own hands Ramakrishna fed the entire amount to Telang Swami in thanksgiving. Telang Swami, who was a true Siddha, had no difficulty in consuming the whole cauldronful, but did not bother to look at Ramakrishna. And that was the last sadhana Ramakrishna Paramahansa ever did; Tantra was the culmination of his sadhana. He did have to suffer for calling Telang Swami selfish, though; he developed cancer of the throat eventually, and died. It is never wise to insult Shiva, as that priest of Benaras learned about Telang Swami so many years before. So Telang Swami taught Ramakrishna a good lesson, didn't he? Just because he did not move his lips did not mean he was not teaching Ramakrishna; he did it with his fingers. Then he caused Ramakrishna to develop the desire to learn Tantra. There was no need for Ramakrishna to have such a desire otherwise. It was all the play of Telang Swami, who contacted him from a distance and disturbed his mind to demonstrate what child's play it was to direct his consciousness. It was all the magnanimity of Telang Swami; otherwise Ramakrishna would never have had the opportunity to learn Tantra.

## GURU AND DISCIPLE

You know, getting a good disciple is a real boon. To get a good guru is the best blessing, no doubt, but to get a good disciple is really rare. The Rishis of course bring their own with them when they come, just as Krishna and Ramakrishna Paramahansa did.

Once Matsyendra Nath, the direct disciple of Adi Nath, who is Lord Shiva, wanted to test his pet disciple Gorakh. You know, for a sadhu his dhuni (fire) is his TV. He looks into it and can know anything that is going on anywhere in the world. One

night as Gorakh was sitting on his dhuni he saw his Guru Maharaj in Assam in the company of dancing girls and thought, "Oh my God! Guru Maharaj has become entangled in the samsara! He is in danger of losing everything that he has gained through his penances! I must go and save him. Matsyendra is mine, he belongs to our tribe of Nath. He is not meant for these things." Gorakh had intense possessive love for his Guru Maharaj.

So Gorakh journeyed to Assam, disguised as a minstrel. When he located his guru, Matsyendra, he was drinking wine and had two girls in his lap, one on each thigh, with a hand on one breast of each. Gorakh, still in disguise, began singing a song: "Look, Matsyendra, Gorakh has come; remember who you are and forget this Maya."

But Matsyendra did not want to leave. Gorakh literally had to force him to start the long journey back to Girnar. Along the way, Matsyendra went off for a bath, leaving his shoulder bag with Gorakh for safekeeping. Gorakh thought that it felt quite heavy, and when he opened it two gold bars fell out. He became wild and thought to himself, "What is wrong with my Guru Maharaj? He is a Nath; he can piss on a rock and turn it into gold. I will not allow him to become entangled in Maya," and he threw both bars as far as he could into the jungle.

Finally they arrived in Girnar and Gorakh said, "Now Guru Maharaj, do you remember who you are?" He was feeling very proud of having walked 3,000 miles to save his Guru Maharaj from the clutches of the world.

Suddenly Matsyendra Nath passed his hand over Gorakh's head, and Gorakh Nath realized that all that he thought had happened had been an illusion, and that in fact neither of them had even left Girnar. And then Gorakh Nath realized how foolish he had been to imagine that his Guru Maharaj could ever become enmeshed in Maya. But Matsyendra loved his disciple all the more, seeing that Gorakh loved his guru enough to search him out and force him back to his senses.

Of course you can't expect ordinary people to play about like Aghoris do. Only Aghoris really know how to play about — and Nath is Aghoris, nothing else. But to understand their

play is extremely difficult. The ordinary seeker feels revulsion when he hears about using wine in rituals or seating a naked girl on the left thigh with a hand on her left breast and her hand on his penis. That is how Dattatreya got rid of all his so-called disciples except one, who became the Adi Nath. Dattatreya was the guru of Lord Shiva himself, the Lord of Aghoris.

Of course Dattatreya is too good, but other Indian gurus have learned from his example and have made use of it to test their own disciples. I know of a case which happened in Girnar. There was a Muslim fakir who had 1,000 disciples. When he was about to die, his disciples all began to pretend to love him a lot. So he said to himself, "Is that so? I'd better teach these buggers a lesson."

So, the next day he announced, "I have decided to leave this world, but before doing so I have a desire to have sex with a female donkey. Then I'll be ready to die."

Of the 1,000 disciples, 990 said, "Guruji has gone crack," and left him. Only ten remained, thinking it was some sort of joke. The next day the fakir said to them, "Now, please collect the money necessary to buy the donkey." Then those ten realized he was serious, and seven of them left saying, "What can this man know when he is entangled in such worldly desires?"

Three remained, and the next day the fakir said to the three, "By my astrological calculations I have determined a good day. Now, be prepared with the donkey." Another departed after this speech, leaving two. After the donkey was brought one of the two boys realized that the old fellow was going to go through with it, and he too got fed up and left. The fakir looked at the sole survivor and said, "What are you waiting for? Better go now."

The boy said, "Oh no, my Lord, I want to see how you do it with this donkey."

"All right," said the old man. "Bind her legs nicely so that she doesn't kick me." After this was done he said, "Now, lift her tail so that I can have a clear passage."

As soon as the boy touched her tail the donkey turned into a

beautiful Shakti, a Yakshini, who went and sat on the fakir's left thigh. The old man said, "Now, take this Shakti, and she will teach you what you want to know." When the Shakti had passed from the fakir to the boy, the old man died.

There is also the story of the head of a Hindu monastery who was getting old and nearing his end. As usual, many of the sadhus in the monastery were anxious to become *mahant* (abbot) to get their hands on the lands and money that belonged to the monastery. So the old mahant was not sure who should succeed him.

Finally one day he stood up in the middle of his assembly hall and said, "How many of you would like to become mahant?" When almost all the sadhus there indicated that they would, he turned to his throne and said, "I curse this chair that whoever sits in it will be a pauper and will be eternally ill, but will achieve all the Riddhis and Siddhis (supernatural powers)."

Well, suddenly, none of the sadhus were willing to sit on that seat. Only one person in the whole hall, the young boy who swept the floors and who had become a disciple of the old man only a few days before said, "I will," because he said to himself, "If I need to I can use the Riddhis and the Siddhis to produce wealth." And when he sat on the throne he immediately received the old mahant's Shakti, which astounded all the old cronies of the monastery. So, the ways of these Indian gurus are not very straight.

You know, actually even though that disciple who was ready to help his guru have sex with a donkey achieved something, he was still not a really good disciple. If he had been a good disciple he would have told his teacher, "No, I won't let you go. Stay with me. If you've created one Shakti you can create more. I don't want to possess Shakti, I want to learn how to create Shaktis." But the guru was far more clever than the disciple. He didn't want the boy to know that he could produce these Shaktis and so he manifested one in the form of a Yakshini. Then the boy thought that the Guru had merely gained the Yakshini instead of having used his own Shakti to produce her.

At least this guru permitted his disciple to pass the test. Once



there was a disciple who thought he could do anything his guru could do. So naturally his guru decided to teach him a lesson. They were traveling one day and the guru saw to it that they had nothing to eat all day long. The disciple started to forget the mantra he was supposed to be repeating and began to listen to the rumblings of his stomach instead.

At length they passed a fish seller's stall. The fish seller offered them some fish. The guru took some and swallowed them whole. The disciple did the same, even though he was supposed to be a vegetarian, and because of his hunger began to appreciate their taste. Then the guru calmly vomited up all the fish — alive. He turned to his disciple and said, "Can you do that? If not you have no right to eat. Get away from me, I have no use for fools like you."

Sometimes when a guru wants to test his disciple he can be very devious. Once there was a guru who had a disciple who had been with him for twelve years. The disciple felt that the guru was not teaching him anything, and the guru felt that the disciple was being taught nicely. One day the guru decided to teach the fellow a good lesson and make him permanently forget about complaining.

In the course of their wanderings the two came to a certain town and camped on the banks of the local river. The guru decided to have a bath before his midday meal and, accordingly sent his disciple into town to find some food. As the boy was walking about shouting, "Bhiksham dehi! Bhiksham dehi! Give alms!" he heard a parrot calling, "Come here, Maharaj, come here." The boy followed the parrot's voice to the place where he was caged and found a nice home. The lady of the house invited him in and insisted he eat while she prepared food for his guru. Of course a sincere disciple will never eat before his guru does, but this one was rather hungry, and he decided that it wouldn't matter much. When he had finished his meal and the lady had packed the guru's lunch in a box, the disciple started back for the riverbank. Suddenly the parrot called out to him: "So, you are a sadhu!"

"Yes," the disciple replied rather proudly, "I and my Guru

Maharaj are enjoying the hospitality of this town today. I am just taking food to my mentor."

"Please ask your Guru Maharaj one question," said the parrot. "When will I be free of this cage?"

"Since you are the reason that we obtained this delicious food," said the disciple, "I will certainly ask him." So saying, he returned to his guru. The guru was served his food and, on inquiring about his disciple's food and learning that he had eaten already, shook his head in a knowing way and finished his meal. Afterward while enjoying a pleasant smoke from his chillum, he asked his disciple what had happened in the town that morning.

"Well," said the boy, "as I was strolling about, shouting 'Give alms,' I heard a parrot calling, 'Come, Maharaj, come!' and when I went to investigate, the lady there gave me the wonderful food which Your Lordship has just consumed. And as I was leaving, the parrot called me over and asked me to ask you when he would be free of his cage."

As soon as the guru heard these last words his eyes rolled back in his head, he gasped for breath, he clutched at his chest, and he toppled over on the ground. The disciple thought to himself: "Now what is happening? Just when I asked that stupid parrot's question my Guru Maharaj collapsed. If I ever want to get any of his knowledge I'd better try to save him somehow." After several splashes of river water the guru regained consciousness and continued with his smoke.

Next day the boy was again sent to town to beg food, and as he passed along that certain lane he again heard the parrot's call: "Come, Maharaj, come." The disciple entered and collected the food after eating as he had done the previous day, and as he was leaving the parrot asked him, "What did your Guru Maharaj have to say in answer to my question?"

The disciple replied, "You fool! When I asked that idiotic question of yours to my Guru Maharaj he turned pale and fainted, and I thought I would never be able to revive him."

As soon as the parrot heard these words his tail feathers went limp, he paled, and he fell off his perch into the dust at the bottom of the cage with a loud squawk.

His mistress, hearing the commotion, rushed outside and with a little shriek opened the cage and took the prostrate parrot into her hands to try to gauge the seriousness of the disorder. Whereupon the wily bird flew from her hands onto the branch of a nearby tree and said to the bewildered student, "Dunce! You have been with your guru for twelve years and learned nothing, while it took only one lesson for me."

Puzzled, chagrined, and insulted, the disciple returned to his master, only then wondering how the parrot could have known how long he had been with his guru. After the Guru Maharaj had eaten his dinner, the disciple related the whole story to him while the master was having his smoke. At the end the Guru Maharaj retorted, "Stupid donkey! Don't you understand yet? I have been teaching you for the past twelve years, and you haven't even been aware of my teaching, much less tried to learn anything. And that parrot, who was my disciple in a previous birth, got the idea right away. Do you think that you deserve to be taught anything further?"

That disciple who had become a parrot must have made some mistake in order to be reborn as a parrot, right? He must have failed some exam his guru had set for him in their previous encounter. The guru had no choice but to locate him and save him, though he took his own sweet time about it, to let the disciple stew and realize the gravity of his failure so that he would not fail again.

That progression is always there. A "child" may truly love his guru, serve him faithfully in so many ways, and generally endear himself to the old man, but when the time for examination comes around the guru will forget all the "child" has done for him. You may call him ungrateful, or hard-hearted, or whatever, but that will not make any difference to him. He wants to make his disciple firm and for that there can be no wavering. Does a surgeon waver when he operates?

Let us take the simplest possible example so that you will understand what I am trying to get at. Suppose we are sitting quietly together after lunch and I say to you, "Come along, let's go see my Guru Maharaj."

Now, if you say, "No, not today, today I am rather busy with

some other work, I will meet him later," what have I learned about you? I learn that you are not too interested in progressing. If you wanted to make progress you would have said, "Yes, come on, get dressed, let my other work go to hell, I want to meet your mentor."

Whatever your answer may be I will keep quiet because I will have what I want: the result of my test. Actually, as I said before, there is no such thing as a test. This is a simple measure of the causal body. If there are still too many karmas stored in the causal body then a "child" will not get the desire to achieve, or will only get that desire off and on, not continuously. In either case more sadhana is necessary to wean the "child" from desire completely. Other gurus may work in different ways. Namdev thought that he was quite somebody, because Lord Vishnu in the form of Vitthala ("He who stands on the brick") came in person to eat lunch with him every day. One day an assembly of all the great saints of Maharashtra took place. Tukaram, Jnaneshvara and many others were there, and so was Gora Kumbhar, the potter-saint. When everyone was seated, Jnaneshvara's sister Muktabai said, "Gora, why don't you use your stick and test all of us to see if we're well-done?" She was referring to the stick which a potter uses to determine whether or not the pots are fully fired. Gora Kumbhar smiled and began to test. He pronounced everyone passed except Namdev, about whom he said, "This one will have to go back into the oven for some time more."

Naturally Namdev was angry, because he had been considering himself God's greatest devotee, and he went to Vitthala to complain. But Vitthala told him, "Namdev, Gora was right, and if you don't believe him I will also test you. I will come to you before sunset today, and you must recognize me; otherwise, you fail." Namdev agreed.

In the evening, as Namdev was out walking he saw a Chandala (scavenger) and his wife — who were really Vitthala and his wife Rukmini, in disguise — cooking their evening meal. Namdev was feeling tired and sat down to rest nearby, where he could watch what was going on. The Chandala said to his wife, "The pot is not full. Cut up the chickens and put them

in." There were twenty-five chickens, representing the twenty-five Tattvas, or essential principles of the universe. But Namdev did not realize this, and he thought to himself, "Oh, my heavens, how violent. However, it must be God's will."

After some time, the Chandala said to his wife, "Still the pot is not full. Cut up the dogs and put them in." There were four dogs — the four Vedas. Namdev should have realized this, but didn't. He thought, "Well, the Chandalas will have to endure the burden of their karmas eventually." What Vishnu was trying to teach Namdev is that when all the Tattvas and the Vedas have been killed, butchered and cooked, only the absolute, undifferentiated reality remains. That was the last lesson that Namdev had to learn. He had achieved success in worshipping Vitthala, but such worship is limited by duality, and now he would have to go beyond duality. Because of the play of Vishnu, though, he didn't realize any of this at that moment.

Suddenly, the Chandala said to his wife, "Still the pot is not full. Now let's cut up that man over there and put him in!" Namdev jumped up and forgot all about God and everything else and, remembering only self-preservation, ran as fast as his legs could carry him. Vitthala wanted to initiate him into the undifferentiated reality, by killing, butchering, and cooking: Sadguru, Karnaguru, and Upaguru.

Have you ever heard of the Sadguru, Karnaguru, and Upaguru? The *Sadguru* kills the aspirant — separating him from his mundane existence. The *Karnaguru* flays the carcass: the ego. All the accretions of untold births, the false personality, is chopped into tiny pieces. When my Mahapurusha cut Haranath Thakur, my parents' guru, into tiny pieces and removed Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas from the pile of sixty-four, this is what He was doing. The *Upaguru* cooks the ego in the fire of Shakti, and the result is a tasty dish: an enlightened being.

The best guru, of course, combines the Sadguru, Karnaguru, and Upaguru into one, like my Mahapurusha. This is what Vishnu wanted to do for Namdev — but Namdev was still not ready. Namdev stopped running after reaching the nearby village, and seeing a Shiva temple decided to go there to rest. When he went inside he saw an old man with his feet resting on top

of the Shiva Linga. Namdev said to him very sententiously, "Do you know, my good man, that you are defiling the sanctity of this temple?"

The old man looked at him and said, "My son, I am very old and infirm and cannot move my legs. Will you help me so that I can avoid angering Shiva?"

At first Namdev felt revulsion because he would have to dirty himself by taking hold of the old man's feet. But finally he overcame the revulsion, picked up the offending feet, and laid them down a short distance away.

"Nam," said the old man, "I still feel there is something under my feet. Would you just look and see?" The old man called him "Nam." He didn't call him Namdev because Namdev literally means "name of God," and the old man was insinuating that Namdev had not yet reached that state, but was still only a common name. In fact, being addressed as "Nam" irritated Namdev, but he forgot then there was no way the old man could have possibly known what his name was. It was all part of Vishnu's play.

Again Namdev unwillingly lifted the old man's legs, and saw another Shiva Linga. When he placed them down again, another Shiva Linga spring up from where the feet touched the ground. Then Namdev realized there was something more to the old man than met the eye. "Nam," he said, "tell me where Lord Shiva isn't, and there I will put my feet." Namdev embraced his feet and took him as his guru, and the old man, whose name was Vishoba Kechar, taught Namdev that though he had known one limited aspect of God he had still to learn of the universality of God.

After Namdev finished his lesson, and Vishoba Kechar sent him back to the assembly, Gora Kumbhar hit him with his stick and said, "Now this one is done, too."

No matter how your guru works, if he is a real guru he will push you to the limits of your endurance and then further. He will test you until you think you can no longer bear it, but it will be worth it because once he is finished with you, you will be ready for real sadhanas — like Aghora, for instance.

## CHAPTER SIX

# AGHORA

*When I look at someone I don't see them as they are now; I see them as they will be. Then I can try to change them if there is something in them I think I can change. If I love skin and bones how will I be able to help them? Skin and bones will only decay, but the individual will continue to exist even after death. That is why I can say that I love people not for their present value but for their future value; not for what they are but for what they will become, or for what they have the potential to become. This is an Aghori's love.*

## THE TRUE AND THE REAL

I have never believed in religion. Religions are all limited because they concentrate only on one aspect of truth. That is why they are always fighting amongst one another, because they all think they are in sole possession of the truth. But I say there is no end to knowledge, so there is no use of trying to confine it to one scripture or one holy book or one experience. This is why I say when people ask what religion I follow, "I don't believe in *Sampradaya* (sect), I believe in *Sampradaha* (incineration)." Burn down everything which is getting in the way of your perception of truth.

I also often say that I belong to the Vedic religion. But there are problems in that also. For example, the Vedantins. *Vedanta* means the end of the Veda, and the Vedantins try to distill the essence of the Veda away from the minute rituals. But sometimes they make a mess of it.

For example, the philosophers of *Advaita* (absolute nondual) Vedanta say, "Brahman sat, jagan mithya," meaning that the Universal Soul or Atma exists in reality but that the world, the manifested universe, does not. An Aghori believes, "Brahman sat, jagan sat": Both the Atma and the Samsara (the world of manifestation) are real and existent because the Samsara manifests itself directly from the Supreme Soul. If the product is impure and the process is efficient then must not the raw material be impure? But we know the Atma is pure. If all is part of a harmonious whole then all must be accepted as real. The world may not be true, no doubt. The world is in fact full of falsehood. But it is real, at least as real as you and I are. And you cannot deny your own reality, because when you do you enter a logical paradox: If you are unreal then you cannot comment on the reality or lack of it in your existence. This is all such a waste, a labyrinth of words, which does no good to anyone, and will not get you to where you want to go: to God.

Advaita Vedanta suggests in fact that nothing exists except the individual; that each of us has our own individual realities which are real only for us. That being the case, how can you communicate your experiences? It is impossible. That is why the Vedic religion, which is one of the two eternal religions, gives the same advice to everyone: "Carve out your own niche." There is no such thing as sin; we have invented sin, along with heaven and hell. You must work at your own rate of speed toward your own goal; no one is required to do anything else. You will achieve, after some time. There is nothing to worry about.

The scriptures talk about enlightenment, not because when you are enlightened you are supposed to see some clear white light, but because you have been "lightened" of your heavy burden of karmas and rnanubandhanas thanks to your own penances and to the grace of your guru. And, because you have

developed the "light" of perception so that you can "see" truth directly, without any interpreters. Vedic religion is the religion of light, the light of lights, the light of the sun, and modern scientists put the lifetime of the sun at about 10 billion years. Isn't that almost eternal, as far as you and I are concerned? So, if you are in no hurry you can afford to wait.

Very few can worship according to the rules of the other eternal religion; Aghora is too rigorous for almost everyone. Is there any limit to darkness? None. In Aghora, you embrace darkness and make it work for you. Does it sound easy? Only the senior-most Rishis can master both the Veda and Aghora.

The Upanishads have a nice little prayer: "Lead me from untruth into truth; lead me from darkness into light; lead me from mortality into immortality." What is untruth? The world, which is composed of an aggregate of limited forms. Whatever is limited cannot be true. The true is that which is beyond every limit. What is darkness? The darkness of a mind clouded by ignorance. The light is your own inner light, which is your true self. The Veda teaches you to achieve immortality without renouncing the world, but the procedures of its rituals must be rigorously adhered to. We do things differently in Aghora.

Aghora teaches you to embrace the world, embrace impurity, embrace darkness, and push through forcibly into light. You must catch Shakti by the hair and drag Her to you.

There is no life without Shakti. But everyone is afraid of Shakti: "Beware of Maya, my son" is what our present-day religions teach us. Do they realize that every individual creates his or her own Maya? It has to be this way. Maya is just the projection of Shakti into the outside world. Because you get yourself entangled in your own Shakti, you scuttle yourself. And that is why everyone fears Maya, simply because they know they can't control Her.

But an Aghori never gets entangled in his Maya. He self-identifies himself so perfectly with Shiva that he pulls the Shakti forcibly back to him. Shiva is unborn and undying, and, therefore, permanent. He is also that which is to be known, the permanent reality. From the untruth of limitations the Aghori goes to the truth of Shiva; from the mortality of earth-

ly existence he propitiates the Destroyer and becomes immortal; and by harnessing his Shakti he floods his consciousness with light. Doesn't a lamp give light to all? The oil burns, but the lamp is not consumed. This is the Aghori: illuminating everyone with the light of his own incineration, fueled by his Shakti.

Nothing is inauspicious to an Aghori. He can do Sattvic sadhana very easily, because he develops obsessive love for his deity. But Sattvic people have a hard time with Aghora sadhanas because they find Tamas very difficult to control. That is why everyone says "Aghora is extremely dangerous; you may fall and ruin yourself." It's all wrong. If you're naked you possess nothing, which means you have nothing to lose. Let any thief come; what can he take? All other paths to knowledge have traps: Once you learn a little it goes to your head, and you remain just on the outside of the truth, never making the final renunciation. The ego of knowledge is the worst trap of all. But there is no such danger in Aghora because you throw everything away in the beginning. Then there is no impediment to your perfect enlightenment. There is only one requirement: Your mind must be absolutely firm.

There, of course, lies the problem. To maintain a firm mind while a beautiful female spirit dances lasciviously on top of your body is the test of a real man. You have to die while still alive; then you can succeed at Aghora. Then let the ghouls throw live coals onto your flesh, and watch your skin char without flinching: You've given up your body as well, you have nothing to lose. As long as you hold onto that determination you are perfectly safe.

To die while still alive means to relinquish all attachments to your possessions, including especially your body. Everyone can do it to some extent. An Aghori goes all out to do it. Every morning when I wake up the first thing I do is look at my body. I see skin, muscle, and bone, and then I think to myself, "This will go. This will all go and only my consciousness will remain." In this way I inoculate myself against being attached to my own existence.

## RESTRICTIONS

If you want to die while you are still alive you have to restrict the three things which most bind us down to the body: food, sleep, and sex. The Naths (a tribe of immortal Aghoris) have a prescription for spiritual advancement: "Break up your sleep, and cut down your food." No matter how far your mind may soar into the astral regions while you are awake, once you go to sleep you erase all the benefit. Sleep is very much like death, just less permanent. It is the overcoming of the mind by a blanket of dullness.

Food makes you sleepy by filling you up; sex exhausts you, it makes you sleepy by draining you. Aghoris cannot afford the luxury of relaxation; they have to be sharp at all times. They work all night long in the smashan, where drowsiness makes them much more susceptible to attack from spirits.

Food and sex also both make you more conscious of your bodily processes. In fact, in the case of all three — food, sleep, and sex — the more you get of them the more you want. Other desires can be eliminated by gratifying them, but these three desires have to be carefully regulated. If you eat an entire chicken today does that mean you won't be hungry tomorrow? No, you'll be hungrier. If you sleep nine hours today you're likely to sleep ten hours tomorrow. And it is the same way with sex: The more you get of it, the more you want of it. Until you begin to at least curb these desires you will never make any permanent spiritual progress. Write it down; it is impossible. All your gains will be continuously wiped out by your indulgences. And worse, if you ever permit yourself to be tempted in the smashan, you've had it.

Consider this indulgence: Sadhus and other spiritual aspirants are forbidden to drink alcohol; some are not even allowed to take medicine which contains alcohol. Aghoris, however, drink; but only because they can master the intoxication. You must drink the drink; you must not let the drink drink you, lest you become its slave and be lost. You must always retain your control.

What is the use of drinking and becoming drunk? You slob-

ber all over yourself while you run off at the mouth to whoever will listen, buying them drinks if necessary so they'll listen. Then you gorge yourself on a big meal, and probably vomit it back up. Eventually you get into a fight, make a pass at somebody else's wife, or pass out.

Alcohol makes you extroverted, but this extroversion must be firmly controlled. Most people permit the drink to drink them: They allow their conscious minds to be overcome by all the little yeast cells crushed after the fermentation process is completed. Yeast cells undergo such agony during the crushing operations that a great current of Tamas is created by their unvoiced screams in the resultant alcohol.

When I want to drink I always allow a drop of the drink to fall on the ground before I begin, as an offering to Mother Earth. I am asking Her to redeem all the wretched little yeast cells. When She does, each cell becomes filled with the transcendental wisdom and blessing of the Mother, and by my consuming them, I do too! When I offer that drop I repeat a certain mantra and then say "Prajvalita!" because both the yeast cells and I should have our intellects become *prajvalita* (enkindled). By doing this the alcohol enkindles my Bhuta Agni and enables me to soar into the astral regions. Anyone else who drinks will enkindle his Jathara Agni which will increase his appetite and drag him further and further down into physical consciousness. *Jathara Agni* is the fire which digests our food; it is the body's power of digestion. *Bhuta Agni* is associated with the subtle body; it enkindles and inflames Jathara Agni. When the mind is disturbed the Bhuta Agni is weakened, which weakens the Jathara Agni. This results in indigestion, which causes disease.

The Bhuta Agni acts as the digestive fire for the subtle body, except that the subtle body does not live on food; its food is *Japa* (recitation of mantras). If you want to become spiritual you must preserve and protect the power of Bhuta Agni so your spiritual practices will be properly digested by your mind. So many Western seekers have ruined themselves physically or mentally by overdoing mantras or pranayama or whatever before they were strong enough to digest, to properly make use of, the energy they were creating. Because the Bhuta Agni gives

energy to the Jathara Agni, when one is strong the other must necessarily be weak.

If you want to enjoy mundane life to its fullest you will need a strong, well-nourished body, for which you must keep your Jathara Agni well inflamed. And, the best way to increase the power of your Bhuta Agni, your "spiritual digestion," is to do exactly the opposite: eat less. As your physical hunger decreases you will find an increased mental hunger for knowledge, and as you find you can only digest smaller quantities of food you will find that you can digest many more new things mentally, and vice versa. Sleep and sex will generally dull both Jathara Agni and Bhuta Agni. No, there is no escape, to make permanent spiritual progress you must make your Bhuta Agni predominant.

## INTOXICANTS

In an ordinary person the consumption of alcohol will lead to an enkindling of the Jathara Agni. Ayurveda recognizes this and prescribes medicinal wines when there is a need to increase the appetite and promote digestion.

An Aghori, though, is not an ordinary person. Aghoris do not live to eat. An Aghori who drinks must drink not to lose his consciousness and become more enmeshed in the world's Maya, but rather to dilate certain brain cells to increase, not decrease, the awareness. Alcohol should sharpen your mind so much that a problem which might take hours to think out in the normal state can be done instantaneously. It's the same with every other type of intoxication also: if you can't control it, don't do it; you're sure to scuttle yourself.

When an Aghori takes a lot of intoxicants he feels like going to the smashan and being alone with his thoughts. He becomes more introverted; he feels like telling everyone he meets "Leave me alone!" And if he covers himself with ashes and remains naked and shouts obscenities, no one is likely to come near, and he can be in his mood all day long. This is one of the reasons why Aghoris act the way they do. I used to do it myself.

Aghoris are thrill seekers; that's it in a nutshell. When I went to the U.S.A. in 1981, what was the thing I most enjoyed? The roller coasters! Especially "Space Mountain" at Disneyworld and the old wooden roller coaster at Circusworld. I could stay on a roller coaster all day! That rush of speed, that excitement! Most people just scream and forget it, just as most people who drink get drunk and pass out, and most people who indulge in sex have an orgasm and go to sleep. But what is the use in that? That is mere bodily indulgence. To be an Aghori you must go beyond all limitations, and the biggest limitation is the limitation of the body. When we Aghoris use thrills, intoxicants, and sex we use them to go beyond the body. It is the same way with music. Maybe if I use music as an example you'll understand what I mean about intoxicants and sex. Music is vibration, just like mantra. You can use it to benefit your sadhana. Any music will work, if it has a nice melody and a good rhythm. I love Jim Reeves because he has both melody and a good rhythm, and also pathos. I enjoy Spanish and Caribbean tunes, and I will even listen to some rock music, though much of it is too violent for my purposes. Some of our bigoted Indians say, "Only Indian music can make your mind more meditative," but that is all bull. It is true that our Indian rhythms are far more advanced in complexity than are the Western ones, and our tunes are much more intricate, but there is something about Western music which makes it particularly useful for getting into certain frames of mind.

Meat is also an intoxicant, by the way. It is just as intoxicating as music, alcohol, marijuana, or sex. But it involves killing a sentient being, which I don't like; I am fond of animals. Besides, when you eat meat you must be in a position to ensure that the animal gets a higher rebirth, if you don't want to be stained by karma. So it is better to avoid it.

There are three important reasons why Aghoris love to take intoxicants. First, it is a question of challenge and response. It is a contest between the Aghori and the drug: Who is stronger? Will the drug be able to overcome the Aghori's will and drown his consciousness or will the Aghori be able to control

the drug's effect and bend it to his will? The exhilaration of such a duel is a sublime intoxication in itself.

Second, if the Aghori is able to master the intoxication, the force of the intoxicant magnifies the force of his concentration, since the mind is a chemical phenomenon. As the concentration is strengthened, the image of the deity which is being continually formed in the subtle body is made firmer and clearer, and this brings success at worship all the closer.

Third, Aghoris always worship Shiva, Who loves intoxicants. This has a dual-purpose effect. Not only does the Aghori please Shiva by offering Him the intoxicant, but the very act of taking the intoxicant helps the Aghori self-identify with Shiva, since permanent intoxication is one facet of Shiva's personality. Shiva is intoxicated with Samadhi-consciousness: We have to work up to His level gradually.

Most people never realize that the purpose of intoxication is to sharpen the mind. They take marijuana, then eat heavily, then enjoy sex. They will enjoy penetration for one minute and think that they are copulating for years because of the drug's distortion of the sense of time. It's all such a waste.

Aghoris take all sorts of intoxicants, some much worse than these. It is a part of the sadhana. I used to keep a cobra and let him bite me on the tongue every hour, just for that peculiar thrill. To feed him I had to put a small hole in an egg and then forcibly pour the contents down his throat. The idea that cobras drink milk is ridiculous. I had several cobras, including one albino who had three lines on his hood: the symbol of Shiva. I kept a king cobra also. Its poison is much deadlier than that of other cobras because its diet is nothing but other cobras. I used to keep white arsenic also, and lick one of the crystals every hour or two. For my marijuana and hashish I had a special pipe made from a particular type of clay into which I had mixed arsenic, aconite, Datura seeds, opium, and whatnot. It was a chillum, about a foot long. Beautiful! I used to drink twenty-four hours a day sometimes, and go through cases and cases of Scotch. I drank it neat, straight from the bottle. But after a while I began to think "What is the use?" I have stopped most of my intoxicants, though I sometimes still drink alcohol or use bhang.



One of the big disadvantages of intoxicants is their side effects. Smoke chillum after chillum of marijuana or hashish and you are bound to develop a terrible cough, and probably chronic bronchitis. Drink bottle after bottle of whisky and your liver must suffer. Drink bhang and become chronically constipated. And long-term use of arsenic or mercury? Don't even ask about it. But all these substances have their own special advantages, which is why Aghoris put up with all the disadvantages.

Most people think tobacco has nothing but disadvantages. They are so wrong. Tobacco is really a marvelous plant. Nowadays it is being misused by everyone because very few know how to use it properly, and that is why there are so many side effects. Poor tobacco is blamed, instead of the stupidity of the user. If it is properly employed it can work wonders. It has 100 important uses in Ayurveda. Do you think that the American Indians were fools to worship it? Never! They knew what it could do.

But there are even better intoxicants. The Rishis used to take *soma*, which is a type of leafless creeper. Some people today think *soma* was the poisonous mushroom *Amanita muscaria*, but that was also merely a substitute for the real thing. Only the Rishis know what the true *soma* is, because only they can see it. It is invisible to everyone else. Before taking the plant the Rishis would first worship it on an auspicious day and take its permission. If the plant refused its permission it was left alone. If it said "Yes," if it was willing, then they would make sure the plant would take birth as an animal after its demise. Then they would gather it with the appropriate mantras.

If you want to use an intoxicating plant and can't collect it yourself with mantras, you have to add a mantra afterward if you want it to have the proper effect on you, and if you want to avoid the karma involved. Taking an intoxicant without its appropriate mantra is certain to ruin your Bhuta Agni, and your mind.

Sometimes some of my "children" have started using alcohol or marijuana, thinking they could imitate me. But they have all landed in trouble, because without knowing the method you

just can't fool around with these things. Even those of my "children" who I allow the occasional use of intoxicants have gone beyond their limits sometimes, and I have had to be strict with them.

One boy I am very fond of started thinking he was a great Aghori because I would permit him to take intoxicants with me. I decided he should be taught a lesson for his own good to prevent him from going overboard before he was able to gain complete control.

Someone had given me some charas, and this boy was anxious to try it out. You know, charas is not the same thing as hashish. Hashish is the pollen and resin of the cannabis plant. Charas is prepared by taking the fresh fleece from a slaughtered sheep, stuffing it full of this resin, and burying it in the ground for a month. The fat from the sheep and the lanolin from the fleece mix with the resin and liquify it, and the liquid drips into a little pot. After a month the pot is removed, and there you have charas.

I prepared this charas for the boy personally, mixing it with tobacco and rubbing it with my hand in a little water, and I warned him; "Don't inhale too hard. This sort of charas gets a firm grip on your head very easily. I know you've taken plenty of intoxicants in your life, but this one is different. Beware!" But he ignored my advice, as I knew he would, and he and I started puffing away.

Within five minutes — only five — he realized he had taken too much; but it was too late. He began to lose all his body consciousness. His *prana* (vital force) collected in his throat, which prevented him from wagging his tongue. He was game for it, though, I must admit. He started to try to make the *prana* go up to the *Ajna Chakra* (the energy center between the eyebrows) and then out through the *Sahasrara* (the energy center at the crown of the head) — gone for good! Had he succeeded he would have gone into *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, a state in which he would have been permanently unable to self-identify with his body.

But I could not permit that to happen. After all, he still has plenty of *rnanubandhanas* to clear off yet, and if I prevent him

from doing that, I become responsible for clearing them off myself. No thank you. So I told someone to give him some water. Drinking that glass of water kept his prana right there in his throat, unable to go up any farther. Of course the charas was still pushing from below. Now he was in the *Trishanku* state: unable either to go up or to come down. He was neither in the world nor out of it; he lay suspended between the world — the lower five Chakras — and the true *Shunya* (state of “spiritual vacuum”) of the Ajna Chakra. So that he would not forget his lesson I permitted him to remain like that for several hours, while I went to the stables to see my race horses. When I got back there he was, still hovering somewhere in between. When he was finally able to talk again I asked him what he had experienced. He told me, “I felt as if I was on the threshold of forgetting everything; as if just a little farther and it would have been only Thee and Me, and from there onward only Thee — or maybe only Me.”

“Wait, wait,” I told him laughing, “there is still time. Don’t be in a hurry. To go up fast is fine, but to come down too fast is fatal.” And since that day he has always taken his intoxicants according to his capacity without permitting them to overcome his conscious mind, even by *Shunya*. You must work very gradually with this intoxication business; Rome wasn’t built in a day, you know.

Now, obviously, when I prepared that charas for him I added a mantra to it. Otherwise do you think the charas would have sent him into *Shunya*? If that were so, all the charas addicts in the world should be enlightened by now.

One thing I always make sure to do is to take the antidote for whatever intoxicant I use. Ayurveda, our ancient Indian medical science, has provided us with methods to limit or eliminate the side effects on the body which these intoxicants cause, so that you get only the intoxication and none of the evil repercussions on your body, or almost none anyway.

Even with all these precautions, however, your body will deteriorate when you take intoxicants, because your mind becomes partially free of the constraints of the body: That is the whole purpose of becoming intoxicated. Your mind works so fast that

your body can’t keep up with it, and it becomes flaccid, loose. The less the mind self-identifies with the body the better for your sadhana, but the worse for your body; your physical health will give way to improved mental health. Or at the very least you will remain healthy but you will lose weight and fitness, because you are sitting all day long without exercise or food. But then you don’t care two hoots for your body because you find your mental play much more satisfactory.

Of course it is very good to possess a body when you take intoxicants; it acts as something like a sheet anchor when you want to retain your awareness. When you are ethereal you have nothing to hold onto, and other ethereal beings can play havoc with you if they catch you unaware; the possibilities are really frightening. But when you become really firm in your subtle body there is nothing to fear.

Until then, though, you need to have a strong, healthy body to withstand everything you will be going through. Don’t get me wrong; I was a wrestler myself, and I appreciate the benefits of a good physique. And this is another reason I discourage people from taking intoxicants: You have to be very healthy first and have done a lot of physical and mental cultivation before you can afford to get involved in this intoxicant business. Otherwise you’ll just make yourself toxic. And remember, the brain is a chemical matter, and each toxin produces a certain state of mind. So if you are not intrinsically healthy the intoxicant will not only not make your mind soar into the astral regions but it will create new brain toxins, which will overwhelm your mind with disturbing emotions, which will ruin your sadhana. So it is usually better to leave such things alone.

Aghoris believe in reducing sleep to the absolute minimum, because during sleep there is a possibility the mind may slip out of your control. All your careful precautions during waking will come to naught if you get caught up in a dream. Either you must suppress sleep absolutely or you must learn to control your dreams. There exists a plant for this purpose. Make a paste of it and apply it nightly to the soles of your feet. If you do it for thirty nights, or even forty nights, every night you’ll

get the same dream. It is a type of intoxication; the toxins from the plant are affecting the same brain cells each time in the same way. This is necessary for the sadhana of *Svapneshvari* (Goddess of Dreams). Once you get Siddhi of *Svapneshvari* you can control your dreams or stop dreaming altogether. You can also control the dreams of other people, which can be very useful.

Once one of my friends had taken Aghori Baba's stick for some work. When I asked him for it he refused to return it. I sent *Svapneshvari* to him. When she comes to someone she comes in a dream; her face can't be seen. She warned him to return the stick or face the consequences; he ignored the warning. This was repeated three or four nights in a row. Then *Svapneshvari* came to him and told him, "This is your last warning. If you don't return it, you're heading for big trouble." When he woke up in the morning, he found a handprint in blood on his pillow. He obstinately refused to return the stick even then. The next night *Svapneshvari* came to him and said, "Now you have gone too far; take your punishment." The next morning he and everyone in his household woke up with high fevers, which would not go down; no medicine could cure them. He returned the stick, and then the fevers subsided.

There are plenty of other uses of *Svapneshvari*, but any way you look at it wakefulness is better than sleep. Intoxicants can be extremely useful in sadhanas, or they can ruin your consciousness. It all depends on how you use them, and to use them correctly you have to die first.

## TO DIE WHILE STILL ALIVE

To die while still alive means to eliminate all involuntary stimulation of your senses. You cannot salivate when you see a nice roast. Do dead men feel hunger? You cannot become aroused, even mentally, when a stunning woman walks by. Can a dead man get an erection? And remember, once you get involved in this there is no limit to the amount of testing which will be performed on you. You will be tested to your limit.

To die while still alive means you must melt your bones. Why are some spirits depicted as skeletons? Because when the body dies and decomposes the bones still remain for them to self-identify with. To melt your bones means to lose the ability to perform any action with your own individual will as opposed to the cosmic or divine will of Nature.

Do you remember the story of Sagal Shah? The Aghori who was brought to Sagal Shah's home had to be carried in a basket; he had so thoroughly given up action on his own that he was, in effect, boneless.

They say that three creatures have no bones: the earthworm, the madman, and the God-intoxicated man. To be an Aghori you must become just like an earthworm, completely boneless, so that you can be tied in knots and still not suffer. When a cyclone comes through, trees are uprooted, but the grass bends down and escapes.

To die while still alive means to dry up, to become desiccated. Dry herbs are usually more useful than are fresh ones; they gain in potency as they dry. It is the same with an Aghori. He or she dries up and loses all the juices which are necessary to maintain life. Physically it means your digestive juices dry up, your reproductive fluids diminish, your skin may even become harder and wrinkled, especially if you live in a smashan for months at a time.

But the mental effects are more important. Remember, the entire world is a smashan for an Aghori: Everyone is born with their death fixed, which means to an Aghori that they are all dead already; they are all already skeletons. The juices which must be dried up are all the juicy thoughts which keep you bound down to the world by perpetually producing desires. If you can dry these up mentally you can do whatever you please physically; if you can't you will have to observe some preliminary discipline and restrictions. But only when these juices of desire have dried up can the *real* juice of life — the *Amrita* (nectar of immortality) — be obtained.

To die while still alive means to extinguish all thought of dualities. The Universal Soul is single, not dual, so you must eliminate all perceptions of duality: desirable and nondesirable,

pleasant and painful, interesting and boring, and so on. Does a corpse care about anything? No, not a thing — and you must become a corpse, in the eyes of the world, if you want to succeed at Aghora.

## THE LEFT-HAND PATH

Why do they call Aghora the Left-Hand Path? Look at the difference between the right and left hands, at least in Indian culture. The right hand takes the food and drink to the mouth, performs religious ceremonies, makes offerings, and does everything else auspicious. The left hand must perform all the inauspicious activities: cleaning the excretory orifices, even killing animals. And almost all the people in the world are naturally right-handed. Aghora is the mastery of all actions, inauspicious as well as auspicious. Left is always more intense than right, because the left side of the body is controlled by Shakti. This is why a man's wife must sit at his left side when they perform rituals together. Left-handed people are really good in their chosen fields, especially music.

An Aghori forgets the meaning of "inauspicious." Orthodox people think that corpses, skulls, and menstrual blood are filthy, and that anyone who would use them for worship is insane or worse. The very thought of eating human flesh nauseates them. But an Aghori finds these things extremely useful to him.

To become an Aghori is to accept everything in the universe as part of the Atma, but you don't just jump to that stage directly, because you could never cope with it without a satisfactory preparatory period. You must do things stepwise, just as a child does his schooling. You don't ask the child to take an examination in algebra on the day he learns addition, and in Aghora you always start with the basics and work up very slowly, unless, as in my case, you start at the top. But this is exceedingly rare.

An Aghori is awarded his diploma only after he becomes fearless. What should he fear? Not only spirits, ghouls, and what-not, but the entire working of the Samsara. Do you have any

idea how many murders occur every minute on the face of the globe? How many rapes, how many robberies, lootings, tortures, and other heinous crimes? How many times each second people are cheated, misled, duped, and made fools of? When you try to put it all into perspective, it's too much; it will frighten you, when you think of the tremendous load of karmas. Once you have Jnana, and you know the consequences of each action, you will be so scared of karma you will think a thousand times before doing anything at all; so deep will be your fear.

But you must go beyond this fear and realize that it is all part of the whole, all moving according to Nature's sublime plan. Every murder, every cruelty has its significance. You must love everything taking place in the Samsara. That doesn't mean you should go out and murder, but you will realize that even murder is just part of the play of the Three Gunas, all due to the Law of Karma, and therefore a part of Nature.

A good test for an Aghori is this: When you can eat your own feces with real love for it, you have achieved a tiny bit. I don't mean perversion; I am talking about true oneness with all existence. You have produced the feces; it is a part of you; you enjoyed eating the food which produced it, and the only thing between the food and the feces is you. Why should you find it so repugnant? Feces is just as much a part of the Atma as your body and your consciousness are; who is feeding what to whom? The Atma is feeding the Atma to the Atma: It is all the play of the Atma. When an Aghori reaches this stage, he eats whatever he finds: dead dogs, offal, slops from the gutter, his own flesh. He finds whatever he eats equivalent to the tastiest dishes, all because he does not falsely discriminate. He sees everything as One; no attraction or repulsion. When the body demands food, he eats whatever is available.

Aghoris eat human flesh, but not because they have become cannibals. There is a ritual involved. I have eaten human flesh many times; even my son has eaten human flesh. I used to wait at a funeral pyre until the skull would burst — it bursts with a fine "pop" — and then I would rapidly, to avoid burning my fingers, pull out parts of the brain, which would be a gooey mass, partially roasted by then, and would eat it. It was nause-

ating, but at that moment you must forget your nausea and everything else: This is sadhana, not dinner at the Ritz. There was an Aghori in Girnar named Sevadas who had specialized in eating the human brain. But after some time he left it and became absolutely Sattvic, the sweetest, softest possible sadhu. That is the true test of an Aghori: From full-blown Tamas he must graduate to pure Sattva, love for all.

When you see One in All and All in One, there can be no fear; fear of what — of yourself? “Everywhere I see, everything is Me”: a little saying I once thought up. “Me” is capital “I,” the Atma, which conveys the whole sense of the experience. If a Zen Buddhist heard it I think he would experience satori. Can you fear yourself? No, you fear only the unknown; once anything is known, the fear drops away. Once you know yourself to be part and parcel of the Atma, what is there to fear?

The worst fear of all is the fear of death; once you go beyond the fear of death, you go beyond all fears because you go beyond expectation and anticipation, which are the causes of most karmas: “I must experience this enjoyment before I die,” or, “I must prevent that person from interfering with my enjoyments.” When death has no value for you, time loses its value, and then you don’t bother about anything. Then you say, “If I am meant to experience this enjoyment, I will experience it; why bother about it?”

Once you drop fear, the whole world is open to you, because you have nothing to take from anyone; you know only how to give because you have nothing to hold on to. What can you possess when “everything is You”? You already possess everything; it is really a superb feeling.

From your high school diploma, you go on to the first two years of college: temptation. All sorts of temptations will come your way: spirits offering you fame or riches, ghouls offering to slaughter or maim your enemies, Yakshinis offering you sexual favors, any possible whim you might want fulfilled. If you take any of them up on their offers you are finished. There is only one way to avoid it: refuse. If you are really sure you are

part of the Universal Soul then how can they give you anything or do anything for you? You are being taken care of by Nature, you need not bother to accept any of these baits.

The college degree is awarded in Aghora only after the next examination: attack. When the hordes of ethereal beings find they can’t tempt you, they will try to drive you mad with their power of fright. But don’t bother; how can they harm you? You are part of the totality of existence, and your Mother is looking after you; what more do you want?

After your graduation, you are awarded your degree: clair-audience and clairvoyance. Then you go anywhere, eat anything, and you are carefree, because something is directing your every move. You become just like a Yantra. The cosmic Shakti plays through you, and you enjoy the bliss. But this is the final stage. You must start at the bottom and go through the grind.

I hope you can understand by now that it takes a special temperament to become an Aghori; not everyone will be able to do it.

And doing it is just part of it; getting out of what you are doing is even more difficult than doing it in the first place. Suppose you get involved in strenuous penances with the use of intoxicants. You can’t just quit them once you feel you’ve had enough because your body won’t be able to take it. You have to reduce them gradually. And so many Aghoris forget why they have been taking the intoxicants, and even after years they may become simple addicts, unable to give them up, ruining their consciousness in the bargain.

You know the reason I quit using intoxicants? I used to use them all day long, twenty-four hours; but then I realized that the greatest intoxicant there is exists within me at all times. It is free, easy to use, harmless, and never gives me a hang-over. It is the name of God. It gives the best concentration of mind. The effects of alcohol or marijuana or whatever will wear off by the next day, but the intoxication caused by God’s name just goes on increasing; there is no end to it. I use it all the time, and it always works for me. No matter what has been

my problem, the holy name of God has always been my solution. This is true Aghora. Forget all the externals; only when your heart melts and is consumed in the flames of your desire for your Beloved will you ever come close to qualifying to learn the true Aghora.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SPIRITS

*If a four-year-old boy were to sit on top of his dead grandmother, pick up his father's japamala and begin to do japa, what sort of boy would you say he is? You would have to say he was born to do Smashan Sadhana. I have seen a boy who did that. Why, even I, when I was a child, used to build toy funeral pyres out of twigs and matchsticks; it's an inborn tendency in someone who is meant to be an Aghori.*

### SPIRITS

The true nature of Aghora sadhanas has always been a closely guarded secret, given by a guru only to his most trusted disciples. They have to be secret, because they are not in the realm of the written or spoken word. They deal with planes of existence which are unbelievably alien to our everyday lives. And ethereal beings are jealous; they don't like just anybody to find out about them. If you go around telling everyone what you have achieved you will definitely suffer.

You should always eat in private, you should always go on pilgrimage alone, when you make love there should only be the two of you present, and when you perform a ritual you must never permit anyone else to be present if you don't want it to

go wrong. This is the sensible way of doing things. One of the most basic of Aghora sadhanas is Munda Sadhana. *Munda* means skull, and this sadhana involves the use of both human and animal skulls. You prepare them in a certain pattern, cover them nicely, sit on top of them, and then do your japa. Very simple.

After you have been doing japa for awhile some doubts will probably arise in your mind: "Can there really be any use in such things?" or "Do spirits really exist?" or some such. You'll forget all about your doubt when one of the spirits whose skull you are making use of loses his temper over your persistence in disturbing his repose and throws a live coal or a heavy rock on you. You will be burned or bruised, and the pain will remind you that, yes, there is indeed some truth in the whole thing.

This is the time when you need to know how to protect yourself. Before you sit for japa you must do Kilana by drawing an ethereal ring around the spot on which you'll be sitting. As long as you stay inside that ring, nothing can harm you; no spirit can throw anything on you or harm you in any way. But the moment you step outside you are at the mercy of the spirits, and compared to what they will do to you, being flayed alive is pleasurable. Don't step outside; sit and watch the fun in safety. Slowly your confidence will develop, and you will be able to move up to more difficult sadhanas.

Sadhana of a spirit means enticing it with things it likes and then maintaining it with mantras. You must perform Kilana and Stambhana. Both mean "to fix something in one place." *Stambhana* is the first, temporary fixation, and *Kilana* (literally, "nailing") is the permanent attachment. If you want to hang something on the wall, first you decide where to put the nail, you put the nail in the appropriate spot, and then you hammer it in. Here, the spirit remains with you as long as you follow all the rules appropriate for the particular sadhana. One mistake and all your work is undone.

And remember one thing: No one likes to be chained up. And no one likes to do work for anyone without being paid for it. So unless you know exactly what you are doing, you will someday make a mistake, and then all the chickens will come

home to roost. Some people think they are very clever to do sadhana of Yakshas and Mokuls to force them to do work, but I think they are the biggest fools, because they become dependent on these spirits, who are really our servants and must be treated appropriately.

If I ask my servant Dhondu for five rupees he will give it to me. But even after I pay him back, when I try to dismiss him he will tell me, "I'll go, Saheb, but to think there was a time you needed to borrow five rupees from me and I lent it to you. Now you're telling me to get out. What sort of man are you?" Then I am completely lost; my honor is smashed beyond repair. The only way out is to commit suicide. I may ask my friends the highest deities for help, but not my Dhondu.

I draw a distinction between spirits and deities because a spirit is bound in one way or another; otherwise, why would they live in the smashan? They would locate a deity, or take rebirth, or otherwise find their own way to a better existence. But for various reasons they are obliged to remain in this intermediate state, wandering about. A deity or a Siddha visits the smashan or lives there with a specific purpose in mind but without any necessity to remain there unwillingly. I've told you the smashan is known as "Shahr-e-Khamosh," the City of Silence. Why city? Because it is not empty, as you might think: It is filled with spirits.

Of course not everyone can see these spirits. Nowadays most people's minds are so enmeshed in the slush of the Samsara that they have no subtlety of perception whatsoever. Only when your mind becomes subtle can it soar into the astral regions and begin to perceive all that is waiting to be perceived.

Matter and energy are never destroyed. Just as the astronomers can take measurements and tell us what happened billions of years ago, thanks to dim light being emitted from distant stars, all the events which happened in our universe millions of years ago are still present as subtle vibrations, which are available to anyone who is subtle enough to become receptive to them.

It is the same way with ethereal beings: Only when one has an extremely subtle mind can one perceive them. But even with

a fine mind you can't just stroll into a smashan and expect to be entertained. You have to awaken the smashan. Spirits have a different sense of time, space, and causation than we mortals do. To "awaken" a smashan means to bring it into a state where you can eavesdrop on what is going on and where you can communicate with the inhabitants if you like.

Finally, even if you have perception and you know how to awaken the smashan you should never, never, under any circumstances, venture to attempt any sadhana you might read or hear about unless you have a guru to save you if something goes wrong. Even then your guru may also make a mistake and then both of you will be sunk, but at least you have tried to provide for a safety net. Many rituals exist which can give you amazing results, and you can succeed at them very quickly, but most of them are so dangerous that 99 out of 100 who attempt them go insane or die. Spirits are not to be trifled with.

When I say *spirit* I mean ethereal beings in general, excepting deities. There are so many categories of spirits, such as those who were once human, those who were never human and can never become human, and those who might get the opportunity to become human. There are less in this last category, however, because animals don't self-identify with their individual personalities to any great extent which makes rebirth easier for them. Humans self-identify with their past lives so strongly that it takes time for them to forget sufficiently so they can be reborn, unless someone drags them forcibly into a womb.

One of the useful things you can do in the smashan is to arrange for spirits to obtain wombs, with the help of Lord Shiva, of course. You know, in the South there is a temple whose Shiva Linga is actually in the form of a human penis, made of eight different metals. When a girl is about to be married she is taken to the temple and made to sit on the Linga so that her maidenhead is broken. In that way Lord Shiva is her first husband.

It seems paradoxical, doesn't it; the God of Death being the ideal husband? There is an esoteric significance: Shiva being the God of Death is lord of all the spirits, and it is only through His grace that a spirit can be reborn on the earth. What this means, practically, to an Aghori, is that with the blessings of

Shiva you can give a child to a childless couple. It is not all that difficult if you know what you're doing. First you must go to the smashan and find a spirit. He has to have at least a little rnanubandhana with the parents, and you should try to get one that does not have such bad karmas that he will immediately be the ruin of the family.

Then you must ask Shiva for His blessing to allow the spirit to take birth. Once the blessing is there nothing can stand in the way. The spirit waits until intercourse takes place, and after ejaculation picks a sperm and actually drags it to meet the egg. After fertilization occurs the spirit ensures that the zygote is firmly implanted into the wall of the uterus. Then there is absolutely nothing to worry about. The spirit will sit at the mouth of the cervix and make sure that the baby grows to full term and that the delivery is smooth and without complications.

Now, there is a *Jiva* (an individual soul) in every sperm. But in this case the Jivas are very weak, unable to grow on their own. So the child will have most of the attributes of the spirit and very few of the Jiva, because the spirit's tendencies will be so strong as to overpower those of the Jiva. And of course the child will have less of the father's traits, because they were represented in the Jiva who is eclipsed. In this way the future personality of the child can be predicted, because the spirit is a known quantity. The spirit has little affinity for the mother and father, since most of the rnanubandhanas with them were in the Jivas in the sperms, which means the child will leave the family earlier because his rnanubandhanas are with other people.

Not only that, but you can know other things about the child because he has had the blessings of Shiva, for instance, *Dirghayuh* — long life. How can Shiva allow him to die young? Also, he will be full of intelligence, have no birth defects, and so forth.

Isn't this a fine way to do things? The parents get what they wanted: a child. The spirit gets what he wanted: a womb. Shiva is happy to see one of His spirits get a womb, and a human one at that. And by doing this you finish your rnanubandhanas with



the parents and with the spirit, and yet you perform no karma. You are just a bystander. Isn't it wonderful?

It is wonderful. Unfortunately most of the people who go to the smashan to do sadhana don't look at it in this way. They go to try to capture a spirit and make it do work for them, which as I've told you does not pay in the long run. I know; I have made mistakes, but thanks to the boundless compassion of my mentors I have escaped the worst consequences. For example, once I became fed up with having to worry about how to make money. I went to the smashan, and when I got home in the evening my cupboard was filled with piles of banknotes: 10,000-rupee notes, 5,000-rupee notes, 1,000-rupee notes. "That's right," I said to myself. "Nothing to worry about now."

The next day I forgot the key to my cupboard when I left the house. My son found it and opened the cupboard and was astounded. He ran to his mother and told her. They both felt I was hiding it from them because I had been complaining for months about the pitiable condition of my finances. Unfortunately, they succumbed to temptation and they took out one-quarter of the amount and locked it into a chest. Then they relocked the cupboard.

Meanwhile an ethereal being had told me, "Your Lordship, this is the situation. Don't lose your temper." I decided I should go home to see for myself. Once I was home I had tea, and while I was sitting with my wife and son I said offhandedly, "Oh, you know, I forgot the key to my cupboard today. Have either of you seen it?"

They both denied it, but they both darted a little glance in the other's direction, which confirmed the information I had been told by the spirit.

Then I asked for the key to the cupboard. My wife became very defensive and said, "What makes you so suspicious? Why should we touch your precious cupboard?" A guilty conscience biting. I replied, "Who said anything about your touching it? I just want to show you something." I located the key, opened the cupboard — and it was empty. I told them, "And if you open your trunk you'll find it empty also." These things are

just too dangerous to play around with; they ruin your mind without expert guidance.

I once knew one Narayan Das who had gained control of a small spirit. When I say small, I mean in power; a spirit is ethereal, so there is no question of dimension. Narayan Das used his achievement to enrich himself. I suppose it's logical: Both of us studied with Jina Chandra Suri, and Narayan Das took the old man's advice about making a pile of dough out of his knowledge.

Narayan Das would make you hold a currency note between your index finger and thumb. He would tell you, "Grip it tightly, even tighter . . .," and suddenly it would disappear into thin air. Or, he would take a banknote, make you sign it, and then say, "Go out and buy us some snacks with this." You would, and on returning you would be asked for the change. Then he would say, "You thief! Here is the original banknote in your pocket!" And there it would be, signed in your own handwriting, with the same serial number.

Narayan Das could also remove roses from cabinets, sweets from tables, and more of such tricks. But when he made a very minor mistake, the spirit, who was furious at being overworked, took hold of his only son and was about to squeeze the life out of him until Narayan Das came to me and begged me to save him. I did, since we had been fellow students, but Narayan Das died shortly afterward; a miserable death.

I could go on and on. There is a lady near Bombay who can make red powder appear out of thin air, but her daughter is crippled, and mad as well. And no one on earth can cure her, except someone who knows about this sort of thing, someone who can understand the spirits. A spirit is of the same form as the mind, so it can enter your brain and do plenty of damage: create temptations, pervert your intellect, and so on. Only if your acuity is as subtle as theirs will you be able to control them absolutely.

And remember, most spirits are miserable. They don't want to harm you, but if you come along and tease them they have every right to hit out. This is how most spirit possessions occur. Someone just sleeps under a tree or urinates in the wrong place,

and he or she gets possessed. It seems unfair, doesn't it? But if there is a spirit in the tree you sleep under, it may suspect you of ill will. We all know attack is the best form of defense, so the spirit may strike. And as for urinating, spirits have some rights: You can't just do anything to them. They don't like urine any more than anyone else does. They like it even less because they have no mouths and so cannot eat physically; they eat through their sense of smell. This is why they love incense and scent so much, and why these are so important in the sadhanas. Deities are even more refined: In addition to the sense of smell they eat with their gaze, their sweet glance. But none of them likes the smell of excrements, except the lowest possible spirits, who possess the forms of skeletons. But you definitely don't want to attract *them*, because they are 100 percent sure to ruin your mind; they are far worse than mad dogs. The spirits you want to attract hate filthy odors, and if you offer such to them, you had better be prepared for punishment. You may chain up a dog, but if you venture too near you are going to get bitten without fail if he is vicious. Always remember: Most spirits are not evil, they are just miserable, but they will attack if provoked, like a dog or a snake, and, of course, they can only take possession of you if some *rnanubandhana* is present. And what sort of possession occurs will depend on the type of spirit.

I can't begin to explain all the types of spirits, I'll just tell you about a few so you'll get the idea. There are *Pretas*, people who died without any relative to perform the appropriate ceremonies for them and who are doomed eventually to take the form of a cobra; and *Bhutas*, spirits of the newly dead who are still quite attached to embodied life. There are *Dakinis*, the spirits of women who died in childbirth and who frequently have such morbid possessive love for the child that they cause it harm or kill it so they can be with it again.

There are headless spirits, who were decapitated during life. There are the spirits of those who were murdered: hacked to pieces, buried alive, poisoned, you name it. Almost everyone who dies a sudden death becomes a spirit because there is no time to select a new life; this is why a peaceful death is so

important. There are also tiny children: those who were born dead or who died of disease or accident or some more terrible fate. There is the *Karna Pishachini*. *Karna* means ear, and when you have succeeded at the sadhana for this type of spirit, it will come and sit on your shoulder and whisper things into your ear. It knows a lot about the past, a little about the present, but very little about the future. This knowledge can come in handy when you are testing someone to learn the source of his knowledge: If he can't predict the future, he may have a *Karna Pishachini*.

Besides telling you events, a *Karna Pishachini* can protect you, and see that you get enough to eat and drink, and help out with your sadhana. But they are possessive and jealous. You try to get into a romance with someone of the opposite sex, and you and your partner will have a hard time of it. But they are very useful. Arjuna started out with a *Karna Pishachini*; so did Veda Vyasa. Once you have learned all you can from yours, your guru can remove it from you, and you can go on to something higher.

Higher than a *Karna Pishachini* is a *Yakshini*, the female form of the *Yaksha*, a male spirit almost at the level of a minor deity. *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis* were once human and were good sadhakas at that time; otherwise they could not possess such powers. *Yakshas* and *Yakshinis* were Hindus during their lifetimes, *Mokuls* were Muslims, *Angels* were Christians, but their condition and level are roughly the same. Since they were once humans, they still retain some human traits: A *Mokul* is most likely to speak to you in Urdu, a *Yaksha* will like the sort of things Hindus like, and so on. For instance, hibiscus flowers play an important part in the sadhana of a *Yaksha*. During the sadhana of a *Mokul*, a lamp filled with the pure essence of *hina*, a Muslim's favorite perfume, must be kept continuously burning. There is a type of spirit who comes to a woman and makes her fall into a stupor, what we call the state of *Tandra* in Sanskrit, and then enjoys sex with her. If you were to watch it, and I have watched it, you would see her lying on the bed, twisting and turning, oozing, enjoying orgasms, and what-have-you. In fact, she will find it much more satisfying than physical sex,

because he has no body to tire out, and he makes her enjoy much more than any man could. If the spirit is of a really high caliber, a child may even be conceived out of this kind of intercourse. It may sound unbelievable; don't believe it if you don't want to, I don't care. But it's true.

A man can also be entertained by a female spirit, and he will have more or less the same kind of experience. He will also find it more satisfying than ordinary sex. But, and here's the rub, by indulging in this you can never again be satisfied by a physical partner. You will long for your ethereal lover, and, when you die, you will also become a spirit.

This is one of the things a Yakshini can do for you. When she is satisfied with your sadhana, she will come to you in whatever form you desire: Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield, anyone you want. Have you ever heard of performing sex with a corpse? It can be done. I don't mean in the perverted sense of necrophilia, of course; I am talking about a ritual. You can call a Yakshini into a corpse and then enjoy sex with her. And believe me, a Yakshini can make you enjoy sex. If you do this five or six times the Yakshini will come to you on her own and force you to copulate with her and extract all your energy. And you can't get free of her; it's next to impossible. When you die, you become one of the fraternity of spirits, of an order lower than even the Yakshini, and you will have to work your way up from there, roaming about. You don't even have to copulate with her; just kiss her — once only — and you are finished, done for.

Our scriptures mention all the various hells, like Raurava and Maharaurava, and each of them can be identified. *Raurava*, which means "terrible" or "terrifying," is an ethereal hell. This is terrifying because anyone who is sent to such a hell is born into an ethereal womb as a spirit. Spirits have no physical bodies, and therefore they cannot die. They have no choice but to exist, no matter how painful and miserable may be their plight.

There is no time limit. They might have to wait millions or even billions of years, until a higher being takes compassion on them and makes them enter wombs. They have no hope whatsoever of escaping otherwise. Isn't this terrifying? It ter-

rifies me. It is a great blessing, perhaps the greatest, to be born human, so that you can die and move on to new things. But I would never want to perform such karmas that I would have to go to an ethereal hell after my death.

Can you guess who would go to this type of hell? Someone who had fooled about with spirits during his lifetime. Take that fellow who had spent some time with me some years back. All my friends saw how he could help gamblers by correctly predicting what would turn up, and he has helped many people become rich. He does it with spirits. He failed with me, though, and ever since his career has been in a tailspin.

As for his sadhana, his specialty was to take women who had died in pregnancy or in childbirth — Dakinis — and force their spirits to do work for him. He and his guru also unearthed the corpses of over 200 babies — most Hindus don't cremate their babies — and made them work also. Those babies; so innocent! When I think of it I go into a blind rage. They don't deserve to be used like that, to have their rest disturbed. Shouldn't they get their revenge on this man? They must, and it has already started. His guru made a mistake one day. The guru went blind, his family business was ruined, all his brothers and sisters died, his wife and children died, and he, too, died after watching them all go. His disciple made a mistake one day, and now his younger son is raving mad, worse than an animal. All his family members are cursing this fellow for getting involved in this; he is penniless. The babies are harassing him, and as soon as he dies, I can promise you, he will become a spirit, and they will have him in their power for good or until someone pardons him and helps him find a womb. Sadhanas can be dangerous.

I say it over and over again, just so you'll remember it: Playing with spirits is fun, and boosts your ego, and so on, but it is very, very dangerous; so dangerous, you cannot even imagine all the possible dangers, all the nuances of danger involved. For example, suppose a *Pishacha*, a low sort of spirit, becomes pleased with you and blesses you. You may not have asked for the blessing and yet you get it. And the only blessing a *Pishacha* can give you is that you will receive everything you ask for, and that can be so dangerous. Naturally if you are a saint or a

sadhu you may be able to take it. But even good sadhus have had to suffer, even when they had not done any sort of sadhana for the spirit, never asked it to come. Once I was in Bombay, and I started to get a mental request from someone to come to visit him in Bhopal, because he wanted to take *Agni Samadhi*, to end his life by consuming his body in flames he would create from within. He had some things which he had collected during his life, and he wanted me to be their custodian. I resisted for a few days, because I was very busy in Bombay, but finally I agreed to go.

When I got to Bhopal, he greeted me as his spiritual "heir" — and then I found out the problem. Some time before a man who was possessed by a spirit had been brought to him, and just to help the man out, he exorcised the spirit. The spirit, who had been removed by satisfying him, not by force or violence, was pleased with this sadhu and asked what he desired. I suppose the sadhu's mind must have been elsewhere because he said, "Be with me always."

Thereafter, the poor sadhu had not been able to get a single night's sleep. Every time he would drop off to sleep, the spirit would prod him awake and say, "Here I am; what do you want?" The sadhu was so exasperated he decided to end his life, which is why he had called me. I removed the spirit, the sadhu took *Agni Samadhi* anyway, and I took a truckload of herbs, Yantras, and what-have-you back to Bombay.

And when the spirit asked me what I wanted, what did I say? "Come when I call you." For a higher class of spirit, "Be happy with me always as you are now" is a good formula, but not "Be with me always." To escape from a spirit is next to impossible once you have taken work from him.

You are probably thinking by now, "Then what is the possible use of all these sadhanas if you are in danger of ruining yourself for untold aeons?" There are plenty of uses, and once again I tell you it all depends on your presence of mind and strength of will as to what you do with your success. I did these sadhanas because I wanted to know if they really worked, and I have always believed that whatever anyone else can do in the sma-

shan, I can do better. You may call it egotism or whatever, but that's the way it is.

Another reason I did these things was to help out the spirits. If you were to develop a sense of perception and you could hear them talk, your heart could not help but be smitten by the pathetic lamentations they make. Once I was in Hyderabad, and as I was walking down a certain street I heard such a noisy wailing I felt I must find out from where it was coming. It turned out there was a female spirit in a tamarind tree nearby. She had been a Muslim — spoke beautiful Urdu. It seems her husband had murdered her, and all she could do was wander about and try to find some way to get even with him.

I asked her if she would come with me, and she agreed. I put her into a small cemetery and had her repeat a certain mantra for some time, and after a few months she was able to leave, go into a womb, and be born again. She forgot all about her revenge, too. Of course, she will get her revenge eventually. Nature's wheels grind very slowly, but there is no escaping from them. They do a thorough job. By the time she takes her revenge she will have forgotten why she was entitled to it, and her self-identification with her actions then will act as a new karma to bind her further to limited existence. That's the way things are in this world.

And, of course, if you know about spirits you can help people who are being troubled by them. Once someone brought home a picture called *The Shining* and we watched it on the video. The people who made that film made some good guesses about spirits, but that's all they were: guesses. The reality is entirely different, though the picture did come close in some respects. But when I think of all the fake exorcists and all the damage they do when they really have no idea of what they are doing, I really lose my temper.

When I had my dairy in Borivali, North Bombay, the man who was chairman of the Bombay Milk Producers Association was named Magan Seth. His wife was possessed by a very low sort of spirit. Ordinarily she was a very meek and mild woman, but whenever the spirit entered her she would develop immense strength and would attack her husband. He found

this very embarrassing, and also painful, and was on the lookout for someone who could exorcise the spirit. I could have done it, but the spirit was not harming her, and her husband deserved a beating for some of the things he did. So I did not let Magan Seth know what I could do. I have never advertised myself. Not only is it beneath my dignity, but I would never have any peace if I did things openly.

Anyway, one day Magan Seth came to me excitedly and said, "I've located someone who can cure my wife!" I doubted it, but I decided to play along. A few days later we all met at my flat in South Bombay: Magan Seth, his wife, myself, my foster daughter, and the exorcist. The exorcist was a sweetmeat merchant; can you imagine it? He had offered *attar* (concentrated floral essence) by the pound to Bhairava (a terrifying form of Shiva) and thought he was quite something. I decided it would be wise to teach him a lesson. Not only would it prick the bloated balloon of his ego, it would also make him turn away from such things before he would fool around with something he couldn't handle and *really* got himself into trouble.

He was explaining, "When I pronounce the sacred syllable "Om" in the correct way the spirit will be forced to obey me and leave this woman." The sacred syllable "Om"! Who did he think he was, some Rishi? Suddenly the spirit came into the woman's body. I contacted the spirit, though not through vocal speech of course; that is useless with spirits. There is a different method. I explained my plan to him, and he was only too willing to cooperate. So as soon as this sugar butcher opened his mouth and began to warble the "sacred syllable," the woman rose from her chair, walked over to him, and gave him such a tremendous slap that he was floored. Yes, actually laid out flat on the ground.

I made a show of concern for him, helped pick him up, dust him off, and so on. Then I picked up a few incense sticks to show the spirit I was friendly. Spirits eat through their sense of smell, of course, so I was feeding him. If you throw a steak to a vicious watchdog chances are he'll let you pass, right? So I asked the spirit, "Now look, what is it you want that you are harassing this poor woman for?" He told me what he wanted

done. I said, "If I promise to ensure that it gets done will you leave her?" He said yes. I shook the incense sticks a couple of times, and he left — and she was suddenly normal again. And she has not been troubled again. It is not always so simple, of course. Sometimes the spirit refuses to leave, and then you have to resort to other measures. At least you can always control such spirits, even if you can't make them exit immediately. Then, gradually, you can usually make them see reason, unless the spirit involved is of the lowest possible category; then it is a real job to make them see reason.

One of my friends is possessed by a spirit. It was not his fault at all. He had gone to Chowpatty, Bombay's downtown beach, and decided to relieve himself under a tree. Unfortunately for him — it is all a matter of *rnanubandhana* anyway — there was a spirit in that tree who resented it and immediately he was possessed. He fell down in an epileptic-type fit. But it wasn't epilepsy; there was no tongue-biting and so on.

Eventually someone brought him to me. I was in Poona, and this fellow was chatting with us all very nicely when suddenly the spirit entered him. I told a boy standing nearby to hold our friend so that he wouldn't fall and hurt himself, but the spirit tossed that boy aside like a stuffed animal. The eight or ten men in the room then grabbed hold of him, but they also could not hold him down; he threw them off one by one.

I decided that things were going too far, so I sent a girl with some ash to throw on this fellow. It was special ash; I knew it would probably calm him down. But as soon as she threw it he slapped her, and she came running back to me, crying.

This was too much to be borne. Attacking an innocent girl! I decided it was time to teach this spirit a thing or two. I was a wrestler in my heyday, you know. I walked up to him and hit him so hard that he fell to the floor in a heap and slept like a dead man for several hours. When he got up we found that his shoulder had been dislocated. In fact, he had to have it operated on later.

That sounds cruel, doesn't it? But after that the frequency of possession by the spirit is much less, and our friend can lead an almost normal life. His shoulder is healed also. And even

when the possession is there it is much reduced. One day it happened at my place in Bombay, and I just told Ravi to sit on him and the problem was controlled in just a few minutes — although the sight of the spirit contorting our friend's features scared everyone else in the room into speechlessness. That spirit is now learning how to behave. It is not an ideal situation, but it is the best that can be arranged under the circumstances.

You can learn a lot from spirits. A *Brahma Rakshasa* is the spirit of a teacher or guru who while he was on Earth was negligent about passing all his knowledge on to his pupils. After he dies, he must station himself somewhere and wait for a suitable individual to come by to whom he can give his knowledge. If you take the knowledge from him, you should be aware of the strings which are attached to it. One is if you ever sell the knowledge, if you commercialize it, you will become a *Brahma Rakshasa* when you die. But you don't have to commercialize it. You can use it to help out other suffering beings.

Yakshinis can teach you as well. But if you really want to learn, you should go to *Gandharvas*, *Kinnaras*, and *Vidyadharas*: the celestial musicians, dancers, and pundits. These are much higher than ordinary spirits, and they can teach you their arts if they become pleased with you. Once I took my son into the jungle to a particular spot and made him listen to ethereal music; it scared him a little, hearing the music but being unable to see what was going on. Many of my friends have heard disembodied recitations of the Vedas. But to see one of these beings is more difficult.

You can see them after they take birth, though; all of them eventually make some error, however minor, which forces them to take birth in the physical world. Once a *Gandharva* or *Kinnara* comes to Earth, he or she becomes entangled in the *samsara* and then for thousands or millions of births it is impossible to regain that former state. Once back there, the *Gandharva* realizes the limitations of being a *Gandharva*, and then he or she goes higher. But to be a *Gandharva* — marvelous! What joy!

Unfortunately, whenever a *Gandharva* comes down to Earth he lives a life of misery, even though he makes beautiful music.

Look at Beethoven: a typical *Gandharva*. He achieved unheard-of heights as a musician, but he was thoroughly syphilitic, his body was full of pus, and when he died he was in misery. Very rarely, though, a *Gandharva* will come down to Earth and not ruin himself completely. I am thinking of the last Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah. From his childhood he had been quite a different type, and though he was a Muslim he used to dance with such intensity that Lord Krishna himself used to come and take possession of his body.

He had two musicians who were brothers: Kalika Prasad, who was a singer, and Bindadin, a percussionist. One day the Nawab told Bindadin, "If you are such an excellent musician, you should be able to make Krishna come and dance before me. If you fail, you will have to suffer." What was Bindadin to do? And the Nawab made the conditions even harder by saying, "You must sit in your own house and play, and Krishna should come before me." His house was about 100 yards from the palace.

Bindadin composed a new song, and told Kalika Prasad, "You go before Nawab Saheb and sing this song as loudly as you can. When I hear you singing I will start to play my drums, and then we shall see the result."

What was the result? Wajid Ali Shah forgot his identity entirely and imagined he was one of the *Gopis*, the milkmaids who loved Krishna. He began to crave for Krishna so intensely that he started to dance. He danced for three hours, unaware of his earthly existence; he went into *Bhava Samadhi* (a state of emotional ecstasy) and did not return to earthly consciousness for three days. When he finally came to his senses again, he asked what had happened. Bindadin told him, "I did as Your Highness commanded. I played, and Krishna came." Then the Nawab realized what sort of musicians he had.

What happened to the poor Nawab? All during his reign he encouraged music, dancing, perfumery, all the high arts. And the British, who disliked him for his extravagance with money, overthrew him. And what did they do with him? They incarcerated him in a small house surrounded by a sewer. The Nawab said bitterly, "What do these pork-eaters understand of me? I

have lived my life surrounded by the finest of fragrances, and they give me this." He died after a very short time.

I am sure Wajid Ali Shah and Beethoven were originally Gandharvas because they were born musicians; they began singing or playing instruments as soon as possible after birth. Whenever a higher spirit is born on Earth, some of the impressions of that celestial existence will be retained. A Kinnara, when he is on Earth, will have an innate ability to dance; right from his birth he will be light on his feet. A Vidyadhara will have an innate love for Jnana. That doesn't mean every spirit who is fond of music is a Gandharva, however. You must know how to distinguish. Once I was in Berhampur, Orissa, and I was told about an old palace which had been converted into a school. During the day there was no difficulty, but no one dared stay there at night. I immediately said I would; I had to find out what it was. And besides, I needed a place to stay.

I became wonderfully intoxicated and sat in the main hall waiting for the circus to begin. Eleven o'clock — midnight — one o'clock. I was beginning to feel it was just a case of the fertile imaginations of the local inhabitants and was thinking of going off to sleep when suddenly a young dancing girl came in to me, bowing low, and saying, "I am indeed sorry, my lord, for having been late tonight. Now we are ready to begin." Let me tell you, I have never seen such dancing nor heard such singing as I did that night: superb! About dawn, the little girl came to me again and said, "My lord, we must take leave of you; please do come back tomorrow night." I did, and for several nights thereafter; I enjoyed myself thoroughly before I left town. And no one ever found out what I had seen there.

They were all spirits, of course. The palace had belonged to a Nawab, and one night his enemies had come under cover of night and slaughtered every living being within. Now they were all spirits, trying to maintain the standards of the court as they had while alive. They were deathly afraid that I would try to remove them, which explains why they were being so nice to me. But they weren't harming anyone, and school was going on uneventfully during the day, so I left them alone.

One of the females there was a princess, and she and I took

to each other from the start. She told me, "Why don't you keep me with you?" I said, "How can I? I'll be going away before too long." Then she indicated to me the place where her skull was buried, and I unearthed it, cleaned it, and kept it with me. She was with me for quite some time; her dancing was something superb. Spirits are infinitely more faithful than humans. Once a spirit loves you he or she will never desert you no matter what. Can you say that about any human you've ever met?

I don't know why, but I have always had good relations with spirits. Even the most vicious spirits try to harm me only very rarely. Once I was in Bihar, and at night I saw an unusual procession: several naked women carrying torches and charcoal braziers. They were *Chudails*, a very low type of spirit, and it is said that after seeing them you cannot survive. But nothing happened to me. Last year in Bombay I was driving along when I saw a group of people carrying a corpse and running. The corpse's head had slumped to one side, and there was a sickening fixed grin on it. Again, *Chudails*. No one else in the car could see it besides me, but again, nothing happened. Maybe it has something to do with my years of sadhana in the smashan.

My suggestion is, if you ever happen to propitiate a spirit, accidentally or intentionally, don't use it to make ash fall from your hands or any other such tricks. Take a lesson from the story of Tulsidas. He found his deity, Ramachandra, with the help of an ordinary spirit.

Tulsidas was in the habit, after relieving himself in the early morning and washing up, of pouring any leftover water on a nearby pipal tree. After forty days of this, the spirit in the tree said to him, "Now I am pleased with you; what can I do for you?"

Tulsidas said, "I wasn't pouring water here to please you; in fact, I never knew you were here. I was only doing it out of love for the tree."

The spirit replied, "That's all right, still I'm happy. What do you want?"

Tulsidas told him, "All I want is to see Lord Rama."

The spirit said, "If I knew the location of Lord Rama, I would go there myself. But I can do one thing for you. I can send you

to Anjaneya, and he can take you to Rama. In a certain place a recitation of the Ramayana is going on, and a group of lepers comes daily to hear it. Anjaneya is always the first of the group of lepers to arrive and always the last to leave. Catch him, and he will show you Rama. That's the best I can do for you."

Tulsidas did as he was told and watched a few days to make sure the same leper came first and went last. When he was satisfied, finally, one day he waited until the recitation was over and grabbed the leper.

The leper, struggling to get free, asked him, "What are you doing, you fool? Do you want to catch my disease?"

Tulsidas said, "Yes, I want to catch the disease of devotion. Take me to Lord Rama or kill me if you can't; I don't want to live."

At the mention of the word *Rama*, Anjaneya immediately understood. And, it was not long before Tulsidas located Rama, all thanks to an ordinary spirit in a pipal tree.

You should treat a Yakshini in the same way. Don't look at her with eyes of lust; treat her as your own mother, and she will treat you as her son and love you maternally. When the Yakshini accepts you as her child, then you can ask her, "Ma, won't you show me where I can find Anjaneya," or a Yogini, or a Siddha, or whatever. She probably won't know — if she did, she would be there herself — but she may know where to tell you to look, like Tulsidas's little spirit did.

One of my old pals pestered me for years to teach him some rituals. Eventually I initiated him into a mantra which allowed him to handle the most venomous snakes with ease and even to cure snakebite, but that was not enough for this fellow; he demanded more.

I knew there was a rnanubandhana between him and me regarding transfer of knowledge so I did try to oblige him. I made him go out one day and sit on a rock at the seashore with a vessel full of water next to him. I told him, "All you have to do is offer water to whomsoever comes to you."

He said, "Ha! Don't worry! It is all over now, but I will go through with this just as a formality." He was so sure of his

success. All I could do was shake my head in disbelief. I went off to sit nearby to watch over him.

After some time an old woman walked up to him and asked for water. He could do nothing but look at her with his mouth agape and his arms and legs shivering. He couldn't move a muscle. Again she asked him, "Please, my son, do give me just a sip of water." No response. A third time she asked, and a third time she remained unanswered, and then sadly she walked away, while this fellow remained as insensate as before.

I went over to him and said, "Well, what about the formalities?" Unfortunately, he couldn't answer me; he was still speechless with terror. I tried a second time to make him do it, but the same drama was repeated, and then I just told him, "You can't do it, it's just not in your destiny; why don't you realize that?" And since then I have never tried this with anyone else, because I know what the result would be. For your information the old woman was not an old woman at all but a Yakshini. I told her to come as an old woman, because if she had come as a young girl this fellow would have run amok and tried to climb on top of her, and then he would have really ruined himself. And who would have gotten all the karma? Me! So I washed my hands of the whole affair and said, "Nevermore!"

I had felt like there was a good chance my friend would have been able to relate to the Yakshini as a mother, and she would have taught him so many useful things. This fellow was not an ordinary individual, by the way: He had already done several million japas of a mantra for Ma, so I was just trying to accelerate his spiritual progress, but it was not meant to be. Even though she was in an old woman's form my friend could still sense her tremendous power, and he simply was not strong enough to endure it. Not that there was any real danger: That's why I was present, to watch over him. And besides, I had put the Yakshini up to it so she would not have ruined him.

I can't repeat it often enough: Don't fool around with spirits. When this fellow could not endure a Yakshini in spite of his years of penance, what will you be able to do if even a small



spirit comes up to you? And spirits are really the least significant of ethereal beings.

Of course if you have a competent guru, the matter is different. And that is why I will always salute my own mentors; they were wonderful, really amazing. They taught me everything very systematically. For example, sadhana for deities is hundreds of times more difficult than is sadhana for spirits. Deities are higher, no doubt, but what is the use of knowing about them if they are too difficult to reach?

You have to use your brain. If you can first succeed at the sadhana of a spirit, that spirit can help you with your sadhana of a deity. Both you and the spirit will be benefited; isn't that better?

Or, if you like, you can do sadhana of a Yogini. There are sixty-four Yoginis, who act as companions or handmaidens to the Great Goddesses; Smashan Tara is one of the Great Goddesses. The Yogini can teach you a lot herself; she can make you immortal, take you to the Himalayas and bring you back in the twinkling of an eye, and make you succeed at other sadhanas. And with her introduction a productive audience with one of the Great Goddesses is certain.

I have always preferred female spirits and deities to males, for the simple reason that I always look at every female, ethereal or human, as if she were my mother. All females are facets of the Divine Mother, after all, and you can't go wrong this way. When your mother is pleased with you there is no end to what she would do to promote your prosperity, physical or spiritual. That is the sublime nature of maternal love. I think this is the best way to do sadhana, especially in Aghora.

Can you understand now why Smashan Sadhana is the best of all sadhanas? The longer you sit in the smashan the more you learn about death, which will teach you about life. Some of the things you see there are heartbreaking, but you must go beyond them. There is a sadhana done in the smashan, only on one certain night in a year. You repeat a particular mantra, and hundreds of dead children will flock to you. Hundreds; some murdered, some crushed in accidents, some who fell to disease. They will crowd around you and cry, "Give us! Give us!"

Then you must cut your finger and throw blood to them, just a bit, to satisfy them. You should have made preparations for forty to forty-five kilograms of sweets, and when you throw them to the children, they will catch them; it's a sight to see! After they've all eaten you ask them, "Have you had enough?" They will say yes and ask you what you want.

Here comes the dangerous part. If you ask for anything, eventually they'll come back and extract work from you, and you'll never be able to take it. Don't even ask for knowledge or for help in finding deities. If they volunteer information, OK, but not otherwise. If you ask even one question, you are bound to repeat this procedure each year on the same night; if you don't you'll never know what hit you. And if you take work from them, be it stock market fluctuations, races, or whatever, you'll get it in the neck.

So never ask anything. On the contrary, try to help them out. They are only children! Can any parent take anything from his or her children? Of course, nowadays parents expect their children to slave away for their whims and fancies, but they are not real parents. Treat these children as your own children. Suppose you saw your own child in such a predicament; could your heart bear it? Wouldn't you forget any danger to your life and try to rescue the child? You would if you were a real parent. You can help these children out by doing sadhana for them. Everyone will be benefited by it. Your own sadhana will be made firm by the effort, your rnanubandhana with the kids will be snapped, and when they are able to locate wombs and be reborn to continue their evolution the blessing they'll give you is something unique. You cannot purchase such a blessing or the satisfaction you will derive from seeing a child smiling, even with billions. And you will come closer and closer to the deity who hates to take children, the Lord of the Smashan: Mahakala.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# AVISHKARA

*One of my friends once asked me, "Is there ever one moment of the day when you are not doing Avishkara?" What could I tell him? Does he know the wonderful joy of Avishkara? He can't imagine it because he does not really know how to love.*

## AVISHKARA

When I say that spirits can be helpful, I am sure you cannot imagine all the ramifications of such a statement. Let me explain it in this way. Why do we Hindus worship stone or metal or wooden images of our deities? We are not worshipping the image; we are requesting the deity to come in His or Her ethereal form and take possession of the image, where we then concentrate our worship. We treat the image as a living being, because a ritual called *Prana Pratishtha* is performed in which *prana*, the life force, is actually transmitted into the image.

You don't just take any image and try to add prana to it. The first thing you must do when you want to perform a Prana Pratishtha is *Bhuta Shuddhi*. That is, you must clear out all the filthy, troublesome spirits. I don't say "evil" spirits because no spirit is really evil. But some are so miserable they will try

to harm you without any reason just as a mad dog bites whoever crosses its path. After Bhuta Shuddhi is done, then *Bhu Shuddhi*, purification of the ground where the image is to be located, is indicated. Only when everything is purified should the Prana Pratishtha be performed. However, it will take years and years for a stone image to respond to you, because even after prana is added the deity must be called repeatedly, and only if the worship is continuous for some time will He or She become fixed there. True, if an image has been worshipped before by a Siddha or a Mahapurusha or some other high-ranking immortal being you will get all the benefit of that previous worship; but where will you locate such an image?

To avoid this problem, you can worship mentally with your subtle body. By long worship your subtle body will actually take the form of the deity you are worshipping, and you can achieve. This is much better because there are no external images to be broken or defiled; there is only your inner self which is impervious to all exterior pollution.

So, you can worship an image which has been made to live or you can use your subtle body, which is already living. And there is a third way also, which I am sure you have never even imagined. The deity can enter into someone's body, and you can worship Him or Her in that way. Your sadhana is very easily accomplished; the deity is pleased; and the person into whose body the deity enters plays with his Beloved and is purified in the bargain. Besides deities, you can call the spirit of some saint or fakir, who can do many mundane works for you. Isn't this useful? We call this *Avishkara* in Sanskrit, and *baithak* or *hazri* in Hindi or Urdu.

It is handy if the body into which the deity or spirit enters is well prepared for it through long sadhanas, but it is certainly not essential. In Brindavan, the Ras-Lila, the story of Krishna's dalliance with the milkmaids, is performed by many troupes of players. Krishna is played by the most beautiful ten- or twelve-year-old boy who can be found. Daily he self-identifies with Krishna. If you were to worship him ritually as if he were Krishna, before long he would start to get Krishna within his body, and then you would be worshipping Krishna directly.

Unfortunately, no one ever thinks of doing this; they are all too busy worshipping stones. And besides, these troupes have to play for big merchants in order to survive. While the play is going on the merchant worships the boy as if he were Krishna; after the performance is over, he goes to the manager of the troupe and says, "Take this money and give me the boy who played Krishna. I want to fire his ass." How can such a thought enter anyone's mind?

You don't even need a human for Avishkara. On the day when Ganesha is to be worshipped, I go to the zoo and feed the elephants with my own hand. I give them the things they like, especially sugarcane. By reciting a certain mantra I cause Ganesha to enter the body of the elephant, and by worshipping the elephant I worship Ganesha. Isn't this better than worshipping a rock? Not only will Ganesha be pleased, the elephant will appreciate being fed and will bless me himself in his own way. I am doubly fortunate. Roshni learned to do this from me. She even climbs the fence to get inside the elephant pens to feed them if necessary!

If you want to do Avishkara yourself, you have to create a spiritual vacuum within; otherwise how will the other personality be able to come in and take control? You must "get lost" in order to get the result, because the spirit or the deity can enter you only if you are empty. The superpowers are busy creating political vacuums that they can fill; you must do the same thing on the spiritual level.

Next, you must self-identify with the spirit or deity who is being called. In the beginning when you do Avishkara, you must put on all the outer garments and accessories characteristic of the desired personality. If your imagination is not strong, these props are necessary. For instance, when someone I know wants to do Avishkara of Kalaji Rathod, one of the Rajput generals, he dresses just like a Hindu prince of 400 years ago and carries a cavalry saber. He wears a Rajput-style turban and offers everyone present opium diluted in water, the warrior's favorite drink.

This is the lowest form of Avishkara. The intermediate stage is when you can self-identify mentally, directly, with no thought for the physical details. If you are really sensitive, the right

music should be sufficient to induce Avishkara. The ultimate is to be so attuned that the spirit or deity comes at the merest thought.

At first you have no control over who comes or when; they come and go as they please. As you get better at it, you request certain ones to enter you at certain times. When you are really expert, the ethereal beings themselves will beg you to permit them to enter, because they love to play about. That's the beauty of it. Finally, you enter the state in which there is no need of even the formality of Avishkara: The spirits and deities are always with you, coming in and going out as required.

During the Avishkara the subject has no idea of his earthly existence. Afterward, his body feels terrible because Avishkara is a tremendous strain on the nerves, but he doesn't care. If he does Avishkara of a deity, he is in a state of total bliss; no iota of ego separates him from his beloved deity. After the Avishkara is over he feels blank, empty for several hours, until the old personality becomes firmly fixed in the body again. Ramakrishna Paramahansa loved to go into *Mahabhava Samadhi*, emotional highlights, and play about with the Divine Mother Bhavatarini, but at the end of his life his disciples actually prevented him from doing so as much as they could to save his body. He never cared for his body, though.

You can't afford to care for your body if you really want to do a good Avishkara. When the Avishkara is going on, the subject's body can do and endure things it would never be able to do otherwise. There is a certain fellow many of my "children" know. We call him Das Bapa. When he does Avishkara of Mahakali he slashes his arms, neck, and tongue, and blood pours from the wounds, but he doesn't feel a thing, until afterward. Even then there is no problem, because the wounds close automatically and heal quickly. When Anjaneya enters him, he can drink a bucket full of mustard oil with a pound of oxide of mercury stirred into it, and nothing will happen to him. *That* is the power of Anjaneya.

Once some townspeople tried to test Das Bapa. They told him they were going to build a bonfire into which he would have to jump. If Anjaneya really entered his body he would

remain unburned, and only then would everyone believe his claims. The fire was built, and as soon as Anjaneya entered him, Das Bapa jumped directly into the flames and stayed in there about an hour. And who got burned? The people who forced him to jump in and stood there to watch. They got their demonstration, all right.

When this Das Bapa does Avishkara of a certain spirit named Bhima Bapa, his body is tied into a shroud, just like a corpse. When the Avishkara begins, the body jumps into the air, despite the fact that the arms and legs are tied. This particular spirit likes cigarettes and smokes fifteen at a time, in a big bunch. Once a fellow watching this demonstration tried to be funny and challenged Bhima Bapa to do some of the work immediately. The spirit said, "OK, if you think I can't do anything, try to get up from where you are sitting." He couldn't.

Three or four people were unable to lift him. After some time the spirit told this fellow, "Well, now we are all going to leave. If you are interested, why don't you come along with us?" Tears came into the man's eyes, and he was finally allowed to get up. But this was a good sign that Bhima Bapa was able to do work. You must always test these things thoroughly. If you are requesting a deity to come, you must make sure that it is really a deity which has come and not a tiny spirit of a lower order who may masquerade as a deity and fool you.

Take the example of Das Bapa again. When he wanted to do Avishkara of Gorakh Nath he had to dress up just like a Nath: black handkerchief, ash on the forehead, strings wound round the waist, jingle bells on his feet, and a fire tongs with bells on it. He smoked quite a lot of ganja and then started to shout, "Aa-o, aa-o, aa-lek, aa-lek," just as a Nath would, waving the fire tongs over his head and bashing himself with it over his shoulders, neck, and head. All this was necessary for him to self-identify with Gorakh Nath sufficiently to permit Gorakh to enter him.

During the Avishkara he had to cross a water channel in the floor of the cave in which we were seated. Some people got up to help him over it, thinking that he might trip, but I told them to sit down. If Gorakh was there, he would never lose his foot-

ing — he is a Nath, after all — but if there was only a spirit there he would have a nice fall. In this case, Gorakh was there, but only for a few minutes. Then a little spirit came and started playing about. I knew about it because I knew the signs. For instance, he gave his fire tongs to someone else to shake while he was talking: Would Gorakh ever give his fire tongs to a human being? Never! Then he was talking about himself (Das Bapa). Would Gorakh Nath ever bother about anyone as mediocre as that? And there were some subtle changes in the eyes also. Besides, he was answering so many questions wrong. Gorakh could never be wrong.

I love to do Avishkara, because I get an opportunity to play with my beloved deities: Anjaneya, Ma, Gorakh Nath. But I never bother about the external formalities; I don't believe in using crutches when you can walk on your own two feet. Still, if there is music I appreciate it, and incense is essential since deities "eat" through the sense of smell. The music can be anything appropriate; for Anjaneya I prefer devotional chantings, but for Ma there is a song from a certain Hindi film which always sends me into an Avishkara unless I am careful. It is dangerous to go into Avishkara when you're driving down the road at top speed listening to the radio.

Unfortunately, I can't do Avishkara of deities too frequently because it is too great a strain on the nerves, and it makes me want to leave this miserable existence and get on to greater things; do you think this is the only place I have to play in? But I want to finish up certain projects before I die, so I have to restrict my Avishkara. Instead, I often do Avishkara of sadhus or fakirs long since dead. It's interesting.

Suppose I want to do Avishkara of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Now, Akbar must already have taken birth in so many wombs and probably is embodied even now. What will happen is that when I call for the spirit of Akbar the body in which he now resides will lose consciousness. Without a personality to self-identify with how can it express itself? As long as the Avishkara goes on, that body will be inert, and as soon as Akbar leaves me he will return to the other body, which will awake without any knowledge of what has happened. Akbar in his

present condition may not know he was once Akbar; that's not necessary. But all the old records are still stored in the causal body, and that's what I'm interested in. So I don't bother about Akbar's present personality; it has its own job to do.

I'm very fond of Kinaram Aghori; he's so sweet and gentle, the ideal Aghori. But for mundane benefits, Muslim spirits are always better. Muslims live for emotion, and they are always more playful after death. Hindus, on the contrary, become steadier, and if they want to make you rich they will take their time about it so you will be able to digest your new riches before going overboard. But if a Muslim decides to make you rich he says, "At least once I'll make you exuberant like I am, no matter what the consequences may be." I don't have to request them for their exuberance; it is natural to them. I often do Avishkara of Nizamuddin Aulia from Delhi, and also of Abdul Qadr Gelani, one of the most famous saints of Iraq. But I guess my favorite is Akbar; there must be some rnanubandhana there somewhere.

When I do Avishkara of Akbar I always wear a turban. I tie it myself; none of these modern pre-tied turbans for me, thank you. I don't require the turban for my concentration, to be sure, but Akbar was Emperor of India, and if I want to play about with him I have to respect him in that way. So I am actually offering him what one offers an emperor. Those who come to witness the Avishkara must also behave as if they are actually in the presence of Shahanshah Mohammed Jalal-ud-din Akbar, Jahanpanah, Alamparah, Khudavan, Mere Dil-e-subahni, Mahabali.

Pretend you had come to visit me, and we decided to have an Avishkara. Once Akbar came, you would first know it by my eyes: They change color slightly and become fixed, staring directly ahead into yours. As long as Akbar is within my body they will never blink. Also, my foot will begin to shake as long as Akbar is there. Then you must play your part. Imagine yourself as a courtier in the hall of audience of His Majesty; how would you act? Reverently. You have to, because insolence in front of a king is equivalent to inviting death to approach you. Remember, my body is still present, but I, Vimalananda, am

not; I have gone elsewhere, to play about in another way. Your work is with Akbar, so you forget my body and concentrate on him.

First, bend low to salute him. If he is pleased he will offer you his hand; kiss it. Then, to please him all the more, apply *attar* to his hand. Hina attar is the best; all Muslims love hina. When you speak to him, use Urdu if at all possible; it was his court language. I also love to speak in Urdu, but you'll notice that when Akbar is within me, my vocabulary and style of speech change drastically. He was an emperor, after all, and emperors are always fond of flowery speech.

They are also fond of flattery, if it is not too obsequious, so when the Emperor asks you to admire his turban describe its beauty to him in glowing terms. Offer him a cigarette if you like. Hookahs were in vogue at that time, but he has no choice if he wants to play about in today's world, does he? Hookahs are outdated according to so-called modern people. Akbar loved wine, so you can offer him drinks also. His wine was much different than is ours, much sweeter and tastier, but if you offer it with respect he'll accept it.

Offer him music. Don't make the mistake of expecting him to appreciate modern music; it is just so much noise to him. Offer him classical Hindustani music, especially Raga Darbari or Raga Miya ke Malhar. These two Ragas were specially composed just for Akbar by his court musician, the famous Tansen. If you can't sing or play an instrument yourself, a recording will do just as well.

Once he is feeling intoxicated from the attar, the tobacco, the alcohol, and the music he will begin to talk about any subject which seems fit to him. Keep quiet and listen to him, speaking when he expects you to. Don't be argumentative; it will just sour his mood and he won't be willing to do any work for you. Roshni used to wrangle with him, and for so long he would never come when she was around. Can an emperor permit any insubordination? Never!

He may speak about anything; he may even tell jokes. Here's a sample: Do you know the main difference between the days of the Mughals and these days? Back then, before you started

on a journey, you would take your horse or elephant aside and permit it to remove the liquid element from its bladder. Today, before you start you must take your mount (motor vehicle) and put the liquid element into its bladder. Whether you think his jokes are funny or not, though they usually are, you must laugh a little to be polite.

When he is finally satisfied and feeling expansive, he will ask you what you want. Don't hesitate; he is an emperor, and emperors know only how to give. They are famous for giving, because it builds up their reputation. Does anyone dare to give a better present than the Emperor? So be bold. Tell him what you want, preferably material, from life. You can ask him about the spiritual also, because he became very spiritual in his later days, but he is better with the mundane, because he was Shahanshah, the King of Kings, and Jahanpanah, the Refuge of the World.

There is no use for me to speak: Dozens of people have attended Akbar's Avishkaras, and they have had their work done. Any sort of work: passing exams, getting new jobs, removing thorns in the office, finding a runaway child, curing diseases, anything. He will ask each person present in the room what he or she desires and will spend time with each discussing it before he moves on to the next, just as if he were still seated on his throne, dispensing favors. That is why he is valuable, because he was installed on the throne: It is the throne which gives him his authority. "Takht ki tasir" is the Hindi phrase: The authority or power lies in the throne itself. Even his son Salim, who got away with murder otherwise, had to tremble once in his august presence. So as long as you play along with the situation, your work will be done along with everyone else's.

Finally, when everyone has been attended to and all problems have been dealt with, he will ask again two or three times, "Is there anyone left to ask anything?" When no one replies, then he'll say, "Now I'm going to return to Sikandra," which is where he was buried, and he may say something like, "When I was alive I had authority over the whole of India, but now I am reduced to an ethereal form; all my worldly authority has disappeared. That is the way it always is with the world; seek

that which is beyond the world." Then you should salute him in the Mughal way: head bent low from the neck, palm raised to the lips. He will then return to his own place.

Each personality has his or her own peculiarity, of course; you don't treat Ganesh the same way you would Akbar. You have to be clever enough to know how to satisfy each personality and what sort of work to take from each. Asking about money to Smashan Tara is useless, but She might be willing to cure disease. It takes experience to know all about it, but some of my "children" have sufficient experience and get all their work done this way. I'm very happy, since it's that much less for me to do.

Someone once asked me, "Why should these people who lived so long ago bother to come back and play with you? What do they get out of it?" I can't tell you what they get out of it, but they must get something; otherwise they wouldn't do it. Here in the world, no one does anything without some self-interest, not even spirits. But then that's between them and me.

The best kind of Avishkara is the one in which no one has any idea of what is going on. Once I decided to teach a lesson to a friend of mine who refused to believe in such things. I never told him what I intended to do; I just suggested that there was no limit to the power of the human mind. When he challenged me to prove the truth of my statement, I told him I would perform a keratoplasty operation with my own hands. He was an eye surgeon, and he knew I had never been trained in surgery, though I had qualified in Ayurveda.

He thought I was just gasbagging, so I outlined the operation in detail. He was taken aback, but to test me he took a tray of instruments and asked me to pick out the trephine I would use. When I immediately selected the right instrument he was impressed, and he agreed to permit me to perform the operation. A suitable patient was located, and I operated a few days later. It was all over in a matter of minutes, and the patient recovered much sooner than expected. My poor friend could never understand how it might be possible.

It was not me, of course, doing the operation; it was an expert surgeon. I had been able to locate one, and he was willing to

perform the surgery using my body in return for a certain favor which I was happy to do for him. A fair exchange is no robbery.

Maybe the ultimate in this sort of thing is to cause Avishkara in someone else, without either that individual or those around him having any suspicion that something is unusual. I recall a very sad case which fortunately turned out happily. There was an Australian lady who had come to India with her small son in hopes of procuring enlightenment from one of the local "holy" men in Poona. She and the boy, who must have been five or six, had been reduced to living in a small hut in a smashan, of all places, because she had donated all her money to her guru and there had been nothing left to live on.

A smashan is a fine place for an Aghori, his home in fact, but it is no place for the unwary, like this tiny Western tot. He developed typhoid, and after it seemed he might recover, suddenly he turned up with all the signs and symptoms of acute peritonitis. One of the typhoid ulcers in his intestine must have perforated.

The mother went to her guru for help, but she might as well have approached a stone for all the good it did her. One of the disciples told her, "We can't help it if your child is sick. All humans have to die sometime; be prepared." A fine attitude from a guru! None of her fellow foreigners were inclined to help her; the only person who was in the least interested in her plight was Dr. Lad, the chief medical officer in the hospital into which her son was admitted. He provided him free medicines and donated a pint of his own blood for the operation. But the surgeon who was to operate was convinced of the likelihood of failure and was leaning in favor of cancelling the operation.

Dr. Lad, who has known me for some time, came to me and explained the entire situation. I sat and smoked over it for a short while, when suddenly I heard the tinkling of bells outside: an elephant! The sight of an elephant is always auspicious, or so we Indians believe, and I rushed outside and fed it some apples, the only fruit we had handy. "Well," I said to myself, "this is a good sign! It seems that what I have planned will succeed!" And I turned to Dr. Lad and told him, "Go and tell

your surgeon to operate without any fear; the child will pull through."

I had to return to Bombay that day, so it was only the next day that I learned over the telephone the outcome of the operation. First, it had been almost bloodless; there had been no need of administering any blood. Second, well, let the surgeon speak for himself: "Until now my hands always used to shake when I would operate," he told Dr. Lad after emerging from the operating theater, "but I don't know what happened this time. It seemed to me as if something had taken over my hands, that they had a life of their own, and they moved so quickly and accurately that I was myself surprised."

"Not only that," he continued, "but as soon as I opened the abdomen the intestine leapt out at me, and it was child's play to repair it. I have never operated like this before; I just can't understand it, but I think God must have been helping me."

He can never know what was helping him; but why should he bother about it? The little boy made an uneventful recovery, and after he was strong enough his mother's sister sent them plane tickets from Australia and they returned there. I am sorry to say, however, that after leaving her son in the care of her sister, the lady came right back to India and resumed her place at the feet of her guru. I don't care for her at all. If she is so heartless and cruel as to expose her son to such dangers in the first place, then desert him, and run back to her playmates, she is no mother. But I am glad the little boy could be saved; Mahakala always likes to avoid taking children. And I was happy to see the honor of India preserved. Supposing he had died here; forever afterward the mother, her relatives, and their friends would have cursed India for killing him, forgetting their own complicity in it. So, everyone's work was done, and no one was stained by karma.

I have never hesitated to do anything when I thought someone could be helped by it. A good illustration of the use of a long-term Avishkara comes from my own family.

I have never scolded my children. I've always tried to understand their problems and sympathize with them. When my son said he wanted to marry a certain girl, I said, "Go ahead." When

he told me he wanted 50,000 rupees to celebrate the wedding on a grand scale, he didn't bother to ask whether I had that kind of money or not. Anyway, I got it from somewhere and gave it to him. A few days later I was sitting early in the morning, as is my habit, checking on what was going on with the people I love, when I saw my mother dying. My visions have a habit of proving true unless something is done about them. The first thing I did was call my son and tell him to get married as soon as possible; otherwise, according to the customs of our community, he would have to wait a year. I don't bother about such things, but all my relatives would. I told him not to bother about the lavish ceremony but just to go to the marriage registry and tie the knot without further delay.

While we were busy with that procedure a message came: My mother had suffered a severe heart attack, massive. All the doctors, including my brother-in-law, advised us to put her into intensive cardiac care immediately, but they, with my son who is also a physician, were of the opinion that she was going.

How compassionate she was! In the ambulance on the way to the hospital she told me, "I hope I don't die. Not because I'm afraid of death, but my poor daughter-in-law will be blamed for it. All the gossips in our family will say, 'Ha, look what sort of luck she has brought us! On the day of her marriage her mother-in-law passed away.' "

Isn't that unusual, at least nowadays, for a person to be more concerned about someone else's welfare rather than their own when they are near death?

"Kuputro'bhiyate kvacidapi, kumata na bhavati." (A bad son is sometimes born; there is no such thing as a bad mother.) Unfortunately, Shankaracharya, the author, was wrong when he composed that line. In Kali Yuga most physical mothers are bad mothers, especially in the West. Here at least we still have strong family ties, but in America when the child comes of age the parents tell him, "Now go out and take care of yourself. We are finished supporting you." How could any child not become bad with parents like that?

And in the case of boys like my Ravi who have good parents but have gone astray, it is only because of the loving kindness



and forgiveness of the parents that they have been saved at critical moments. Had it not been for parental teachings protecting the mind from complete degradation, where would such prodigal children end up?

A good mother can make all the difference in a person's life. Motherly love is the finest, highest form of love. Our Vedas say that the mother is the first guru. The Muslims say that paradise lies at the feet of the mother. A bad mother, though, is the gate to hell. Why? What sort of mother will tell her child, "Get out, earn money, enjoy your life, and forget about everything else," if not one who is uninterested in the child's ultimate fate? This is not motherhood, it is mere *rnanubandhana*. Very rarely do you find a saint who had a bad mother, and he or she could become a saint only by guru's grace. Today a real mother, *Sumata*, is very rare, so the lack of love in the world is not surprising. Motherhood is inherent in a woman's body, but it must become conscious for the emotion to manifest itself. There is a big difference in physical and emotional motherhood.

I have been lucky in so many ways, but I was really lucky in having a mother such as I had. She was a *Jnani*, a woman of true knowledge. She was worshipped by half a million people as a goddess. She never claimed to be a goddess, of course, but people treated her that way. She had ashrams in Secunderabad and in twenty-two other cities. But besides that, what a wonderful woman she was. When she was dying she was fingering her rosary, repeating her mantra, in spite of being in great pain. The day she died she fixed food for my father. They lived together for sixty-seven years, and he never took any food not prepared by her hand.

Just as she was dying my father was sobbing. She asked him to come over to where she was lying and told him, "What are you doing? Haven't you always told me that suffering is only elimination of karmas? So what is there to cry about? You should be happy instead." Imagine, remembering that at the moment of death, when most people can't remember anything.

My mother always had good advice for me. Once I was feeling low because a friend had let me down quite badly. I went

to see my mother and told her, "Give me some paan." I always loved to take paan from her hands.

She said to me, "Why are you so miserable?"

I told her, "Please put down your rosary for a few minutes and listen to what I have to say. Once a man found a little doll in the street. It was very dirty and broken in several places. He took it home and washed and mended it, put nice clothes on it, and kept it with him. He and the doll enjoyed each other's company for several years. But one day the doll found some other man and ran away, and now the first man, the one who retrieved and took care of the doll, is very sad."

My mother just smiled at me and said, "That man should realize that a doll from the street belongs to the street; it is not possible to change its nature. That man should forget all about external dolls. Instead, he should seek and play with the little doll that is here in everyone's heart, because that doll will never fail him or be untrue to him as long as he lives. Other dolls will break or run away, but this one is always there." How beautifully she put it! She was right. There are two words to describe the world: wretched and thankless. That's all there is.

Anyway, at the hospital, the doctors were telling me she couldn't last long. I lost my temper. Fortunately, a friend was with me, and he cooperated; everyone else was busy otherwise. I made him go down and buy me a bottle of whisky. I broke the bottle open at the neck by smashing it against a table and drank it down neat. Then my mind became a little clearer.

Suddenly, I started hearing music. I realized when I went over to the window that it was a *qawali* (a variety of popular song), sung by Shankar and Shambhu. "Ohhh," I said to myself, "now there is nothing to worry about." I located my friend and told him to drive me to the cemetery. My elder sister looked at me strangely and said, "But we'll all be going there within a few hours after Mummy dies. Why should you go there now?" "You keep quiet," I told her, "I'm going."

When I got to the cemetery, I told my friend to drive off, but he suggested I might need the car later on, so he slept in the car while I did my work. It was the burning ground at Banganga,

where all the members of my family, including my son Ranu, have been cremated. After I was finished and I knew my work would be done, I woke up my friend and we went home. When I got there my foster daughter, Roshni, inquired as to my whereabouts: "Don't you know Ma must be dead by now? Twice, people have called from the hospital to get in touch with you, but you were out somewhere."

I told her, "Don't be ridiculous, Ma is perfectly fine." After a cup of tea and a brief rest, we went to the hospital. There was my mother, sitting up, talking with everyone. The oscilloscope, on which her heartbeats were being displayed, showed perfectly normal. The first thing she told me was, "What is this thing in my arm?" She meant the pacemaker they had implanted the day before. "Take it out immediately." She was OK, so they removed it. "Now, I'm hungry. Give me tea and biscuits." They gave her tea and biscuits, and they even allowed her to go home. Can you believe it? One day on the threshold of death; the next day fit as a fiddle.

There was one small problem: She had been in the habit of speaking Gujarati all throughout her life; and now suddenly she was speaking in Hindi and Urdu, which she had never known fluently before. What you can understand from this, assuming your mind is subtle enough, is that my mother was no longer in her body. She had died at the time appointed by Mahakala; and someone else had been forcibly placed inside. That someone else, who happened to be a male, a spirit of a very high caliber, was made to self-identify with her so perfectly that she continued to live.

When we reached our house, my father came to the door and greeted her in Gujarati. She replied in Hindi. He asked her in Gujarati, "Vimu" — that was his pet name for her — "Vimu, when have you started speaking Hindi?" She replied to him in Hindi, "I know Hindi perfectly. Why shouldn't I speak it?" I took her, or rather, him, aside and said, "Look, talk in Gujarati if you don't want to cause a big brouhaha."

After that, she was absolutely fine for four to five months. My son had his glittering reception; everyone was happy. Only my elder sister, who has always been a troublemaker, tried to

ruin things by insisting that a pacemaker be implanted in my mother's chest. "To forestall any further deterioration" was the explanation or some stupidity like that. When she is fine, why torture her with an operation? But they operated, and she died on the table. The surgeon was saying, "Oh, please don't die, it'll be a stigma for me." He began to massage the heart. Fortunately I was there. I rushed into the operating theater and gave the heart a good solid blow from my fist, and it started beating again. This was not a medical procedure, really; it was a way to remind my friend to do his work properly.

Many of my friends met my mother during this period, and they were most amazed at the conversations she would have with them. She would discuss how metals are formed deep down within the earth or how the conditions are on other planets, things she couldn't possibly have known. Of course, *she* wasn't talking, don't forget that.

Finally, the spirit that was within her came to me one day and said, "Now look, enough is enough. I've done your work for you; what is your idea? You think you can make me stay here permanently?" Strictly speaking I could have, but it would have ruined our friendship, so I agreed. I selected a good day for my mother's death: the day on which Kapila Muni gave Jnana to his mother. As the auspicious moment approached, the spirit left the body of mother, and my mother returned to her body. She had been kept in a safe place during those months, reviewing her life, removing all delusions. That is why, when she was gasping out her last few breaths, she could remember the name of her guru, Haranath Thakur, and repeat it: "Hara, Hara, Hara." Now, as I've told you before, Hara is one of the names of Mahakala. How many people have ever died with the name of the Destroyer on their lips? Too few to mention. So I think she was very lucky.

Interestingly enough, when we took her for cremation the next day, she was looking rosy, absolutely healthy, and rigor mortis had not set in. My son, who is a doctor, became bewildered about the whole thing and asked me, "Papa, is she really dead?" I told him, "Yes, this time she's really dead." And we burned her.

I had warned her long before she would have to suffer at the time of death; that's just the way things were written in her destiny. But as her son I felt my duty to my mother was to help her with all means available to ensure a higher rebirth, and, God willing, I think it may succeed. If she has given me good teachings I must pay her back adequately.

Very few Aghoris are really terrible. Most are soft as foam, because they know all about suffering. Take Kinaram Aghori, for instance. He used to live on Asi Ghat in Benaras, and his sect of Aghoris can still be found there. People used to say about him, "What Rama can't do, Kinaram can do," so he must have been quite something.

Once there was a dancer in the court of the King of Benaras. One day when she stretched her leg up higher than usual, everyone noticed a white patch on her thigh. At that time leprosy was the disease most feared by all, so she was immediately driven from the palace. She had decided to drown herself in the Ganges when Kinaram came across her and heard her sad story. He told her, "Go to my well in the middle of the night every night for seven nights. Bathe, then change your clothes, and throw the old ones away." She did so, and by the sixth night she was completely cured and was in fact much better than she had been before: more beautiful, more talented, and healthier.

Kinaram invited everyone in Benaras for a dance program. He was very fond of music himself and played the sitar. When the girl danced at this program, everyone was enraptured by her performance and wanted to know who she was. The king was especially interested. Kinaram told the king, "Don't you know who she is? You should. Look closely; she is the dancer you threw out of your palace." And Kinaram got the two of them married also. That was Kinaram — unique.

Don't be deluded by the ease with which Kinaram cured the girl. He knew exactly the burden of her karma he would have to bear, and he was willing to bear it. You can get yourself into a lot of trouble if you perform penances, develop good spiritual powers, and then use them without any regard for the consequences.

You have to be just like a snail walking on a razor blade if

you want to do Aghora sadhanas. Any other beast than the snail would be cut, but the snail moves very slowly and never deviates from its path. If it ever veers, well, that's it for the snail. If you want an example, here's a story:

Once upon a time there was a guru who was traveling about with one of his disciples. Having reached a certain town, the guru stopped beneath a shady tree and sent his disciple to beg the day's dinner.

As the boy cried, "Give alms! Give alms!" here and there, he was invited into the house of a certain lady, who prepared food and served it to him. The boy said, "I can't eat food before my Guru Maharaj does." But the woman replied, "Don't worry about it. I am packing his lunch, and as soon as you have finished yours it will be ready for you to take to him." The boy gobbled down a delicious dinner and then said, "Well, I am satisfied. Now, is there anything I can do for you?"

"There is just one little thing that you might do for me," said the woman.

"Speak it and it shall be done," said the boy.

"I have no child to rear and love. Give me a child."

"Saubhagyavati bhava! Have a child! Your wish is granted."

Having dispensed this royal favor, the disciple picked up his guru's lunch and set out to deliver it. When he arrived his guru asked him about his adventures in town. The boy said, "Oh Maharaj, a beautiful lady called to me and provided us food. I ate my portion there and have brought the rest for you."

"All right," said the guru, "and although you forgot that you are to eat after I do, it's all right, I forgive you. What else happened?"

"The lady, after giving me my food, asked one little boon, which I granted. She wanted a child."

"Mm-hmm!" said the guru, "so you have developed the Sid-dhi of having all that you say come true, I suppose. Did you grant her this on the strength of your own power?"

"No, no, of course not, Maharaj. I guaranteed it on the strength of *your* power, so that she could know what a great guru you are," said the boy, who was really more interested in his own fame than in anything else. "Well, well, well," said the guru,

who had understood the boy's intentions, "you leave me no choice. Someone has to be found to go into that woman's womb. You will die and be reborn as her son."

And that is the way it happened. Watch out! Don't fool around with things you can't handle. The boy in this story was a fool. He couldn't spot a dangerous situation and avoid it. Of course, there are times when even if you see the danger coming, you can't avoid it and you shouldn't try, because you have to endure some privations because of your past karmas. Listen to the story of Shams al-Tabriz.

Shams al-Tabriz ("sun" of Tabriz) was a fakir who received that name because of his great spiritual power. He became known in Tabriz as a man who could work miracles, and naturally he developed some enemies, who were jealous of his position. To test him, the chief religious magistrate called him one day and said, "We hear that you are able to do many impossible things. Will you please bring this man back to life?" pointing to a nearby corpse, that of the king's only son.

Shams agreed to do so, and asked the boy to rise in the name of Allah. He requested him thus twice or thrice, and then he got wild and shouted, "All right, then, in my name get up!" The boy was restored to life.

Naturally everyone thought Shams al-Tabriz would be rewarded for bringing the king's son back to life, but the magistrate said, "No, because he has raised the boy in his own name, he is an infidel and must be skinned alive."

Shams had to raise the boy in his own name because it was his own Shakti that was doing the job. He was skinned alive, but as they did it he remarked, "It doesn't matter. Do they think they are injuring me when they torture this body?"

Now there was a good reason that Shams had to be skinned alive. Years before, when he had been wandering about near what is now Abbottabad in Pakistan, he had become intoxicated with his own power. When he came to a certain river one day he was hungry and said to the fish in the river, "Get up here!" and they jumped out onto the bank. Then he looked up to the sun and said, "Shams (sun), cook these!" and the sun cooked the fish for him. But he didn't bother about the other

creatures and plants in the area, which were roasted by the sun. For exceeding his limits he had to pay, later in his life. Even today, Abbottabad is the hottest place in Asia.

Most sadhus become proud of their achievements, and that makes them miserly; they aren't willing to use the fruits of their austerities to help out anyone else. But then what is the use in doing the austerities at all if you mean to use them only for yourself? You will get the results, no doubt, but that is all. Compassionate love, which God's devotees have, you will never get, because for that you must forget all penances, all karmas, everything, except your beloved. And that intoxication of love is worth all the penances you can do in your lifetime.

One day King Janaka was taken to heaven by a messenger of the gods. While there, he asked to see hell, which he had not seen before. A demon was summoned, and Janaka was taken to hell.

When they arrived Janaka was surprised to see that everyone there was happy and smiling, but the demon was even more surprised, because everyone in hell is supposed to be in agony, miserable. When the demon asked for an explanation one of the inhabitants of hell replied, "When we look at him (meaning Janaka), we feel that he is bearing our karmas for us, so that soon all our evil karmas will be finished and we will also be able to go to heaven."

The demon was stunned and asked Janaka to return to heaven. The spirits of the dead said, "No, don't go, please stay with us." Janaka said to the demon, "No, I don't want to go. I would rather stay here, for tens of millions of years if necessary, until all these people are freed from their bondages."

When Vishnu heard this, he was amazed and said to himself, "Even though I am the preserver of the worlds, still I haven't done as this man has." Then Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva performed Abhisheka on Janaka and blessed him, and one of the results of the blessing was the birth of Sita (Rama's wife).

This is the way a real Aghori feels. Because he has endured so much suffering himself he knows how miserable other people are who don't have the spiritual advantages he has, and because of his compassion he tries to help them face their prob-

lems fearlessly whether or not he does anything else concrete to relieve their sufferings. To overcome fear is a great thing, because Maya is not really dangerous; She has no teeth. She tries to scare everyone, and usually She succeeds. But if you refuse to be scared then She has no power over you.

An Aghori always seems a little ghoulish to the ordinary observer, but inside he is never ghoulish; he is simply acting according to his inherent nature, without hindering it in any way. Besides, since his friends and colleagues are spirits and other ethereal beings, shouldn't he seem ghoulish?

The whole idea of Tantra and Aghora is transmutation. Whether you make use of the Shaktis of spirits or deities or magical plants or whatever, transmutation is the goal. That is why some Tantrikas practice alchemy and learn to transmute one metal into another, in preparation for transforming themselves.

Aghoris don't bother about such piffles. If they want gold, they'll piss on a rock and it will become gold. Tantra is limited by time, space, and causation, but Aghora is beyond all triads, all dualities, beyond all limitations. Tantra is just the preliminary finger exercises a musician performs to train his hands; Aghora is the full flowering of the musical talent.

For example, remember Telang Swami. By the force of his austerities he had developed the ability to transmute his own excreta into purified substances. That is why he could worship in the temple with his own urine and feces. When the Veda calls for Ganges water there is no alternative but to go to the Ganges and get the water. Telang Swami did not need to bother; he could create Ganges water within himself at any time.

Telang Swami was the pride of Benaras. He was originally a Brahmin from Kanyakubja and was devoted to his mother, who always despaired of her son's queer behavior. Finally she decided he should get married and located a good girl for him. He told his mother, "Why do you want me to bother with all these worldly formalities? Anyway, the girl is destined to die." The wedding took place — and the bride died before the honeymoon could even begin. When his mother finally died Telang Swami sat for twelve years right there in the smashan in which she

was cremated. Eventually a Brahmin guru came to him from Telengana (in what is now the state of Andhra Pradesh), which is why he came to be called Telang Swami. After meeting his guru, Telang Swami spent another twenty-five years sitting in the smashan, twenty-five years sitting *inside* a blazing fire, fifty years on the bottom of the river Ganges at Benaras, and finally about a century on the shore of the Ganges in Benaras, observing absolute silence.

He made it a habit to worship at the temple of Annapurna (the goddess of food), using his urine and feces as offerings. You know what happened the day he decided to do it at Kashi Vishveshvara. After the king's dream of Shiva the king sought out Telang Swami and asked to be taught something. Telang Swami agreed to come out with the king in his boat, and as they floated down the river Telang Swami sat quietly listening until the king started to talk something out of his wits about what belonged to him.

Suddenly Telang Swami grabbed the king's sword and threw it into the river. The king was flabbergasted and asked, "What have you done? That was my symbol of authority, and besides, it was an old family heirloom, priceless."

Telang Swami reached into the river and pulled out two swords, one exactly like the other, and said to the king, "Pick out your sword." Then the king understood that he could not even recognize that which he claimed as his own. Wasn't that a good way to teach?

Telang Swami was a Siddha, after all. Ramakrishna Paramahansa met him; then Ramakrishna's disciple Vivekananda met him both before going to America and also after returning. Even after Vivekananda's death Telang Swami went right on living. That's how I was able to meet him.

Finally he did decide to take samadhi. His devotees nailed his body into a coffin and cast the coffin into the Triveni Sangam, the meeting of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati Rivers at Allahabad. As soon as the coffin entered the water someone looked up and saw Telang Swami standing unconcernedly on the opposite bank of the river. Then he disappeared, and no one has seen him since.

Yes, Telang Swami knew how to transmute; if he didn't who would? How else could he have dared to worship Shiva with his own excreta? I remember another story about him. One day he was standing naked, minding his own business, when some English official came by and was scandalized by the sight of this nude behemoth of a holy man and ordered him to be brought to his office for questioning.

Back then when the English were ruling our country they enjoyed ridiculing our customs and sporting with us because we couldn't fight back. This official decided to have some fun with Telang Swami, in the privacy of his office, and said to him, "Will you eat what I eat?" Telang Swami did not bother to speak, but merely nodded his head in the affirmative.

The official then uncovered a plate of roast beef and offered it to Telang Swami. Now you know that Hindus never eat beef; some would fly into a murderous rage if they were even offered beef. But Telang Swami did not bat an eyelid. He ate the beef and then he said to the official, "Now, will you eat what I eat?" When the official agreed, Telang Swami shat on the salver on which the beef had been served and covered it with the lid.

The Englishman flew into a frenzy — forgetting he was just being offered a taste of his own medicine — and shouted, "I'll have you thrown in jail!" He turned to call a guard. As he turned around again Telang Swami told him, "Look a little more closely at that salver." And when he did he saw there was not any shit on it at all; instead, he saw a well-roasted chicken, dripping with gravy and ready to eat.

The Englishman was quite naturally astonished and became the greatest devotee of Telang Swami. I just mention this story to give you some idea of how an Aghori can transmute. Telang Swami once pulled this trick in court also: he shat and transformed his feces into roses. He was too good.

Why Telang Swami? I can give you an example from my own life. One day I wanted to drive from Bombay to Poona but I had no money, and there was no petrol (gasoline) in my car; I had a Humber Super Snipe at that time. A naked Aghori by the name of Mangaliriji happened to be with me, and when I explained my problem to him he said, "What, you are worried

about such a trifle? Don't worry!" Then he stuck his penis into the petrol tank and pissed into it. I was aghast: I thought the engine would be ruined. When I told him so he replied, "Don't be silly, let's go." We got inside, and when I pressed the starter the car started! We drove all the way to Poona and back, almost 300 miles, without ever adding a drop of petrol. Hard to believe, isn't it? I would never have believed it had it not happened to me.

All these external transmutations are mere trinkets, of course; it is the internal transmutation which is important. And that is where Avishkara is important; the more you bring your deity into your body, the more He or She will transform you from a limited personality, the one you possess now, into an unlimited personality — the personality of the deity you are worshipping, and, ultimately, into the Absolute personality: His personality, with a capital H.

## CHAPTER NINE

# SEX

*I have always maintained that there are two parts of the body which move even though they have no bone to support them: the tongue and the penis (or clitoris). These organs are made to move by the ego alone. They can take you to the heights of success if they are controlled, and if they are misused — if you make just a single mistake in your sadhana — down you go, divebombing like a Stuka.*

## MAN AND WOMAN

I am afraid that nowadays most people don't understand the natural differences between the sexes as well as they should. This is why there is so much misunderstanding between men and women, and why men have become so passive and women so aggressive.

Ultimately, no doubt, there is no such thing as gender. In fact I always had the desire to fill a room full of skeletons. One would be lying one atop another as if copulating; one would be holding a skull as if contemplating it, and so on. When anyone came to me to ask about spiritual knowledge I would show them this room. Then I would say, "Do you see those two skeletons over there? That is what you look like when you are mak-

ing love. There is no gender! Gender was created by Nature for Her own purposes. Copulation is due to rnanubandhana, the bondage of karmic debt."

As long as we exist in the world we are enmeshed in duality. For worldly purposes we have to consider gender. Until you can go beyond your body completely your gender will exert its effect on you. So I don't think there is any use in trying to avoid gender differences or pretending they don't exist. You have to know a thing before you can go beyond it.

Men are creatures of ambition, and women are creatures of emotion. Yes, women can have ambition, and yes, men can have emotion. But only a woman can be overwhelmed by emotion, which is why she can succeed at achieving emotional ecstasies fairly easily. A man must encounter plenty of obstacles before he can enter emotional highlights. He has to work hard to develop such extreme emotion. Of course men are better than women on the path of Jnana, or knowledge. Rarely can a woman develop good Jnana. Why? Because she is the very embodiment of Shakti.

Now I know you can argue that men are also the embodiment of Shakti because the entire manifested universe is nothing but Shakti. But then the entire universe is all the creation of Shiva as well. Both men and women possess attributes of both Shiva and Shakti, but in different measure. The chief characteristic of Shakti is that She is kinetic, She moves. And this is the chief characteristic of a woman, that she is changeable. Some call her fickle. Shiva's chief characteristic is His immobility. Likewise, a man is, or should be, firm. Often, he is unyielding. Women have to learn firmness; men have to learn emotion. The universe cannot exist if either the male or female principle ceases to exist. There is no way to determine whether men are greater or women are greater. Both of them *are*, that's all.

Once the Adya Shakti said to Lord Shiva, "Ha! Who do you think you are? Without me you are nothing!" Shiva smiled his deep, secret smile and said in reply, "Be calm, my dear. Remember, I gave you birth. Your very existence is due to me."

Consider something else. Women are meant to be more close-

ly bound to the world than are men. Only women can give birth. What is birth? It is the process of taking a spirit and enmeshing it in physical existence. A woman's job is to clothe spirit in matter. This is why traditionally in Vedic times women were supposed to look after the home and the mundane side of existence while their men went out and did rituals and provided for the family's spiritual advancement. The man never had to worry about providing for his physical necessities so he would be free to spiritualize himself to the maximum. The woman never had to worry about tough penances and other spiritual practices because whatever penance her man did automatically came in some measure to her. Now things have changed. It is hard for a woman to find a good man, I don't deny it, and if she can't find a good man then she has to try to do sadhana on her own; it's only reasonable. But it is not the ideal situation.

Even physically we can find evidence of this truth. Consider the vagina, a hollow organ. Hollow means empty. A woman has a very basic emptiness which she is always trying to fill and which can best be filled by a man. A man has a solid, firm penis which is always on the lookout for emptiness which can be filled. The vagina is an expansile organ; it can change size to fit any penis. The penis does not change size to fit the vagina, remember; it is the vagina that makes the adjustment and clutches the penis tightly. Just as the proton is enveloped by the "cloud" of electrons which whirl about it, just as Shiva is encompassed by Shakti, even so is a man surrounded by his woman, physically and mentally.

This fact makes women more superficial than men. I know that this statement will offend many self-professed feminists. But look at the vagina again. Is it not superficial to the penis? Does it not cover, as its function? Is not the penis central, the thing covered? Shiva is impulse, Shakti is that which limits the impulse. Is not the limit superficial to the thing limited?

There is nothing wrong per se with being superficial. It has its benefits and drawbacks, like everything else in the universe. If Shakti was not superficial, then Maya, Shakti's skin, would not exist, and the universe could not hold together. And then



none of us would exist. Which is why I worship Ma. But it is necessary to call a spade a spade.

Our Vedic religion made a thorough study of this whole business of male-female duality. Remember, the Vedas never discriminated against women; the discrimination came much later. Many of our great sages were women, like Lopamudra and Gargi. All of our Rishis were married householders. As I said before, in an ideal Vedic marriage the husband exists to provide stability and direction while the wife sees to the details. In music the rhythm (Shiva) provides the stability, and the tune (Shakti) provides the ornamentation. It is a partnership, a mutual thing: You can't have one without the other.

Our scriptures describe in detail the qualities of a good wife. When her husband is troubled or tired or fed up with life or needs advice, she is friend, companion, and advisor. In his work she shoulders part of his load, as a servant would; she shares his karmas with him. When she feeds him and cares for him when he is ill, a wife must mother her husband. And finally, "Shayaneshu Rambha": in bed she should be as passionate as Rambha, the most sensuous of the dancing girls in the court of Indra (king of the gods). In fact she has the right to demand that her husband satisfy her sexually.

Most important, a good wife will always encourage her man to do his sadhana, since he is doing it for her also: They have become two parts of the same being. Never forget that sadhana is possible only when your domestic life is stable. As the great saint Tukaram said, "Pahile Pothoba, nantar Vithoba," meaning that you should first make sure that your belly has been satisfied and only then think about going out to search for God.

If a man and a woman can cooperate like this then the sky is the limit for what they can achieve together. I once told this to an American couple whom I treat as my spiritual children. The lady told me, "This is all about a good wife. Didn't anyone in India ever bother to consider what makes a good husband?"

She was right, of course; she had every right to demand to know. I told her, "A good husband does all he can to satisfy his wife's desires, beginning with sex. He must not fail to satiate her with sex. Our ancient scriptures even mention this." In

one of them, Parvati, Shiva's wife, says, "Among all the pleasures of women the greatest pleasure is to unite with a good man in private, and the misery which arises from its interruption is not equalled by any other."

A man's enjoyment in sex and in family life in general is meant to consist of the satisfaction he obtains from being able to satisfy his family's desires. If his woman is a good wife all her desires will benefit him directly or indirectly anyway, so he is not losing anything. It is a mutual benefit, an attempt on the part of both to do the best they can for each other.

Of course, nowadays such well-balanced couples are so rare as to be almost nonexistent, and this is all because men and women no longer know who they are and what they are supposed to do. Every woman has within her a measure of the original Shakti but very few women know their own capabilities, all because of the heavy overlay of karmas which obscures their perception. A woman who learns her capabilities as an embodied Shakti, well, she becomes someone. And this goes for men, too. Deep down inside they have a spark of the divine Shiva. Unfortunately most humans perceive things so dimly that women interpret the Shakti they feel as a need to smother their men, and men feel just sufficient force of Shiva to make them think they need to dominate women without knowing how to control them. Control of a woman can never be by force, which produces too many deleterious effects. Control must always be by love alone if it is to be effective. How many men know how to control a woman today? Even a handful? Ha!

Remember, always remember, that just because Nature wants men to control women that no one should ever think that women are in any way inferior to men. Never! They are just different, and it is not enough for a man to say to himself, "Men are supposed to control women," and then proceed to beat his wife, physically or mentally, if she refuses to indulge his whimsicalness. Women are different from men emotionally, and they have their own advantages which men cannot claim. For example, once a woman decides to do something and sets her mind to it no force can dissuade her. Once an object is electrified the electricity never leaves on its own; it must be drawn away.

This explains why women are more passionate than men: They abandon themselves to their passion, they lose themselves in it.

This is why I am never bothered when I find a spiritual aspirant who is obsessed with sex. It is a good sign. Once you can transfer that obsession to a deity it will always pay dividends. After all, sex is just an attempt to return to the state of primordial unity; it is just misdirected. Once such aspirants are given the proper direction they can achieve very quickly, in a blitzkrieg.

I have told you stories about Tulsidas. Did you know that sex made him renounce the world? It happened this way. When he was a young man he married a young beauty named Ratnavali, and he went mad with lust for her. He couldn't sleep at night unless he had slaked his lust with her at least once. She enjoyed this in the beginning, of course, but eventually she became tired of it and one day decided to take a break. She told him that she had to consider her obligations to her family and so needed to make a social call on her mother and sister for a day and a night. She left.

That night Tulsidas found himself unable to sleep without his usual sexual release. It did not take him long to become frantic with desire, and in the course of the night he determined that he must have Ratnavali or he would surely die.

The night was dark. Rain cascaded down onto the insatiable Tulsidas as he careened through the town's muddied streets. Ratnavali's family lived across the river from Tulsidas, and the swollen torrent of the stream temporarily stopped his progress as he feverishly considered ways to cross over.

It so happened that a corpse lay there on the riverbank waiting to be cremated. The rain had set in before its pyre could be built, and the mourners had had to run to shelter to await a drier moment to perform their duty to the deceased. Tulsidas's desperate brain saw the corpse as a suitable raft on which to cross the river, failing to register that it was indeed a dead body. Overjoyed at his good fortune Tulsidas dragged his "raft" into the water and began wild paddling for the opposite shore.

Once on the bank he leapt ashore and flew toward Ratnavali's

house. It was lightless with midnight. Knowing Ratnavali's room to be on the top floor, he grabbed a handy rope, knotted one end into a lasso, and looped it over an obliging tree branch, entirely oblivious to the fact that the rope was not a rope but rather a large, very venomous, and thoroughly astonished snake.

Into Ratnavali's room Tulsidas catapulted. Embracing her out of her sleep he had his way with her over her shame-filled protests that her mother and sister would hear. Spent, he lay back exhausted, soaking her bed.

She spat at him disgustedly, "Tulsidas, you came to me only to satisfy your lust. You crave my flesh and bones. If you had put as much emotion into worshipping Lord Rama as you have in longing for this impermanent body of mine, just think of what heights you could have reached by now."

This barb embedded itself deeply in poor Tulsidas. All his sweet intoxication of passion and satiation evaporated instantly, and he replied, "Oh, is that so? Well, I'll show you!" He left, noting in passing the corpse and the snake, amazed at the blindness which sex had engendered in him. He left his own home and wandered the world as a sadhu. He searched and searched and eventually found Rama.

And Ratnavali? She was as good as a widow after that. She helped her husband attain God and ruined her marriage in the bargain. She did not meet Tulsidas for several years. Once she finally located him he told her, "You are my first guru. I must always respect you for pushing me onto the path that led to Rama. But now I have greater happiness with my Rama than I had with you. So please go back to your mother and sister."

Here is a wonderful example of a lost opportunity. If Ratnavali had had subtle intelligence she would have converted her husband's sexual energy into love for God by always seeing him as Shiva and always imagining herself to be Parvati. She would still have been his guru, fulfilling that *rnanubandhana*, and he would still have achieved, perhaps after a longer time, but then both would have achieved, and what love they would have had for each other! But by being insulting she lost everything. That's why I always say that the tongue and the penis can lift you to

the heights or drag you down to the depths. It all depends on how you use them.

## THE NATURE OF SEX

Why do people enjoy sex so much? It's such a filthy activity, putting flesh into flesh, lying in a pool of sweat, oozings, and discharges. Modern people explain it by saying this is the way Nature ensures the survival of the species, but that is not an explanation. It is merely a restatement of the problem: How does Nature overcome individuals with the desire to mate?

Consider this: The ultimate foundation of all interpersonal relationships is cuddling and fondling. When a child is born its parents cuddle and fondle it, creating in it the feeling that it is loved. When the child is older it develops an attachment for a member of the opposite sex, which progresses from cuddling to fondling and culminates in the sex act.

After marriage some of the mystique of the romance between the two partners disappears. The solution? Produce a child which the couple can cuddle and fondle. Once the child is grown and married the couple will have their grandchildren to cuddle and fondle. All throughout life there is nothing but this.

When a man and a woman love each other they always try to get closer and closer to one another. Separation is always painful, and they try to avoid it by spending all their free time together. This is why the word "couple" is singular in English even though it means two. This feeling of separation is possible only because there is duality; the misery of separation is the misery of being unable to make the two, which were originally one, into one again. In the primal condition there was no male and no female.

When a man and a woman are really deeply in love, when the emotion is so strong that they are always mentally close, daydreaming about each other, imagining the next rendezvous, there comes a time when they can no longer resist the urge to be physically close, to unite sexually. The tension builds up to the point where release is inevitable. It is a question of posses-

sion: "I want to become you, and I want you to become me." This is impossible; the bodies get in the way. The next best thing is, "I should be in you and you should be in me." When the couple is overwhelmed by the imperative to unite, they have sex. Actually only the penis and vagina unite, but for the duration of the sex act the man feels, "Yes, I have penetrated her, I have possessed her," and the woman feels, "Yes, I have accepted him into me, I have possessed him."

I have always said that women are more possessive than are men, and that 99.99 percent of women are possessive. And whenever I say this some woman objects. But look at physiology again! The vagina accepts the penis, not vice versa. The female is meant to possess, and the male is meant to feel that he is being possessed. Nowadays, of course, when everything is so topsy-turvy many men have become possessive, but this is pathological; it only happens because they are unsure of their own masculinity. Men are very worried about their sexual performance, their ability to make a woman feel that she is "full." This fear of inadequacy makes them fear that their partners will have to go to other men to become satisfied, and they defend themselves by becoming possessive.

But that is abnormal. It is normal for a woman to be somewhat possessive, and only the greatest women can go beyond it, just as only the greatest men can go beyond their image of themselves as great stud bulls who women are supposed to want to possess. Then of course you have Freud, who claimed that everything was due to penis envy, but that is another matter. Right now let us consider the sex act.

When the penis and the vagina unite there is a great satisfaction in both partners; possession, partial unity, has taken place. This partial unity overwhelms them with the desire to attain to perfect unity, and they attempt to move their bodies even closer together until their nervous systems overload and orgasm occurs. During the moment of orgasm the two forget entirely their earthly existence, and for a brief moment — a very brief moment — they are again one. But only for the time the orgasm lasts. Afterward they are again separate.

Most people try to convince themselves that they are satis-

fied with orgasmic sex, but they cannot. Even if you enjoy sex with real concentration, with real cooperation between the partners, the satiation will last for a week or two at the most, and then the desire will again arise. Of course if you are chasing sex for the orgasm alone and not for the love, you will not be satiated even by copulating ten times a day. You will end up a pervert; there is no escape. Orgasm is just a physical reflex; it causes no satisfaction on its own, just "tension release." To really enjoy an orgasm you must enjoy your partner. You must love your partner sincerely, and you must be more interested in his or her gratification than in your own.

With ordinary sex between two partners who are fully receptive to each other's needs, satiation can't last more than two weeks. But with Vajroli (see p. 279) a couple can enjoy themselves so fully in one sexual experience that for three months or more the sexual urge never rears its head. They feel so close to one another that there is just no need for the temporary closeness provided by an orgasm. There is real beauty in such a relationship. This is what the West has yet to learn: Sex is something which deserves a lot of time and effort to perfect, to make the effect unique and lasting.

How many people in the world really know about sex? Oh I know, there are Masters and Johnson and so many other sexologists and dozens of books on the subject, but how many people have really become experts at sex? We Indians, only a few of us, are the only ones in the world who really know the spiritual erotic art. Westerners are doing plenty of research but they have a long, long way to go. If they were to learn our techniques they would be able to perform them very well, because they are willing to try anything new. They have very few inhibitions left, in contrast to today's Indians who have plenty.

But there is such a difference in the mentality of a Westerner and an Easterner! And sex is all in the mind, no matter what anyone tells you. Take prostitution as an example. A Western whore watches the clock very closely. Once your time is up you must emit and depart. But here in India suppose you try to climb on the lady too early. She will tell you, "No, my lord, wait, the night is yet young, we have until morning to enjoy

our play." If you fart in the bed of a Western whore she will say, "Oh, you bloody stinking fellow!" But an Indian girl would tell you, "What a man you are! Even the gas you pass is melodious!" Of course this is the way things used to be; Indians are gradually becoming clock-watchers under the influence of the West.

Don't you think a man is more likely to perform well in response to a supportive and caring attitude rather than one which is strictly businesslike? I don't mean to say that Indian prostitutes have hearts of gold; far from it. They put on this act because they know it will help generate more revenue from the customer. Here in India both get what they want: The man thinks he is being treated like a lord, and the lady gets paid for having a good time. And in the West? Only business. We Indians are very emotional and to trick us you have only to play on our emotions.

Westerners have become very clinical on the subject of sex. I read in *Time* the review of a book written about the clitoris. Very nice, but inexact. Very few people in the world understand women's orgasms, and in the East only about 1/10 of 1 percent of women have any idea of what an orgasm is. In the West at least 10 percent do because they all read the sex manuals and try out what they read, but they are still groping, they don't have a complete grasp of the subject. To begin with they should forget all about quantity and should concentrate on quality; one good orgasm satisfying to both partners is worth a hundred ordinary physical responses. For this they must try to understand the true nature of sex.

## THE RNANUBANDHANA OF SEX

In reality there is nothing to sex but rnanubandhana. Freud was right to argue that the sex instinct is inherent in all creatures, inborn in each one. But did he know why? Did he know that the sex instinct actually begins with the union of the sperm and ovum, because that is a sex act all its own, a union of male and female? Sexuality begins with conception, and as soon as

the child is born it is aware of its sexuality. Doesn't the penis of a tiny infant become erect? Since erection occurs only when the ego self-identifies with the penis, ego awareness of sexuality must be present even in infancy.

Two people can be mutually attracted to one another only if there was some relationship between them in a previous life. They may have been animals or insects or humans, but if they copulated then they will be overwhelmed by the urge to copulate when they meet in this life. And just because they were mates or husband and wife in a previous existence it does not always happen that they must be husband and wife in this life. They may come back as mother and son, father and daughter, or brother and sister; and then the result will be incest. In the past these instincts were rigidly controlled by the rules of society, and those cases of incest which did occur were hidden deep. Today everything is out in the open.

Now, the person of subtle intelligence will be able to discover so many things about two people who copulate. For one, suppose it is a mother and her son who unite sexually. Does the mother make the son climb on her or is it the son who initiates the activity? By knowing this you can know who was the male in the last encounter, in the last birth. Normally, the male is dominant. He first indicates his desire for sex, and then the female acquiesces. She will acquiesce only if there was a relationship between them in the past. She will be overcome by the urge developed during that previous liaison. If the female in this birth takes the initiative, she must have been the male previously.

Even the posture taken during coitus is determined by that previous relationship. You know, I suppose, that camels and rhinos mate hindways; the penis points backward in these species. Each species has its own peculiarities of mating, and if you know all the possible wombs, like a Rishi does, the sex posture alone is sufficient to pinpoint the species involved in the previous relationship.

This knowledge can be beneficial. Suppose I have knowledge of my previous births. I meet a girl I like and we go to bed together. Since I know the form we shared previously — fish, bird,

mammal, or whatever — I will refer to my mental files and locate the sex techniques appropriate to that species and then deliberately initiate that technique. She and I will then instinctively enjoy that sex much more than we would have, had we used any other posture, because subconsciously we go back to our previous state, which makes the conscious mind drop away, which increases the passion. That sex will be so satisfying that the rnanubandhana is fulfilled completely by one session. My work is done; another rna is crossed off my list. The girl enjoys herself better than she has ever enjoyed before. No one is a loser. This is especially important because, as a male, I have the obligation to satiate my partner.

To know the rnanubandhana is to be able to decide how and when to fulfill it. If I know *Shiva Svarodaya*, the science of breath, I can deliberately inhale certain of my partner's breaths during a deep embrace, and she will never be able to leave me. When I know the rnanubandhana is finished and it is time for our relationship to end, I will inhale certain other breaths and she will develop an aversion for me and we will split; it's as simple as that. She never knows what has happened. She thinks it is all her own volition that she came to me and that she left. She forgets that there is no such thing as free will.

There comes a point, though, when sex becomes tiresome. How much can you perform the sex act, anyway? You have to tire of it eventually. Suppose that a certain couple had enjoyed sex so much in a past birth that they were fully satiated. When they meet in this birth they will have a desire for sex but they will never be impelled to follow through on that desire. They must have a desire for sex together because they were related sexually in the past; it is axiomatic. But if they avoid sex in this birth their relationship will become much more intense.

Physical sex makes you more aware of your body, which weakens your mind. This makes you more interested in gratifying your body and makes it less likely that you'll remain faithful to one partner. When your relationship is purely or predominantly mental though, there comes a point when you will be unable to do without your partner, the ties will be so strong. You'll never be tempted to look at anyone else because you

know you'll never find anyone else to understand you so well. A peculiar sort of Maya will bond the two of you together. Whenever you are apart you will always long for the day when you will be reunited; you yearn for each other, to share your professions, your hobbies, your pastimes, and, most of all, your sadhana. There is such a beautiful lingering memory that you can't bear separation, but there is almost no desire for sex because just a kiss or a hug or the touch of a hand is enough to satisfy. Isn't this better than repetitively going through the moanings and groanings of physical sex? Isn't this more refined?

Like music sex is an art, and you must be artistic if you hope to become good at sex. Everything in life should be artistic, in my opinion; otherwise, what is the use of living? This is the main grudge I have against Westerners: They are so crude and rough. It is because they are slaves to time, always in such a hurry to get things done that they rarely have time to do anything right, with art, grace, and culture. And now the Westerners are spreading this disease all around the world.

There has never been any other lover in the world like Lord Krishna, and there will never again be another like Him. He had more than 16,000 wives, and every woman who saw Him immediately fell in love with Him and melted into Him. When He lived among the cowherds of Brindavan He used to dance with the women of the village — the dance known as the *Ras-Lila*. There is an esoteric meaning for this and every other event in Krishna's life, of course, but besides that, an imitation of the *Ras-Lila* has been performed as a folk dance for millennia here in India. A boy and a girl stand opposite one another, each holding a pair of slim sticks. They wheel and whirl, tapping their sticks together to the rhythm of the dance. Most intricate; fascinating to watch. But now the vulgar have made the music disco, and the children beat their sticks together violently. The last time I encouraged Ravi to join in I thought he would be beaten soundly by the girl he was dancing with! She was that rough.

Our society is regressing into barbarism; it's sad. Is it any wonder that people have no time or interest for mere kissing and holding hands or lying together quietly side by side? Such

development in a couple occurs only after many lives lived together. Today, people will not settle for anything less than sex, usually rough and violent sex, and even that fails to satisfy them.

## MARRIAGE

Most people cannot get out of the rnanubandhana of sex, which is why society developed the institution of marriage. Originally, there was no such system as marriage here in India. People were more primitive, something like cavemen. If I wanted some woman I would just go and take her, and no one could say anything about it. Swetaketu changed all that.

One day Swetaketu, his father, Uddalaka Rishi, and his mother were all sitting peacefully near their hut. A Brahmana walked up to his mother, said "Come with me!" and carried her away. Swetaketu wanted to follow him and bring his mother back, but his father dissuaded him gently, saying, "Someday you will steal someone's wife yourself." Then Swetaketu's young heart was so hurt that he vowed he would change society so that no children would ever again be so cavalierly deprived of their mothers. And so marriage came into being.

Still, the ancient sacrament of marriage was nothing like what we have today. Back then if a boy and girl decided to marry they would go out alone together to a secluded place and would take the sun, or the fire, the water or another of the Great Elements as a witness, and that was it. From that time forth they were man and wife. Plenty of rituals were added later by the priestly class to prolong the ceremony for the priests' benefit, but the essence of the rite is still the same. Every Vedic wedding today takes fire as a witness, because no marriage is regarded as irrevocably solemnized until the couple takes seven steps around the sacred fire.

The true Vedics never consummated a marriage the day it took place no matter how auspicious the wedding day might be. The bride would return home with her parents to wait for another auspicious day, so chosen that by copulating on that

day the couple would achieve such satisfaction that they would never think of leaving each other. Another advantage to the wait between the ceremony and the consummation was that both parties had time to prepare themselves mentally. The days they spent apart served to heighten their desire for each other, from anticipation of the sex they would enjoy together. I have always said that 50 percent of the enjoyment of a romance lies in the waiting period, when you don't know whether the opposite party will fall in love with you or not. You can't be sure, you can't take anything for granted, you are on tenterhooks continuously. After you both know you love each other, part of the joy is lost, but part still remains: "If I make a mistake he (or she) might leave me." This keeps you always on your best behavior.

But after marriage you know you always have each other, you have ready sex whenever you want it, and your partner dare not leave you since society will point a finger if he or she does. The result? All the magic, the mystery, the danger disappears from the relationship; it becomes devitalized. And then there is nothing to do but endure it, or if you are an American, divorce.

In India we have known about human psychology for a long time, and this wait before the bride is taken to her husband's house is one means of making the marriage a success. Each day the longing would increase until both bride and groom would be half-mad with desire by the time the auspicious day rolled around. Then the bride would be decked out in a beautiful sari and whatnot and would travel by stages to her husband's house. With her she would carry a big silver glass filled with milk: two liters boiled down into one, mixed with almonds, pistachios, saffron, and so on. She would also bring five paans. Each paan would have extra ingredients added to it, and each would be folded into a particular shape.

After all the greetings and other formalities, which would be suitably prolonged to drive the newlyweds to distraction, the bride and groom would enter their nuptial chamber, and no one would disturb them until they emerged.

The first paan would be square-folded. Both would eat it

together so their lips would meet in a kiss. That kiss, the first kiss of passion in their lives, would be prolonged, and when the young man would then look at his wife's lips he would see them blood-red because of the paan juice. And you know what red is to a bull: it intoxicates, excites him.

People talk about kissing but they don't have any idea about how many types of kisses there are. Let me tell you about just three of them. The kiss of entanglement is a kiss on the lips, which is practiced by lovers or by husband and wife. It entangles you further and further in the Maya of sex. The satanic kiss is a kiss on the eyes by a Dakini or a Pishacha. This kiss makes you see the ethereal world, which will in all probability drive you insane; that is why it is satanic. When Ma kisses you, though, She will kiss you on your forehead at the location of your third eye, which She causes to open. This is the kiss of enlightenment, the kiss of true Motherhood, and the day Ma gives you this kiss you become filled with Her Divine Intelligence. I think this is the best type of kiss, and after enjoying it I never feel like enjoying any other type of kiss. I want only Her sweet lips.

But most human beings insist on fleshly lips. Most human beings, unfortunately, have become so obsessed with sex that they have forgotten the beauty of a kiss. Forget coitus; once you have kissed someone, once you have come so close to another being as to unite your mouths together, how can you forget that person? Isn't sex just the uniting of the lower mouths together? When someone has so totally surrendered to you as to open his or her body to you, shouldn't you always remember that surrender? Most people don't, though; they enjoy and forget. It just goes to show that all sex today is directed solely by rnanubandhana. Traditionally, though, a couple would experience a romantic kiss first on that night of consummation, and it would be the experience of a lifetime for them.

The second paan was to be placed between the girl's breasts. The boy would take it with his mouth, using his tongue to clean and excite the area, thus igniting the erotic centers of the upper body. Remember how the ancient Romans in their orgies used

to pour wine over the women's breasts and then lick it up? This is the same sort of thing.

The third paan was to be folded flat and placed at the navel, a very important erotic center. Here the boy was not to use his tongue, only his lips. The erotic centers ignited above should now be truly inflamed.

The fourth paan was to be folded conically and placed in the vagina. As the young man bit it the conical tip would pierce the hymen. By this time the bride should be experiencing uncontrollable spasms. The boy would then mount her and discharge. If they knew Vajroli, of course, there would be no discharge; he would make her have so many orgasms that she would be satiated for a full three months. In any event after coitus they would both share the fifth paan, kissing again, and then they would drink the milk. Ayurveda says, "After food drink buttermilk, and after sex drink hot milk." The milk strengthened and invigorated them for further play.

At Indian marriage ceremonies a round fruit which looks something like a walnut and is called a *Madanaphala* is tied around the groom's wrist. Most people today don't bother to search for the real thing and tie any convenient root or fruit instead, and even the people who tie the real *Madanaphala* don't know what it is meant for. *Madana* is one of the names of the god of love, and *Madanaphala* is one of the best of aphrodisiacs. It is tied around the groom's wrist for the bride's benefit. Should he ever become impotent she would take that fruit which he had worn at the wedding, to which a small ritual had been done, and would administer it to him after preparing it in the prescribed way. Then he would again be able to perform his sexual duty to her. This was another of the customs propounded by our Rishis for the preservation of family and society, but as our society declines this knowledge is being lost.

Circumstances today just don't permit most people ever to have satisfactory sex. In the West no one allows themselves the time; as I've said, they are all clock-watchers. In India we have plenty of time but no privacy. The Indian couple is always afraid that auntie or little brother may be watching, spying on

them. This destroys the mood. Sex being all in the mind, what is the use in indulging in it without the proper mood? Another reason I am not in favor of today's sort of marriage is that it ruins sex. Marriage has become licensed prostitution. Neither the man nor his wife is legally permitted to enjoy with anyone else, so there is no incentive to gratify the partner. Everything regresses to self-gratification.

For years and years the priests burned widows alive on their husbands' funeral pyres, claiming that by doing so the women would become Sati. Nothing could be more ridiculous. If a man and a woman are deeply in love the one will not be able to last once the other dies; the longing is just too strong. My own father lived only a couple of years after the death of my mother; and during that period we would often find him sitting apart, wiping the tears from his eyes. A woman who finds herself bereft of her husband who she truly loved as her god incarnate will not find any further interest in life and will die. She may not throw herself on the pyre; she may starve herself or just waste away, but she will quit living. She is Sati; she has gone beyond rna and will meet her man again in future births. As long as you are restricted by rna you have no free will; only when the limitation of rna is broken can you become Sati.

A woman who is not so attached to her husband will not bother too much about his death. She will continue living; she might marry again. The rnanubandhana between her and her former husband is broken. They will no longer be born together but will go their separate ways. The same goes for a man whose wife dies and who then forgets her. These are not true marriages, only arrangements for the fulfillment of rnanubandhana. I say, why bother with marriage at all? It is no longer necessary to marry to enjoy sex; people enjoy more or less as they please nowadays. The only other use of marriage is to make the children you produce legitimate in the eyes of the law. This is convenient but is not an insurmountable difficulty if you prefer otherwise; many famous men and women were illegitimate. Why bother to marry and create complications for yourself?



## CREATION AND PROCREATION

Human beings like to procreate, to reproduce their own kind. If they could learn to create there is no limit to what they could achieve. But you have to give up procreation before you can begin to create, and few, very few, are willing to do that.

Let me try to explain the difference between creation and procreation. It's really all in the point of view. Ordinary men and women treat Nature as something external to them. They talk about Nature procreating because they see the continuous birth and death of the samsara surrounding them. Because of ignorance they conveniently forget that they too are part of the copulating game, insignificant worms in the samsara themselves. They self-identify with their own limited bodies and personalities. This puts them under the control of Nature, and they are not even aware of it; they remain subject to the Law of Karma and to rebirth.

If they could go beyond their limitations they could actually see that Nature is really doing the creating. Nature has control over the patterns that manifest, and all the reproduction in the world is just the natural outcome of the impulse of Nature. Therefore, it is Nature who creates, and ordinary mortals who procreate.

Humans think it is the other way around, out of ignorance. They believe that through sex they are creating a child. Why should they want a child? They just want someone to reproduce their own attributes, someone who will appreciate and love them. Just as Shiva and Shakti generate universes in which beings can, by means of hard penances, come to the stage of admiring and loving the Father and Mother of the cosmos, a man and a woman produce a child in the expectation of receiving love and admiration from it. But this is really procreation because they are unaware of the rnanubandhana, the impulse which impels them to do it. Real creation becomes possible only when they become aware of that impulse and transcend it. However, if everyone realized all at once their true selves then there would be no one to fall prey to Maya and continue

to ride the wheel of birth and death. Nature, therefore, keeps almost everyone in ignorance. Isn't it wonderful?

Conception is in itself a wonderful process. All the sperm have the same determination: "I must go through the cervix to the uterus, get into the tube, locate the ovum, and unite with it." The ovum is single and passive; it doesn't have to search for the sperm. The sperm have to swim hard against the current, and, of the millions ejaculated, only one is finally accepted by the egg. What can we learn from this?

First, the male should always be the active partner and the female the passive partner in the sex act. This is Nature's way, as exemplified in the physical process of sex. A man will never be able to penetrate if he cannot maintain an erection, and even after penetration he must make movements. The woman needs to do nothing but lie still and allow it to happen. She can cooperate if she pleases, but it is not at all necessary.

One of the problems with Westerners today is that some women are attempting to become the aggressive factor in the relationship. As I mentioned before, this is because they were males in their previous existences, and their present male partners were the females then. Although it is easy to give in to these past tendencies it is better to resist them and to learn the gender roles appropriate for your sex this time around. The male is meant to be dominant because Shiva must always control Shakti. This is why the male should be on top during copulation and why the woman must be beneath him. Shiva must be on top to control. If the woman is on top Shakti is in control, but Shakti knows no control. The result? The male might become a pervert, because the free-flowing Shakti will cause his perverted karmas to emanate from the causal body. The idea that the woman should actively climb on top of the man is completely against Nature. What happens during Vajroli is different, of course.

Second, only that sperm which will provide the specific heredity required by the spirit who is to take birth will be selected by the egg. The sperm having the strongest rnanubandhana with the ovum is always the winner. If the child is meant to be born

blind or deformed or mentally retarded, only that spermatozoon which fits the bill in its entirety will make it to the egg.

“Gahana karmano gatih”: The ways of karma are profoundly deep. Sometimes even when there are plenty of sperm they run into a “No Vacancy” sign when they try to meet the egg. If there is no Jiva with sufficient rnanubandhana or if the horoscope which would result will not fit the requirements of the Jiva or if there is some curse, you may pour in liters of semen and still conception will not occur.

If there is enough rnanubandhana to attract some Jiva then that disembodied spirit will impel the sperm and ovum to meet. When they unite the two become one; duality is ended. But this unity, like the unity of orgasm, is very temporary. Because of the overwhelming joy of the union the sperm and ovum procreate and form billions of cells. As the zygote begins to divide, duality begins again.

Until the heart starts to beat the Jiva is in a state of bliss, at one with Krishna, in a state of union with the Absolute. Once the heart starts to beat personalized existence begins, separation from the Beloved. The Jiva really begins to self-identify with the fetus only after the heart starts to beat. The Jiva enters the zygote at the moment of conception, to be sure; otherwise growth and movement would never occur. We say, though, that life really begins in the fourth month, and after the seventh month the Jiva has a firm grip on the fetus because it is then that the fetus becomes viable if premature labor occurs.

The Jiva in the womb has a memory of past lives. This explains why the fetus kicks and moves about: It recalls its past freedom and resents being trapped in a cramped womb, surrounded by hot, fetid intestines, tortured by the spicy food, intoxicants, and other inappropriate things its mother indulges in. The subtle body completely self-identifies with the fetus and enjoys the placental food. Despite the torments of living in its own waste products it never wants to leave the womb, because it remembers its past lives and comprehends the mistakes it has made. It promises God that if it is permitted to remain in the womb indefinitely it will worship with concerted mind.

At the moment of birth, though, the fetus is cut off from the

placenta. Because it craves food it projects its mind outward — and forgets its past lives. When its head is squeezed coming through the birth canal it forgets everything and comes into the world screaming, “Koham? Koham? (Who am I? Who am I?)” Some hear in its cries “Uma! Uma!” Uma is one of the names of Shiva’s wife, Parvati. By crying “Uma!” Shakti is calling, “I am here!”

The embryo or fetus is the characteristic of Maya. At the time of birth the fetus forgets all the promises it has made to God about what it will do after its birth because the mother and father were copulating only for pleasure, not to have a child. Even in those couples whose aim was to procreate, the last moments of coitus produce such great passion that they forget everything except the bliss of sex, and this is what makes the child forgetful as it is born. Out of a million cases maybe one couple will unite for the specific purpose of producing progeny and will keep that determination even through the orgasm. That child will remain fuzzily aware of his past existence: He will have a sort of ESP.

Why should a guru call the disciples who come to him “children”? Because in a very real way he is creating them, though not through the usual method of procreation. He is not interested in the body at all, only in what is within the body.

Jesus said, “You must be born again.” He meant that you must be given a new birth by your guru. The guru must recreate you after first destroying you. Your ordinary physical birth pushes your face into the slush of the samsara. The guru gives you a new birth which takes you out of the world.

Doesn’t it make sense then for an Aghori to die to the world? Once you are dead you can be easily reborn, and this time with full consciousness of who you are. When a guru “mates” with his Shakti to create a disciple, he does it not for pleasure but to fulfill a specific purpose. Such a “child” is bound to be clairaudient and clairvoyant, isn’t he?

This is why a true guru will always be celibate. He is not interested in using his semen for mere procreation; he preserves it for something better. Today everyone pooh-poohs this idea. They say, “Semen is only a natural product. There is no harm

in evicting it as much as you like." In fact, I was told that one theory making the rounds in America now is that if a man does not ejaculate at least once every forty-eight hours that he runs the risk of enlargement of the prostate! How absurd! What rubbish! The fact is, too much emission of semen is much more likely to cause prostate enlargement in old age than is too little ejaculation.

## OJAS

For creation you must use the semen in a different way than the way you use it for procreation. Semen is that substance in the male body which has the ability to create. Only procreation is possible if it is expelled from the body, ejaculated during the sex act. If it is retained within the body, stored instead of being wasted, then real creation becomes possible through ojas. *Ojas* is the source of the body's metabolic energy, the Jathara Agni. Loss of semen means loss of ojas and thus loss of digestive power. Ayurveda cautions that all diseases result from disturbed digestion, which explains why Ayurveda always also cautions that the wise man should preserve his semen.

It is said in Ayurveda that ojas is derived from semen, but this is not quite so. Ojas exists in association with the head and the nervous system. In fact the "aura" or "halo" which you can see around a person's head is composed of his or her ojas. When I say that loss of semen causes loss of ojas you must remember that sex is all in the mind. Before the penis surges into erection there must be a mental command for it to do so. When thoughts of sex fill the mind the *Kama Agni* (Fire of Lust) becomes inflamed. Heat is anathema to ojas. The *Kama Agni* causes a disturbance in the ojas, which alters the brain chemistry and directs the endocrine glands to begin to secrete. The effect is first felt on the prostate in men and the Bartholin's gland in women. Whenever oozing from these glands occurs you can be sure that ojas is being dissipated. During celibacy the ojas goes on and on harmonizing itself.

Women are lucky in that every month all the filth in their

blood is drained out. This is the function of menstruation, and each menstrual cycle strengthens a woman's ojas because there is less waste material in the body to disturb digestion or brain chemistry. Unfortunately, since women are nine times more passionate than men most of them will find that this increased ojas merely serves to increase their sex drive. They will be impelled to copulate more, and all the benefits will be lost. Ayurveda recognizes that the same substances which rejuvenate the body also act as aphrodisiacs and warns that when a rejuvenating effect is desired, sex must be restricted.

Ordinary sexual activity destroys ojas, but so do thoughts of sex and sexual fantasies even if you do not act on them. In fact continual brooding about anything is equally devastating to the ojas because thought causes the mind and brain to heat up and all this mental heat, no matter what the cause, causes excessive physical heat. According to Ayurveda excess heat in the body leads to constipation, the root of most diseases. Heat also causes hypersecretion of all the glands, which in turn excites the mind via the body. It's a vicious cycle. Excess coolness in the body can be readily dealt with; excess heat is dangerous. Any unnatural heat ruins the ojas just as surely as does an inflamed *Kama Agni*.

Likewise, harmonious thoughts increase ojas. How often have you heard someone say to a pregnant woman, "What a glow you have about your face!" That glow is the aura, composed of ojas. You might think that a pregnant woman's ojas would be low because her body tissues are being depleted to furnish nutrients for the baby. But because of the emotions of motherhood, the overwhelming love for the child being formed, ojas actually increases.

## CONSERVATION

If you want to progress from the state of being a donkey in human form, one who lives for eating and procreating, to a higher state, you must conserve your semen. If you are female you must preserve the vaginal secretions which pour out during

excitement and sex. The need for celibacy is the same in both sexes. There are dozens of good reasons for *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), but we will consider just a few.

First, Newton's Law of Motion: Action and reaction are equal and opposite. When a man indulges in too much sex or masturbation he kills millions upon millions of sperm. He gets a little thrill out of it, but he must reproduce all those living beings again within his body. Celibacy is not meant to remove all pleasure from life; it is meant to avoid killing sperm, among other things. After such an overindulgent man has died isn't Nature right to make him be born as a spermatozoon for at least seven births? Then he learns what it is like to be wasted: living quietly in the body, a brief moment of joy, freedom, and — finished. And such a man will continue to be reborn as a sperm until he can locate an ovum with which he has some *rnanubandhana*. You see, hells are not imaginary. Some of them exist outside the earth but many exist right here. It's just that we can't see them easily. When you become aware of the real significance of, say, *Kumbhipaka*, the hell in which you are born and reborn as a spermatozoon, well, then you will say, "Oh, yes, now I realize. . . ."

Second, if you are not interested in sex then it will be impossible for any voluptuous, passionate young woman to entrap you, or if you are female for any man to sweet-talk you. Since you have nothing physical to take from anyone you will never have to subject yourself to scheming lovers and succumb to their wiles. The more you indulge in sex the more your mind becomes attached to it. This makes it far easier for someone, human or spirit, to use sex as a bait to hook you. Abstinence, *Brahmacharya*, is safer.

Third, *Brahmacharya* makes your nerves very strong. Sex is a nervous response of the body. The more you enervate your body the more mentally unstable or "infirm" do you become. You can't afford to have weak nerves if you want to perform *Aghora sadhanas* because the first wild shrieking spirit who comes along will reduce you to a gibbering wreck, or will give you such a rude shock that your nervous system will collapse and you'll die of heart failure. Or, if your guru wanted to give

you some of his *Shakti*, your nervous system might not be able to take it, in which case you would run amok.

Fourth, the body's *Agni* controls not only the body's digestion but also that of the mind, which has to digest all the new things it learns every day. Loss of semen causes loss of *ojas* which dulls the mental digestion, which is especially bad for spiritual aspirants, who must develop subtle perception.

Fifth, the physical pleasure of sex arises from the stimulation of nerves in the genitals, resulting from the friction caused by the movements of the penis in the vagina or anus. Our ancient Indian scientists knew the value of the anus as an erotic center, mind you. Be it vagina, anus, or mouth, the friction produces heat, which destabilizes the mind. The more you copulate the less firm will be your mind. As I've noted, firmness of mind is especially essential in *Aghora*.

Sixth, years of *Brahmacharya* will develop great strength of *ojas*. Your aura or halo will develop to such an extent that whoever meets you will feel refreshed and relieved afterward. The *ojas* will harmonize both you and those around you. This is the hallmark of a real saint, the test you can use to separate the men from the donkeys.

Finally, copulation causes a disturbance in the Ether Element because of the friction vibrations and the queer thoughts which are engendered in you as a result. These sex vibrations are tremendously irritating to deities and other high ethereal beings. Since most *sadhanas* involve the attraction of an ethereal being to you, sex is contraindicated in *sadhana*, absolutely. I once made the mistake of teaching a *Ganesh Mantra* to a man who could not control himself. He remained celibate for almost three months and then just when he was about to achieve, he decided he had to have some sex. He went in to his wife, who unsuccessfully tried to prevent him from sleeping with her. After enjoying himself twice he went to sleep. In a dream he saw an enraged elephant chasing him and giving him a good slap with its trunk. The next morning his face was swollen to twice its normal size. He was removed to the hospital and died that night.

*Ganesh* is the lord of the *Muladhara Chakra*, the lowest of the energy centers, in which the *Kundalini* lies sleeping. Now

just imagine: If you are doing penance to make the energy move upward and suddenly you reverse its flow and make it move downward in great spasms, what is going to happen? You will blow out your nervous system like this man did.

Consider two other benefits of remaining celibate. According to Ayurveda it takes thirty days for a drop of semen to form. In those who are good celibates the semen is so sticky it can be pulled out into a meter-long thread without breaking; very sticky. And its consistency is like cream. If it falls onto cloth it can be knocked off without staining or separating. Such high-quality semen is sure to produce high-quality progeny if used for that purpose.

Also, ojas is a living substance. We say it is derived from semen because all the Jivas in the unused sperm give up their individual existence and merge with the ojas. This can happen only in a true celibate and is a sort of blessing to the Jivas in the sperms because they become exempt from taking any future births. I mentioned that the ojas forms the halo or aura which attracts people to a saint. How could they be attracted unless it was a living substance? I am talking about a true attraction here, not some sensory enticement. Buddha's aura, for instance, affected everyone within a fifty-mile radius of wherever he was staying: They all became automatically calmer and more introverted.

I hope you know now some of the importance of Brahmacharya. Now it is necessary to consider the methods by which celibacy can be preserved. The most obvious method is simple avoidance of sex, but this is not perfect. The more you restrict yourself the more frequent will be your nocturnal emissions. If you go in for physical control you must be very thorough. Some asanas will deaden the sexual nerves. In certain rituals a thin wire is passed through the penis and tied tightly around it to ensure that not even a drop of prostate fluid is lost. But all this is limited because if the mind is not controlled, thoughts of sex will still emanate and ojas will be lost. Loss of ojas is far more detrimental to the body and mind than is loss of physical semen.

The mind must be controlled. Ganja (marijuana flowers) and

tobacco smoked together "burn" the semen if you don't eat any heavy food afterward. The tobacco makes you physically impotent, and the ganja makes you mentally impotent. This is quite useful, but it is still reliance on external agencies. You must "burn" the sex center in the brain, up in the thalamus, if you want to be perfectly free of sexual proclivities. Some people say that celibacy means never discharging semen, even in a dream; but I say that only that man who never even gets an erection is the true celibate. His penis should not even "rumble" when he gets some stimulus. Not only should a good female celibate not ooze from her vagina, but her clitoris should not even twitch once. Mental control is essential if you hope to achieve this state.

This is not an overnight process, you understand. It takes years, and a good guru is necessary. He will allow his "child" to try out sex as much as he or she likes for a month or so. After the month is over the "child" will know exactly what are the effects of sex on the body, mind, and sadhana, and he or she will understand why it is useless to try to do serious sadhana and simultaneously try to carry on an active sex life.

An Aghori takes a somewhat different approach to sex and celibacy, of course. One day I got wild with my penis. I told it, "You bloody thing, what do you think of yourself, always spoiling my sleep by becoming hard?" I went into the bathroom and found some acid and poured it over my penis. My God, it was terrible! Then, when the pain was troubling me I got wilder and said, "So, not enough, eh?" and I grated some green chilies and applied them as a poultice.

I can't tell you what agony I was in for three days, but it healed without a scar. In fact, it acted as a type of purification.

Ayurveda states that semen resides in the brain. The thick white semen from the testicles does not travel upward into the head, of course; this statement means that the brain is the seat of ojas, because the whole process which culminates in the ejaculation of semen begins with a disturbance in the mind which causes certain brain cells to be dilated. This dilation causes ojas to move downward and impel the seminal movement via the neurotransmitters. A firm mind means firm ojas and no

emission of semen; loss of mental control means loss of both ojas and semen.

Firmness of the mind is always difficult, if only because you have so many rnanubandhanas with so many individuals of the opposite sex that you will always be running into someone with whom you once had a sexual relationship, no matter how far you try to hide from society.

Once a certain lady used to come and offer fruit and what-have-you daily to a certain celibate sadhu. The day came when she asked if she could massage his legs. He permitted her to do so. In the course of the massage her hand accidentally touched his penis. "Don't touch that!" he commanded. "That is *Maha-papa* (the Great Sinner)."

The next day, to return the favor, the sadhu started to massage the lady. Accidentally his hand touched her vulva. "Maharaj," she said, "don't touch there. That is *Naraka Kunda* (the Pit of Hell)."

The sadhu, however, had become excited by the touch of her genitals and said to her, "You know that the only place for sinners is hell. Therefore, if I now put the Great Sinner into the Pit of Hell all the sin will be extinguished." The lady, who had also become excited by his touch, was only too ready to agree. And that is how the sadhu came to lose his celibacy.

Even if you can maintain your physical celibacy you may still get yourself into trouble if you are not careful. Shankaracharya (the great preacher of Vedanta) was once made to learn a good lesson because he forgot that mental Brahmacharya is more important than physical Brahmacharya. He wanted to debate with Mandan Mishra on religious texts in the city of Mithila. Entering the city he made his way to a group of young women at a well to ask for directions to his adversary's house. The girls had a nice laugh at his expense when they heard why he had come and told him, "Maharaj, before you try to debate with Mandan Mishra first debate with his parrots, and if you can defeat them then only think of going on to him." Shankaracharya left in a huff, but once he reached Mandan Mishra's house he saw the truth of what they had said: All the parrots in the big banyan trees encircling the house were reciting texts

they had memorized because of Mandan Mishra's habit of practicing out loud in his garden.

Shankaracharya was greeted warmly by his opponent, who realized what the zealous young man had in mind. Recalling the obligation a host has to his guests Mandan Mishra offered food to Shankaracharya, but it was indignantly refused: "No, I have come to debate, not to eat." Mandan Mishra's wife told him, "You will have your debate without fail, Maharaj, but first please do enjoy a meal with us." Shankaracharya was adamant, however, so the debate began.

Before long it became clear that Mandan Mishra could not win. Suddenly his wife said to Shankaracharya, "Maharaj, the texts state that the husband and the wife are two halves of the same being. You must also debate with me, the Vamangi, the left half of my husband." Shankaracharya had no choice but to agree.

She began to discuss the erotic art, the *Kamakala*. Her opponent had never had any experience of women and was therefore unable to answer her. Moreover, as he was a sworn celibate there was no way he could go out and experience sex in order to learn about it. What to do? He asked for a twenty-four-hour recess of the debate. Mandan Mishra's wife smiled at him and said, "Maharaj, nowhere in the rules of debate is a recess permitted. You are about to lose. But that's all right; you are our guest. Take your recess." Only Ma could be so generous, even at the cost of victory.

Shankaracharya went back to his disciples and told them to guard his body carefully. He then went into a trance and used his subtle body to enter the physical body of an old king who had just died. Everyone in attendance on the king was astonished, to say the least, to see the ruler jump back to life. His wives — kings always possess large harems — were especially astonished because he immediately called them in to him. Some of them noticed a change in his personality, especially during lovemaking, but they feared for their necks and dared not say anything.

Having thoroughly learned the science of love from these ladies, Shankaracharya returned to his own body. The next

morning he defeated Mandan Mishra's wife in the debate. Then, feeling generous, his ego pampered by his success, he said grandly, "Now, Mandan Mishra, I am pleased to appoint you head of my monastery at Jyotirmath near Badrinath."

Mandan Mishra's wife laughed in Shankaracharya's face and said, "At one time I thought you were a true ascetic, but now I see you are a fake just like all the rest."

Shankaracharya got the shock of his lifetime and said, "What do you mean?"

She replied, "You teach that the physical universe is just an illusion and that Maya does not exist. If you are not your body but are the pure, undefiled Universal Soul as you claim to be then your vow of celibacy applies to your body and to your mind and to your entire consciousness. How could you then legitimately enjoy sex through your subtle body? Are you not guilty of breaking your vows? Is this not a stain, a stigma, on your ochre robes of renunciation?"

"Moreover, if the Universal Soul is all that exists in the universe and all else is illusory then you and your debating and your success in this debate are also illusory. If you, I, and my husband are all the same Universal Soul, then with whom are you debating? Yourself? Isn't it a contradiction in terms?"

"My husband is named Mandana (construction); he believes in building things up. He encourages and provides confidence to those who come to him. You believe only in destruction — all for what? To prove to the world, which you believe to be illusory, that you are unconquerable in debate. What is your value? Can you compare with my husband?"

Shankaracharya had to keep quiet. Shakti had taught him a good lesson.

Actually there is some distinction between physical and mental Brahmacharya, even though Mandan Mishra's wife was correct in her argument that a sworn Brahmachari must observe total celibacy. It is never bad to preserve bodily celibacy even if you must perform mental sex to complete some rnanubandhana. Nor is it bad to preserve mental Brahmacharya, to be completely aloof from the body, if you must perform physical coitus to fulfill some rna. This is how an Aghori works, in fact: The

body does whatever it must do to complete its rnas, and the mind is a passive observer, never self-identifying with the actions of the body. It is unbelievably difficult, though.

Someone once asked me, "If Tukaram Maharaj was really a true devotee of God, concentrating on Vitthala (Vishnu) twenty-four hours a day, how could he have had two wives and fathered so many children?" This is a good question which deserves a careful answer. Tukaram Maharaj was never apart from Vitthala mentally even while his physical body continued to fulfill its rnanubandhanas. His rnas with his wives included sex, and his body performed the sex act with his wives. His mind, though, was never aware of his body or of what it was doing. His mental Brahmacharya was perfect, so he could father children and still remain pure.

But my questioner was not completely satisfied with this explanation and posed another question: "If Tukaram Maharaj was not self-identifying with his body, who was? The penis can become erect only when the ego self-identifies with it. If Tukaram Maharaj's ego had lost itself in Vitthala, what remained to self-identify with his penis?"

I love to answer such questions, because their acuteness shows me that the people who are listening to me are thinking about what I have said. Something must have been inside Tukaram's body self-identifying; this much is clear. And one other thing is clear: It wasn't Vitthala. If it had been Vitthala or some other deity, or if Tukaram Maharaj had self-identified with the Universal Soul during copulation, then the power of the deity would have been transmitted to the children, even to some tiny extent, and they would have become spiritual giants. But they didn't; they were perfectly ordinary, mundane. There must therefore have been another personality present, one with sufficient rnanubandhana with Tukaram's wives to perform sex with them through the medium of Tukaram's body. Tukaram Maharaj was not even observing it, though; he was elsewhere.

Rnanubandhana *can* be completed without physical sex. An ethereal being lacks a body with which to copulate. If that being desires sex it must locate a couple engaged in the sex act, enter

one of their bodies, and enjoy. Self-identification must not be permitted, though; then there is no stain of karma.

Now, the practical application: Suppose there is a girl who loves me. Perhaps because of the social situation she is unable to marry me and must marry someone else. I am not ethereal, but my subtle body is. When I decide that the time is right to fulfill my rnanubandhana of sex with her I will wait until she and her husband are in a deep sexual embrace. Then, by entering his body, I will see to it that she gets full satisfaction.

She gets her satisfaction from me, which breaks my rnanubandhana with her. She is fully satiated, because I know how to satiate her; her husband would never be able to do it. But the husband knows that she is satiated and thinks he is responsible. He takes the credit for being a big stud bull, which is fine with me because by his self-identification he gets all the karma. I get my sexual enjoyment and remain untouched by karma. Everyone is happy, and I have preserved my physical celibacy.

## SVAPNESHVARI SIDDHI AND SHIVA LATA MUDRA

If you want to preserve even your mental celibacy you must have some siddhi. Svapneshvari will do nicely. Suppose I discover a rnanubandhana with a girl in France. I find it very inconvenient and time-consuming to travel to France and romance her. So, I send Svapneshvari to her in a male form. In a dream she finds herself enjoying sex with a man whose face is always hidden from her. She is satiated, because sex in a dream is always more satisfying than is physical sex. There are no inhibitions, no fear of discovery, no worry about inadequacy, no restraint to full pleasure in a dream. By satiating her in this way my rnanubandhana with her is broken. She never knows who has come to her and never cares to know. There is no karma and no interruption of either my mental or physical celibacy.

Absolute celibacy is too far away for most people, of course,

but our Vedic religion has provided for everyone no matter what their level of achievement. If you restrict yourself to having sex with one partner, for example if you are married and engage in sex only with your spouse, this is also Brahmacharya, the Brahmacharya appropriate for married people. And as long as you observe total celibacy during specific periods of penance you too can achieve great things, if you work hard.

However, even a married man can practice absolute celibacy and still fulfill his sexual duty to his wife if he knows Shiva Lata Mudra. He must worship his wife as the cosmic Shakti, and she must worship him as Lord Shiva. Shiva is the controller, Lata the controlled. *Lata* literally means "creeper," like the ivy which twines around a column. Because Shakti has emanated from Shiva and wishes to return to Him She is impelled to come into close proximity to Him. He is the center, the Linga, the fixed, unwavering nucleus. In order to become one with Him, Shakti gives up Her own independent characteristics and makes an absolute surrender to Him. A creeper has no support of its own, which is why it must take the help of a tree or pillar. Once it has selected its support to grow on, the creeper cannot change its mind and shift to another support: It is committed. The tree is beautified by the creeper, the creeper is supported by the tree. Neither is complete without the other.

When a man and a woman come together for Shiva Lata Mudra the woman must sit on the man's left thigh and hold his penis with her right hand. He must cup her left breast with his left hand. Like a creeper she drapes herself around him, clinging tightly like a delicate vine; and he permits himself to be clung to, offering her support.

There are three types of Shiva Lata Mudra: mundane, spiritual, and one which is beyond both the mundane and the spiritual. The mundane gives maximum sexual excitement; the spiritual is for sadhana; and "beyond" is too advanced to be dealt with here. In all types the female counts japa with her left hand, the male with his right. The mantras are specific for each type. He forgets who he is, and she forgets who she is. He thinks, "I am Lord Shiva in the form of Bhairava (the Fearful Lord), and this is my Shakti, my Bhairavi." She thinks, "This



is my Lord Shiva, and I am His Grand Consort, His Bhairavi (the Fearful Goddess)."

If the couple is doing it for mundane purposes they must concentrate on exciting each other. Without realizing it she will begin to breathe through her left nostril and will direct that Shakti to him. His right nostril will be working and that Shakti of his will be directed to her. Hypersecretion of all the glands will result, and at the moment of greatest excitation cessation of breathing occurs for a moment. Then the male mounts and discharges his semen convulsively. Because of hypersecretion he will now eject three teaspoonsful of semen as opposed to his normal one teaspoonful. Because the vagina and cervix have become utterly loose and dilated the sperm will go directly to the mouth of the cervix. The result is a child, if this is done at the right time of the month. This is the Brahmacharya appropriate to the ordinary householder because by such sex, satiation occurs for a month or more and ojas is not wasted by frequent orgasms.

The spiritual Shiva Lata Mudra is quite different. The Shiva must control his Shakti very carefully to ensure that she does not become sexually excited. The couple should be able to sit together for at least three hours without the least excitation, no twitching or oozing. The girl must understand that she will not get an ordinary orgasm this way. If she waits patiently she will eventually get a super orgasm which will make her forget sex forever. If this Mudra is done properly she will go into Bhava Samadhi: Her emotions will crescendo until her mind becomes totally one-pointed, directed toward Shiva, and she will partly forget her worldly existence for awhile. Even Mahabhava Samadhi, which I call emotional highlights, is possible — total immersion in Shiva but with retained awareness of the bliss. Wonderful!

The concentration must be intense and the self-identification with Bhairava and Bhairavi perfect. Usually the couple should have already enjoyed plenty of sex together, should have experimented with sex as much as they desired, so that they can drop it for several months and work for something beyond ordinary sex. Once a couple gets initiated into this practice they

develop such a liking for it that they count the hours until they can practice it again; they can think of nothing else except performing it. This is good; their minds are effectively disengaged from mundane things by this sadhana and their urge for togetherness is fully satisfied. In the beginning the woman must be willing to wait. If she is patient and works hard her experience will affect her more strongly than hundreds of orgasms all at once; she will be forever satiated.

The beauty is the wonderful play of the two partners. At one point the male will feel such overwhelming love for his Shakti that he thinks, "I must give her everything." Then Shakti becomes indignant: "I am your Shakti; how can you give me anything? You are useless without me, you could not even exist." Then Shiva smiles and says, "Oh, is that so? From where did you originate if not from me?" The intoxication of this play cannot be described; you simply have to experience it yourself to know what it is.

This play can only begin when the true personalities of the man and woman surface. Where do you find nowadays a man who is strong as a tree, solid as the Rock of Gibraltar, firm enough to support his partner without a single lapse? And where do you find a woman who is sure enough of herself to surrender totally to her partner, relying totally on him for support like a creeper does on a tree? This is why people find sex so unsatisfactory today and why they go in for dolls and dildos instead. It is no wonder that today's people are maladjusted sexually. They will get a glimpse of what real sex can be only if they study and practice this technique. Otherwise they will continue to grope about, making a mess of things, copulating without satisfaction, becoming more and more neurotic.

Once the first posture is perfected the couple moves on to the second posture: face to face, the female on the male's lap, the penis near but not in the vagina. Being face to face there is no holding of penis or breast. Once they can sit this way for three hours without the least excitation there are three other stages. In the final stage there is full penetration of the vagina by the erect penis with full control: not a twitch, not a rumble. Only when this is perfected can they move on to Vajroli.

The examination of a student who might like to learn Vajroli involves making two girls sit on the boy, one on each thigh, for three hours. When the boy can do that he has achieved — a little.

I know that many of the people who read this are immediately going to jump up, rush out the door, grab a partner, sit down, and try it out. I don't mind if they do; they will learn soon enough that without adequate prior preparation it is impossible to succeed at Lata Mudra. You will simply get aroused, and even if you succeed in avoiding orgasm you will still ooze. Until you reach the state where you can self-identify with Shiva or with Bhairavi, depending on your gender, for a full three hours at a time, you will be unable to succeed at this because it is not your personality which will be achieving it; it is the personality of Shiva or Shakti which you have invoked and projected into yourself which will succeed at it. Which means that without a guru to show you the way you can try this for a hundred years and you will still be unable to perfect it. It is good to know about it, though; once you learn about it you may become truly interested in it and not merely curious about it. Once you have a genuine desire to learn it Nature will see that a teacher comes your way. Nature is never cruel. She always gives you what you want, provided you want it badly enough.

Until you do locate a teacher there are things you can do to prepare yourself, if you are willing to work at them sincerely. First you must utterly efface from your consciousness the idea that you and your partner are lovers, or husband and wife. You must treat each other as mother and son. Freud was so obsessed by the Oedipus complex because he never realized that sex was not the only form of union which can occur between two individuals. He said that all girls experience penis envy. Actually they experience the desire for Shiva's linga, which is the state of oneness, and when this desire is projected out into the body it becomes penis envy in the unenlightened individual. The effect of Freud's writings has been to make whoever reads them overly conscious of the body and, therefore, of sex. Sex is no doubt important, but it is only secondary. Freud tried to make it primary.

This is why I always say that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Generations have now grown up studying Freud, learning wrong or imperfect knowledge because of his errors, and convincing themselves that there is nothing to human interaction except sex. This is why most Americans think they are satisfied with sex alone. Sensual love is all their parents learned. They never developed true, deep maternal love, and since only a pervert would have sex with his or her child that parent ends up loving the child very little. Such parents just don't know how to love their children, since they only know sexual love. American children grow up without any parental love and become so love-starved that they will take any affection they can get. Only a few are choosy. The rest just can't help themselves.

If you look at a voluptuous woman or a handsome man and see only the skeleton beneath the flesh, many benefits will accrue to you. You will communicate with a deeper layer of the individual, one closer to the center than the superficial flesh and skin which is that individual's Maya. Loving Maya always leads to misery; loving the skeleton at least enables you to project your love onto a form that will continue to exist even after death. It is certainly not the ultimate, but it is an improvement.

A male should look at every woman, especially his partner, and see Ma within her. A female should see all men and boys, and especially her partner, as her sons. This reduces the danger of falling into sex, it teaches the couple something of parental love, and it leads to fidelity in the relationship.

Another thing: All desire for personal enjoyment or self-gratification has to be effaced from the mind. If you have even the slightest intention to take or gain something from your partner, that tiny desire can snowball when your nervous system is under full load, and an avalanche of energy can result, ending in sex. You must forget how to take and learn only how to give. Does any real mother ever ask for anything from her child? No, nothing, not even love. And a child never need ask anything from a good mother because she will provide it without the child's asking, which allows the child to give his or her love freely. Shiva is known as the Great Giver. He has given

up everything and sits alone in the smashan waiting for someone to love Him. You have to become like Shiva, sitting alone in the smashan of the world, if you ever hope to achieve at this sadhana.

These are just preliminaries, of course; but they are essential preliminaries, and worth working hard on if you want to obtain the benefits of this sadhana: good celibacy; fidelity to one partner because of longing, not legalities; the presence of Shiva and Shakti in your bodies as Avishkara; and eventual samadhi of intense emotion.

## AMRITA

One of the benefits of perfect Brahmacharya is Amrita. *Amrita*, which literally means "undying," is a secretion of the pineal gland. It is the true Fountain of Youth, because through Amrita you can preserve your youth almost permanently.

There are three important *rasas* (juices) in the world: Amra Rasa, or Kama Rasa, which is mango juice; Charma Rasa, which is semen (literally, "skin juice"); and Bhakti Rasa or Rama Rasa, which is Amrita. Mango juice represents the epitome of nourishing food. It strengthens the body but is an aphrodisiac, making the semen move downward. Rama Rasa becomes obtainable only when the semen (that means the ojas, remember, not the sticky white fluid) is made to move upward, undisturbed. Semen, or ojas, is the pivot between the mundane world, the world of Kama, and the spiritual realm, the world of Rama. As they say, "Where there is Kama (lust) there is no Rama, and where there is Rama (divinity) there is no Kama."

It might seem logical that semen would be the best diet to increase ojas, but this is not so. I did meet a forty-year-old whore in France who looked a mere twenty-five, and she attributed it to drinking semen. There are side-effects, though. It makes you more prone to certain diseases, and, more importantly, it makes your Apana Vayu move more forcefully downward, making you more and more sexually arousable. This is because semen is not ojas but merely the raw material from which ojas is pro-

duced. Those who drink semen and expect their ojas to increase will obtain only physical benefits, like the French whore did. It is not so easy to extract Shakti from Maya.

Celibacy gives you access to Amrita, which must then be externalized if you want to use it to obtain physical immortality. It is not necessary that the Amrita come from your body for it to be effective on you. There are other sources you can tap. The easiest is to locate a girl who is just about to have the first menses of her life. An expert will be able to spot that moment when Amrita will be available from the corners of her eyes. She will actually thank you when you remove it, because it will feel as if a tremendous weight has been removed from her body. That weight is a good part of her Shakti. By removing it you shorten her life span by up to ten years. Don't forget the Law of Karma. Of course if you didn't remove it she would probably waste it in masturbation or fornication anyway, but that doesn't exonerate you. And besides, unless you are an expert or know where to locate one this method is of no use to you.

Or, you can procure an elephant. Do you know that this was the real reason kings were supposed to keep elephants? Most kings never knew. An elephant is not just for pomp and pageantry. If it is well cared for and becomes pleased with its master it can take Amrita from its body and present it to its master. Today no one knows how to do this, save a few who tell no one.

Even if you are married you can become immortal through Amrita, though during the sadhana and forever afterward you must observe absolute Brahmacharya, because Amrita is a glandular substance. Whenever Kama Agni, the Fire of Lust, becomes enkindled in you it causes chemical changes which would consume this substance and nullify all the work you had done to obtain it. You will then ask, "Is it wise even to try to gain physical immortality?" Well, I never had that desire. I want to die out so that I can be free of all my earthly limitations. It just depends on what you want to do. These are the facts I am presenting to you, and you have to decide what to do with them. You can use your Amrita to create more ojas,

you can use it to obtain immortality, you can do whatever you please with it. But first you have to obtain it.

And don't think it is not wonderful to be immortal; it is. Think of Chang Dev, the Aghori who learned that he would only be able to meet his guru after 1,400 years. Now, in 1,400 years who knows what sort of incarnations you may have to take? What if you forget all about spirituality and miss your chance? So Chang Dev deliberately remained alive for 1,400 years and then met his guru: Mukta Bai, the fourteen-year-old sister of Shri Jnaneshwar. Yogi Chang Dev used a different method than Amrita, but the idea is the same.

Amrita is actually being produced continually in everyone's body, and continuously it drips down into the gut where it is incinerated by Jathara Agni, the fire of digestion. A Yogi can trap this Amrita and prevent it from being destroyed by practicing Khechari Mudra. The guru first tests the aspirant to determine whether or not he'll be able to succeed. If you pass this test you then must practice *Shirshasana*, the "headstand," for several hours daily until you perfect it. Many people today are being misled by half-baked Yoga teachers who tell them, "Do Shirshasana, it sends plenty of blood to the brain" — bull! They prescribe the headstand to everyone without considering its uses and restrictions. For example, those who indulge in sex should never practice Shirshasana lest they weaken themselves both physically and mentally; the brain and nerves will suffer. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

The real asanas are not physical anyway; they are mental. Can you even imagine what mental Shirshasana must be like? If you can you can do away with the need for the physical headstand altogether. But it is not so easy.

When your Shirshasana becomes firm your guru will begin to cut your frenulum lingua with a piece of rock salt; not a blade! He cuts only a tiny distance each day, and the salt prevents the cut surfaces from healing together. This is very delicate: If he cuts too far the student may never be able to speak again. This is not the modern idea of taking a scalpel and swish! Straight through on the first go! Oh no! There is a reason for doing it gradually.

When the frenulum has been sufficiently cut, and the tongue

can be retracted to cover the back of the mouth, the guru selects an auspicious day to begin Khechari Mudra. On that day you will be told to perform Shirshasana and put your tongue completely backward into your mouth. Your guru will warn you that whenever you feel something dripping onto your tongue you should not swallow it but instead come down out of the posture and let the secretion flow from your mouth into your hand. This is Amrita, which should be taken to your guru, who will put it into a special paan and only then make you eat it. This secretion needs to be consumed only thrice. After that your mind becomes steady, firm absolutely, which will make your meditation steady, no waverings of the mind to any side. Isn't that useful?

Amrita really *can* make you "undying," to the extent you follow the conditions. There are a lot of conditions, the main one being that you must never again enjoy sex or else the Amrita will dissolve and within a short time your body will age completely.

It is the same way with those amulets which some gurus implant into their disciples' arms or legs. These amulets have two important effects: You grow younger and younger as the years roll by, and you develop *Vak Siddhi*, which means that whatever you say comes true. When a guru gives such an amulet to a disciple two promises are extracted: total celibacy from then on and complete equanimity even in the face of severe provocation, because any curse you deliver will come true and will ruin both you and whoever you curse.

In the spiritual field, if you fall down you don't just have to stay and repeat a grade like you do in school. You will have to start all over again right from nursery school, which will take a number of lifetimes. To fool about with these things without knowing their gravity is terribly dangerous.

## VAJROLI

There is another way to obtain Amrita: the practice of Vajroli. Anyone can learn Vajroli, but for householders the prior practice of Shiva Lata Mudra is essential. So long as they are unable to control themselves this much they will be unable to do Vajroli.

To learn Vajroli you must first thoroughly clean out your body: eyes, nose, mouth, stomach, and digestive tract. The upper body is cleaned by swallowing, churning, and regurgitating water. The bowel is washed by sucking water up through the anus into the colon, churning it, and expelling it. The urinary passage is cleansed by sucking water through the penis into the bladder and through the ureters into the kidneys and then releasing it. This last process is called *Gaja Karma* because elephants (*Gaja*) suck up water with their trunks and playfully spray themselves for a bath.

To be able to do this you must know the method of controlling *Apana Vayu*, the body force which causes the expulsion of urine, feces, flatus, semen, menses, and fetus. I can't tell you here how you can make *Apana*, which naturally moves downward, go up, but consider this: If you want to urinate and you start to strain, the flow won't start; you must relax to start the stream. And in Ayurveda you are taught that if you clench your teeth tightly whenever you urinate or defecate then your teeth will always be firmly fixed in your skull and will always be healthy. How are the teeth and *Apana* connected? Think about it.

Anyway, after you have been able to suck up water through the penis and hold a bladder full of water for three hours you proceed to use milk, to cool the genital organs. Then ghee (clarified butter), to lubricate. Honey next; it is very sticky and hard to make flow upward. Finally, you do it with mercury, which is extremely heavy. You must use mercury which has been purified and prepared in the Tantric way; otherwise it is a deadly poison. When you can hold a bladder full of mercury for three hours without spilling a drop you have reached the level of the first qualification.

A woman prepares for Vajroli in exactly the same way: She learns to suck up water, milk, and so on, up to mercury, with her vagina. She reaches the level of the first qualification when she can hold a vagina full of mercury for three hours. You must have heard of the women of the Place Pigalle in Paris who can pick up one-franc coins from tables with their vaginas; I have seen this with my own eyes. And I am told that in Laos and

Vietnam some bargirls can smoke cigarettes vaginally, so don't think that sucking mercury into the vagina is impossible. It's not; it's just hard work.

Mercury is the most important element in Tantra. It has hundreds of uses but in this context we should note that it is the best preservative available. Half a handful of it is sufficient to preserve an entire silo of grain for a very long time. No insects or rodents dare venture near it; no fungus or mold can grow there. This was a common practice in ancient India.

When mercury is sucked up into the genitourinary tract its main effects are on the prostate in men and on various glands including Bartholin's glands in women. It causes these glands to contract. A well-contracted prostate will not enlarge in old age. Also, when these glands are contracted their secretions will not flow so easily, so right there there is some control over the sexual response. The outstanding characteristic of prostatic fluid is that it propagates life; we know this because sperm need it to stay alive. The fluid from a female's glands is called *Stri Shukra* (female semen) in Ayurveda, meaning that it should be preserved by a woman as carefully as a man preserves his semen.

A man who practices Vajroli on a woman sucks up with his penis the secretions which ooze out as she gets excited. These oozings further contract the prostate; in fact, they cause to be produced a new type of cell which mediates prostate function. The woman used for this purpose loses ten years of her life span, though, since such a great amount of her *Shakti* is removed. Of course a woman who knows Vajroli can "milk" an unsuspecting man of his semen with her suction. She can make him eject over and over again until there is nothing left to eject, which will sap him of all his *ojas*. Her glands will be well benefited by this, at his expense.

If you want to practice this technique you need a body which is in good shape. For the first twenty-three years of my life I didn't know what salt was, and I had never experienced sex. Westerners eat salt excessively all their lives, and they are introduced to the opposite sex very early. Western men who waste their semen even once every three days will suffer for it; their

resistance will drop and their nerves will be affected. This makes knowledge of Vajroli all the more important. A man who knows real Vajroli should be able to satisfy dozens of females in a single night, each female having at least ten orgasms, without letting even a drop of prostate fluid fall, and once he is finished he should be able to calmly wash his hands and smoke a cigarette.

Don't forget, though, that the Law of Karma is very queer. You can get yourself into trouble even if you know Vajroli. I know, it happened to me. I had been going along merrily performing a little Vajroli on so many girls. A little only, because if I had done the full thing they would have been bleeding and in bed for months because they knew nothing of the technique. Besides, it would have shortened their lives, and I wanted to avoid that karma.

One day I met a very powerful being — a Mahapurusha, actually — who said to me, "So, you've become a beef-eater, eh?"

I didn't like the way he sneered that and got wild. "I have never eaten even a mouthful of beef in my entire life. How dare you call me a beef-eater!"

He said, "When you do Vajroli with beef-eating girls, isn't that the same thing as eating it yourself?"

I had to pull my ears at that one; he was right. When you suck up vaginal secretions you take an immense amount of Shakti, and the body's Shakti is composed of the essence of the food consumed. I *had* been eating beef that way. The Mahapurusha made me purify myself. My God! It was rough. After that I paid more attention to my partners and finally quit altogether. The Law of Karma is really rough. I've made mistakes, no doubt; I'm not infallible, as many see the Pope. But I've always confessed to my mistakes, and Nature has always pardoned me. I cannot describe to you the awesome magnanimity of Nature; it is amazing!

Control is all in the mind. Physical control, like pinching the penis at the moment of orgasm, is most crude. There are other methods. If you prepare mercury in a certain way and fill your navel with it you can copulate for days on end and never spill even a drop of prostate fluid. But this is also unsat-

isfactory because it is an external method; once you lose your mercury you are through. Mental control is both more refined and more efficient.

Now, the applications of Vajroli: Modern scientists claim that only the head of the spermatozoon yields the progeny, but actually millions of beings can be produced from each of the millions of spermatozoa present in each drop of semen. This is how Shukracharya, the guru of the Asuras (demons), could resuscitate all the Asura troops killed in the wars with the gods. That is why he was called *Shukracharya* (Semen-Teacher).

At the other end of the pole from the Asuras are the Rishis, who believed in family planning. A Rishi would have one child in twelve years, or even less frequently, but he would enjoy vigorous intercourse with his wife regularly, thanks to Vajroli. Once he and his wife did decide to have a child they would first decide on its sex, and then on its type: grammarian, musician, mathematician, saint, or whatever. They would then construct a good horoscope for the proposed child to be born under, selecting planetary positions according to the type of child desired. Some of this information as to what sort of child will be conceived when you copulate on a certain lunar day in a certain position has been preserved on the walls of our temples, such as the Sun Temple at Konarka in Orissa.

The Rishis knew much more than this, though. They knew all about the subtle or ethereal planets which exist along with the gross planets we can see. When the time came for the Rishi and his mate to perform coitus they would first perform all eighty-four of the postures designed especially for intercourse, using Vajroli. Then at the precise moment of the lunar day and with the correct lunar asterism predominating to maximize the child's attributes the Rishi would discharge his semen, which would go directly to the cervix — no waiting in the vagina. The Rishi would be precise to the last second, because four minutes of time means a difference of one degree of celestial arc. The couple would have the best of all factors: proper mood, hypersecretion, full excitement, precise moment. The ecstasy would be so great that it would permeate the zygote thus conceived and would produce optimal samskaras. A Rishi can con-

trol his own samskaras, of course, and can juggle them to create new genes if he so desires. Let Western scientists discover the twenty-fourth chromosome and then they may understand a little more of the mystery of life — a little.

You see, by this method of knowing what the child will become even before it is conceived you know exactly what to do with the child as he or she grows up. Isn't this a better way than coupling haphazardly like animals and producing brats? This is why I say the Rishis knew about creation and today's human beings know only about procreation.

Rishis have upward-moving semen, of course, and do not need to copulate to have children. Originally they did it by force of will alone. A Rishi would look at a woman with such intense affection that she would become pregnant. Later it was done in other ways, including mantras. Rishis can also create thousands of beings just by wiping the sweat off their foreheads. As humans forgot these ways the business of having children became degraded, and humans began to breed like animals do, using coitus.

Another reason a man should know Vajroli is that women are said to be nine times more passionate than men. Only when his wife is satiated has a man fulfilled his duty to her. He must ask her ten times, or even more, "Are you finished? Have you had enough?" But a man's ego is hurt to ask because he knows his wife may not find him satisfactory. So 99.99 percent of men never ask, and their wives are never satisfied fully.

Moreover, most men have no idea of female anatomy. Women's orgasms come in waves, while a man's is only one. A man has to last as long as he can after penetration before ejaculation. The immature man goes off quickly, and the man with a little knowledge lasts a few minutes at most. This is insufficient to satisfy the female, and since almost all people are interested only in physical sex, there is misery.

Consider the Sanskrit proverb: "Bhoge na bhogata; bhogam iva bhogata." This means that the enjoyment of pleasure lies not in the act of enjoyment but in the fact of enjoyment. Human beings have become very selfish. They want to enjoy their own orgasms and can't be bothered about their partners'. This

attitude will never satisfy you, though. You can only get true satisfaction from sex when you are more interested in your partner's satiation than in your own, because only then will your partner reciprocate fully, freely, and enthusiastically and do his or her best to satisfy you. That joy of having another being attempt to satisfy you is far greater than the pleasure of the orgasm itself. This is the meaning of that proverb.

The real bliss of sex occurs when the male is able to steer his mate into a condition of absolute sexual frenzy. In order to do this the male must know each erotic center in his partner's body, and he must know the relationship between the erotic centers and the moon. The moon plays a very important role in each woman's life. *Menstruation* is derived from a word meaning "moon" since it occurs at intervals of one lunar month. In the past, women's menstrual cycles were much more regular than they are now; everything was more natural.

A different erotic center in the female body is awakened on each lunar day. If the male concentrates his passion on that center the female's passion will ignite very quickly, and the resulting orgasms will be far more intense. Finger action should be sufficient to cause a female to have ten oozings, if you know which center is proper for which lunar day. The male should cooperate with the female's body so there is no need to struggle to arouse her. This way the arousal happens automatically. It should be intuitive, yes, but intuition alone is insufficient. Knowledge of the woman's body is also required.

Do you know how many erotic centers are present in the buttocks alone? Here, I'll give you a practical demonstration on this handy teenage girl. Now, when I press here do you see the result? And that is just one finger. Look, I'll add one more finger. You see, she can't stand it, she has to break away because the excitement is too much. If I continue she will start to ooze, and if I do it with concentration she should have 100 oozings from finger pressure alone, all because I am pressing the center which is more active today.

Shiva plays Shakti like an instrument; humans should follow His lead. The erotic centers are the keys of the instrument. The male must know which key to press and when. Does the

instrument ever complain about being controlled by the musician and demand to be allowed to play him occasionally? No, it's absurd. But this does not devalue Shakti in any way. Without an instrument or a voice no musician can make music. Both are essential; neither can do without the other. It just so happens that the instrument must be controlled and the musician must control; this is Nature's way. If you can think of any other way please let me know about it. I will worship your lotus feet as my guru for teaching me something new.

And remember, control is possible *only* when you learn how to give and forget how to take. Today's men not only do not know how to satiate a woman sexually, they are not *interested* in doing so. They only want to emit their teaspoonful or two of semen and relax. This is why men can no longer control women.

When someone accepts a gift from you, you have successfully inserted an element of control into your relationship with that individual. Your choice of gift and time of giving can influence events. To take, you must come under someone else's influence to create the opportunity for your taking to occur. This is why Shiva is the Great Giver. He never takes anything from anyone, so He is eternally free from the influence of Maya.

Can a musician take music from his instrument? No, he must give his experience, his expertise to the instrument, and then the instrument will automatically produce the music. In fact, a musician really has only a foggy idea of how instruments make music, unless he is only an artisan and not an artist. A real musician becomes so engrossed by his music that he is amazed when it finally comes forth from within him. The musician gives his all to the instrument, and, inspired by this gift, the instrument gives its all to the musician. It is a mutual thing. Isn't it wonderful?

The human body is a much better instrument than any musical instrument which has ever been created because you can play it in so many ways. All parts of the body have erotic significance, especially the ear lobes, navel, buttocks, and lips. In the old days, you know, there was no such thing as kissing, which began only in Kali Yuga. In Kali Yuga the mouth has

assumed great importance because we get much of our prana through food and we know how to communicate only in oral speech.

Originally people smelled one another. Children would come in to their elders who would embrace them by smelling their heads. Lovers would embrace each other and take in each other's body odors. Smell pertains to the Earth Element, the most gross, physical element. Sniffing inflames the passions of those who want to enjoy coitus. All the senses are important: taste for kissing; touch for caressing; hearing, verbal and nonverbal. Sight is the most important because it permits a direct telepathic communication between the two. They can go beyond words and feelings.

The senses provide different instruments to the conductor or composer to create the symphony. The asanas are musical tunes and phrases. Our texts on sex describe eighty-four important positions for copulation. Each position affects a different group of erotic centers, like a different pattern of musical notes, and each position, therefore, has a unique orgasmic effect. An expert will perform all eighty-four postures in three hours with the use of Vajroli to inflame his or her partner so thoroughly that no sex desire will arise again for months. There is no need; he or she is too full.

I know I said that the female should under no circumstances climb on top of the male. I stand by this statement as far as sex between ordinary people is concerned, but the situation is different, vastly different, when two people know Vajroli. Then it becomes a friendly competition. I start off with one posture and try to take her off guard and overwhelm her with the sensation. She will respond by changing my posture into a slightly different one, trying to get the upper hand. A rhythm of its own develops, a musical melody, and both of us begin to dance while we are still making love. There's nothing like it; you just can't imagine the feeling.

Suppose she tries to maneuver herself on top of me. If she succeeds she will gloat: "Ha, what sort of Shiva are you? Now I will be in control." I can't allow that, so as soon as she comes on top I will suddenly, effortlessly, and gracefully transform



that posture into one in which I am in command. Then I can tell her, "You dare not try to control me; I am your controller!" And as I speak those words she will be converting that posture into another one more favorable to her.

When both partners have full knowledge of Vajroli there is mutual benefit. She releases a little of her secretion to him, just enough to lubricate his prostate; he releases just enough of his prostate fluid to rejuvenate her. Only if they want a child does he emit semen and only then does she permit it to enter the cervix. A fair exchange is no robbery. This is important from the karmic point of view, because if you suck up all the secretions from all your partners and take years off their lives, you are to blame for their misery and will have to pay them back someday.

Vajroli is not a joke. A man who uses full force Vajroli on an ordinary woman will cause her to bleed. She may even lose control over her sphincters and soil the bed. It can cause complete revulsion for sex, or it can create nymphomania. When a woman who knows Vajroli "milks" a man of his semen he discharges and discharges until he is empty and still must discharge. The tension becomes so great he cannot bear it. So this knowledge is not to be toyed with, lest you ruin yourself and others with you. When both partners know Vajroli, though, well, there is nothing like it in the world. You'll forget all about sex except with that partner.

Vajroli is only the beginning. After Vajroli there are Rajjoli, Sahajoli, Amaroli, and Gaupya — but no one knows about Gaupya except Lord Shiva Himself. These techniques are very difficult to describe in words and can be practiced only when the two partners can leave their bodies at will. The Vedantins talk about "Atma krida, atma ratih, atma maithunam," meaning the love play, eroticism, and sexual union of the Universal Soul, but they don't understand the true meaning of it. What happens is that the male must enter the female's body with his subtle body, and vice versa. Then the man will be able to feel the spasms his mate undergoes as each erogenous zone is ignited, and she can do the same thing in his body. They both thoroughly enjoy each other's play before the final coitus occurs.

Vajroli is a mutual clashing, interaction, and union of two personalities into one. Shiva and Shakti merge together into Sadashiva; the proton and the electron reunite to form the neutron. Just as in physics such a union is associated with tremendous energy, the union of Vajroli is associated with awesome Shakti, which can be used for great spiritual advancements. It is the achievement of a lifetime.

Both partners must be thoroughly prepared for Vajroli, but preparation of the female is more important since females are naturally more passionate. A female can go into samadhi through this practice only when she forgets her body totally. If she retains even a slight interest in sex the intensity of Vajroli will magnify it so much that she will drag her man down and make him again conscious of his physical body. Or, if the man's willpower is strong enough to prevent this, nothing will happen to him but she will develop a ravenous appetite for sex. This is why it is essential that you perfect Shiva Lata Mudra while you are learning to suck up water and all the rest with the genitals. Both partners must forget their sexuality entirely and their physical bodies as much as possible and self-identify totally with Bhairava and His Bhairavi.

There is no comparison between Vajroli and ordinary sex. Vajroli has nothing to do with friction and irritation. It actually creates harmony, because the movements are not random; they follow a definite set pattern. Also, the male never emits semen and the female does not ooze continuously, so neither partner's aura is dissipated. In fact the two partners mutually increase each other's auras by the effort at sadhana.

You can even take your Bhairavi into the smashan if you like and perform Shiva Lata Mudra or Vajroli with her there. Certain ethereal beings will be so irritated by your audacity that they will come and try to unnerve you. But never permit yourself to fear. You can gain control of Yakshinis in this way. But — and this is a very big but — if your Bhairavi is not absolutely firm mentally her mind will be dragged down into her body, and you will be dragged down along with her. And then you are done for. But if you can do it, it is the best possible sex, even better than copulating with a Yakshini after calling her

into a corpse. This is why I say over and over and over again: If you want to do this sadhana you must have a superpartner; otherwise you'll never be able to succeed and both of you will be ruined. I was very lucky that my Bhairavi was so expert; or perhaps I was just destined for it. If you cannot find a perfect partner it is better either to forget all about doing this sadhana or wait until you can locate an expert.

## BHAIRAVI

Thus the question arises: where can you locate a Bhairava or Bhairavi and, hopefully, if you are accepted as a pupil, learn these techniques? Well, nowhere except in India. Even here only a handful know Vajroli. I do not teach everyone who comes to me because I can't be sure they will not try to commercialize what they learn. I once taught a fellow to suck up water with the penis and what did he do? He went to Germany and became a big so-called swami. When I met him afterwards, he became very uneasy and said to me, "I hope you won't let on. . . ."

I replied, "Don't worry, babu, your secret is safe with me." Why expose him? Give him enough rope and he will hang himself eventually; why should I interfere? After that experience, though, I have become quite selective. In fact I have not yet found a worthy pupil.

Of course I myself was not a worthy pupil in the beginning. Once, just shortly after Smashan Tara came to me I saw a woman pass me in the street. What a beauty! I was for a moment overcome with lust. Then I heard Ma telling me, "Control yourself. Remember that she is mortal. She will get old and wrinkled one day, and then she will die and her beautiful body will decompose. Only her bones will remain. When you look at her see her not as she is now but as she will be eventually: a skeleton."

From that day forward I forgot to look at people as they presently exist, and I started to try to look at all of them as skeletons, especially the pretty women, so that I could control my lust. It took me six years to make a thorough job of it.

No, the only way to learn Vajroli is to have an experienced partner who can make up for any deficiencies you might have. I think my partner, the Bhairavi who taught me, is the most experienced Bhairavi in India, which means in the world. As far as sex is concerned there is no one to beat her. When she came to me she looked like a fifteen-year-old girl, but she is much, much older than that. Death cannot come to take her until she herself desires it. She remains naked, but covers herself with her long matted locks, and she carries a trident, Shiva's symbol.

Once I playfully asked her, "Why don't you let me see your real form?" She showed me — and my God! it was horrible! I was nauseated by the sight: All her skin was wrinkled; her eyelids drooped down onto her cheeks, and she had to pick them up with her fingers in order to see me. She has become immortal through the use of mercury. Take one of her hairs and put it into a furnace of 1,000 degrees for one month and nothing whatsoever will happen to it. *That* is the power of mercury, the power of preservation.

And the way she taught me; none to beat her. I learned all the connections between the erogenous zones and the lunar days. She would use her mouth to demonstrate how her labia would look at each point in the process. Sometimes I would laugh at the way she would make faces, and she would get wild with me: "You old man, what do you know?" Imagine, she would call me "old man" even though I was a baby compared with her age.

In the early days when I knew nothing she guided me carefully. When I would become fatigued after hours of Vajroli and postures she would make me drink hot milk which had been medicated with mercury in a special way, and then I would be back to my old self, fighting fit. If my erection began to droop all she had to do was touch a certain nerve and woop! I would again become fully erect.

When she wanted to test my progress she would tighten her vaginal muscles and then tell me to penetrate her. My God! It was absolutely impossible; she could make her vagina as hard as wood. Once I must have become somewhat frivolous, and

to teach me a lesson she let me penetrate her and then clamped down with her vaginal muscles. I thought my penis would be squeezed flat! Then she actually began to lift my body, gripping me by my penis with her vagina! And mind you, I weighed 210 pounds at that time. It felt as if my entire pubic region was being ripped from my body! She's too good, that's all I can say.

I got my Bhairavi thanks to Shyamananda Aghori. It happened like this. I was on a university trip to Hardwar with some of my friends. A little away from the city was an old cemetery in which no one was able to spend a single night alone; everyone who tried died. I don't know what happened to my friends — perhaps something or someone affected their minds — but they dared me to spend a whole night there alone. I have never been able to ignore a challenge, so I agreed. I loaded up two hip flasks with whiskey, packed some snacks, and took my trusty Colt revolver. I was fond of hunting back then, and I had decided that some wild animal must be killing everyone who tried to spend the night there. My plan was to shoot it down, using myself as bait to attract it, and stop those stories once and for all.

Night had fallen by the time I reached the place. There was an immense stone image of Ma, and I could see that it would be the ideal place from which to get a bead on my adversary, whatever it might be. I settled down in between Her lotus feet and noticed one of the skulls that lay nearby. It was unusually broad, something you think of in terms of prehistoric man, and it was bleached absolutely white. I was sure it would crumble to powder when I touched it but, no, it was quite solid.

I began to eat and drink and sat fiddling with the safety catch on my revolver. As the night deepened and the hours rolled by I started to think the whole thing was just a hoax, when suddenly I heard a rustling from the vegetation near the temple. My senses had been sharpened by plenty of hunting. "Aha," I said to myself, "it is a wild animal, and I'm going to get myself a nice trophy from tonight's adventure." At that time in my life I was completely wild because of doing so much Smashan Sadhana, and I believed in only one thing: kill or be killed. The

blood lust had taken hold of me that night, with a good deal of help from the whiskey, and I sat waiting for the blighter to come into view.

After a bit I heard a low growl, which gradually came closer and closer, and before long I could see two eyes like burning coals and I knew it was a tiger. I thought to myself, "It's all very clear now. This fellow has become a man-eater. A simple explanation for the whole mystery of this place." I was just waiting for him to come into range since a revolver is only useful at close quarters, and you must get a clean shot at a tiger to drop him. If you don't drop him with the first shot you may not live to regret it. I planned to shoot him right between the eyes, and the whole matter would be finished.

Closer and closer he came, and I was becoming more and more excited: When will he come into range so I can shoot him! I lifted the revolver and aimed it, and just as he came within about thirty yards of me I decided to pull the trigger — and my hand became useless. I just couldn't move it. In that instant all my confidence deserted me. I suddenly realized that I would be killed by the tiger like all the rest. It was such a shock that I passed out.

When I awoke I was most surprised to be alive. The tiger was gone and in his place was an Aghori standing over me. I looked at him rather stupidly, I suppose, because he said, "Get up! Don't worry, I'm not a tiger to eat you up! I called you here; that's why you've come." He told me to go down to the river and take a bath, and then he explained to me that I would have to come to the cemetery every night and perform a certain sadhana known as *Sahasra Munda* (Thousand Skulls). There was an immense heap of skulls nearby, of the prehistoric type I had seen earlier, which is why the place was called *Munda Durga* (Fortress of Skulls). With Shyamanandaji's help I succeeded at that sadhana. As he said, "Anyone who wants to be an Aghori must do Munda Sadhana." The only thing is, most do Munda Sadhana with five skulls: I did it with over 1,000.

After I completed that sadhana he told me, "Now I am going to give you my Bhairavi." That's how I got her, and, oh my,

what she has taught me! I don't think any other woman in the universe could have taught me so much.

Once my Guru Maharaj wanted me to accompany him to a certain locality near Nasik, but I flatly refused. I told him, "My Bhairavi is there, and if I go to meet her I will never return; I will remain with her forever because she will never allow me to leave. She will feed me mercury so that I can regain my youth and then we will practice Mudras together indefinitely. I will forget about everything else in the world, including you, so please do not insist." He got wild, but I was adamant.

My relationship with my Bhairavi was such that I never wanted to leave her. I did not leave her willingly, in fact; I was forced to. I was ordered to return to the world and continue my work here. But even though we have been separated for many years now I have not forgotten her, and I will never forget her. No other female has ever been able to satisfy me even 1 percent as much as she could, and I doubt I'll ever find any woman who will. Sexual satisfaction is the least she gave me, of course; our relationship was very different. A purely physical relationship can only be temporary; a merely mental relationship lasts not much longer, perhaps an entire lifetime. A spiritual relationship, though, is permanent, eternal, and that is all I value.

When I last visited America I talked to some Americans about ojas and Vajroli. I know that Americans are obsessed with sex and I wanted to try to impress upon them how little they really know about the subject. And I wanted to test them.

In this lifetime it is unlikely that any of them will locate a Bhairava or Bhairavi, so it will be impossible for them to learn Vajroli, or even Shiva Lata Mudra. I told them as much, in fact, just to see how they would react. Some of them had the attitude, "Well, this is very nice but it is not at all practical so we really cannot spend any time on it." Some of them, I am sure, though no one admitted it to me, went directly home and tried out Lata Mudra and found out that it was indeed impossible to do without guidance. There might possibly be even one or two who would try the Mudra or Vajroli out with several partners

and then convince themselves that they had achieved. They might even start to go around and hold seminars to teach others the half-baked knowledge they imagined they had learned. I know there are plenty of "Tantrics" in America doing this sort of thing, so it would not surprise me at all if someone tried to misuse this information.

I would have been happy if even one had had this attitude: "It seems unlikely that I will be able to learn this technique this time around, but compared to it ordinary sex is nothing! I am going to make a sincere effort to worship my deity in this life with the sincere intention that next time around or sometime later in the future Nature will teach me what I want to learn."

This is the correct attitude. No effort is ever wasted. What you do not complete in this lifetime you will most certainly complete later if you have a real desire to do so. The progression will be maintained, regardless of time. Time is no barrier at all. But if you are in a hurry for knowledge you will never obtain it. In my opinion, the best things in life are worth waiting for no matter how long that wait might be. This is why an Aghori loses his fear of death. He knows that even if he dies with something unfinished, Nature will be obligated to create the conditions for him to finish his sadhana in the future. Where will Nature go?

I don't mean you should sit back and relax and say to yourself, "Why do any work now since there is no hope for success in this birth? I'll wait until I am born in the appropriate situation and then I'll see about doing penance." With this attitude, which most self-proclaimed "good Hindus" suffer from, you will never succeed even after millions of births.

Besides, you don't know your destiny; who knows what you are destined to achieve in this birth? An Aghori demands success now knowing full well that if it eludes him in this lifetime he will be able to continue later. He never slackens, though. Slackening shows the presence of residual traces of Maya in the personality: "Let me have one more little enjoy-

ment and then I will renounce." NO! If you want to enjoy, enjoy; if you are through with enjoyment, tired of the world's deceptions, then renounce. Don't try to mix enjoyment and renunciation together; it just won't work. And once you renounce, be prepared to wait.

## CHAPTER TEN

# GIRNAR

*Human beings are nothing but sheep. I used to be in the flock of sheep, but I ran away, so it's no surprise that everyone else, all the so-called normal people, thinks I'm insane or, at the least, abnormal. And I think the same about them. Only one of us can be right.*

## GIRNAR

I've always believed that when you do a thing you should forget everything else and do that one thing with heart and soul. When I was interested in mundane pursuits I was a perfect materialist. You would never in your life have imagined that I could be interested in spiritual subjects. And when I was doing sadhana, I forgot everything else and I did it. For example, for ten months in Girnar I lived in an Arka (*Calotropis gigantea*) tree in an old cemetery, eating only Arka leaves, doing a ritual to please Anjaneya. Arka leaves cause violent purging and vomiting. Do you know how "hot" Arka is? Arka means "sun" and after two or three days of eating those leaves my mouth and tongue had swollen to twice their normal size. But that didn't stop me; I continued with the ritual. Aghoris always overdo a thing.

To become an Aghori you must first renounce the world completely, and that is not easy, mind you. Becoming a sadhu in the real way is no joke. Before you can become a sadhu you must do rituals for yourself just as if you had died. You *have* died — to the world. Then you offer your body, your senses, and your mind into the fire. Only then are you eligible to put on the ochre robes of renunciation which a sadhu wears.

After that your teacher will initiate you into the sadhu's mantra, "Om namo Narayanaya." Whenever you see any creature, even the smallest ant, you must remember that Vishnu in the form of Narayana lives in that creature, and you must mentally bow to Him. And when you sit for meditation you must forget the world around you and remember only your deity.

When I was a naked sadhu, or *Naga*, sometimes my ego would be hurt. I had been a wrestler so I was very heavy, and people would say, "Why isn't this fellow working somewhere instead of begging?" or they would say, "He looks like this," or "His cock is like this," but I couldn't say anything. I could only repeat to myself, "Narayana." It hurt, but it worked; I learned to endure all the taunts.

The main reason for becoming a Naga is to remove once and for all every thought for the body. When you are naked you can't hide anything, and before long you don't bother to try. However, most people harbor some shameful thoughts within and would not dare to disrobe before anyone else. Why else would sadhus wear ochre robes? Once one of my "children" who has done a lot of sadhana during his life was sitting with me and suddenly I took off my clothes and told him, "You do the same thing; we must sit naked." He didn't say a word, but took off all his clothes. It was a good test, and he passed it with flying colors. Of course he still found it a little awkward mentally, but that is to be expected in the beginning.

I used to play around like that a lot. Sometimes I would wear a *lungi* (a sarong-like garment) to go out for a drive with one of my friends. When I got fed up with the lungi I would shout at my friend, "I can't take this restriction any longer," and I would rip it from my body and drive naked. The fellow would try to pacify me: "What are you doing? Think of your prestige." I'd

tell him, "What prestige? Does an Aghori have any prestige?" Eventually he would calm me down and I'd put it on again. I am not as wild now as I was then, but I still hate to wear clothes.

And don't forget, if Nagas are shameless, *Nagis*, their female counterparts, are equally shameless or even more so. They love to play about together. Nagas and Nagis know a few mantras and can achieve some minor Siddhis. And, as you know, whenever anyone becomes powerful there is always a tendency to let the power go to the head. Then they go around trying to show off.

Suppose a group of Nagas and Nagis are sitting in the *sma-shan*. One Naga may become intoxicated with his power and elongate his penis. A Naga can elongate his penis fifteen feet or more; it is a simple Siddhi. One Naga I knew, Mangaliriji, in fact, used to coil his penis up like a cobra, and after sucking up water through it and filling his bladder, would spray out the water like a fountain for the amusement of the children who would follow him around.

Anyway, one Naga would look at a female Nagi and would elongate his penis and then he would say, "Ha, look at this. Can you do anything like this? Is not mine a fine Siddhi?" And she would sneer at him and say, "Wah, wah. Why should you crow over such a minor achievement? Bring that thing over here." And the moment the head of his penis would touch her vaginal lips he would get a shock, like an electrical shock but far more intense, like a thousand scorpions stinging him all at once. And you know how sensitive the tip of the penis is. So he would learn his lesson well and proper.

When they talk about being naked, or *Digambara* (Sky-clad), which is one of the epithets of Dattatreya, the first Aghori, they are not talking about external clothes; they are talking about the three sheaths — Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas — which cover the Atma. These are the clothes which have to be removed. And once they are gone it doesn't matter what you wear on the external body; you wear whatever is appropriate. Once you get used to being naked in this way you are not affected by anything.

I used to wear one article of apparel: my *jata* (matted locks).

I know a method to make hair grow ten times faster than normal, and my jata used to reach down to my ankles. A sadhu's jata is his most precious possession. Why? Each hair is an antenna, an aerial to accumulate knowledge from everywhere. No true sadhu ever cuts his jata; he breaks it or it breaks by itself. Then he takes it to the Ganges and offers it to Ma, because the Ganges always remains in the jata of Lord Shiva; that is why He is called Durjati, because His jata is so formidable.

But I did not come to this stage immediately. For the first six months I was in Girnar I cried every night. I was asking myself, "What am I doing here? Why am I not enjoying my life back in Bombay?" But I was very stubborn. I wouldn't go back because I knew what people would say. This has always been my principle; if you want to do a thing, do it right, do it thoroughly — or don't do it at all.

After that first six months, though, I forgot all about my old life and started to enjoy my new life. I developed a routine. Every morning at 3 A.M. I would take a bath in one of the small lakes in the Girnar hills. Then I would coat my body with ash from my dhuni and sit for my rituals. I made friends with all the animals there. Some people think that in the forest you are completely alone, but there is always someone watching you. The forest belongs to the animals, after all, and they are very anxious to know who has come to disturb them.

One night after I began staying at my old Shiva temple I saw a pair of eyes staring at me from beyond the fire. They didn't come any closer that night and soon disappeared. In the next few nights they came closer and closer, and pretty soon a lion appeared, and eventually he came all the way to sit beside me. We became great friends. You know, Girnar is the last place in the world where Asian lions live. We became such good friends that when I had to leave Girnar he followed me five miles, and I had the greatest difficulty in driving him away. I called him Raja (King), and I called my female monkey Rani (Queen).

She was completely devoted to me. Once she saved my life. I had a terrific fever; I was delirious, I couldn't do anything. Rani came near me to see what was wrong. She started to talk to me, in her own way, but I was so delirious I couldn't under-

stand and brushed her away. She persisted and in my semiconscious condition I threatened her with a firebrand, which I would have never done normally. She backed off and then ran into the jungle.

Later when I was sleeping she came with some leaves that she had chewed into a paste. She put the paste into my mouth and as a reflex action I swallowed. Then I woke up because those were the most bitter leaves I had ever tasted. I spit most of the mass out, but I had swallowed some, enough to break the fever. That demonstrated to me that animals know these things.

When it was time for me to leave Girnar I told her gently, "Rani, I am going away and I am not coming back." When she understood that I meant it she immediately leapt into a well and drowned herself. Even my mother wouldn't have done that.

My animals have always loved me. The little Pekinese dog I have now will not eat or drink when I am out of town; she must be force-fed. I think my animals are better than humans. Remember, human love today is nothing but lust resulting from rnanubandhana. Human beings will always fail you, but animals have a selfless love. They don't have any sense of "I am doing this or that"; they only do what their nature tells them to do. When they want to eat they eat, when they want to sleep they sleep, and when they want to love you they will do it wholeheartedly.

There are three important ways in which animals differ from humans. First, they can't know their parents. In the mating season a male catches hold of any available female, even if she is his mother, sister, or daughter. Second, animals can do japa — my little doggie does wonderful japa — but since they have no hands they cannot perform rituals. Third, since an animal does not know its parents it can't do Pitri Tarpana to placate its ancestors so there is no progression in that respect. Humans pay attention to kinship and can perform ritual worship and Pitri Tarpana. Any human who does not do these things is no better than an animal; worse, in fact, because it is a waste of a precious human rebirth which is fantastically difficult to obtain; you don't know. And today no one bothers, which makes most

humans animals. So by living with animals I've learned how to handle humans.

I have never feared the animals in the jungles. Animals can understand everything you think — telepathically. If they sense fear then they think you are going to attack them, and since attack is the best form of defense they will attack you first. But if you show them that you want to be friendly it's very easy to make them love you — if you are brave enough. Animals will never harm you unless you deliberately provoke them.

In fact sometimes even if you provoke them they will not harm you. Once in Girnar I was being troubled by a bee flying near me and buzzing in my ear. Two or three times I tried to brush it away, but it came back each time. Finally I told it, "If you don't leave me alone I'm going to have to kill you." No response. I lifted my hand to smack it as it sat on a nearby stone. Down came my hand onto the empty stone; the bee had moved to one side. Each time I tried to hit it the bee would move to one side. It didn't fly away, it didn't try to sting me.

Eventually, I remembered Guru Dattatreya and his twenty-four gurus, and it began to dawn on me that this might not be an ordinary insect. I decided to inspect it a little more closely, and when I did I saw it rubbing its two front feet together. Suddenly I thought — or the thought was introduced into my mind, I don't know which — "you have to wash your own hands of karma in the same way." Was that bee not a guru to me?

I learned quite a bit from that little bee. Once, some years later I had an argument with a lady on the subject of her insensitivity to pain and suffering in animals. About half an hour later she went to take a bath, and a cockroach began to trouble her. It ran up her leg to a certain secret place causing her to throw the soap up into the air; then it ran onto her leg again. She picked up her slipper to strike it and ended in striking several sharp blows to her foot, arm, and leg as the cockroach evaded her. Every so often it would drop off and run to one side and cock its antennae and stare up at her, and then the fun would start all over again. No, I've always gotten along well with animals. I kept a cockroach as a pet once. I called him Ramji and

kept him in a matchbox. Unfortunately, he was accidentally sprayed one day and passed away.

In my own home I used to have a small menagerie, which included at various times a chimpanzee and an orangutan. I even had a crocodile there for a while. His name was Gopaldas. I had to send him to the Bombay Zoo after he chewed off the cook's leg. It was the cook's fault; he was trying to cause some trouble for me. I think Gopaldas must have sensed it. Anyway, it was too dangerous to keep him at home. I used to visit him often at the zoo. I'd walk over to the crocodile pen and call out, "Gopaldas!" and he would amble over to me and open his big mouth wide, and I'd put some food into it.

For the longest time, whenever I had a good day at the races and was flush with money I used to go down to Crawford Market in South Bombay and purchase all the doves, pigeons, and other fowl meant for the pot and release them — just let them fly away so they could enjoy their freedom. I had enjoyed that kind of freedom as a sadhu, and I knew what it was like to be caged up. After a while I realized I might be interfering too much in karma, and I quit. But I will never forget those years in the jungle when I had only animals for friends, and I will always love them more than I'll love humans.

I have become very wary of humans. When you do something nice for a spirit or an animal they will never forget it. They will love you forever afterward. But do one thing good for a human being and all you will get is a request for something more to be done. There is no end to human greed.

That is why I always like to have animals near me. There are always new things to learn from them. Have you noticed what happens when you spell the word *God* backwards? You get *dog*. I would love to become just like a dog, because of all creatures dogs are the most loving and the most devoted. Is there any animal more faithful than man's best friend? And a dog's love is pure and unselfish. Even if you don't feed him, still he will greet you with love. A cat would never do that. And a dog has only one master; it will never obey any other.

This is the way in which you should worship God. Select one form of God to worship and then worship only that form.



No matter what happens, what difficulties you may get into, be tenacious. Never lose faith. If you behave just as if you were God's dog then you are sure to achieve. Sometime back I read in the papers about a dog whose master left him at an airport in Russia seven years before. Every day that dog meets every plane that lands, waiting for his master to come back and retrieve him. He is fed by the workers at the airport but refuses to go home with any of them. If you can develop that sort of devotion for God then you will not have to wait long before He comes to you. If you crave to see Him, He has to come! Where will He go? He is not a heartless brute like the owner of that Russian dog. But you must have that perfect, selfless devotion if you want to drag God to you. That is why I always keep a dog around me, so that some of the dog's personality will rub off on me. I am devoted to my doggie Lizoo, my Pekinese. I would give up everyone else in the world but her, just like Yudhisthira, who refused to go to heaven unless his dog was allowed to accompany him.

Now, I have never worried about animals when I was in the jungle. The forests *are* full of other dangers, though. It is great to be a sadhu — lord and master of all you survey. But you must always be wary, because solitude is the father of passion.

Once the Emperor Akbar asked his favorite courtier, Birbal, "What is the father of passion?" Emperors are like that; suddenly for no reason whatsoever they ask the most unusual questions. Birbal had no ready answer and so Akbar told him, "If you don't find out for me what is the father of passion within three months, your head will be disconnected from your shoulders." Birbal bowed low; what else could he do? His boss had given him an order.

After two and a half months Birbal had come nowhere near discovering the father of passion. He began to worry for his life. His daughter noticed his despondence and asked him the reason for it. When he told her she just giggled and said, "Call the Emperor for dinner." Meanwhile, she selected one of her serving maids who bore a certain resemblance to her and made the girl into her double.

When the Emperor came for dinner, Birbal had been sent out

so that there were only two present: Akbar and his courtier's daughter. The delicious, rich food was washed down with two bottles of heavy wine, and soon the food, the low lights, and the wine went to the Emperor's head and he indicated to the young lady that he would be pleased to have her company to bed for the night. Birbal's daughter had of course anticipated this; it was part of her plan. She consented graciously and asked for a moment to ready herself. Leading Akbar to the bedchamber she sent in her double, the serving-girl. She enjoyed sex with the Emperor all night long and then returned to her own room after he slept.

When the Emperor awoke he was suddenly seized with remorse: "I have deflowered the daughter of my best friend. How will I ever face him again? How can I demonstrate my penitence for this lapse in my morality?" And he sent for Birbal's daughter.

She entered, laughing, which amazed Akbar, who was sure she would be sobbing and beating her breast. She said, "Refuge of the world, it was not I that you deflowered. It was my double," and produced the serving-maid for proof. Giggling, she continued, "I wanted to prove to you that solitude is the father of passion so that my father's head would be spared. Are you satisfied?"

Akbar was more than satisfied. In court that day he publicly congratulated Birbal for his brilliance, and for having such a brilliant daughter, and he made a gift of a large tract of land to the girl who had lost her virginity. Of course she was thrilled that the Emperor had made love to her, so the land was just an added bonus.

This is why it is so hard to be off in some cave somewhere and maintain your balance of mind. Temptations will come to you by the dozen: celestial damsels, buxom country lasses, tribal wenches. You have to be thoroughly prepared so that you are ready for anything. But even if you are prepared you can still make grave errors which might have lasting consequences. I know.

One day in Girnar while walking about in the jungles I saw a young lady near a tree. She was really beautiful, and it looked

as if she was from a good family from her looks and the way she was dressed, but I couldn't understand what she would be doing out in the middle of a deep jungle. As I passed her she said, "Mai aun?" (Shall I come?)

Now I didn't know what to think. What is she doing acting like a prostitute out here in dense forest soliciting me? I decided that the best thing to do would be to walk on. She started to follow, and she kept repeating, "Mai aun? Mai aun?"

I told her, "Cats say 'Meow, meow'; are you a cat?" But she said nothing at all except, "Mai aun? Mai aun?"

I continued to walk, and she continued to follow until I began to feel tired. I sat down and she came near me, repeating "Mai aun? Mai aun?"

I was tired and fed up with her, and that made me lose my temper and say, "If you are coming, come!" And immediately I was entrapped. She was a Yakshini.

You don't know what trouble I had with her. I wouldn't dare meet anyone, even other sadhus, because she would have finished them off, she was so possessive. Anyway when I was at the tether end of my rope my Mahapurusha freed me from her. That is only a minor one of the many reasons I have for saying that I owe everything to my Big Daddy, my Mahapurusha. If I am flayed alive for millions of births it would still be insufficient to repay him.

Maya spares no one, and She never spared me either. Once in Girnar when I had to urinate I laid my fire tongs down on a rock, and when I came back it had turned into gold: I couldn't believe my eyes. I picked it up and marked the stone so that I could remember exactly where it was. My idea was to use it whenever I needed gold.

I went down to Junagadh town and sold the fire tongs to a goldsmith after breaking it into pieces; a gold fire tongs is of no use to a sadhu. Then I bought a new iron fire tongs and distributed the money I realized from the sale of the gold.

When I got back to the place where the stone had been there was no mark, no sign I had ever been there, nothing. I tried several of the stones, but to no avail. I had tried to capitalize

on it and had lost it as a punishment for forgetting to rely on Nature to provide for me.

How many people really rely on Nature? Once when I was in Girnar I decided to make a test. I went without food and water to see when God would come and feed me.

The first two days were awful; my head was splitting. On the third day I decided, "If God does not come before sunset I am going to eat anyway and I will believe from then on that God is a real phony."

As the day wore on I was becoming more and more desperate for sunset, the hunger was so great and my head so painful. Suddenly about fifteen minutes before sunset a young girl whom I had never seen before came up to me and said, "Why are you making yourself starve like this? I have brought milk for you."

At first I wanted to grab the milk and drink it all at once, I was so hungry. But I had my position to consider. I had to continue with my arrogance so I said, "Go, go on, get out of here." But I wondered how she knew I was hungry. When I asked her she said, "I can see it on your face." Then I felt ashamed; my facade was not as perfect as I had hoped.

She insisted I take the milk. Still I pretended to refuse it — and then she grabbed my matted locks and poured the milk down my throat. It was like nectar after not eating or drinking for three days, and then without my mentioning anything about my vow she said, "Now, has God fed you or not?" And then she disappeared. And from that day onward I know that God looks after everyone. I have been blessed by my mentor so that wherever I go I will always get my food and even cigarettes. Even if I go to the jungle the monkeys bring me fruits. Am I not fortunate? My mentors were very good, really good, excellent.

Thanks to them I was able to perform sadhana in the Cave of the Sixty-Four Yoginis which was the high point of my stay in Girnar. You might try to visit this cave without an invitation. As you approach it, suddenly a giant cobra will rear toward you, standing bolt upright on his tail. If you know the proper mantra you can immobilize him, no doubt, but then as you move on you will start to hear the sounds of wild spirits. Sup-

pose you are successful at immobilizing all the spirits, which is highly unlikely. Then, as you proceed, suddenly you will fall for no apparent reason and break your leg. Out on a mountain with a broken leg near a cave with a well-deserved reputation for preventing the curious from visiting it, who will come to rescue you? So there is no use in trying to enter this cave unless you have a good friend to pull strings on your behalf.

I was lucky; my Mahapurusha wanted me to perform this sadhana. Even so I had to be purified first. I was given a small leaf, and I began to vomit and purge to remove all the worldly elements from my body. For the next two days I was not allowed to drink even water, and by the third day I was really almost unable to go on. Then I was invited into the cave, and a panel of beings — I can't explain what sort of beings — welcomed me as one of their own.

I am forbidden to discuss the nature of my sadhana there but I can tell you this; the Yoginis are the companions of the Great Goddesses. This is a two-fold advantage: They can introduce you to the Great Goddesses, and they can teach you what they have been taught. Actually Shakti is the same in any form; only the details of the manifestation differ. In the case of the Great Goddess the entire range of possibilities of Shakti are divided into nine or ten aspects. For the Sixty-Four Yoginis there are sixty-four aspects which when taken as a unified whole represent the totality of Shakti in the universe. To succeed at the sadhana of one or two is feasible; to succeed at all sixty-four is nigh unto impossible, but the benefits if you do succeed are unimaginable.

Eventually I was ordered to leave Girnar and return to the world. I never wanted to come back to civilization, but orders are orders. When I finally got back to Bombay after being in Girnar and then wandering about as a sadhu, I used to sit in a room where everything was black: walls, ceiling, furniture, floor, everything. I used to wear a black lungi and would smoke ganja all day long and drink imported whiskey straight from the bottle. I was in my own mood all day long and never slept; to rest I would lie down for a half hour or so. The more intoxicants I would take, the more alert and silent would I become.

Visitors would bring mad persons to me — stark raving, violently insane — and I would put them in my garden, and when I felt like it I would go out and give them one slap. Immediately they would become all right.

I used to experiment with new ways of curing diseases also. Sometimes I would dispense the ashes from the pipes I had been smoking, and they would do the job. Sometimes I would blow a whistle and the disease would go away instantaneously. I enjoyed having fun like that. Everyone wondered how I did it, and no one could ever understand.

When too many people would start to come to me and I would become tired of all the rush I would say, "I'm sorry, I've made a mistake. I've slipped up in my sadhana, so now all my power is finished," and this would drive most of the people away. I have done that many times, because I love more than anything else to be alone.

## DEVOTION

If I live for anything I live for my sadhana. And I cannot emphasize too strongly that to succeed at sadhana you must do whatever you set out to do with heart and soul. Never be like a prostitute, going from guru to guru, deity to deity, never selecting one as a true lover. Be like the Cataka bird, that drinks water only when the Swati asterism is in the sky. Never be happy anywhere but where your beloved is, whatever you may choose to love. Then you can get Siddhi — not otherwise.

Even when I was engaged to my wife, I would invariably get up at 10 P.M. no matter what I was doing, and would go to the smashan. She would ask me, "What do you do when you leave here?" One day I decided to take her along with me; why keep secrets from anyone? I drove to the smashan and parked the car. "Listen, while I am doing my sadhana I will not be able to come and help you out. You'll have to wait until dawn. Think it over." She said, "I'll wait in the car until you finish." I shrugged my shoulders over her stupidity, walked over to a blazing pyre, sat down, and began my rituals.

At dawn I returned to the car to find she had fainted. Foam was coming from her mouth, and her skin was cold. A nice slap brought her to her senses, and she started mumbling deliriously, "No, no, don't come near me. Take me home." I took her home, and she was in bed for a month with high fever from the fright of it. What did she see there? No one knows. And still she married me. This is rnanubandhana.

My wife says I'm a fool. Hundreds come to me to be treated and get their work done, and she says I'm a fool. I don't cash in on my abilities! It doesn't matter. Although we can't get along together, still I refer to her and respect her as my first guru, because if it hadn't been for her nagging I would never have rushed up things like I did; a blitzkrieg, if you like. She wanted me to become completely materialistic because she married me for my money; but it was not possible. If it had happened we would not be talking together here today. Therefore I thank her for making me realize the futility of life. You see, I have an Aghori's frame of mind: challenge and response. Either I die or I succeed; either I kill you or you kill me. I picked this up in the jungle as a sadhu, and also when I was a wrestler. That competitiveness has always been there.

Once when I had gone to see my Junior Guru Maharaj after a long interval, I went to the cave I kept nearby and found some other Aghori sitting in it. I got wild. The beauty of that cave is that no one ever sits there when I am gone, but inside it is always spotless as if it were being regularly cleaned. It is full of whitened skulls, and snakes drip off the ceiling. Many of my friends have seen it, and they have all become frightened. There is a tree outside which gives a different type of fruit in each month of the year. You can obtain one fruit from it each day, and with the cool water from the spring within the cave you can live splendidly.

I told the other Aghori, whose name was Bhuta Nath, "Look, this is my cave. If you want to remain alive you had better pack up and leave immediately."

He started to bluster: "This may have been your cave but now it belongs to me. If you don't like it I don't care. Get out!"

What arrogance! This was serious. I told him, "I am warn-

ing you for the last time. I have nothing against you, but I can't be responsible for what my friends will do to you if you stay here any longer."

He just continued to blather, "Do you want to see what I can do? If you don't leave now I will kill you."

Unfortunately the moment he spoke these words he vomited blood and died. I buried his body; who will waste money for wood to cremate him? About some things it is necessary to be very strict.

But you can't punish just anyone who makes fun of you; only those who should know better like Bhuta Nath. Besides, to punish someone is also to create a new karma, even if that someone deserved it like Bhuta Nath did. Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction: Newton's Law of Motion. Eventually you will have to pay for each and every karma you create unless you find someone who is willing to take some of your karmas away from you and endure them himself, which is quite unlikely.

A sadhu has his own karmas to worry about, and rarely will he take anyone else's karmas to reduce that person's sufferings. I have tried it, and I have suffered for overstepping my limits. I took the karmas of one fellow suffering from throat cancer just to spare his children from being fatherless. For forty days I couldn't even drink water. I survived on sips of lime juice mixed in a glass of soda.

Now I know what cancer is like. You see, if the patient will have to suffer for six years, you can suffer yourself for six months or six days, depending on the strength of your penance, because the austerities make the reaction easier to bear. But suffer you must.

Usually, however, a sadhu will say, "You have performed the action and enjoyed the fruit at the time. Now you are enjoying the reaction. Please learn a good lesson from it and don't make any mistakes again." You may find fakirs to help you, because they are more emotional, but only a few sadhus are exceptions to this rule.

I know the truth of this story personally. There was once a girl who married and was happily living in Bombay when she

developed leprosy. Her husband and his family threw her out of the house, and her own family refused to take her in. In despair she went to Girnar. In the jungle she found a sadhu sitting on his dhuni. When he saw her he grunted at her several times, but she still refused to move. Finally, he had to say, "Ma, please do leave here. The sun is about to go down, and it is very dangerous to be out in the jungle at night."

She replied, "I have come to Girnar to find some Baba who will cure me. Until now all the sadhus and fakirs I have met could do nothing, and if you also can't do anything I have decided to kill myself because I cannot stand it any longer."

The Baba didn't say anything after that, and he continued to sit by his dhuni, she sitting nearby. Night fell and the cold set in and she started to shiver, but she didn't move. At about 3 A.M. the Baba got up to have his bath. When he came back he smeared himself with ash from his dhuni, sat on the ground, and called the girl over to him, and motioned to her to sit on his lap. Then he embraced her — and she became free of the disease instantaneously. I can take you to her today; she is a grandmother now. Her husband and everyone else had to admit that she was cured.

And the Baba? Well, he had to suffer terribly for forty days, agony. That sort of compassion you find in only one out of thousands of sadhus and fakirs. A householder Aghori cannot afford to be so cruel. He has his own obligations, his people to protect and provide for, and he must be compassionate. To wear ochre robes is really a terrible responsibility and that is why I don't wear them. While I don't, I am a normal human being and I can play around as I like. I can enjoy my life and make mistakes. But when I put that on, I can't afford to make even a single mistake.

This is another reason why I continuously test the people who come to me to learn something of spirituality. Some of them think they are ready to go out into the jungle without any preparation whatsoever. But do they realize what it means to divorce yourself from all your comforts and live like a sadhu? Once I met a sadhu in a North Indian forest. He was an Englishman, actually, but he had spent twenty years in India already

when I met him. Some of our bigoted Brahmins claim smugly that Westerners will never be able to succeed at our sadhanas perfectly; but that is all bull. Actually Westerners have some qualities which are rare in Indians nowadays. For example, they are thorough in whatever it is they do. This sadhu, named Must Ram (literally "Intoxicated with Rama"), was as perfect a sadhu as you will ever find. When I met him he had injured his leg and the wound was full of pus — and termites. Yes, termites. I felt sorry for him; I was sure he must be suffering some disturbance in his meditation on that account. So I volunteered to cure him.

"Oh, no, no, don't bother," he told me in elegant English, "why disturb them? Let them eat, let them eat." Can you imagine? Would you be able to say the same thing if it were your leg which was being devoured by insects? I doubt it; not in the beginning, at least. Which is why I tell the people who come to me, "If you cannot concentrate properly in Bombay where you have all the facilities, food whenever you want it, a comfortable bed, and so on, how could you possibly concentrate out in the jungle with mosquitoes swooping down at you at odd hours, with a rock for a bed, and whatever you can beg for your dinner?"

I never wanted to leave Girnar, but I can see now it was the right thing to do. I've learned so much about the world and the people who live in it. I can understand how they can be miserable, and I try to help them out of their misery, physical or mental, so that they can, maybe, remember God occasionally.

I love to play about with my "children," to teach them new things, and to help them overcome their bad habits. One day one of them may even develop sufficiently to be fit to become a disciple. One of my American "children" told me once, very sweetly and sincerely, "I am really proud to be able to say I know you, and I am so glad that I can love you and that you reciprocate my love, that it is mutual. I just hope my love is not a burden to you." Wasn't that a nice thing to say? But very naive.

I told him, "Your love is no burden to me because it is a very inconstant love. You love me some of the time, your wife some

of the time, your other friends part of the time, and some of the time you are overcome by self-doubt and are not sure who you love or even if you *do* love. If your love ever becomes real love then it will definitely be a burden to me, because then I will have to work hard to live up to it."

The purpose of sadhana is to develop real love. But nowadays it is so difficult to do proper sadhana because of all the obstacles. The secret is to be sincere about whatever it is you take as your sadhana, no matter how insignificant or unimportant it may seem to you. God is not interested in big sadhus or saints; God is interested only in sincerity. That is why Krishna cannot do without Radha. She can remember nothing else except Krishna, and Her remembrance drags Him to Her.

When Khinaram Aghori cured that dancer of leprosy, or when the Baba in Girnar cured that Bombay girl of leprosy, the love that Khinaram and the Baba showed was infinitely greater than any love you have ever experienced in your life. Why? Because first of all, it was done knowing full well that the opposite party would never be able to repay such a gift. Normally lovers work on the principle that "a fair exchange is no robbery." A lover loves his or her partner only because he or she is confident that the partner will return that love. How many people love without any expectation of return? Secondly, it was a love which was so great that Khinaramji and the Baba were willing to suffer for the opposite party. It is one thing to love without any expectation of return; it is a very different thing to love with the intention of suffering in the other's stead. Sometimes you will find mothers who can do it, especially animal mothers protecting their young. This is why I am always desirous of sitting in the lap of the Mother, so that I can always be learning how to love. *This* is real love, and this love is a real burden.

Where did this love come from? Did Kinaramji want to enjoy sex with the dancer? Did the Baba look at the young lady's body before agreeing to cure her? No. Ordinary love for the flesh can never go so deep because of the instinct of self-preservation. This was love directed inward to the Atma, the fragment of the Universal Soul which dwells in everyone. Overwhelming love for God made these things happen. That Baba, and Khin-

aramji likewise, thought, "Wah, Lord, are you suffering? Let me relieve you!" Real love changes things.

Generally, people say the aim of life is *Moksha*, or salvation, by which they mean freedom from being obliged to take birth again on Earth. But I believe in a personal God and I say to Him, "Lord, let me be born over and over again thousands of times, but don't take your face away from me. Make me a blind leper for centuries but never desert me. Always keep me in your heart and in your eyes." My Beloved loves to play about with me and I love to play about with Him, and the result is emotional highlights: Mahabhava Samadhi! Can you prevent two lovers from meeting? No, even if they have to meet in the road or in some public area where everyone can see what they are up to. Do they have any sense of time or place? No! "Kamaturanam na bhayam na lajja": Fear and shame do not exist for those afflicted with the disease of desire. And Bhakti is far more intense than physical love. Two souls merge into one another; can anyone describe it? To achieve it you must forget the external completely and go deeper and deeper within.

So go on with your sadhana, longer and longer until you can't live without your deity, and He or She can't live without you. Then go further; go so deep that you forget even the deity. The deity then will feel so miserable without your love and remembrance that He or She will run after you and demand worship. This becomes such a bondage of love that you can't escape it. You become lost, absolutely lost, useless to the world, lost within yourself playing with your Beloved.

And when that happens your perspective on life will undergo a radical change. You'll see things completely differently, because you are no longer part of the usual current of worldly events, so your priorities will be determined by your Bhakti. Here is an example.

Once in the South there was a king of the Chola dynasty who was a great devotee of Rama. One day while the court bard was reciting the *Ramayana* (the epic of Rama's life and adventures) aloud to him, the narrative reached the point where Sita was taken to Lanka. The king suddenly jumped up and said, "Immediately prepare the forces for an attack on Lanka. Why

should Lord Rama worry when I am here to serve him? I will see that Sita is returned!"

No one at the court had the courage to tell him that all this had happened long before. So, he sailed at the head of his fleet and duly conquered Lanka. Then he ordered his generals, "Find Sita!" Since they were aware that to refuse a royal order meant death, they made a show of searching and reported that no Sita was present. This mystified the king, who was on the point of losing his temper, until it came out in the course of a conversation that the Ramayana had happened thousands of years ago. Then he realized, "Oh, no! What have I done? I have unnecessarily conquered Lanka!" He gave the kingdom of Lanka to one of his sons, his own kingdom to the other, and went out into the forest to live the life of an ascetic. He became a great saint. Devotion like that will always pay dividends.

When you have Bhakti your attitude becomes quite different. Once Narada (an immortal devotee of Vishnu) asked Lord Vishnu to explain to him the difference in state between a Yogi and a devotee, a follower of Bhakti. Vishnu told Narada to follow him down to Earth. On Earth as they strolled along they came upon a Yogi hanging upside down from the branch of a large tree. The Yogi asked Vishnu, "How many more births will I have to take to be free of the cycle of birth and death? My penance is so terrific that I should achieve very soon."

Vishnu said, "In spite of all your penance there is still a little left for you to do. You will have to take two more births yet."

On hearing this the Yogi got down out of the tree and walked off in disgust, saying, "In spite of all my strenuous efforts and austerities I will still have to take two more births? What sort of justice is that? Forget it; there is no use in continuing with it."

Narada and Vishnu walked silently on a little farther and saw a devotee singing and dancing by himself under a spreading banyan tree. Seeing Lord Vishnu the devotee prostrated himself fully on the ground and said, "Oh, my blessed Lord, how kind of you to come and visit me! How wonderful that I have been permitted to see you! Would you be kind enough to tell

me how many more times I will have to take birth before I can be free of the wheel of existence?"

Vishnu replied, "I am sorry to have to tell you this but you will have to take birth again as many times as there are leaves on this tree."

The devotee shouted for joy, "Only so many times? And I feared there might be no limit. The time will pass almost unnoticed." And he began to sing and dance again.

Vishnu smiled and said, "Oh, is that the way you feel about it? Then come with me right now."

Then Vishnu asked Narada, "Do you see the difference between a Yogi and a devotee? The Yogis still try to hold on to their egos, and what do they get? The devotee accomplishes great things by offering up the ego to the Beloved."

There is a cliff in Girnar. When a sadhu has done penances for years and years and has finally despaired of life and can no longer stand to live without his deity, he will walk to that cliff and throw himself off in a frenzy of anguish — and nothing will happen to him. He will have passed his test and becomes eligible to be taught further. False sadhus have tried it, to attract attention to themselves, and all of them died. True devotion is the only force which can go beyond death.

When you get close to your Beloved there comes a time when you cannot continue to exist separately, and your own personality is lost in that of the deity. Each deity has unique characteristics which give a wonderful flavor to the play. When you embrace Anjaneya, it is as if electricity had been given to all parts of your body. All the cells begin to jump and sing. And what is so marvelous is that in the blood, for instance, if the white blood cells are too many and red blood cells too few, or vice versa, they will automatically go back to their proper levels. In the brain every cell is dilated, every blood vessel is dilated. And that is why they call it Supreme Bliss.

Anyone who follows the path of devotion wants to get the vision of his deity because he is dying to catch a glimpse of his Beloved. He longs for his deity so much that the form of the deity is actually created in the astral body, and then it projects and plays with him. All through this process he experiences

the joys of intense emotional highlights. This is why Aghoris are always the best devotees, because they forget everything else when they remember the Beloved. Their longing is so intense that they cry, wail, tear their flesh, starve themselves, anything to lose their physical consciousness and attract the deity. An ordinary devotee can never be so intense as an Aghori.

Once an Aghori told his disciple, "Take this pot and fill it with water, but don't go near any lake or river."

The disciple thought to himself as hard as he could, and then he wandered around awhile before returning with an empty pot. The guru looked up at him and said, "There is only one way to fill this pot — with your tears. When you love your deity so much that you cannot bear to be without Him, that you cannot exist unless you have a glimpse of Him, that you are ready to kill yourself unless He shows Himself to you, and when you cry continuously until the pot is full, then only are you fit to do Aghora sadhanas; not until then."

Another day the guru told the same disciple, "Build me a fire without wood." The disciple made an effort, but to no avail. When he confessed his failure to the guru, the latter shook his head and said, "Until your heart catches fire with the intense longing for your deity; until you burn yourself to ashes and continue to burn even then; until you become flame yourself, you can never succeed at Aghora."

The scriptures describe the stages through which one passes when overcome by Shakti. First, you must forget your body. If you worry about your body how will you concentrate on your Beloved? When you can no longer remember your body you are on the way. Then you begin to sweat as the emotion builds up. Next you cry. First you cry because of the separation; and later you cry because of anticipation, out of joy when you feel the deity is really going to come to you. When the deity enters your body and embraces you, you begin to tremble and shake because of the overwhelming bliss of the embrace. And then you lose yourself in the fusion of the two personalities into one. If you are a super-Aghori you maintain this state permanently; if not, you can develop the emotion whenever you please and play with your Beloved at any time. Then you are beyond

all the limitations of your physical body, and therefore of karma and fate also.

Once the great Hindi poet-saint Tulsidas, during his period as a wandering sadhu, came to a certain town, where a lady offered him food. In India we always believe in feeding sadhus, birds, animals, all living things, because you never know when God is going to come to you. God may come in any form, and we feel that if we feed everyone, eventually we will feed God and our work will be done. After eating, Tulsidas told the lady, "Please ask for anything, and I will do it for you."

She laughed in his face and said, "Maharaj, plenty of saints have come and none of them have been able to give me what I want."

"But I am Tulsidas," he said, a little offended, "and I will give you what you desire; just speak it."

The woman sighed over his stupidity and said, "I want a son."

Tulsidas went into meditation and after a few minutes came back to earthly consciousness and said, "Ma, I'm afraid that a son is not in your destiny."

The woman smiled and said, "That is what I told you in the first place, but you wouldn't listen to me. However, you are always welcome for food." Tulsidas went on his way.

After some time an Aghori came to the town, and upon learning about the lady who was unable to have a child he decided to do something about it. One day he walked down the street in front of the lady's house, shouting, "Who will feed me? I am offering a child for every *roti* (flat bread tortilla) I am fed! One *roti*, one child! Ten *rotis*, ten children!" When the lady heard this she invited the Aghori inside and told him, "But Maharaj, it's not in my destiny to have children." The Aghori replied, "I piss on destiny!" She fed him eight *rotis*, and in eight years she delivered eight handsome sons.

After twelve years Tulsidas again visited the town. As he walked down the same street he saw the eight boys and was immediately enamored by their beauty and intelligence. They called their mother, and she invited him inside and told him, "Do you remember that you said I had no sons in my destiny?" When Tulsidas heard that the Aghori had given them to



her he went into meditation to ask Rama about it. He said, "Raghuvira, when you would not allow me to give this lady sons, how could that filthy evil-smelling Aghori do it?"

Rama smiled at him and said, "Tulsi, that Aghori is something different from you. He has gone beyond the limits of being a saint and living in Sattva." Then Rama decided to teach Tulsidas a good lesson with the help of the Aghori, and suddenly He started to shout, "Oh, I have a terrific pain in the heart. Please, Tulsi, get me a heart from someone so that I can get some relief."

Tulsidas got scared: If something were to happen to Lord Rama what would be his fate as Rama's chief devotee? So he ran out into the street shouting, "A heart! Lord Rama needs a heart! Who will give his heart for Rama?"

The Aghori, who was relaxing under a tree, heard him and said, "Tulsidas, come here." When Tulsidas came the Aghori said, "Now I know how much love you have for Lord Rama. If you really loved Him, you would have given your own heart instantaneously when He asked. Here, if Lord Rama wants a heart, let Him take mine," and so saying he ripped open his chest with his fingers, tore out his heart, and handed it to Tulsidas.

When Tulsidas went back into meditation to offer the heart to Rama, Rama smiled at him and said, "Now do you see how a real lover behaves with his Beloved?" And Tulsidas had to keep quiet and acknowledge the Aghori's greatness.

Once when I was in Girnar I was moving about with a sadhu named Ganga Das, a great devotee of Anjaneya. He had gone to a temple of Anjaneya to worship, but the priest told us, "You naked sadhus, get out of here! The wives of some important merchants from Bombay are coming here to worship. They will be embarrassed to see you!" And he refused to let us into the temple.

Tears filled the eyes of Ganga Das, and all he said was, "Wah, Anjaneya; I could never have believed You would feel embarrassed to see me. Doesn't matter; I am ready to go." And we turned to leave.

As we left the temple enclosure the image of Anjaneya ripped

itself from the wall and began to follow us! We walked on and on and it followed us faithfully all the while, the priest standing thunderstruck behind. I don't know how many miles we covered but eventually Ganga Das relented and turned to worship the image. The image never returned to the original temple; the trustees arranged for a new temple to be built over it where it finally came to rest.

This is just an example of what I mean when I say that when you really get close to your deity, He or She cannot do without you and will go to any lengths not to offend you. There is a beautiful bondage of love. But only an Aghori can ever reach such heights; others are just too timid.

You can't just go out and try to develop love like this; it takes years. But everyone can make a beginning. Every morning when I wake up I do three things. First, I remember that I'm going to die. This gives urgency to the way I will live that day. Second, I spend five minutes in thanksgiving to Nature for being permitted to live, to have this chance to experience, to learn, and to achieve. And third, I resolve not to cheat my consciousness during the day. As long as I don't cheat my consciousness nothing I do during the day can stain me; but if I do something wrong I know I am likely to end up like the boy whose guru swallowed the fish and then regurgitated them back up, alive.

There are several little things like this I do during the day, just to keep my mind under control. I always make it a point to eat a green chili or two each morning, first thing. And you know how hot green chilies are! It is to remind me of the time when I had only chilies and water to eat all day long, because of my sadhana. That morning chili tells me, "Forget not, forget not."

And there is a practice which I follow every night before going to sleep. It is very simple, but it has helped me immensely, and it can help anyone who uses it. It involves only three questions: Have I lived? Have I loved? Have I laughed?

*Have I lived?* Have I made the best use of the time provided me during that day to grow, to learn, to develop?

*Have I loved?* Have I reached out to everyone I met and made

them aware of the love in my heart and eased their burdens of self-mistrust and self-doubt?

*Have I laughed?* Have I seen the humorous side of even the most painful incident?

If the answer to any one of these questions is no, then it is a matter for remorse. One more day has passed and I am another day closer to my death, and I have not exerted myself to my fullest potential. This is enough to make me work harder the next day and try to make amends, before Mahakala comes and catches me unawares. It is this intense desperation to live life to the fullest which is the hallmark, the stamp, of a true Aghori.

## GLOSSARY

*Adya*: Lit. "first, original." Used as a synonym for the Adishakti, the first or original Shakti which manifests from the absolute and is the Mother of all the worlds.

*Aghora/Aghori*: Lit. "non-terrifying." Aghora is the most extreme of all Indian sects, concentrating on forcible conversion of a limited human personality into a divine personality. An Aghori is a practitioner of Aghora.

*Apana Vayu*: One of the five forces in living beings which cause movements in the body and mind, the other four being Prana, Samana, Vyana and Udana. Apana is the downward-moving force, and is in charge of excretion of urine, feces, flatus, menstrual fluid, and semen, and also delivery of the fetus.

*Atma*: The soul, the indwelling spirit which animates a living being. The Jivatma is the individual spirit which imagines itself trapped in a physical form, subject to the limitations of embodied existence. The Paramatma is the Universal Soul, the totality of spirit in the cosmos. All Jivas or Jivatmas belong to the Paramatma.

*Bhairava/Bhairavi*: Lit. "the Terrifier." A name for Lord Shiva and for his consort. In sexual Tantra the Bhairava is the male, who self-identifies with Lord Shiva, and the Bhairavi is the female, who self-identifies with Parvati, Shiva's Grand Consort.

*Bhang*: A preparation of Cannabis leaf paste and milk which is mixed with spices and sugar. Even strictly abstemious Hindus often take bhang on holidays like Diwali and Mahashivaratri, in honor of deities like Lord Shiva who take bhang regularly. Shiva regards bhang as a wonderful tool for spiritual advancement if properly used, and a good way to ruin yourself if misused.

*Causal Body*: The third of the bodies possessed by an animate being; a warehouse in which all an individual's karmas are stored. Karmas are projected from the causal body into the subtle body (the mind) and then into the physical body. (See "Subtle Body.")

*Chillum*: A pipe used to smoke marijuana or hashish mixed with tobacco. It is three or four inches long and is straight, tapering from a wide bowl to a thin mouth.

*Dhuni*: The fire tended by a sadhu. A sadhu is said to sit "on" his dhuni, meaning close by it, concentrating on it.

*Ethereal Being*: A discarnate personality, the quality of whose influence is defined by his or her degree of spiritual advancement.

*Fakir*: A wandering Muslim holy man.

*Gunas*: Lit. "qualities" or "attributes." The Three Gunas are the three fundamental attributes of conditional or limited existence: Sattva (equilibrium), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia). In its purest state the mind is pure Sattva, and the two chief mental disturbances are Rajas (overactivity) and Tamas (inactivity).

*Jiva*: The individual personality which undergoes rebirth, because the karmas stored in the causal body need a physical body to permit their expression. (see Atma)

*Jnana*: Transcendent wisdom. Knowledge (Vidya) is an outward projection or objectivization of this innate, living wisdom.

*Kali Yuga*: The fourth of the four ages through which the cosmos passes in cycles of 4,320,000 years. Kali Yuga is supposed to last 432,000 years, and is characterized by lack of interest in spirituality among the populace, which leads to materialism, atheism, and the perpetration of various cruelties by stronger beings onto weaker ones.

*Kilana*: Lit. "nailing." It is the process by which a spirit or other ethereal being is "nailed down" or captured with a mantra, and made to remain in a certain location for a specific purpose.

*Lunar Asterism*: "Nakshatra" in Sanskrit. One of the 27 or 28 divisions of the sky through which the moon passes in a month and the sun passes in a year. Traditional Vedic astrology uses Nakshatras instead of zodiacal signs for its calculations.

*Ma*: Vimalananda's generic term for the Mother Goddess, the cosmic potentiality for creation. All females were to him embodiments of this universal principle of motherhood and motherliness.

*Mahapurusha*: Lit. "great being." Vimalananda used this term to mean an ethereal being whose power is unlimited or almost unlimited, who can manipulate the cosmos at will if He so desires.

*Nirvikalpa Samadhi*: A state of consciousness in which all dualities are finally transcended and only awareness of the Paramatma (Ultimate Reality) remains. No consciousness of body or individuality is left.

*Paan*: A chaw composed of betel leaf smeared with slaked lime, catechu paste, and spice, into which betel nuts have been added. Paan is chewed after meals as a digestive and is said to have aphrodisiac qualities.

*Pitri Tarpana*: A ritual performed for a deceased human, usually a father or mother or other progenitor, to satisfy any lingering cravings which that individual might have had. Properly performed, this assures the individual an auspicious rebirth and enables him or her to maintain their spiritual progression.

*Prasad*: Any substance, usually food, which has been offered to a deity or saint, or to the image of a deity or saint, and which is then partaken of by a disciple or devotee. Prasad is supposed to contain a tiny amount of the deity's or saint's Shakti, which can exert a spiritualizing effect on the partaker.

*Rishi*: Lit. "Seer." Anything a Rishi sees or perceives becomes reality, because a Rishi is an ethereal being of the highest

class, one who is almost totally unlimited, who can travel anywhere in the cosmos and do anything at all. The Rishis "saw" the hymns of the Vedas, from which all the knowledge of ancient India was derived.

*Rnanubandhana*: The bondage of karmic debt.

*Rudra*: Lit. "the Crier," or "He Who makes others cry." Rudra is the ancient name for Shiva, the god of death, and is so called because he makes everyone cry who comes into contact with Him, because He separates them from their limited existence, to which they are tightly attached.

*Sadhana*: Any spiritual practice. Aghora Sadhana is designed to replace the Aghori's personality with his deity's personality by creation of the deity's form in the Aghori's subtle body.

*Sarvavidya*: The totality of manifested knowledge. This is a Siddhi which involves control of all Shakti in the cosmos.

*Shakti*: Energy; the ability to perform some action. Shakti is always female in Indian philosophy.

*Shava*: A corpse.

*Siddha*: An "accomplished one." Anyone who has obtained a Siddhi, or supernatural accomplishment, is a Siddha. Vimalananda restricted his use of the word Siddha to indicate those beings who have achieved immortality.

*Smashan*: A charnel ground; an area in which dead bodies are burned or buried. This word is derived from "ashmashana," or "place where rocks lie," which suggests that burial was once more common in India than it now is.

*Subtle Body*: The astral body; the sheath of existence between the causal and subtle bodies. The mind inhabits the subtle body. Karmas projected from the causal body must first pass through the subtle body before reaching the physical body for their expression.

*Tattva*: Lit. "thatness." A category of existence. For example, the Three Gunas are Tattvas because they are attributes, and the category of attribution is a Tattva. The Atma is also a Tattva.

*Vajroli*: A yogic practice in which a fluid is sucked into the penis or vagina by muscular force. During the sex act Vajroli

can be used to suck up the partner's secretions for both physical and spiritual benefit.

*Vasana*: A tendency of the individual personality which produces habitual modes of action, often inherited from one's ancestors. Vasanas make people do what they do in spite of themselves because of the power of the inherent tendency.

*Wah*: An exclamation of amazement, surprise or revelation.

*Yaksha/Yakshini*: A Hindu angel (male and female respectively); an ethereal being who was once human and because of his ability in sadhana attained to this status after death.

*Yama*: Also called Dharmaraja, or King of Righteousness. He is the judge of the dead, evaluating their activities while on Earth and determining which paradise or hell they go to while awaiting rebirth.

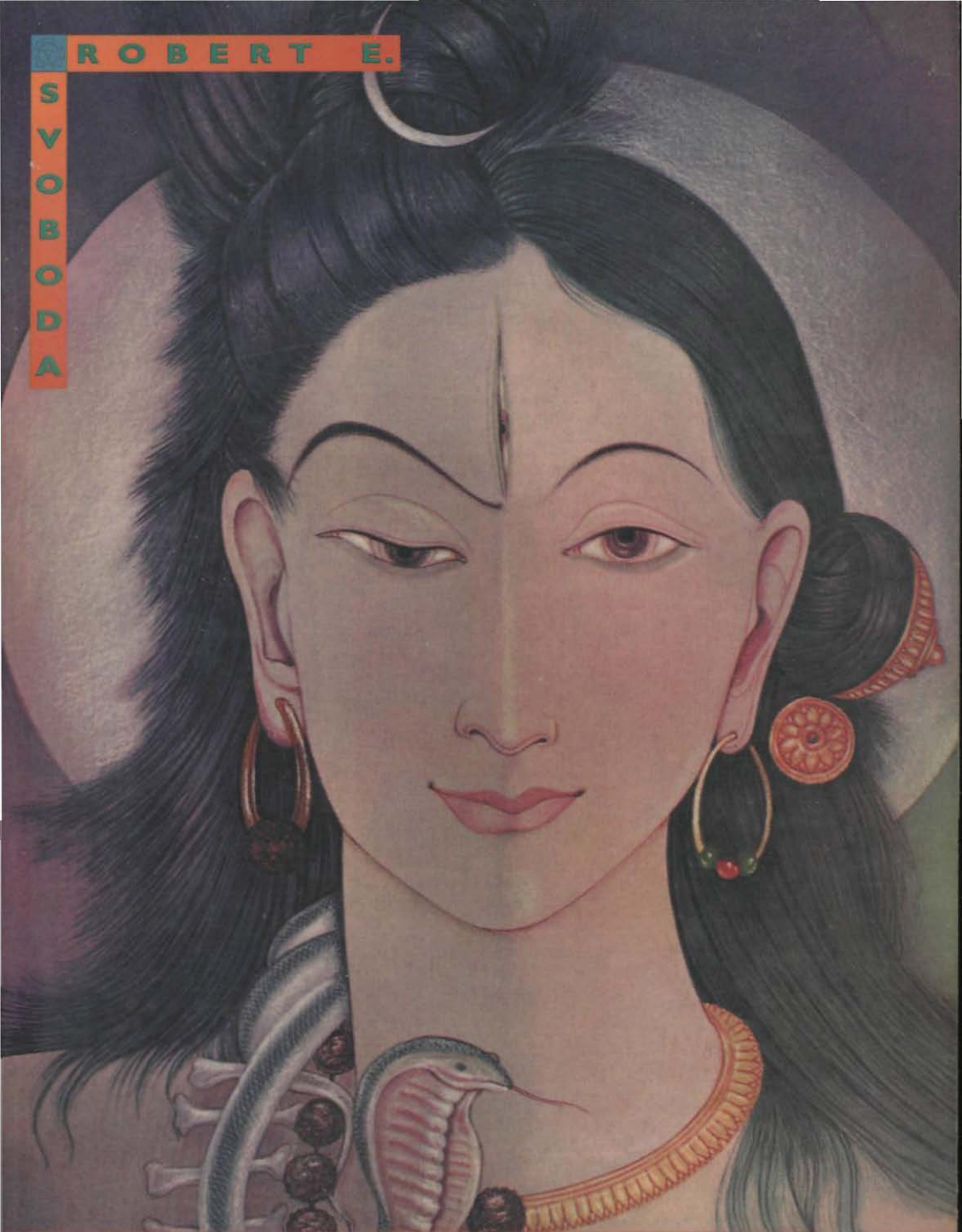
*Yantra*: A diagram which acts as a receptacle for the power of a mantra. Tantra is the ritual by which the Yantra is empowered by the mantra. Any substance can be used for a Yantra, but Vimalananda averred that the best of all possible Yantras is the human body.



Portrait of Vimalananda  
(taken from a photograph and drawn by Dr. Vasant T. Lad.)

ROBERT E.

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# KUNDALINI

AGHORA II

— IN THE SERIES —

*AGHORA, At the Left Hand of God*, Robert E. Svoboda

*AGHORA II: Kundalini*, Robert E. Svoboda

Forthcoming: *AGHORA III: The Law of Karma*, Robert E. Svoboda

# AGHORA II: KUNDALINI

Robert E. Svoboda

Foreword by Robert Masters, Ph.D.  
Illustrations, Captions and Appendix  
by Robert Beer

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## DEDICATION

She, the Eternal One, is the Supreme Knowledge, the cause of freedom from  
delusion and the cause of the bondage of manifestation.  
She indeed is sovereign over all sovereigns.  
(Devi Mahatmya, 1.57-58)

Dedicated to the Great Goddess, the Divine Mother of the Universe:  
the Kundalini Shakti.



# CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	13
INTRODUCTION .....	17
Chapter 1: AGNI .....	29
Chapter 2: KUNDALINI .....	51
Self-Identification .....	59
Coverings .....	62
Nadis and Chakras .....	64
The Nine Chakras .....	67
Raising Kundalini .....	72
Samadhi .....	76
Kula Kundalini .....	77
The Snake .....	82
The Chakras .....	83
Kula Kundalini .....	84
Chapter 3: PRELIMINARIES .....	87
Food .....	92
Panchamakara .....	95
Chapter 4: SADHANA .....	113
Khanda Manda Yoga .....	113
Name and Form .....	115
The Soma Yaga .....	121

“Make Everything into a Sadhana” . . . . .	124
The Sun, the Moon, and Fire . . . . .	128
Gayatri . . . . .	132
<b>Chapter 5: MANTRA</b> . . . . .	<b>139</b>
Mantra Siddhi . . . . .	141
Using Mantras . . . . .	144
The Five S’s . . . . .	147
Secrecy . . . . .	148
Pronunciation . . . . .	151
Four Levels of Speech . . . . .	152
The Four Classes . . . . .	155
<b>Chapter 6: TANTRA</b> . . . . .	<b>163</b>
Time, Eclipses and Nights . . . . .	163
Nyasa . . . . .	169
Mental Worship . . . . .	174
Ganesha . . . . .	177
<b>Chapter 7: MUSIC</b> . . . . .	<b>181</b>
Nada Yoga . . . . .	188
Krishna and the Gopis . . . . .	191
Krishna and Shiva . . . . .	196
<b>Chapter 8: IMMORTALS</b> . . . . .	<b>203</b>
Siddhas . . . . .	203
Rishis, Munis, Naths and Siddhas . . . . .	209
Notable Siddhas . . . . .	212
Rishis . . . . .	215
Time and Space . . . . .	216
Anasuya . . . . .	222
Avataras . . . . .	225
<b>Chapter 9: THE ESOTERIC RAMAYANA</b> . . . . .	<b>235</b>
The Script . . . . .	237
The Players . . . . .	240
Anjaneya’s Role . . . . .	242
<b>Chapter 10: GURUS AND DISCIPLES</b> . . . . .	<b>253</b>
<b>APPENDIX</b> . . . . .	<b>283</b>
Yantras: A General Description . . . . .	283
The Nine Nath Siddhas . . . . .	284
<b>GLOSSARY</b> . . . . .	<b>307</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> . . . . .	<b>319</b>

# ILLUSTRATIONS

Shri Yantra . . . . .	12
Design and Construction of Fire Pits (Homa Kunda) . . . . .	41
Dimensions of Fire Pits. . . . .	43
The Nadis and Chakras . . . . .	70
Kundalini Yantra . . . . .	78
Yantra of Shiva and Shakti . . . . .	79
A Gayatri Yantra . . . . .	134
Treasure Vase . . . . .	137
The Five Elements. . . . .	138
Shiva Linga . . . . .	138
The Panchamamsa Sacrament . . . . .	167
Shiva Yantra & Ganesha Yantra . . . . .	177
Peaceful Offering of the Five Senses . . . . .	201
Wrathful Offering of the Five Sences . . . . .	202
Skulls & Skull Cups . . . . .	234
<b>YANTRAS OF THE TEN MAHAVIDYA GODDESSES</b> . . . . .	<b>251 &amp; 252</b>
Kali	Tara
Chinnamasta	Bhuvanesjari
Bangala	Dhumavati
Kamala	Matangi
Sodasi	Bhairavi

## THE NATH SIDDHAS

The Nath Siddha Matsyendranath . . . . .	287
The Nath Siddha Gorakhnath . . . . .	289
The Nath Siddha Caruangi . . . . .	291
The Nath Siddha Jalandhara . . . . .	293
The Nath Siddha Kanipa . . . . .	295
The Nath Siddha Charpati . . . . .	297

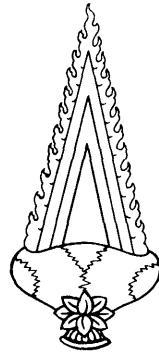
## THE SIDDHAS

The Siddha Nalinapa . . . . .	299
The Siddha Chang Dev Maharaj . . . . .	300
The Siddha Bhadrapa . . . . .	301
The Alchemist Siddha Nagarjuna . . . . .	302
The Musician Siddha Vinapa . . . . .	303
The Siddha Dengipa – The Rice Thresher . . . . .	304

SHRI YANTRA . . . . .	316
-----------------------	-----

YANTRA OF SMASHAN KALI . . . . .	318
----------------------------------	-----

YANTRA OF SMASHAN TARA . . . . .	319
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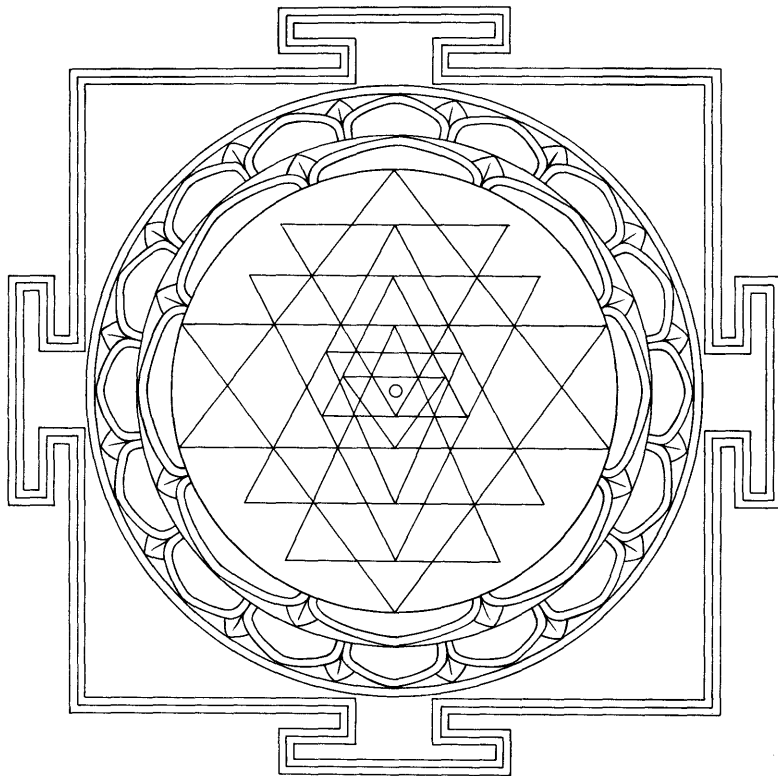
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Allied Publishers Limited, New Delhi, India for permission to reproduce the Sadashiva painting which graces the cover of this volume.

## About the cover:

Vimalananda explains the concept thusly (from Chapter Two): "The purpose of Kundalini Yoga is to reunite Shiva and Shakti, to create the eternal form of Shiva, *Sadashiva*. *Sadashiva*'s left side is female and right side is male; the two principles have united but have not merged. If they were to merge that would be the end of the play, and that would be no fun at all. *Sadashiva* exists on the cosmic scale; in an individual this deity is called *Ardhanarishvara* ('the Lord Who is Half Female'). In order to manifest *Sadashiva* the Kundalini must be made to rise fully, because the highest manifestation of Shiva in the human being is in the head, the highest part of the body.

"In an ordinary person Kundalini is asleep at the base of the spine, and so Shiva is bereft of Shakti. Such a person is not Shiva but merely *shava* (corpse). I look at everyone I meet as a skeleton because that is what they are; until a person's Kundalini Shakti awakens and begins to dance on Her Shiva, that person is as good as dead."



### **Shri Yantra**

The sacred Shri Yantra is the most well known and fascinating of all yantras because of its intricate geometric harmony. It consists of nine interlocking triangles, the union of five downward pointing yoni triangles (shakti) with four upward pointing fire triangles (Shiva), and is also known as the Navayoni (nine yoni) chakra. The configuration produces a pattern of forty-three triangles which represent the goddess Tripurasundari at the center surrounded by her retinue of forty-two deities. These triangles are arranged in a series of five chakras that house one, eight, ten, ten and fourteen triangles progressively from the center outwards. This structure is enclosed by two concentric lotus circles of eight and sixteen petals enclosed within a square Bhupura or ground plan. (continues on page 316)

(For a more thorough understanding of Yantras please refer to the Appendix beginning on page 283)

## FOREWORD

Aghora, described in this volume as “super-tantra,” is a Path of Devotion to the Great Mother Goddess Kundalini, here manifesting with the Name and Image of the Goddess Tara. This Way is one of extraordinary extremes and intensities, even for tantra, and its aim is nothing less than to destroy the human limitations of the practitioner, so that he or she becomes a super-human—in fact, a kind of deity.

*Aghora II* is the second volume of a trilogy describing and explicating this Way as practiced by the Aghori Vimalananda, and as recounted by his student, the ayurvedic physician Robert Svoboda. The result is certainly one of the most unusual works to be encountered in the whole wonder-filled literature of world religions. It is also a work very much of this time, shredding and trampling on universal and almost-universal prohibitions. The Aghori sets out to overcome human limitations by shattering internally every restraint, no matter how ancient or powerful the taboo, and also by creating a body/mind that is able to contain emotional, sensory and other experiences which would consume anyone not properly prepared.

The Aghori, as presented by Vimalananda, must literally and systematically create a body (and subtle bodies) with a nervous system and other systems able to explore levels of consciousness and to tolerate kinds and intensities of energies which would otherwise result in madness, terrible suffering, destruction of gross and subtle body/mind organs, and death. Crucial to avoiding those outcomes are access to the necessary esoteric

teachings and trainings and, above all, to the Goddess.

As Vimalananda says again and again, in this present time the external forms of the spiritual disciplines are of much lesser importance than the inner work and, above all, the immediate and personal relationship to deity. It is possible to relate to the Great Mother Goddess in such a way that most of the requirements, temporal and material, of a spiritual discipline may be cast aside. However, what is dispensed with in the way of formalities must be compensated for by duration and intensity of both Practice and Devotion. Much present-day ritual and ceremony can be understood as aids or even crutches of a kind for those who lack the courage, dedication and devotion to proceed in unmediated interaction with Deity.

In speaking of intensities involved in such practice, here reference is to something going well beyond, for example, the “dionysiac element” in religions *as experienced in practice*. Those intensities are almost always reserved for special occasions, limited in time, and experienced within the context of different kinds of protections. But the Aghori, or similar figure, must always be willing to do without human supports of any kind and to venture into the awe-ful worlds of the nonhuman supported only by activated latent potentials and by confident belief that the Mother Goddess will guide and protect. Such a practitioner must be willing to venture into *anything or nothing*, knowing that in either case a successful experience will bring further isolation from the human and immersion in realities from which there can be no turning back. We are indeed speaking here of a “cosmic thrill-seeker” at home in realms of either terror or rapture—an ultimate psychonaut who is also our most authentic contemporary *saint*.

Despite the uniqueness and emphasis on inner work there is in this book an enormous wealth of information of value to the student of Eastern spiritual disciplines. Often even a sentence or two will shed more significant light on profound states of consciousness or very complex stages of meditation than the reader is likely to find in whole volumes intended to illumine the same subjects. The book is of value to advanced practitioners of yoga and other paths of self-actualization while, at the same time, it should be fascinating reading for anyone interested in the farther reaches of human experiences and human potentials.

Let it be added that there is much in this volume, and more in its predecessor, that will be startling and shocking to almost all. How much is to be taken as “objective truth,” and how much is to be taken as “subjective truth,” often is unclear. Vimalananda makes it plain that this distinction is for him not one of great importance—and, if he is going to make a judg-

ment in the matter, then “subjective truth” is doubtless of greater value. Vimalananda also belongs in the tradition of spiritual teachers who deliberately speak and behave in such a manner as to shock, and often dismay, the observer. Such Teachers are to be found in many Traditions—for our own time, the very saintly Fourth Way Master G. I. Gurdjieff is a wonderful example.

There are other Paths or Ways which have strong similarities to Aghora—most notably, ones associated with Kundalini and the Great Mother Goddess in some other religions and esoteric Traditions. I would particularly mention as examples the ancient and still-enduring esoteric Schools of the Goddess Sekhmet in Egypt, the Goddess Hera in Greece, the Goddess Kapo in Hawaii, the Goddess Kali in India—there are also others. Each of these powerful and authentic mystery Traditions offers Paths of equal intensity, equally demanding of dedication and devotion to the Great Mother. Each uncompromisingly requires that the subtle and gross body/mind systems of the person become transmuted into vehicles or instruments having experiential capacities which by any ordinary standards are “superhuman.” Only when this has been accomplished can there be that level of interaction with deity and other nonhuman beings which the higher Work requires.

Finally, I feel obliged to say that I do not know whether Vimalananda was an actual person. His name, and other names in the book, are said to be pseudonyms intended to prevent readers from being “distracted” by “externals.” We are told that Vimalananda died about ten years ago, so that there is no question of searching him out—as many tried to do with another such mysterious character, the shaman Don Juan in the books of Carlos Castaneda.

In personal conversation with the author, he states that Vimalananda was indeed an actual person and that the mystery surrounding his identity is mainly at the insistence of Vimalananda’s own family. Considering the shock content of various of the Teachings, that is quite understandable. Some may wish to pursue this matter further. Most will find it sufficient to benefit from the extraordinary contents of *Aghora II* and its predecessor.

As for myself, I take pleasure in writing this Foreword even in the absence of any verifiable certainties about the Aghori Vimalananda, and despite strong personal reservations concerning some of the practices described. What I do know from many years of first-hand experience is the immense power of the Way of Devotion to the Great Mother Goddess and how, as this book sets forth, such a Way differs from those which are more dependent on human teachings and such objectifications in the world as ceremonies and

rituals. From my own experiential knowledge of the Fifth Way of the Goddess Sekhmet, I recognize in what is here called "Aghora" another Path that has been provided as a *real* and powerful means of unveiling truth and effecting transformation.

Robert Masters, Ph.D.

Co-Founder and Director of Research, The Foundation for Mind Research, Pomona, NY; author of *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, *Forbidden Sexual Behavior and Morality*, *The Goddess Sekhmet* and many other books.



# INTRODUCTION

*"The study of philosophy without a longing for liberation is like dressing up a corpse."— Tripura Rahasya*

In earlier times, when esoteric knowledge was under jealous guard, a spiritual aspirant usually had to endure years of patient waiting before being taught. Now that information has become an article of commerce, all manner of secrets would seem to have become available to anyone who has the price of a book or tape; however, simply because secret doctrines can now be purchased and thus easily possessed does not mean they can be easily comprehended. Though words can be bought and sold, that living wisdom which cannot be confined within words must still be earned.

Among the long-hidden arcana now being packaged for sale is the lore of Kundalini, the root from which all spiritual experiences sprout, and most of the writers who have tried to present to the world this living knowledge, which is the source of all knowledge, produce only dead words. As Heinrich Zimmer observed, "The best things can't be told; the second best are misunderstood."

Carl Jung, who many decades ago delivered a series of lectures on Kundalini, explains why:

Therefore the Yoga way or the Yoga philosophy has always been a secret, but not because people have kept it secret. For as soon as you keep a secret it is already an open secret: you know about it and other people

know about it, and then it is no longer a secret. The real secrets are secrets because no one understands them. One cannot even talk about them, and of such a kind are the experiences of Kundalini Yoga. That tendency to keep things secret is merely a natural consequence when the experience is of such a peculiar kind that you had better not talk about it, for you would expose yourself to the greatest misunderstanding and misinterpretation. (Jung, p.20)

The experiences of Kundalini Yoga are peculiar because Kundalini is the source of all your experiences. Kundalini is that in-dwelling energy which by self-identifying with your opinions and character traits accretes and preserves your identity. In Jung's words,

... according to the Tantric teaching, there is an urge to produce a personality, something that is centered, and divided from other beings.... It is what one would describe in Western philosophical terms as an urge or instinct toward individuation. The instinct of individuation is found everywhere in life, for there is no life on earth that is not individual. Individuation takes place only when you are conscious of it, but individuality is always there from the beginning of your existence. (Jung, p. 2)

So long as the urge toward individuation is mainly directed toward benefiting your own limited temporary individual self it is called *ahamkara*, or egoism, the force which makes it possible for you to unquestioningly accept the world as it is on the surface. This same force is called Kundalini when it turns away from the mundane and toward the spiritual, the permanent and eternal. After Kundalini awakes it becomes impossible to continue believing that external reality is the sole reality. Ahamkara makes you who you are now; Kundalini makes you into what you will become.

Kundalini has remained secret for so long because, as Jung notes, it cannot be understood; it can only be experienced. The process of spiritual evolution cannot be objectified and separated from the subject who evolves, for Kundalini functions simultaneously as descriptive consciousness, as the thing described, and as its description. Since human language is made up of subjects and objects, descriptions of Kundalini tend to be skewed, either toward objective comment on the experience, which devitalizes it, or toward description of the raw subjective experience itself, which is usually distorted by the experienter's mental imbalances, stresses and fantasies.

Among the writers who have made valuable contributions to the literature on Kundalini are Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), an Englishman who was initiated into Tantra while serving as a judge in India; and Gopi Krishna, a Kashmiri Pandit who suffered terrifying consequences when his own Kun-

dalini was awakened before he knew how to deal with it. While neither perfectly conveys Kundalini's incomprehensible secrets, since their words get in their way, here and there in inspired passages Kundalini's radiance flashes momentarily through, like lightning through a somber sky.

These accounts succeed, albeit partially, because their information has not been lifted out of context. Kundalini can be understood solely within the context of Indian culture. But ever since the time of the early Theosophists most Western interpreters of Kundalini, unfortunately, in order to import into their own systems of psychology concepts which they believe to be Tantric, have not hesitated to assign to Tantric words denotations which often vary significantly from their original meanings.

Jung himself borrowed concepts from Kundalini Yoga, including the very concept of Kundalini, which he called the anima, and so he bears some of the blame for this situation. At least he was more forthright than are most distorters of Kundalini:

One needs a great deal of psychology in order to make these matters palatable to the Western mind, and unless we try hard and dare to commit many errors in assimilating it to our Western mentality, we simply get poisoned. For these symbols have a terribly clinging tendency. They catch the unconscious somehow and cling to us. But they are a foreign body in our system—*corpus alienum*—and they inhibit the natural growth and development of our own psychology. It is like a secondary growth or poison. Therefore one has to make really heroic attempts to master these things, to stand up against these symbols, in order to deprive them of their influence. Perhaps you cannot fully realize what I say, but take it as a hypothesis—though it is more than a hypothesis. It is a truth. I have seen too often how dangerous their influence may be. (Jung, p. 9)

Rejecting those concepts that “we do not need” for a systematic psychological description of Western experiences with the unconscious, Jung rationalized:

We can only understand their picture of the world in as much as we try to understand it in our own terms. Therefore I make the attempt to approach it from the psychological point of view. I am sorry to have bewildered you, but you will be more bewildered if you take these things literally (you had better not). If you think in these terms, you will build up an apparent Hindu system with the psychology of the Western mind, and you cannot do that. You simply poison yourself! (Jung, p. 13)

Possibly those who try hard and dare to commit many errors in order to assimilate concepts from Kundalini Yoga into popular psychology do avoid the fate of the many Westerners who have poisoned themselves by dressing

their minds in Indian vestments. But while replicas of Kundalini Yoga may function well enough in the external world of consensus reality to be useful psychological tools, they cannot substitute for the real thing when it comes to spiritual development. This is particularly true for those people who, by design or by accident, have broken through some of the barriers which separate objective from subjective reality and live lives in which waking reality and symbolic reality compete with one another for attention. Such individuals risk being trapped on an unknown ocean in a leaky conceptual boat if they try to rely on psychology alone to carry them safely to shore.

An awakening into the reality of the nonphysical in a person who lacks adequate prior preparation usually precipitates a personal crisis; such people may seem crazy, are often thought to be crazy, and sometimes believe themselves to be going crazy, all because they can no longer unquestioningly accept our "standard" reality. Most of those who lose touch with everyday reality are actually insane, of course, but in a sizable number of cases the cause is a spiritual crisis.

The prophet Ezekiel once heard a divine voice command him to sleep on his right side for 390 nights and then to switch to his left side for 40 more. (Ezekiel 4:4-6) Unless you know, as yogis do, that the position in which you sleep exerts a profound effect on your physiology, and so your consciousness, you will agree with *Time* magazine that Ezekiel and St. Teresa of Avila who like Ezekiel heard voices, were schizophrenic. When in fact they were most likely inspired by a reality of which the unawakened know nothing.

A spiritual awakening alters forever the way in which an individual experiences the world, for after the initial crisis abates one discovers that there is no way to return to one's previously comfortable mindset. Once aroused and unboxed Kundalini is not "derousable"; the genie will not fit back into the bottle. "After the awakening, the devotee lives always at the mercy of Kundalini," says Pandit Gopi Krishna, who experienced several crises during which the speed, insouciance and authority of the power he had unleashed terrified him. That power which caused his terror, which he had to face without the help of any guide, can terrify or incapacitate anyone who awakens Kundalini without proper guidance.

So long as Kundalini remains within the realm of psychology, our relative objectivity can shield us from the influence of symbolic existence. Once we enter subjective reality, however, that realm in which symbols "cling," we are at their mercy unless we have been taught how to deal with them. Those who ride Kundalini without knowing their destination risk losing their way.

The result may be "ego inflation," which occurs when one's limited personality survives the crisis intact and the individual then "claims the lustre of the archetypal world for his or her own person," or "ego deflation," if the awakening thoroughly disrupts one's self-integration and garbles one's self-image.

The savants of India have for thousands of years worked to perfect user-friendly methods of spiritual advancement that when properly implemented prepare individuals for and guide them through the process of individuation without terrorizing them. Each of these methods arouses the evolutionary power inherent in every individual, but this power appears as Kundalini in one system alone: the Tantric tradition. Anyone who wants to understand Kundalini as Kundalini must first come to grips with Tantra.

Though it has for centuries been maligned by the orthodox and puritanical among Indians, Tantra is not a religion of sensory indulgence which teaches the instant gratification of one's cravings. A good Tantric believes in truth and reality, and in the facing of facts, the first of which is the fact that all of us are part of the manifested universe, subject to its laws until we develop the power to redefine ourselves in other terms. A Tantric aims to become *sva-tantra* ("self-functioning"), to be free of all limitations, including especially the limitations of his or her own personality.

Tantra is not a subject one can learn in school, nor are Tantric texts "how-to" books, because Tantra is not bookish knowledge; it is living wisdom which must be obtained directly from an experienced practitioner. A good guide, a guru who has already followed the path and knows all its pitfalls, is absolutely essential if one hopes to follow the Tantric path and arouse Kundalini without calamity; a powerless or ignorant guru is far worse than none at all.

One such expert, the Aghori Vimalananda, taught me what I know of Kundalini. His uniquely original way of perceiving the world developed thanks to the awakening of his own Kundalini through a midnight ritual on a corpse. When Kundalini awakened for him, she took the form of the Tantric goddess Smashan Tara, the goddess of the burning grounds who enables one to cross over from the reality of life to the reality of death. Smashan Tara, the "Savior of the Cemetery," enabled Vimalananda to cross over from his ordinary consciousness into states in which he could perceive reality from a different vantage. His experiences at the time of this awakening and thereafter are recounted in my book *Aghora: At the Left Hand of God*.

*Aghora* summarized the paths an Aghori follows in his or her odyssey from the darkness of unexamined mundane existence into the light of the celes-



tial realms, all the while maintaining consciousness of both. Aghora is a sort of super-Tantra, a Tantra in which all sense of limitation is removed. Aghora is the Path of the Shadow, the “shadow” being all those aspects of our lives that permit us to exist as individuals at the expense of other beings. We can know the light of altruism only because we have known the darkness of selfishness; only after passing through the Valley of the Shadow of Death do we learn how to live. Aghoris are psyche explorers who go down into the blackness of their individual conceits to find their way to true freedom. Their spiritual path is no anemic “sweetness and light” experience; an Aghori must be “as hard as diamond and as soft as wax” as the situation demands. Only after the grapes of your ego-attachments have been thoroughly trodden into juice can you vint the sweet wine of spiritual wisdom.

Aghoris play the game of life with the utmost sobriety, fully aware of the wagers staked. No means to awakening is too disgusting or frightening for them, for they worship death, the Great Transformer. *Aghora* literally means “non-terrifying”; an Aghori takes the most terrifying experiences possible and transmutes them into devotion to Reality. Tradition sends Aghoris to seek God in the cremation grounds, where death is ever-present, but a good Aghori sees the entire world as one vast ongoing cremation. Aghoris personify and deify death, selecting one face of this Universal Reality as their Beloved and worshipping this deity with an intense and all-consuming love. Every day for Vimalananda was a day of play with the cosmos, his Lover, and he never tired of playing the games that lovers play, for those games brought him ever closer to his sweetheart.

Because when the goddess Kundalini awoke in him, She had a form and a personality that he could interact with, Kundalini spared Vimalananda the sort of anguish that She awarded Pandit Gopi Krishna. Had Panditji perhaps concentrated on a god or goddess instead of a lotus he too might have found a haven in which to rest when the tempest tossed him. To Vimalananda Kundalini was not a wild unapproachable force that batted him about according to Her whim; She was instead his Beloved Mother, in whose lap he sat, allowing Her to protect him from all dangers with Her irresistible clout.

Vimalananda always preferred the path of worship of God-with-form to that of worship of the Impersonal Absolute. To him, the highest expression of divinity is the Motherhood of God, the God who protects and loves Her children no matter what errors they may make. This attitude was to him the best of all possible attitudes when dealing with Kundalini, because once you enter into such a mother-child relationship all fear of damage by the energy

disappears. Also, as he liked to say, “Bhakti is Shakti”: the energy (*shakti*) that you put into devotion (*bhakti*) to your chosen form of God is returned to you manyfold, benevolently amplified by the universe. As your devotion grows, so does your own personal power, which you are less likely to misuse since all you can think about is the One you love.

An Aghori’s ache for a vision of the Beloved is so fierce that no means to achieve it is too extreme. This divine fury, a sort of cosmic thrill-seeking, is Aghora’s hallmark. “Aghoris always overdo a thing,” as Vimalananda liked to say, and *Aghora* documents how he frequently overdid things in his life. Overcome by his craving for his Beloved he worshipped with every element and substance and hobnobbed with every sort of ethereal being, all his rituals becoming, by Tantric transmutation, offerings to the divine.

Aghora’s field of activity is not limited to enthralling or repugnant practices. The path of Aghora is the path of spontaneity; every action must be performed at the moment most appropriate for its performance, and it must be appropriate to the context in which it is performed. Worship is worship to an Aghori, be it in a temple or in a cemetery; with the surrender of all self-interest except that single-minded quest to achieve the Beloved, an Aghori can accept with love and thankfulness everything that God offers, bliss and misery alike, and transmute every experience, even a trip to the toilet, into an act of worship of the Absolute. Everything an Aghori touches, desired and despised, clean and unclean, he drags from the periphery of his experience into the purity of his center to help develop the “critical mass” needed to ignite and sustain a “spiritual chain reaction.”

Vimalananda was a man of action, both “right-handed” and “left-handed,” and cared little for scholarly views on what might or might not be classifiable as Aghora. He embraced accepted doctrine when it suited his purposes, while always retaining the right to innovate at any moment when necessity demanded. Philosophical systems have come and gone in India over the ages, but the spiritual springs from which they have sprung have continued to overflow. Indian spiritual tradition, Tantra particularly, has always ebbed and flowed between the twin shores of theory and practice. Theory perpetually regulates practice, and practice inexorably modifies theory. As fast as theologians erect and legitimize mountains of dogma, iconoclasts weather them down with their own individual interpretations; the heresies of yesterday are the orthodoxies of today.

Contemporary India is filled with individuals and sects working to legitimize their own unique aggregate of philosophy, cosmology and technique by assimilating their systems to the mainstream of “Vedic tradition” or

“Kashmir Shaivism” or whatever, while other individuals and sects—often paradoxically the same ones—move away from such standardized definitions of religion, calling them convenient fictions that limit and mislead. Maintaining that modern circumstances (time, place, people) are too different to permit precise recovery or revival of the ancient ways, they assert that what must be revived within a system is the flame which gives it life, not its external form.

For his part Vimalananda cheerfully combined many seemingly contradictory theories and practices into “his” Aghora, quoting in his support the ancient text which taught that only bewildered people dispute about truth, for “what proposition is there that the learned cannot defend?” Though highly educated Vimalananda’s knowledge of Sanskrit texts was modest, and he neither knew nor cared to know much of the Tantric literature in Gujarati, Hindi or English translation, languages in which he was fluent. His textbook was life itself, and he could read from it meanings which are accessible only to those who know the secret language of spirituality.

While he called himself an Aghori, Vimalananda’s disdain for organized religion distanced him from all recognized Aghori lineages, nor did he refer to his own mentors as Aghoris (and it is doubtful that they would describe themselves thus). He preferred to follow his own path:

“I have never believed in religion. Religions are all limited because they concentrate only on one aspect of truth. That is why they are always fighting amongst one another, because they all think they are in sole possession of the truth. But I say there is no end to knowledge, so there is no use in trying to confine it to one scripture or one holy book or one experience. This is why I say, when people ask what religion I follow, ‘I don’t believe in *Sampradaya* (sect), I believe in *Sampradaha* (incineration).’ Burn down everything which is getting in the way of your perception of truth.” (*Aghora*, p. 167)

In this at least he agreed with Jung, who once observed that “the function of religion is to protect us from an experience of God.” The Aghori Vimalananda was too much the iconoclast and too determined to perceive reality to be imprisoned within dogma; his Aghora is a religion of consciousness, its precepts engraved not on tablets of stone but on the heart of the individual practitioner who must use them to create an individual system, thereby carving out his or her own spiritual niche.

There are not now and there never have been large numbers of Aghoris abroad in the world, nor did Vimalananda create many. He was quick to tell most people, “Do as I say, not as I do,” and never permitted anyone to slavishly imitate him, because only those fit to dine on human brain will derive

spiritual advantage from such a diet. He never devised any system of spiritual practices for the world to admire and follow. After carefully evaluating each individual who came to him he would teach certain lessons, directly or obliquely, or he would teach nothing at all, depending on his perception of his karmic connection with that person and his or her fitness and aptitude for spiritual disciplines. He never hesitated to challenge anyone’s assumptions on spirituality and yogic discipline, and was not afraid to step on toes if he thought that he might arouse someone from their slumber by doing so.

Vimalananda wanted his views to be spread to anyone willing to listen because he felt acutely the anguish of the emptiness of the modern world, whose god is Mammon and whose predominant religion is an arrogantly emotionless science which seems bent on suppressing what humanity remains within us. As society disintegrates and meaning dissolves from life, people tend either to descend into despair or to return to their roots. We in the West have for years been cutting ourselves off from our roots, and now, nearly rootless, we are slowly dying from lack of cultural nourishment.

Some Westerners seek to live without roots, hydroponically, through futurism, while others try to reinvent the past via the “men’s movement,” Goddess Worship, Afrocentrism and the like. Yet others search for roots in such still-living cultures as the Indian, Native American, Tibetan or Chinese, as if perhaps by donning their visages they can somehow assimilate their ways. We have, however, become so superficial that few of us know how to dive deep enough into the cultures we seek to emulate to tap into their roots, and so we usually, as Jung feared, poison ourselves.

Vimalananda had no more faith that mass spiritual movements can save us than he trusted in social programs, political activism or enforced morality to rescue us, since all such solutions are superficial; they change our clothing, not our inner beings. He believed that real change can come only through those individuals who are brave enough to examine all of their reality assumptions and change those which must be changed. The numerous misconceptions about spirituality which permeate our modern world make his teachings on Kundalini valuable for everyone trying to follow a spiritual path. Before his death Vimalananda charged me with the responsibility of presenting his musings to those willing to listen, as much for the purpose of organizing my own knowledge, refining my understanding and manifesting my own creativity as for the purpose of instructing others. He also wanted me to have something solid to remember him by, so that whenever I want to be with him again I need only open the book.

Like other great teachers Vimalananda had a knack for being right, as well

as an outstanding ability to impart his knowledge to those around him, usually when they least expected it, via an uncommon perspective, mixing theory with anecdote or letting anecdote reveal theory. His urbanity and ready humor betrayed a virtuosity in his play with the world which often masked an extraordinary shrewdness. He was never shy to speak out, and at times he seems as arrogant, harsh, critical, opinionated, pretentious and ready with stereotypes as much as at others his words are filled with sweetness, compassion, love, devotion, farsightedness and attention to detail. In his opinions and often peculiar views he was unequivocal and unshakeable, which earned him both fear and respect, and a reputation variously as a genius, crank and man of wisdom and God. Whatever else he may have been, Vimalananda was always real, always true to himself and his vision of reality, and he encouraged anyone who couldn't stand his heat to leave his kitchen.

Those who are convinced that the real is limited to that which our senses can perceive will ask, "Did all the events described by Vimalananda actually 'occur' in the outward sense of our consensus reality, or did they occur solely within his individual consciousness?" Better they should ask this question of themselves, for few people realize just how much of their reality is manipulated. Today's mass media daily synthesize miraculous phenomena for our amazement, that they may manipulate our emotions. Are these images "real" or not? With the rise of computer-generated "virtual reality" soon we will literally be unable to believe our eyes and ears; dare we rely on the "objective" truth of our sensory perceptions any longer?

One of the chief arguments against "subjective" reality is that since it has no physical substance it is ephemeral. This is certainly true, at least on the surface (which is where objective reality operates, after all). But below the surface it is objective reality which is found to be impermanent, while the reality of ideas, memories and reflections goes on and on. This truth is brought home to me regularly in India, where people when giving directions often refer to landmarks which were demolished years before. Clearly, a structure's ethereal reality may persist long after its physical form has disappeared.

Though all living beings eventually lose their physical existence, they continue to live on in the hearts of those who remember them. Some live on in memory for generations; a few, like Jesus, will live and continue to transform human lives forever. Others, like the gods and goddesses of India, are remembered even though they may never have lived in physical bodies. Are they real? We in India believe that they are far more real than humans are,

even though their existence may not be provable by methods acceptable to materialistic science.

Whether these acts that Vimalananda recounts actually "happened" in the physical world or not is impossible to say, for India is truly a mysterious country and strange things do happen there. Many people who knew Vimalananda experienced many unusual things when in his vicinity, and most of them attributed such occurrences to him, while he attributed them to the Great Goddess: "I am talking as if I do these things, but in fact it is beyond me to do anything. Only Ma can do it; She does it all. This is the foundation of all my confidence in my abilities. Do I have any capabilities? Ha! Everything is from Ma." Vimalananda was an artist of consciousness, and it is enough to know that his experiences were intensely real and true to him, and that they can be real and true for anyone who is open to the possibility of their being so. Every time I reread an incident from his life it suddenly becomes real for me again, no matter how long ago it transpired, and Vimalananda thus continues to live for me.

Vimalananda was convinced by his experiments, as some modern physicists have become convinced by their experiments, that it is really impossible to speak of objective reality without taking the assistance of a subjective observer, a "knower" whose observation irrevocably alters the reality thus observed. That shift in perception which allows Aghoris to know that knower, known and the process of knowing are one and the same Reality allows them to perceive miraculous phenomena, whether obvious to others or not. Aghoris control their thoughts and emotions themselves that they may better enjoy the reality they so crave: the company of the Beloved.

Since human consciousness requires objects, this book speaks of Kundalini as if She can be considered in isolation from the individual in whom She exists. Kundalini cannot be objectified, but until She is awakened in an individual She exists for him or her only as a concept, and so She can be relatively objectified. As She awakens, this relative objectification is progressively converted into relative subjectification, until when Kundalini has been completely aroused one moves wholly into subjective consciousness, and descriptions lose their utility.

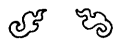
This was one of the reasons that Vimalananda preferred to deal with people individually, and never discoursed in public. When he met someone he would use words to express the objective portion of what he had to communicate, and would express the subjective part by other means. Since each individual's consciousness is made up of a particular ratio of subjective to objective awareness, the targeted individual would often get the message

while other people in the room might miss it entirely. I have tried to select from the many objective messages directed at me over the years those which are sufficiently general to be of use to readers who knew neither of us, and I have tried to compile them in such a way as to permit some of his subjective messages to come through as well.

Vimalananda insisted on anonymity in these books because the less people know of the external details of his life the less they will be distracted from looking at what he wants them to see: the internal details. Anonymity protects his message—the subjective story of his life—from any scholarly nitpicking over its objective details. A consummate actor, he compiled his teachings in the book of his life, in actions rather than in words, his every action a well-thought-out statement in the chapters of his saga. Though he insisted on anonymity both for himself and for his mentors, the name Vimalananda is not wholly pseudonymous; he used it occasionally in his younger days. It means both “son of Vimala” (his mother’s name was Vimala) and “he whose bliss is stainless.” Through all the ups and downs of his life, in days of anguish or exaltation, Vimalananda’s bliss was ever stainless, because he was a true Aghori, perpetually intoxicated with love for God.

As I struggled over *Aghora* I realized that no single angle provides a truly accurate view of Vimalananda, and so I decided to use three angles. In *Aghora* Vimalananda told his own story subjectively, presenting his life and work in his own words much as they were spoken to me, his scribe. In this book he appears much as I saw and objectified him, and in the third volume will appear the artist that was Vimalananda, constantly at work in the atelier of the world around him.

This book deals predominantly with Vimalananda’s approach to the details of Tantra, as outlined in the preface to *Aghora*, and has three protagonists: the teacher (Vimalananda), the taught (me), and the teaching. A majority of it is dialogue, or rather triologue, since the teaching has its own voice. Living wisdom cannot be confined within words, but it can be hinted at through situations, much as a specific feature of an otherwise undistinguished landscape can often be discerned by following the path projected by a pointing finger. “Them that have ears, let them hear,” said Jesus; whoever “hears” the inner import of Vimalananda’s words will be able to “see” their inward meaning.



## AGNI

When I met Vimalananda I had already been living in the city of Poona for more than a year, studying Ayurveda, India’s ancient medical system, and yoga. I had spiritual ambitions but despite guidance from saintly personages I had no real idea of my ultimate spiritual aim. Still, I dutifully invested many hours each day in postures and breathing exercises, holy books, incense and meditation while I waited impatiently for something to happen.

To help pay for my schooling I had competed for and won a grant to report on how Ayurveda was being practiced in Poona. I interviewed physicians of all sorts in the area for this purpose, and one day my Sanskrit professor, who had been helping me locate interviewees, announced that he had located a most unusual doctor who was also a Tantric as well as a racehorse owner, someone who deserved to be met.

I greeted this news warily, as I had been cautioned of the great dangers inherent in Tantra. But since my mission was to obtain a cross section of healers and therapists, certainly I needed at least one Tantric, since many of the Ayurvedic remedies in common use today have been derived directly from Tantric alchemy; and Tantra like Ayurveda has its roots in the Atharva Veda.

Vimalananda was at that time staying with a family in an Irani colony just a few blocks from my own residence. The first time I went to meet him he had gone to the racecourse, where an elderly mare he had recently purchased was running. When I retraced my steps to meet him later in the day

I found the flush of victory suffusing his broad and handsome face.

I remember very little of that meeting, other than that when I mentioned a questionnaire that I wanted to use on him he suggested we talk about it on the following day. When I discovered on reflection that he had answered all my questions without my even asking them, I was impressed enough to return eagerly the next day, and the next. During these first days he predicted (correctly, as it turned out) that none of his immediate family would attend his funeral, and that I would cremate him. Such a prospect seemed almost as strange as his prediction of it, but he had taken me as his foster son almost from the moment we met, and it was soon natural enough to see him as friend instead of informant, and then to accept the proffered role of offspring.

Soon I was a frequent visitor to the Irani colony. These Iranis are a sect of Zoroastrian fire worshippers who exited Iran more recently than did their brethren the Parsis, who have lived in India for more than thirteen centuries. Soon I, like Vimalananda, became an auxiliary family member, tutoring at his behest the family's younger daughter and spending many pleasant, quiet hours chatting with him when he made the trip up from Bombay to attend the races.

I had known him for only a week or two when he invited me to accompany him outside Poona on the occasion of a lunar eclipse for me to see, as he said, "how I do my rituals." A month earlier I would have attended as a skeptical observer; now I accepted with alacrity, unsure of what I would find but certain that this was the right course of action for me.

We left Poona one morning by autorickshaw, a motorized three-wheeled taxi, and a jolting three-quarters of an hour later we reached Alandi, our first stop. Alandi is the home of Jnaneshwar Maharaj, who lived there seven hundred years ago with his brothers and sister. (A guru is often called *maharaj*, "great king," because he has become master of himself, and because he is the disciple's absolute master.)

Jnaneshwar translated the Bhagavad Gita from Sanskrit into Marathi, the local language, and composed a commentary for it to make its teachings accessible to the common people. His book the *Jnaneshwari* is the most beloved book in the state of Maharashtra, and his story is known to every Maharashtrian.

Jnaneshwar, who is reknowned for making a buffalo speak the Vedas and causing a wall to fly in the air, tired of the world around the age of twenty-one and took *jeevan samadhi* ("living trance"): he entered a cave and had its entrance sealed behind him so he could continue to meditate without inter-

ruption. His resting place was forgotten until a few hundred years later when another famous saint of Maharashtra, Eknath Maharaj, had a dream in which Jnaneshwar begged him to come to Alandi and save him from the tree above his head whose roots had begun to grow around his neck. Eknath Maharaj located Alandi, discovered the cave, found Jnaneshwar Maharaj, and removed the roots. Before resealing the cave he took with him the manuscript of the Jnaneshwari, which was resting on Jnaneshwar's lap. So it is thanks to Eknath Maharaj that the Jnaneshwari, which had been lost until that time, again saw the light of day.

A shrine now stands atop Jnaneshwar, and throngs of people come there regularly to worship God and to request Jnaneshwar's assistance in solving their problems. Hundreds of pilgrims crowd the shrine each morning, making the rounds of each tree and image and offering their respects to the black stone beneath which he is said still to be sitting. In 1974 a group of "rationalists" demanded that the government excavate the area beneath the shrine to determine if indeed Jnaneshwar continues to be resident there in the flesh. The ensuing public outcry prevented this from occurring, and Jnaneshwar sits there yet, enjoying the mingling of the devotional singing of the pilgrims who concentrate in his front courtyard with the murmuring of other penitents who recite the Jnaneshwari under the slim branches of the tree whose roots were the cause of its reappearance.

We sat at Jnaneshwar's stone that morning with other members of our party for over an hour, ritually requesting his assistance for our own more individualized worship scheduled for later that night. After similarly saluting Siddheshwar Mahadev, the *Shiva Linga* (phallic symbol of Shiva, the god of death and transformation) in the temple adjoining Jnaneshwar's, we all repaired to our officiating priest's nearby home. After a frugal meal and a short rest Vimalananda took me aside to explain some things.

"You are a student of Ayurveda," he began. "Have you studied Sankhya?"

The *Sankhya* philosophy is the theoretical basis of Ayurveda, and I considered myself to be well-acquainted with its principles, so I replied, "Yes."

"So you know that the entire world is made up of the Five Great Elements; you do know the Five Elements?" Yes, I did: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether. These Great Elements are not elements in the chemical sense that hydrogen and helium are elements; they are rather states of matter. The Earth Element predominates in everything that is solid in the universe, the Water Element in that which is liquid, and the Air Element in gases. The Ether Element is the space in which things occur, and the Fire Element is the force which changes solid to liquid to gas and vice versa. Everything in

the manifested universe, including the human being, is made up of these Five Elements.

“As long as you are alive, your consciousness is limited by the vessel in which it is kept: the body. And since the body is made of the Five Elements your consciousness is limited by those very Elements. Knowing that your consciousness is limited is all well and good, but what are you going to do about it? You don’t want to remain limited, do you?”

“Not in the least.”

“Theoretical knowledge is necessary, but it is not enough; practical knowledge, experience is also needed. We have a proverb in Hindi: ‘Where even *ravi* (the sun) cannot reach, there will go a *kavi* (poet).’ But that does not go far enough. I say, ‘Where even a *kavi* cannot reach, there will go an *anubhavi* (experiencer).’ I believe that you should go out and experience what you have learned, so that it will have some practical value in your life. This is why I have brought you with me today.

“The essence of Tantra is purification of the Five Elements, to awaken the Kundalini Shakti, which is your own personal shakti (power, energy). Any spiritual practice, in any religion, is basically some process or other of awakening Kundalini, and Kundalini can only be awakened once the Elements in your body have become purified. Do you understand?”

I kept quiet in a way designed to reply, “Somewhat.”

“I will explain all of this to you—eventually. For now, just think about the Five Elements. You can make spiritual progress by worshipping any of these Elements, but I think it is best to worship the Fire Element. Worshipping Earth may take you eons, because the chief characteristic of Earth is its stability. Worship of Water is unwise nowadays because Water is the main substance which makes up the body, and most of us identify too strongly with our bodies anyway. Worshipping Air is likely to make you seriously unstable, and there are difficulties in worshipping the Ether Element also. I think Fire is best.

“The first word in the Rg Veda, the most ancient of the Vedas, is *agni*, fire. The Vedic religion is basically a religion of fire worship. The Rishis, the Seers who wrote the Vedas, worship the fire because it is the representative of the sun on Earth. Life could not exist on Earth were it not for the sun, and most people think the Rishis are trying to propitiate the sun by their fire worship. In fact they are feeding the sun. If they were ever to stop their continuous offerings of nourishment to the sun, all creation would go to hell. As a by-product of this service that they perform for the benefit of all embodied beings, they obtain the might of the sun.”

As amazing as I found all this talk of the Rishis and their pastimes I kept quiet, since I wanted to hear everything he had to say, and Indian teachers are notoriously intolerant of interruption.

He went on: “The Rishis used fire in their worship because fire both purifies and amplifies whatever is put into it. Even NASA [the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration] has realized that the flames of its rockets amplify whatever sound is fed into them. For those of us who are not Rishis, worship of the fire is meant to purify the Fire Element in the body and to purify the consciousness by amplifying the mantras we repeat.”

(A scientist has now developed a combustion chamber which resonates with sound power, so that a furnace’s own roar fans its flames. *Mantras*, which are words of power that may or may not have meaning in known human languages, fan different flames in a different way.)

“A good sadhu lives for his fire; an Aghori is always near a fire. Every sadhu maintains his own fire, which is called a *dhuni*, and no one but that sadhu can sit there. You enter into such an intense relationship with the fire that only you two can share the experience. Do you invite a third party into your bedroom to watch you and your spouse make love?”

I shook my head and quickly asked for a clarification: “A *sadhu* is a wandering religious mendicant, I believe; do all sadhus keep dhunis?”

“Not all; actually, nowadays, only a few are left who do. But Nagas do. A Naga, a naked sadhu who gives up everything, gives up everything except his fire. Because of the hours he spends with his fire his consciousness eventually becomes the consciousness of his fire, and his fire becomes a part of him. A sadhu’s *dhuni* is like a king’s throne; whoever sits there becomes imbued with its accumulated power. When I lived as a sadhu at Mount Girnar I always kept a *dhuni*, and whoever tried to sit at it had to run away, because it was mine.

“Why maintain a fire?” My question though unspoken was heard nonetheless. “First, because fire causes life to exist; it is the very form of the lord of creation, the god that sadhus worship. Second, because it serves as his television, as his viamedia to get information from all corners of the Earth. During the times I have roamed as a sadhu I kept up with all the people who loved me with the help of my *dhuni*.

“Zoroastrians worship fire, but they don’t understand this principle. I have seen their priests sitting and fanning themselves while they make offerings, as if they were being put to great trouble by the flames. What I say is, if you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. If you don’t love flames, don’t worship fire.”

“My way is quite different. I have always treated the fire as my beloved friend. When I sit and worship the fire, I play with it. Tonight you will see what I mean. I call it to me and let it come and kiss me. Don’t you kiss the ones you love? And because I don’t fear it, it doesn’t burn me. It will never burn me; it loves me, because I have changed its fundamental characteristic. You can also use mantras to control the fire, and you can use mercury or many other things, but the highest way is to so overpower the fire with love that it loves you in return. Any other method involves changing its nature against its will. You should cause the fire to voluntarily drop its characteristic of burning. That is a *real* achievement.

“When you worship anything, even a rock, you will always get a better result if you personify it. Fire is no different. Give it a personality and then you can love it, play with it. How can you love fire as fire, which is so hot and destructive and burns anything with which it comes in contact? You have to bring it to a level where you can relate to it and love it. All *sadhana* (the collective name for any method of spiritual development; a *sadhu* is a renunciate who practices *sadhana*) is just the preliminaries for falling in love with your deity.

“Now that I live in Bombay again I can’t very well keep a *dhuni* going all the time, so I make up for it by going out and performing *homa* on a regular basis. Vedic worship of the fire, *yajna*, is extremely detailed and complicated. Each ritual requires a fire pit of a unique shape, unique substances for offering, unique mantras, and so on. Nowadays no individual can perform an external *yajna*; it is simply too elaborate for the common person. You may be unable to do *yajna*, but you can still worship fire and derive benefits from doing so by performing *homa*. What we will be doing tonight is *homa*, which is a lot like *yajna* but much simpler.”

I wondered diffidently why he thought I might be qualified to participate in this ritual and again, as usual, he answered my question before I could speak it.

“By doing *homa* you make progress in the spiritual field in spite of so many defects in your body and mind. In fact the fire will gradually burn away all your defects. After doing *homa* you always feel light and energetic because of all the bad *karmas* the fire has burned away. This will not happen if you worship Air, which you do when you control *prana*, the life force, in the practice of *pranayama*.”

I had just spent a year and a half practicing *pranayama*, stopping after I had weakened my system significantly by overdoing it, so I knew he was referring particularly to me.

“I know that you have been practicing *asanas* and *pranayama* under the guidance of someone who tells you he is teaching you *yoga*. I am sorry to inform you that such a system of physical jerks is not the *yoga* that is fit for today.

“Were you not taught that all your defects must be removed before you practice *pranayama*? If you make a mistake in *pranayama* you run the risk of becoming physically or mentally ill; you may turn completely to the mundane world, or you may lose contact with the mundane entirely. Neither state is healthy. I know that Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* says to practice *pranayama*, but Patanjali was not a *Rishi*. He forgot that he was not living in the Golden Age, and that people get worse as *Kali Yuga* (the dark age in which we live) progresses. In *Kali Yuga* it is actually dangerous to practice too much *pranayama*. Our water and air are polluted, our nervous systems are bombarded by noise and radiation. Very few places today have the peace and purity essential for successful *pranayama*. Worshipping Fire is much better.

“My spiritual ‘children’ are not *sadhus*, so they cannot keep *dhunis*, so I encourage them to perform *homa*. Each of my ‘children’ repeats a certain mantra. Maybe they picked it up from a book, or maybe some guru gave it to them, or whatever; that doesn’t matter. What matters is that they are reciting those mantras with sincerity, and everyone who repeats a mantra regularly should do regular *homa* to purify that mantra and amplify its effects.

“Several times a year I and my ‘children’ get together to perform *homa*. There are a number of reasons for this. First, many of them are poor and could not afford to purchase on their own all the *ghee* (clarified butter) and other expensive ingredients which go into the *homa*. So, the more affluent among them pay for everyone else, and in this way even the poorest can fulfill their yearly percentage of *homa*.

“Second, their being together encourages them to concentrate harder. You always try to show off when someone else is watching you; it’s human nature. At first this had a negative effect: a few were treating the whole thing as a picnic and spending all their time worrying about filling their stomachs. You can’t worship on a full stomach. One day I got wild and told them, ‘We have come here to do penance, not to eat. If you can’t do without food even for a day, please don’t come.’ Now these elements have been weeded out of our group, and everyone else is doing much better than before.

“Third, these ‘children’ of mine think they are performing the *homa* on their own—human beings typically self-identify with what their bodies

do—but they are just puppets. Some ethereal being comes and sits inside each one without their knowing it and performs the homa with far more concentration than they could do it themselves, and my ‘children’ get the benefit of this worship.”

“There must be other restrictions to homa other than avoiding a full stomach,” I remarked.

“There are plenty of restrictions. Just as a woman during her menses must never enter a temple, she must not sit and do homa; she should not even handle the offerings, because of the odor she will transmit to them. The beings we are trying to please eat by smell, and they are not at all fond of the smell of menstrual blood. This is also the reason why you must never sniff or smell the offerings before you offer them. Would you take a big bite out of a piece of cake you were serving to someone? Only if you wanted to offend them.

“If you are an Aghori none of these restrictions apply—but until you become an Aghori all of them apply. Unless you are a veteran Aghori you must never eat meat, fish or even eggs on the day on which you plan to worship the fire. You must if at all possible bathe immediately before your homa, and better yet you should bathe your insides by performing purifications like an enema beforehand. You should never even try to do homa on your own without someone to show you how to do it properly first; otherwise you may make some mistakes which will play havoc with you. I have brought you out here today because I want to show you how to do homa properly, so that eventually you can do it on your own and make progress on your own.”

And so that night under his watchful eye Vimalananda and I performed homa together, under the rays of the eclipsed moon. Thereafter I accompanied him on his homa expeditions whenever possible.



Alandi is a small town on the Indrayani River, which like most of the rivers of the Deccan Plateau flows freely only during and immediately after the monsoon. The land near the river is fertile and intensively farmed, but surrounding this zone of prosperity is a much larger region of rocky, treeless hills where even goats graze with difficulty. Our group investigated other shrines and unusual spots in the vicinity. And when one day our priest told

the strange story of a nearby Shiva temple Vimalananda immediately decided to visit there, with a view to performing homa in such a unique location.

According to the story this village is one of the places where Kubera, the god of wealth, is supposed to reside, and a fantastic treasure is said to be buried nearby. An inscription carved in stone, which is now submerged in the river, states that if a human sacrifice is performed in a certain way there, unimaginable wealth can be obtained.

Once there was a king who heard of this inscription and decided to perform a human sacrifice and get the money for himself. He could find only one suitable victim in his entire kingdom: a young Brahmana boy, the son of the temple’s priest; the child’s mother and father sold the boy to the king out of greed.

When the time for the sacrifice arrived the poor innocent boy threw his arms around the Shiva Linga and sobbed, “Lord, these people want to take my life just to gain wealth. What have I done that I deserve to be sacrificed in this way?”

Shiva’s favorite being in the whole universe is Lallu, the Baby Krishna, because of His innocence. He sees Lallu in every child. When this child invoked Shiva with such sincerity how could Shiva refuse to help? Suddenly there was a roar of thunder, and Lord Shiva manifested in a terrifying form at the sacrificial site. So terrifying was He that the king and the boy’s parents fell dead on the spot.

Lord Shiva tenderly lifted the little boy and asked him, “Now, what else can I do for you? I have saved you from being sacrificed, and the king and your parents have died for their wickedness. Is there anything else that you want?”

The little boy said, “Lord, please resurrect the king and my parents.”

Lord Shiva said, “But they were the ones who were going to kill you just a few minutes ago. Why should I spare them? They will become spirits and will be under my complete control; I will make sure that they pay for their crimes.”

But the boy told Him, “No, it is because of the king and my parents that I could see you so easily. I might never have attained the intelligence to worship you, and even if I had I could never have achieved so quickly. So please revive them; I am thankful to them.”

Lord Shiva smiled at the boy’s discriminative power and revived the three corpses. But no one got the treasure, nor has anyone been able to locate it since; plenty have tried, and they all came to grief. One sadhu came and,



thinking perhaps the treasure was underneath the temple, moved the Linga; another had sexual intercourse with a local girl near the temple. Such strictly forbidden activities earned these men the wrath of the community and made the villagers suspicious of all sadhus. There was even one sadhu who came to town wearing a solid silver loincloth, but in the end he too had to flee just like all the rest. It is said that human sacrifices have even been performed there, but they too were of no avail.

When I asked Vimalananda about this he told me, "There is a good reason why everyone has failed. The Shiva Linga in the temple is over 2600 years old. It was established there by Gahani Nath, a disciple of the Gorakh Nath, who does not want the place disturbed by a bunch of treasure-seekers. In spite of all the evil karmas which have occurred in the neighborhood it would be a very auspicious place to perform rituals because there we can tap the power of Gahani Nath, and through him Gorakh Nath. This is why proper worship there yields great benefit; worship of that Linga would give us the benefit of the penance of Nath's."

I had heard of Gorakh Nath, vaguely, but before I could ask about the Nath's he had gone on: "You know," he said, "this village is unique for other reasons besides Kubera's wealth. On the opposite side of the river from the village is a cave in which there is an image of *Ma* (the Mother Goddess). Now only bats go there, but in the past that image was regularly worshipped. There were some silver pots in the cave, and on the occasion of feasts or festivals the villagers would go to the temple and somehow the pots would be found full of food. No human would cook it; it would just appear. And no matter how many people were to be fed, there would always be enough food in the pots to feed everyone. This can happen only through the blessings of Annapurna, the goddess of food. This went on for many years until someone stole the pots from the cave. Then the goddess got angry, and since then no one has dared enter the cave. Greed always ruin things."

Undoubtedly the village knew the dangers of greed well, given the number of shady sadhus who had come and gone. Indian villagers, by and large, are extremely generous people, to strangers as well as to friends; but even under optimal conditions it is difficult to simply wander into a village and announce that you are going to dig a dozen fire pits and perform a Tantric ritual. I suspected that we would be met with less than open arms, and I was intensely curious to see how Vimalananda would extract permission from the headman for our work.

The few kilometers to the village passed slowly, for the monsoon had just

ended and the road still bore the deep scars of recent downpours. We were of course the center of attention when we reached the village—a delegation of Bombayites, accompanied by a foreigner—and many of the villagers, especially the children, were literally open-mouthed in amazement. Soon enough the headman was located, and we sat down for a chat. Luckily for us he had spent many years in Bombay, since he and many of his neighbors grew flowers for sale in the markets there, so we felt that immediate camaraderie which Bombay-dwellers share.

As I had surmised neither he nor the residents of the village were anxious for a party of strangers to invade their temple because of the bitter experiences of the past. They were afraid we had come to try and unearth the money, and that our efforts would increase their misery. No one was thriving here; sickness was in every house, crops were scanty. People could see the spirits of the dead wandering about even during the daytime.

Vimalananda quickly took the situation under control. First, he assured them, we were not interested in the treasure; let it remain buried. We were interested only in worshipping God. Second, our homa would produce ash which could be used as medicine for the sick, and as a sort of potentiated super-fertilizer for the crops, which he had examined and found wanting during our approach. We would not try to do anything in secret, but would do everything in the open. Then he invited whoever wanted to come and sit with us and watch our work, and if any of what we did was objectionable we would bid our farewells and not return.

Vimalananda was always a convincing speaker, and he underlined his remarks by using some of his "special" abilities to tell the headman some things which no one else but he knew. Soon we had the desired permission, and we sent to Alandi for a bullock-cart-load of wood. Meanwhile other members of our party dug fire pits, mixed offering materials, and brewed tea. A short while later Vimalananda called me to sit with him on the ground near the temple where the little boy had once so narrowly missed being sacrificed. I could see from his manner that he had some instructions for me, and I indicated by my manner that I was aware of this and was ready to listen.

He began, "Up until now you have done whatever you have been told with very little explanation. You have asked me many questions about homa, and I have told you as much as I thought you needed to know. Now I want you to know even more about what we are doing, and why we are doing it here.

"We are going to do our homa right down there on the riverbank, just

below the temple, which is right across from that cave I was telling you about. It seems that where we will be sitting was once the village *smashan* (burning ground), which makes me feel right at home. Many corpses have been burned under the big banyan tree there in whose shadow our fire pits are located. This tree is immensely old; as you can see, by using its aerial roots it has created a second trunk some distance away from its first, and now it has 'walked' several feet to a third location. It does not look very happy, does it? It is not happy—or rather, the ethereal being who lives in it is not happy.

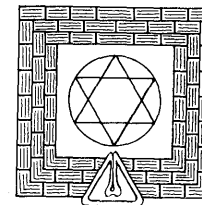
"One of our aims in doing this homa is to make this tree and its resident happy. It is our obligation to this village, when they have been so generous as to invite us to stay and perform our rituals here, that we do our best to make their lives happier. Properly performed, group homa harmonizes the atmosphere for miles around the place where it is done, and creates peace in those who live nearby, humans and ethereal beings alike. You are now part of our group, and you must do your job to the best of your ability. Now is a good time to learn, because when I am gone you will be on your own."

I started to protest that he would live for many years yet—I was still very young, and thought little of mortality—but he waved off my protestations and continued.

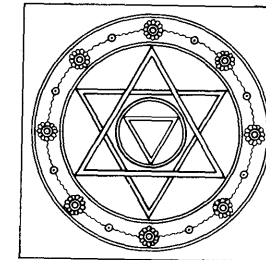
"You will notice that here, as elsewhere, we dig several fire pits, and that normally two people sit at each. Strictly speaking, each worshipper should have his or her own. When a man becomes an *agnihotri*, a fire worshipper in the Vedic sense, no one is allowed even to touch him, much less sit at the same fire with him, with the sole exception of his wife. But for convenience, and because when two sit together they can help one another out, we use this arrangement.

"Before we sit we salute Mother Earth, who supports us, and we ask Her to make our worship successful. Then, after remembering Ganesha (the elephant-headed son of Shiva) and asking him to remove any obstacles, we begin to prepare the fire pit. In the bottom of the fire pit goes the *yantra*." A yantra, I knew, is a sort of mystical diagram which is meant to control and contain the energy put into it by the ritual. The yantra also represents the deity invoked during the ceremony. "I normally use as a yantra a six-pointed star, which is composed of two triangles, one downward-pointing and one upward-pointing, superimposed on one another, because I am doing this sort of homa for the general good of all beings in the neighborhood, especially those involved in the ritual. The six-pointed star, the Star of David, is significant for us Indians as well as for the Jews.

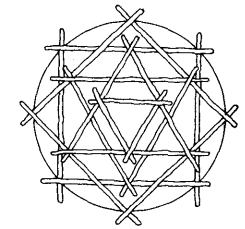
**Design and Construction of Fire Pits (Homa Kunda)**



a.



b.

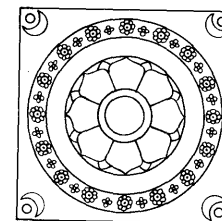


c.

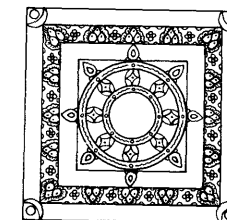
a. Plan of a square fire pit used in rituals of peace and prosperity. The rim of the Kundra is built up in three steps of brick, at its base and facing east is the triangular Yoni (vulva) symbol. In the center of the fire pit is a six pointed yantra as used by Vimalanada.

b. Design of the Tripura Yantra commonly used in Devi (goddess) worship.

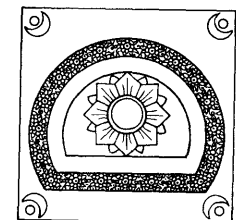
c. The placement and arrangement of the fire sticks above the Devi Yantra.



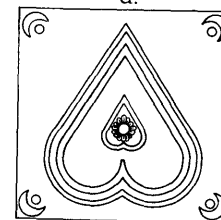
d.



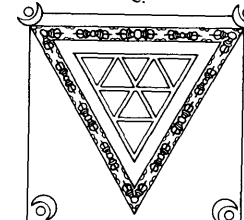
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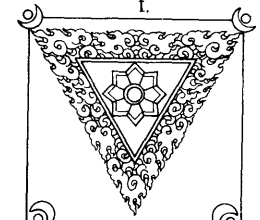
f.



g.



h.



i.

**Yantras employed in the six Homa rituals of Tantra**

d. Circular Yantra used in rituals of propitiation and peace.

e. Square Yantra used in rituals of prosperity.

f. Half moon Yantra used in rituals of subjugation.

g. Yoni shaped Yantra for conjuring forth.

h. Nine triangles used in rites of obstruction and causing hate.

i. Triangular fire yantra employed in rites of destruction and slaying.

“Have you noticed how important triangles are in life?” Vimalananda was fond of rhetorical questions, and I did not even try to answer this one. “Look at the human body. A man’s pubic hair forms a triangle with the point upwards. A woman’s pubic hair is triangular also, but with the point downwards. A woman’s triangles point downwards because she is responsible for the creation of duality. From one she becomes two, when she bears a child. A man’s triangle points upwards because he is meant to control and finally overcome duality. Only when the two come together is creation possible. When a man and a woman enjoy sex together the two triangles come together to form a six-pointed star. Don’t you think there must be some significance in this?”

“There are other triangles in the body also. A woman’s two breasts and her vulva: downwards. A man’s penis and testicles: upwards. The seminal vesicles and the penis—I could go on and on. Four triangles form a pyramid when fitted together, and pyramids have their own peculiar uses, as the ancient Egyptian, Incan and Mayan civilizations knew well. They are all yantras. An external yantra can always be lost or stolen, which is why you should make your body into a yantra; then there is no chance of losing your yantra as long as you live. And you can perform so many rituals, internally, without anyone ever knowing about them, like the Rishis do. Isn’t that better?”

“A flame is also in the form of an upward-pointing triangle. The flame converts all things into ash; all dualities become one reality when they are burned. We offer the fire duality—our offering material—and the fire transmutes it. The head of a human being also possesses an upward-pointing triangle: the three eyes. The lower two eyes see duality—the upper eye, nothing but unity. Therefore it is only logical to conclude that properly performed worship of the fire will help to open your third eye.”

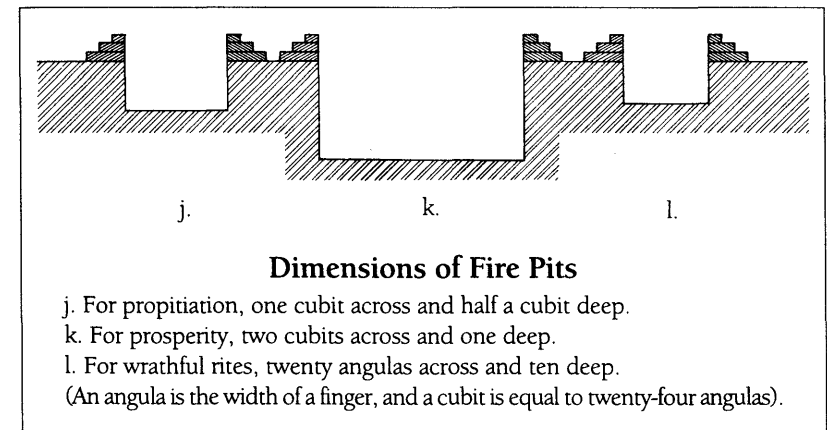
It seemed logical.

“Once the yantra is prepared it is time to worship Ma. Every fire pit must have a symbolic representation of the vulva attached to it. Some have them built in. I usually just make two parallel lines on the side of the fire pit with red powder. You must worship Shakti before you begin, because without Her none of your work can be done; there is no creation without the female principle. And since creation is the function of the genitals, they must be worshipped. Fire is Shaktiman, the Controller of Shakti, but ordinary fires have lost their Shakti; you have to return Shakti to the fire, so it can do your work for you. Shiva and Shakti are identical in the absolute sense, of course, in the same sense that fire and burning are identical; but practically they are different.”

This was confusing, but Vimalananda was not to be interrupted when in such moods.

“Then the fire is ignited. Have you ever wondered how a sadhu deep in a jungle or out in a frozen Himalayan wasteland is able to build a fire? Even if he can locate dry fuel, where will he get a spark to enkindle it? He doesn’t carry a box of matches around with him. The answer is in the proper use of the Vishnu Sudarshana Mantra.”

“The Vishnu Sudarshana Mantra?” I had never heard of it, but I knew that Vishnu, the Preserver of the Cosmos, uses a discus for a weapon, the name of which is Sudarshana, which literally means “good sight.” There seemed to be some esoteric significance to the name of this mantra, especially given the mention Vimalananda had just made of the third eye, and I was hoping for some further insight.



But Vimalananda said only, “Yes, when you repeat this mantra the fire automatically ignites and burns furiously no matter how wet the fuel. I have experimented with making funeral pyres burn brightly in pouring rain with this mantra.”

Aha! I had been in Poona only a few weeks when I saw a front-page report in a local newspaper on a man who was able to create fire by repeating a mantra. Various eminent physicists had tested him for fraud and had had to conclude, scratching their collective head in amazement, that his was a legitimate power. But when he was asked how it was done, by people who wanted to learn that knack themselves, he replied that all prospective students should come with him to a secluded area in the mountains where they would stand on one leg for twelve years repeating the mantra, after

which it would be energized sufficiently to work. He had no takers.

Because I had heard of such a thing, Vimalananda's claim did not strike me as implausible. He went on.

"Why is there creation? Because of friction. Without friction there is no creation. And wherever there is friction there is fire. Can you produce fire without friction? No, unless you take it directly from the sun, using a magnifying glass for instance. Fire is created for Vedic sacrifices by friction, by rubbing two sticks together, much as the American Indians used to do.

"Friction may possess an excess of any of the *Three Gunas*: Tamas, Rajas or Sattva." The Gunas are a crucial part of Sankhya philosophy that I knew well from my Ayurvedic studies; they are the three tendencies of consciousness as manifested through the mind. Sattva is equilibrium, Rajas activity, and Tamas inertia. The mind fluctuates among these three states continually until, by dint of sadhana, it is brought under control and focused on a single point.

"Tamasic friction is argument, discord between people. It creates fiery emotions like hatred, anger, revenge, and violent frenzy. Rajasic friction is sex, which is due to the Fire of Lust. The Upanishads explain that the woman is herself the fire, the penis is the fuel, and the pubic hair the smoke. The vulva embodies the flames, the friction is the coals, and the pleasure is the sparks. This is much better than Tamasic friction because the two people involved get some pleasure out of it. Not much, of course, and not for long. What is created? More lust, and a child. "Sattvic friction, which is sadhana, is the best of all. When you perform sadhana you are working against all your old tendencies and habits caused by the karmas of millions of births. This is bound to produce friction, and you will heat up. The word for penance, *tapas*, literally means heat. Have you noticed how often I apply ice to the top of my head?"

How could I have failed to do so?

"Enlightenment is achieved by the 'burning' of your karmas through *tapas*. When you do plenty of penance your mind heats up, and you become irritable. If you indulge in anger or lust their fire will burn away all the shakti you have accumulated, but if you follow through on your vows and control your temper and your passion the resultant enlightenment will make the whole thing worthwhile.

"Remember that fire's basic quality is to burn. Did you know that the fire which is in the tongue burns whatever it speaks? What this means to you is that you should always confess any bad karmas that you perform. This will free you from them; they will be burned up. And you should never speak

about any good deeds you do, or about your spiritual experiences, because if you do they will be destroyed just as surely. Unfortunately this is Kali Yuga, and most people do exactly the opposite. They hide their sins down deep in their hearts where they can't be cleaned out, and they boast to everyone in sight about their accomplishments and spiritual achievements. I don't need to remind you of what would happen if you told anyone what mantra you repeat." This was one of the first warnings he had given me.

"If we wanted to show off for these people," he said, pointing at our hosts, "we too could light the fire by rubbing sticks together in the approved Vedic fashion; but neither do we want to show off, nor are we performing a *yajna* here that we need to maintain the same strict standards that are necessary for a Vedic sacrifice. Fire purifies whatever it burns, but it takes on some of the qualities of whatever is offered to it. As an Aghori I cannot afford to make any distinctions between a funeral pyre or a sacrificial fire; but as a householder I feel responsible for my spiritual 'children' who come to worship with me. Most of them are not yet ready to do *homa* on a funeral pyre. We settle for maintaining strict purity of our offerings, but we use matches to start the fire, for convenience."

The purity of offerings, I had already learned, extended to the wood used; someone inspected each piece to make sure it contained no insects that might be cremated when it began to burn. All the offering materials were also carefully sifted, screened and inspected to remove dirt and insects before they were combined together into the final offering mixture, the *samagri*.

"The choice of offerings in a *homa* depends on the work, both spiritual and mundane, that you have for the fire to do. In the *homas* I do with my 'children' we always offer clarified butter, barley, wheat, rice, sesame seeds, dry and fresh fruits, honey and sugar, combined together in a specific proportion. All are sweet because we want the fire to give us mundane prosperity as well as spiritual advancement. We add sugar cane also, which is very dear to elephants. This propitiates Ganesha, who must always be propitiated first whenever you do any sort of worship. In addition we add several medicinal herbs, which make the resulting ash medicinal.

"The *homas* that are done as part of the Six Rituals of Tantra—rituals performed to cause death, delusion, discord, hatred, obstruction, and enchantment—are quite different. Each ritual requires a specific set of mantras and even clothing, and worship materials like oil, salt, chilies, and other intense, spicy substances are used. Don't even experiment with these rituals; terrible karma is involved. And never try adding such substances to your own fire.

Since you don't know what you're doing you'll just be harming yourself. There is no limit to the good or evil which can be done through worship of fire."

"Why do such rituals exist at all," I inquired challengingly, "if Tantra is really a benign science?"

"I will explain that to you—eventually. But right now, since the Six Rituals are not part of our program, I would prefer for you to concentrate on what we will be doing."

I accepted this mild rebuke and signaled my deference. He continued.

"I begin my homa by remembering my mother: first my cosmic mother Smashan Tara, and then my physical mother. She is dead now, but even when she was alive I would think of her: 'Ma, because of you I am in this world. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to redeem myself.' Then I remember my family's Rishi, Bhriгу: 'These mantras originate in you and derive from you; and because I was born in your lineage, I salute you.' Then I salute the Seven Rishis as a group—Pulaha, Pulastrya, Devala, Asita, Kratu, Bhriгу, and Angiras—and then four other Rishis whom I cannot name. Next, I salute various gods and goddesses, the planets, and all the demigods in charge of the village and the neighborhood, and of the home, if I'm performing my homa at somebody's house. Finally, I make offerings to all the other classes of ethereal beings: those who are relatively benign, like the Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas and Vidyadharas, as well as those who are more malevolent like the Brahma Rakshasas and other spirits of the dead.

"Finally, I turn to the fire and request it to enter me and enkindle my *Bhuta Agni*. The *Bhuta Agni* is the fire of the subtle body, the fire which must be ignited in order for spiritual progress to be made. One important reason for doing homa is to awaken *Bhuta Agni*. If I really want Fire to enter me, my 'I' must disappear; a spiritual vacuum must be created. To do that I offer my ears to the fire and ask for divine ears in return: clairaudience. When I get a positive response from the fire I then offer my eyes and ask for divine eyes: clairvoyance. When positive response comes to this offering I offer my tongue and ask for divine speech. Once Fire enters me I can proceed to do whatever work I have to do. You don't offer your physical ears, eyes, and tongue to the fire, except in *Khanda Manda Yoga*, which I will tell you about one of these days; in homa you offer your *senses* into the fire.

"After all these preliminaries I request my deity to be present in the pit, and I begin my offerings. As the homa proceeds the fire will sometimes crackle, hiss, or make other noises. This is the fire's way of trying to talk, which you can understand only if your perception is very subtle. The fire

tries to communicate with you in other ways also; its color is especially significant."

"How so?"

"Modern science has itself proved that each different color of light has a different effect on the body and mind, by stimulating the pituitary, pineal and hypothalamus, which then influence the rest of the organism. One color may cause anger, another joy, and a third may improve concentration. When you get close to the fire and embrace it you offer yourself to it, and it enters you. Then the external fire acts as a barometer of the workings of the internal spiritual fire, the *Bhuta Agni*. You must bring *Bhuta Agni* under your control before you can completely control physical fire.

"When I am finished with the number of offerings I have planned to make, at the very end of my homa, I put a coconut into the fire. The coconut represents the worshipper's head, with its three eyes. Also, it is full of water, just as the head is full of blood, cerebrospinal fluid and glandular secretions. When I offer the coconut I offer my entire consciousness to the fire with a request that it be transmuted into a divine consciousness. I offer my own 'head' to get a divine head. Then I bow to the fire and request my deity to return to His or Her home, and my homa is completed. Then I sit by the fire for a while, after I am finished, and commune with it.

"Always remember this: fire is a living being. Once you bring it to life you are responsible for it. For example, you don't dare smother it any more than you would dare to smother any other living being. You must permit it to die out by itself. After you collect the ash you must wash the area thoroughly so that no one will step on any ash inadvertently, and any ash you don't use must be disposed of in water. That means put into a stream, or the ocean—not into a drainage ditch! And one other thing: if it seems like the fire is about to go out during your homa, never blow on it directly. Always blow on the palm of your hand first and let that air fall onto the fire. Why that is I will explain to you—eventually."

He fell silent for a few moments, to allow me to try to summarize and integrate what he had told me, and then continued: "Naturally, I don't expect you to remember everything perfectly this time; you will have many opportunities to practice homa and for me to correct your mistakes, while I am still alive and even afterwards. I have always said that half the enjoyment of enlightenment is the path you have to tread to get there. As your consciousness progresses from that of a limited human being to that of an unlimited being you will experience all sorts of things, wonderful and appalling alike. Don't ever become attached to any of these experiences;

they are only guideposts to tell you how far you have come and how far you have left to go. If you become attached you'll get stuck there and you'll quit making progress.

"My 'children' generally have good experiences as a result of doing homa. Because Nature is kind to me She is usually kind to my spiritual children also, especially if they come to me first and seek my permission before going out to do something. Once one of them had reached the end of his homa and was ready to offer some sweets to the fire and take some *prasad* in return." (Prasad is that portion of your offering which is returned to you for your consumption so that you can imbibe some of the vibrations of the deity you have worshipped.) "When he lifted the box of sweets all of them fell into the fire at once and began to burn. This fellow actually started to cry because he would have no *prasad* when suddenly one sweet fell out of the fire onto his leg.

"Another time a group of them finished their homa before using up all their samagri. Any such remainders must be properly disposed of, so since they were in a rural area they tried to give it to a cow, but no cow would touch it. Have you ever heard of a cow refusing to eat a mixture of rice, sesame, barley, honey and sugar liberally sprinkled with dried fruits and nuts? Not one but several cows did indeed refuse it. And a dog, who followed my boys all the way from the village, was ready to eat it but was not offered any of it.

"When they got back to Bombay I reminded these 'children' that Lord Shiva frequently comes to His devotees in the form of a dog. The cows in the place where they had done their homa refused to eat because the deity there, Lord Shiva, wanted them to continue their worship with that material, or at least wanted them to offer it to Him, in the dog form, instead of to the cows. When you begin to come near the deity you are worshipping, the deity will begin to play about with you. Everyone likes to play about.

"This is the way you should look after your spiritual 'children.' Children must be protected until they have progressed far enough to do things on their own. The Hindi word for child, in fact, is *baccha*, which comes from a word meaning 'to protect.'"

"So a child is 'that which is protected?'" I surmised.

"Precisely," he acknowledged. "For example, whenever my boys go out into the jungle, someone or another will bring them food and water when they need it. Ask them if you don't believe me. How does it happen? I don't know; all I know is that it happens. Once a group of them who were camping in the jungle began to be a little fearful around midnight. Suddenly a

party of villagers with torches arrived, saying that they had suddenly got the desire to come spend the night out there.

"This does not mean that my 'children' are being handed everything on a silver platter, however" he hastened to add. "Whenever any of them tries to act smart the fire teaches them a lesson. Last time we went out for homa one of my 'children' got his hands burned so deeply they blistered; another scorched his foot very badly. It's dangerous to play with fire. Fire is a living being; to misuse it is to invite disaster upon yourself. As long as it loves you there is no problem, but the day you start fooling about you've had it. These two characters were full of jealousy because Freddy and Katyayani had come to perform homa with us. How dare they be envious! According to Indian tradition a guest is to be treated as God. Why shouldn't they suffer for being envious of God?"

Vimalananda never hesitated either to suffer himself or to make others suffer when he felt it was necessary.

"When people are envious of you and your achievements, like some of my boys are of you, as you well know, don't bother about it. Their jealousy will act as a wonderful fire to burn out all your bad karmas. You will find yourself getting lighter and lighter, and day by day they will be taking your karmas on themselves. Fire always burns, and if you worship it properly it will burn away all your bad karmas."



A year or two after our first homa there, after we had become fixtures in the community, Vimalananda and I were sitting near the temple early in the morning after a long night of fire worship. After our arrival, conditions in the village had gradually improved. Maybe it was coincidence or maybe it was, as Vimalananda had predicted, that our worship was affecting the villagers' lives positively. They certainly seemed happy with our homa; they would hover around the fire pits as soon as we arose, waiting patiently for the moment the ashes from the fires would cool off sufficiently to be collected. Some villagers used the ash as medicine—one woman healed a horrendous ulcer on her thigh simply by applying it regularly—and others just kept it in their houses for good luck. The farmers who used the ash on their fields reported bumper crops, and their prosperity allowed everyone to put a little money aside. The villagers were certain that this upturn in their fortunes was all due to our homa, and to the proper propitiation of their deities, and

whenever we bade them farewell they begged us to come back again as soon as possible.

On this morning, as we watched them collecting their share of the ash—we kept some for ourselves for similar purposes—Vimalananda said to me, “Even the ethereal beings in the area enjoy our presence. They can’t take the ash directly like the villagers do, so they just blow a little up into the air and inhale it. All you see is a puff of wind.” He smiled.

“When we first came to the village our friend the tree did not look as if it would live long, did it? Now look at it: new leaves have sprouted, and it has recovered most of its vigor. This is because the ethereal being who lives there also enjoys our homa—the fragrance of the smoke and the resonance of the mantras. Her misery was ruining the villagers when she came, and now that she is happy again she looks after the locals and makes them thrive.

“There are other auspicious signs too that most people do not know how to interpret. Here is just one: Do you remember that pair of little owls that has come out to join us several times late at night when everyone is concentrating well on their homas? The ones who fly up and perch on the upper branches of this tree, chatter together for half an hour or so, and then depart?” I did indeed. “Owls generally do not come near light, but I think it is good for everyone involved that these two do.

“This is the right way to worship, the real yoga: not to perfect physical postures, but to make every home a happy home. If one hundred villages in India could be harmonized as this one has, the whole pattern of life in India would change. I can’t do that, but perhaps my ‘children’ will be able to. A father lives for his children, not for himself, if he is a real father.”

## KUNDALINI

Vimalananda developed close personal relationships with his racehorses, visiting then regularly at the racing stables to feed them treats and love. He continued to call on his mares even after they had been retired to stud. It was on one such visit to a stud farm near Poona that the driver of the autorickshaw in which we were travelling abruptly refused to go any farther out of town, leaving us to trudge irately down the road during the heat of midday to cover the remaining half-mile.

A massive heart attack a few years previously had forced Vimalananda to carry with him pills to treat angina. Perhaps it was solely the combination of the heat, the exertion and his exasperation with the rickshaw driver that precipitated an attack that day, though there may also have been an internal reason to which I was never made privy. Whatever the cause, this particular attack was much more intense than ordinary angina, and the pills failed to relieve it. Despite his heart condition Vimalananda had continued to smoke, and I lit a cigarette for him as he stood stock still trying to minimize his anguish.

There we were on a deserted road, with no medicine other than the ineffectual pills, with no way to get Vimalananda to a doctor short of walking him there. As the pain had become too great for him even to walk, the only thing left to do was to move out of the road where we were standing, find a place to sit quietly in the nonexistent shade, and wait for destiny’s gambit to unfold. As we headed toward a leafless thorn tree, Vimalananda flicked his

cigarette butt despairingly into the air.

He sat on the ground beneath the tree and I stood behind him, reduced to wondering what would happen next, when some inspiration caused me to look up. There in the tree was his still-smoldering cigarette butt, precisely impaled on a long, sharp acacia thorn. My heart leapt into my throat: an omen! I shouted to Vimalananda to look, and when he saw it he smiled, then started to laugh and said, "Well, well, Robby, it looks as if I'm not going to die here after all. Nature hasn't deserted me yet!" Immediately his pain began to recede.

Vimalananda loved Nature, and Nature loved him. There is order in Nature, a grand rhythm called in Sanskrit *rtam* to which all the celestial bodies promenade. Because Vimalananda habitually moved in harmony with this cosmic rhythm the universe had become habituated to cooperate with him. When he tossed away his cigarette with a silent, desperate prayer to Nature, probably something like, "Don't let me die by the side of this road!" back came the answer in a sign from Nature: "Don't worry, you are still safe with Me!"

Dying cigarettes usually do not find their way to and impale themselves on acacia thorns. Perhaps a highly improbable coincidence chose to randomly occur there and then; but such "coincidences" happened day in and day out with Vimalananda, so a better explanation than "chance" is necessary. The unerring flight of that aerodynamically unsound projectile was an external reflection of the internal event which precipitated it: a cry for assistance in extremis. Vimalananda's prayer hit the cosmic bull's-eye with the same accuracy and force that his cigarette hit its bull's-eye; the latter event demonstrated, on the gross physical plane for all to see, the former event that was hidden within, like iron filings on a piece of paper conform to the lines of force projected by a magnet held beneath them.

The ancient Law of Microcosm and Macrocosm tells us there is no real difference between the vast external universe and the limited internal universe of the human body, except that the individual believes itself to be different. A human being is a living microcosm of the universe, and the universe is a living macrocosm of a human being. Each cosmos affects the other; the universe affects us, moment to moment, and each one of us by our actions influences the entire cosmos, for good or ill. The cosmos is the body of the Absolute, the vessel through which the Absolute expresses Itself. Every created thing in the universe contains at least a spark of the universal consciousness which is the Absolute, but most things cannot adequately express this consciousness.

Vimalananda explains:

"*Chit Shakti* (the power of consciousness or subjectivity) identifies with the Unmanifested Absolute, and *Maya Shakti* (the power of unconsciousness or objectivity) identifies with the world, the manifestation of the Absolute. These two Shaktis cannot exist without one another. Even in the grossest matter there is a spark of consciousness—this is why I say that even rocks are alive—and even in the highest states of consciousness there is a particle of Maya, as long as there is even the least sense of individuality. Once you learn the truth of the universe, you forget your own individuality, and remember your true nature; only then, when you no longer exist, does Maya no longer exist for you."

The One exists in the All, and the All defines the One; unity and duality both exist simultaneously. Wherever Chit Shakti is displayed there is intelligence and sensation; otherwise there is ignorance and insensibility. The human body is a vessel into which consciousness pours, according to individual capacity, filling the body via the nervous system. The spine and spinal cord extend consciousness from the brain, the pole of greatest awareness which is called Shiva, to the coccyx, the pole of greatest density. Each body cell expresses its own sort of consciousness according to its own capacity.

At the base of the subtle spinal cord in the subtle body lies the residual shakti of individuation, an energy which remains unavailable to the individual so long as his or her consciousness remains firmly entrenched in the mundane. This energy is our personal fragment of the cosmic power of self-identification. Thanks solely to this sense of I-ness called *ahamkara* (literally 'the I-causer') we exist as individuals. When Vimalananda spoke of the ego it was *ahamkara* that he meant, not the Freudian ego.

Just as discrimination is the chief characteristic of the intellect, *ahamkara*'s chief characteristic is possessiveness, that proprietary overlordship of the organism which remembers your self-definition and allows you to hold your own in the world. *Ahamkara* self-identifies with every cell of your body from conception until death; you instantly die as soon as She ceases to self-identify with you. The more you identify with your individuality, your microcosm, the more She functions as your own personal Maya and the less She reflects the macrocosm; as you identify less with your individuality She is freed to reflect more of the macrocosm, to increase Her awareness of the One. *Ahamkara* and Kundalini are two names for the same power manifested in two different directions: *ahamkara* connotes Maya Shakti and Kundalini, Chit Shakti.



Maya Shakti keeps you awake to the world and asleep to the Absolute, while Chit Shakti awakens you to Reality and puts you to sleep with regard to worldly matters. Since the consciousness of a living being is conditioned by the matter in which it resides, the greatest Maya that we experience is the Maya of the matter which makes up our bodies. So long as we live the embodied life each one of us participates in the play of Nature, binding ourselves to the world by the “things” we accrete in our personalities. No incarnate being can be either wholly worldly or wholly spiritual; no matter how filled with light you may become, you never quite transcend your dark side fully so long as you remain embodied.

The expression of shakti in the physical body is *prana*, the life force, the power which keeps body, mind and spirit functioning together as a living unit. All parts of one’s being require *prana*. Physical life, health and longevity require that *ahamkara* self-identify strongly with the individual organism so that sufficient *prana* will enliven the body, while spiritual health requires *ahamkara* to relinquish most of this attachment. Just as every plant requires just the proper amount of both sunshine and rain to flourish, so does a human being require just the right amounts of the sunlight of spiritual awareness and of the cloud cover of ego-attachment in order to thrive. Too much spirit burns the world out of you and makes it impossible for you to retain your body; too much attachment drowns your consciousness in worldliness.

In the ordinary human the ego is fully identified with the body and the limited personality, and all actions are centered around this temporary “self.” Each microcosmic reality is influenced by every other; all of us are caught in each other’s projections and are defined in large part by them. Our conscious personalities that we like to think of as stable and constant are in fact merely aggregates of ideas with which we temporarily self-identify. The conscious personality is a sort of museum whose curator—*ahamkara*—selects objects for display to others from the museum’s warehouse, the subconscious. These objects are assembled into exhibits, the personality fragments which each act as if it were “the” personality while it operates. Popular exhibits enjoy a longer run, while less-patronized exhibits are changed more quickly. Eventually the museum goes out of business, at the moment of death when the ego completely forsakes the limited, limiting personality which it has supported for so many years.

Most people never notice the fluctuations of the ceaseless creation and destruction of their personalities any more than they notice the individual frames of film in a motion picture. This perpetual shifting of self-identifica-

tion among all these personality pieces consumes tremendous amounts of energy and keeps *ahamkara* quite preoccupied. Only when some life-changing event forces the issue do you begin to wake from the sleep of contentment with Maya, like the Prodigal Son woke to find himself dining from the pig trough, and to take the first few toddling steps toward the light of Chit.

Kundalini will eventually awaken in every being in the universe. If you prefer to enjoy the vicissitudes of karma you can wait for that awakening to dawn; otherwise you can actively try to find your way to that state. Vimalananda outlined the choices:

“Whatever you desire will eventually come to you; this is the magnanimity of Nature. She will always eventually give you what you ask for; it is only a question of time. If your desire is the product of a controlled, coherent mind you will achieve it quickly. This is how the Rishi Vishwamitra created an entire parallel universe: the force of his austerities was so powerful that when he set his mind to it, it took shape immediately.

“If you desire God you will eventually get to God; about this there is not one iota of doubt. How long it takes you to get to God, how much of a gap there is between your desire and its achievement, depends on how much you want God. Once you become really anxious to locate God and your mind becomes focused on this desire you can achieve without much delay.

“Lord Krishna says, ‘Bahunam janmanam ante’: only after millions of births does an individual soul get the desire to return to God. Only after many, many rounds of physical existence does the soul finally say, ‘Now I’m tired, Lord, tired of all this birth and death. Please take me away from all this.’ As the soul becomes more and more desperate interiority develops, and if he keeps to it eventually he achieves.

“The first sutra of the Brahma Sutras is ‘Atha ato brahma jijnasa,’ which means, “‘Now there is a sincere desire for knowledge of the Ultimate.’ The Brahma Sutras have already existed for thousands of years, and will probably continue to exist for thousands more. The use of the word *atha* (‘now’) here indicates that there is no limitation of time when it comes to spiritual advancement. Whether it is today or ten thousand years into the past or one million years into the future, *atha* means ‘whenever there is a sincere desire for spiritual knowledge.’ ‘Now’ is thus different for everyone. Right now is the ‘now’ of the Brahma Sutras for all those of us who are trying to grope our way back to God in spite of the terrific Maya which assails us.”

The Maya which assails us is our own, of course, and that of our friends, neighbors and other co-conspirators who share a consensus reality. Most

people do not want to rock the boat, much less go overboard, and many do not take kindly to the defection of their fellows. Vimalananda used to say, "Human beings are nothing but sheep. I used to be in the flock of sheep, but I ran away, so it's no surprise that everyone else, all the so-called normal people, thinks I'm insane or, at the least, abnormal. And I think the same about them. Only one of us can be right." (*Aghora*, p. 297)

Only those brave enough to disturb the somnolence of the world around them and shout that the Emperor is nude possess the strength to withstand the censure of the remaining sheep. Those who shout, "Beware of Maya!" malign Maya, for Ma always only gives us that which we ask for. When we call on the Goddess to ask Her for mundane boons, which bind us to limited forms, She appears to us as Maya; when we pray to Her power and energy She manifests as Shakti; and to those few who relate to Her maternally she reveals Herself as Ma, God the Mother. Those who remain stuck in Maya do so because they do not try to redirect their urge to individuation from Maya to Chit; they allow themselves to be carried along by the current of their lives, and of their neighbors' lives.

Aghoris never permit themselves to be passively defined by the external environment; they define themselves, and by so doing define their surroundings. Vimalananda's control of an awakened Kundalini gave his self-expression such accuracy and force that incidents which would be out of the ordinary for most of us, like that of the cigarette and the thorn, became commonplace in his life. He never hesitated to define his surroundings, even if doing so landed him in hot water:

"One day one of these people who call themselves 'Bhagavan' ('God') was having a big meeting down at Chowpatty (Bombay's downtown beach). They were charging Rs. 25 to get in. I didn't want to go in the first place, especially to see someone selling spirituality like that, but one of my friends insisted that I must see this 'great saint,' and he paid my way.

"Everyone who went to the saint was supposed to bring along a flower. I said to hell with that and didn't take along any flower or anything else. When we got there the so-called Bhagavan told everyone to take his or her ego, put it into the flower, and then put it at the 'guru's' feet. He called this the great 'Mohini Prayoga.'

"When it was my turn I went up to him, and he looked at me and made a gesture to say, 'Where is your flower?'

"I told him, 'Please let me know one thing. If I put my ego into a flower I will die *phat* right here; it is because of my ego that I am alive. My ego self-identifies with this body, and if it were to leave my body would immediately

become limp and dead. And then how would I be talking to you here? So will you please explain to me how to do it? How to put my ego into a flower?'

"He looked at me in a peculiar way and then looked at one of his disciples who caught the cue and told me to get out. I thought I might be beaten, the way all his disciples gathered around us and threatened us. So we left. This was the same fellow who advises his disciples that they can go into samadhi by putting all their energy into the sex center, awakening Kundalini and having a great cosmic orgasm. What nonsense! Has Kundalini become so cheap? You know, in India you can get away with anything in the name of religion."

Ahamkara uses the body as ballast for the mind, that it may not drift away and be lost like a runaway balloon on a breezy day. When Kundalini awakens before death She will try to return to and unite with Her opposite pole, the pole of greatest awareness which is Shiva, by reversing the outward projection of energy which led to incarnation. While She slumbers She supports the body; once She is aroused and throws back the covers which bind Her down, the body-mind-spirit complex starts to unravel as the life force is released from its bondage to the organism.

If your awakening Kundalini unites totally with Her Shiva you will cease to exist, since nothing will remain to identify with your body. If She awakens slowly enough that you can "digest" the tremendous energies which are released as She lets go of everything that has been holding Her down, you will become a man or woman of God. If, however, She awakens too quickly to be controlled, and too slowly to kill you outright, you will be catapulted into the maelstrom of a "spiritual emergency," a Kundalini crisis.

Some modern writers inaccurately blame all human illness on such spiritual crises. While it is true that all disease is due, directly or indirectly, to ahamkara, to one's sense of ego and identity, all neuroses are not signs of incipient Kundalini arousal; and while a Kundalini crisis may produce a nervous breakdown, every nervous breakdown is not a spiritual emergency. Most of those who maintain that the awakening of Kundalini is the root cause of all their imbalances are merely experiencing the consequences of Her first stirrings from sleep; this is more a crisis of ahamkara than of Kundalini.

The "physio-Kundalini process," touted by some as a form of "natural stress release," is merely the preliminary purification of the ethereal nerves in which Kundalini will eventually move. The awakening of Kundalini is a "stress release" only in the sense that as the bonds of body and personality

that hold Kundalini down are undone, the energy that had been used to self-identify with these “stresses” is released for the organism to otherwise allocate. The awakening of Kundalini releases all stresses, not merely those which produce neuroses; relief of neurosis is not regeneration of identity.

If Kundalini be triggered suddenly in an unprepared nervous system, the shock produced resembles that delivered to an unsuspecting toddler who grasps a live wire. When an unreconstructed personality tries to resist Kundalini, consciously or unconsciously, She may fry nerves and blow out endocrine fuses, shorting out the nervous system at its weakest point and blowing a hole in the victim’s aura. Since the aura’s job is to insulate us psychically from one another and from disembodied influences, holes in the aura permit all sorts of chaotic, negative mental vibrations, including even ethereal parasites, to enter the individual’s field as they like and spread ruin.

If the individual remains functional, Kundalini may inflate and empower his or her limitations. That person into whose genitals Kundalini is diverted full force, for example, will begin to live, eat and breathe sex, and may misidentify as spiritual experiences the colossal lusts which arise. Or, should Kundalini become lodged in the digestive organs, insatiable hunger may supervene.

Even if overt calamity is avoided worse dangers await, for the ensuing catharsis can actually reinforce the limitations of the personality instead of releasing them. Those half-baked spiritual aspirants (called *ardha dagdha*, literally “half-burned,” in Sanskrit) who permit the power to swell their heads, like gas inflating a balloon, may believe themselves to have achieved exalted states. Because the power of Kundalini that buoys them confers an aura of seeming truth to their words they may shoot up to the heights of self-confidence as pseudo-gurus, commanding others with confident persuasiveness to follow them until one day the pressure of temptation becomes too great and there is a cataclysmic fall.

Such self-inflation may proceed insidiously; as Gopi Krishna observes “. . . the desire for power, the yearning for mental conquest . . . often accompanies the activity of Kundalini in the intellectual center, causing a slight intoxicated condition of the brain too subtle to be noticed by the subject himself or by his uninformed companions, however erudite and intelligent they may be.” (Gopi Krishna, p. 176) A spiritual aspirant may not intend to go wrong, but the power of even a half-awakened Kundalini often proves to be dangerous.

Which illustrates the great danger in the notion that all one’s problems will be solved if one can just awaken Kundalini; problems are solved if and

only if Kundalini awakens in a slow, controlled way. When She does awaken in a controlled way, She awakens slowly and reveals Herself gradually; only very rarely, as with Vimalananda, does She shine forth in nearly fully developed form almost from the start. What many people believe to be the culmination of their spiritual practices is thus really only the beginning, only a brief, tantalizing disengagement of Kundalini from Her normal self-identification with the mundane. Should this happen to you, you must then methodically follow up on it with measures to guide and channel Her if you hope to survive because Kundalini progressively unties every knot that binds the personality together.

Though I had been introduced to the idea of Kundalini before I met Vimalananda, She became real for me only after I began to glimpse Her peculiar path through his life. Because he was concerned to remove the idea of quick achievement from my mind, he never sat me down and said, “This is what Kundalini is all about.” Instead he provided me with little bites of information from time to time, encouraging me to digest each morsel thoroughly and assimilate it efficiently. As he liked to say, “Never be in a hurry; start with a sip and end with the bottle.” The long conversation reproduced below did not occur at one sitting; various snippets have been spliced together to provide an overall glimpse of his approach to Kundalini Yoga.



## Self-Identification

“Actually there is no difference between the Kundalini Shakti and *Adya*, the original Shakti of the universe, except that the Kundalini Shakti has become individualized.”

Vimalananda was not one to repeat himself; as soon as he began to speak about something of interest to me I was expected to drop whatever I was doing and listen. Usually he picked moments when I was engrossed in some mundane matter like reading the newspaper, since drawing my attention to his words would disengage my mind at least temporarily from its attachment to the mundane.

“That is why I call the Kundalini Shakti the ego. The ability to self-identify, to treat something as part of oneself, is ego. As long as the Kundalini Shakti self-identifies with the body She remains asleep. Once She awakens She searches for Her mate: Shiva, that fragment of the universal consciousness without which an individual cannot exist. When they merge that’s it; the play is over. It’s something like an electron finding its proton and merging with it.

“The Rishis, who are the only beings in our universe who can travel to the sun, have the full power of the Kundalini Shakti at their disposal. They can reach the sun in the instant they will themselves there, thanks to Her awesome might. Do you know the speed of the Kundalini Shakti? It’s immeasurable, but since the Rishis can travel from here to the sun in less than one second its speed must be more than one hundred million miles per second.”

I must have looked at him quizzically, for he emphasized, “Yes, I have been to college and have several degrees, so I know about the speed of light; but there is nothing faster than the speed of thought.

“The Kundalini Shakti is the highest possible expression of an individual’s will power. When you have purified your will so totally that it can be directed to a single object at a time—coherent just like a laser beam—then the Kundalini Shakti is operating in you, not before. Anything travelling that fast must have tremendous force behind it, and very few people can handle such power. This is why I get so wild when I read about all those people in America who claim either to have had their own Kundalinis awakened painlessly, or to be awakening the Kundalinis of all and sundry effortlessly. Don’t ask me to believe such drivel. If it were so all of America would have merged with the infinite by now.”

Restraining his indignation with some effort, he continued.

“Why I am so outraged? Because the ordinary individual can at best, after long penances, become able to partially self-identify with the universe, or with a deity; whenever that self-identification becomes perfect the ego loses all concept of individuality and all contact with the body, which then disintegrates. Once you lose your ability to identify yourself with imperfection, how will you be able to continue to exist in our imperfect world? All the swamis and sadhus nowadays who talk about the awakening of Kundalini are really talking about Her partial awakening, whether they realize it or not. You may accidentally awaken your Kundalini partially, or a saint may partially awaken it for you, but that is not the end; it is only the beginning, which is why so many aspirants go astray.”

A brief pause signified that this applied particularly to me.

“In an ordinary individual the ego resides at the lower end of the spinal cord because gravity has full power over Her. So long as She lies there sleeping the individual remains in ignorance. If you want to liberate the ego from Her restrictions you must create a force within your body to counteract the force of gravity; this can only be done by strenuous penance. The purpose of all spiritual practices in every religion is to disengage the ego from Her identification with the limited personality so that She may reunite with Her perennial personality.

“Whether you do it slowly or quickly, you have to rip your ego away from your nerves when you practice Kundalini Yoga, and this will come as quite a shock to your organism. The ego has such a strong grip on the body that it is impossible for most people to do this. In fact, some die of shock when Kundalini is awakened, and others become severely ill. Indiscriminate awakening of the Kundalini is very dangerous. Everyone is doomed to die, of course, but dying disoriented in pain and fear will ruin your chances for a good rebirth.

“If your nervous system is strong it can endure a great deal of shakti before disintegrating, which is why penance is required. If you do the practices your guru sets for you and control your tongue and your penis—”

“Or if you are a woman?”

“Or your clitoris, you can create nerves of steel. I’m sorry, but if you think you can dare to awaken Kundalini and survive while living in a body that has been weakened by dissipation you are living in a fool’s paradise. How do you think Moses was able to withstand his experience with God? Only because of his long penances. Moses described a burning bush which burned but was not consumed. That bush was his own brain and nervous system, ignited by God.

“Kundalini has been described as *vidyut lata*, the “lightning creeper.” Think of how a creeping vine clings to a tree; and then think of that vine as a lightning stroke, a bolt of billions of volts of energy which would splinter or incinerate any ordinary tree, or bush. But Moses was destined for greatness, and his nerves, though severely strained, were able to take the sudden flash of pure consciousness that God graced him with. How few are able to do this!

“If you could just for a moment experience the power of a fully awakened Kundalini Shakti you would know what bull is being put out by these phony Yogis who say that the Kundalini can be felt as a creepy feeling in the spine, or as a cool breeze in the palm. Creepy feeling, my foot! And to con-

trol Kundalini, do you think it is some sort of joke? Never! For an ordinary human to control Kundalini is impossible, or nearly so. Only immortals can properly control Her.

“No, raising Kundalini in an uncontrolled way is not the answer. You don’t become enlightened or become a yogi just because your Kundalini is aroused. There is a great potential for abuse of this power. As long as it goes up it’s fine, but when it falls, it falls like a thunderbolt.”

“Like in the Bible where Jesus says, ‘I saw the devil fall like lightning from Heaven?’”

“Yes. Jesus was talking about the devil of the uncontrolled ego, who tempts us to indulge in the pleasures of the mundane world. Isn’t life in the mundane world really hell? And it is an endless torment, because we are reborn into it over and over again. To rise above all this misery you must raise your Kundalini, in a controlled way.”

## Coverings

“While Kundalini sleeps in the Muladhara Chakra at the base of the spine you are awake to the world and asleep to reality. When She awakes to unite with Her Shiva in your brain then you wake up to reality; you ‘fall asleep’ to the world. An ignorant person believes that he is in the world; his Kundalini self-identifies with the poison of Maya. A *jnani*, one who knows, says rather, ‘The world is in me,’ because his Kundalini self-identifies with Shiva.

“We say that Kundalini is ‘sleeping’ because She, the ego, is self-identifying with the individual’s limited personality. Because of this self-identification She accepts its limits as Her limits. In Her pure form the ego is the purest of shaktis, but as long as She self-identifies with the body She lies under three coverings which prevent Her from remembering who She is and where She belongs. These three coverings are the Three Gunas (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas), the Six Tastes (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent or spicy, and astrigent), and the Five Great Elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether).

“The Gunas control our minds, the Elements shape our bodies and the world around us, and the Tastes control our internal chemistry, which links our minds and bodies together. Together with the ten senses, the five we all know plus the tongue, hands, feet, anus and genitals, there are twenty-four limitations which distort the human consciousness.

“Externally the Universal Self is covered by *Maha Maya* (the Great Maya); internally Maya appears as these twenty-four limitations. The first step in Tantric spirituality is to work on the individual scale to uncover the ego and make Her reunite with Shiva, the true Self. Numerologically twenty-four means  $2 + 4 = 6$ , the Six *Chakras* (energy centers). The Six Chakras are also manifestations of these twenty-four limitations, which means that only when you go beyond the chakras do you go beyond these limitations, and vice versa. Both are ultimately identical; it is all a question of perspective, of point of view.

“Now, what is the meaning of the word *Kundalini*? *Kundala* means a coiled earring, so *Kundalini* means ‘the Goddess with a *Kundala*.’ Here the coil is at the tip of the spinal cord; the ego is coiled because it is tightly constricted by the three coverings. So long as Kundalini lies sleeping in the Muladhara Chakra She is coiled up.”

“And that is why She is sometimes called ‘Kubjika’ (‘the Hunchback’)?”

“Yes. Once She enters the Ajna Chakra, though, She completely loses Her coils and becomes straight and, unencumbered by the three coverings, She can express Herself fully. Conditioned knowledge is always slightly distorted; only unconditioned knowledge is truly straight.

“In Kundalini Yoga we usually begin with *Bhuta Shuddhi*, the purification of the Five Elements, to allow Kundalini to travel upwards through the chakras. *Bhuta Shuddhi* is really the essence of Tantra. The force of Her motion, if it is unimpeded, lifts the other coverings and eventually produces simple or ordinary spiritual wisdom: *jnana*.”

“*Jnana* is ordinary spiritual wisdom?”

“*Jnana* is the knowledge that the entire cosmos is really One Great Being, in spite of the fact that we see multiplicity in the world: All-in-One, One-in-All. When you progress from ordinary *jnana* to the ability to influence the placement or the removal of these coverings on the cosmic scale—creation, preservation and destruction—you have practical spiritual knowledge, a higher stage, which is called *vijnana*. The ‘vi’ in *vijnana* means *vishesh* (special, extraordinary). You are then a *Siddha*, an immortal, because your own ego has become absolutely purified. Only *Siddhas*, and higher beings like *Rishis*, can possess this sort of practical or specialized knowledge; a *vijnani* is something quite different from an ordinary *jnani*.

“After the three coverings are removed from Kundalini your perception becomes quite different. It is the difference between capital ‘I’ and e-y-e ‘eye.’ The eye is symbolic of the world of sense objects. As long as the ego is covered, it knows nothing but the senses and their objects and is contented

with them. But they are external, and therefore impermanent. The ego must be made to realize the capital 'I,' the Self, which lies within, and therefore, the first thing to be cultivated is interiority, withdrawal of the mind from external objects. Love, including orgasm, is internal. If you look for love externally, as most Westerners do, you will either become bored and perverted, or frustrated and desperate. Only interiority can give you bliss.

"Once you develop interiority your mind will gradually become quiet and perception will develop. Eventually you will realize that effect, instrument, and action are all one. You will see yourself in the goat being slaughtered, in the act of slaughtering, and in the one who slaughters. When you can see yourself in the butchered, the butchering, and the butcher, you will see that all are mere manifestations of the Self. All is His play, capital 'H.' When you see yourself everywhere, where is there any possibility of pity? This is jnana, ordinary spiritual knowledge.

"To go beyond this to vijnana you must go beyond the body, and to do that you must first understand the relationship between the body and the ego. The nerves of the body are the probes, the feelers of the ego. This is what Krishna meant when he talks in the Bhagavad Gita about the tree whose roots are above and whose branches are below: the roots of the nerves are in the brain, and the nerves themselves branch out to cover the whole body.

## Nadis and Chakras

"The ego or ahamkara does not actually reside in the physical body, because the ego is not at all physical. It resides in the subtle body, and moves in the *nadis*, the ethereal nerves. The body's 72,000 nadis act as conduits for prana, which is closely related to the ego. Numerologically, 72,000 means  $7 + 2 = 9$ : the Nine Doors through which prana can enter or leave the body. Most of the nadis begin or terminate at these Doors, which are the sense organs: the two eyes, the two nostrils, the two ears, the mouth, the anus, and the genital organ. Prana, moving with the breaths, enkindles the body's fire, just as a bellows is used to ignite and inflame the fire in a forge, and the mind is carried out through these Doors by prana so that it can experience the world. Control of the nadis enables you to control the ego, the mind and the senses.

"Of these thousands of nadis three are most important: the Surya Nadi

('sun channel'), the Chandra Nadi ('moon channel'), and Sushumna (the 'fire channel'). The right nostril is related to the Surya Nadi, and the left nostril to the Chandra Nadi. Sushumna is closely associated with the spine and spinal cord."

"So, on the physical level there is a physical structure, and on the subtle level there is a nadi, and they more or less occupy the same space, so they influence one another; is that the idea?" I could visualize it, more or less.

"Yes, that is close. The sun heats things up, while the moon causes them to cool down. When your right nostril, also known as Ganga (the Ganges River), works more efficiently than does your left nostril your appetites for food and other enjoyments will increase. When your left nostril, also called Yamuna (the Ganga's main tributary), works more efficiently than your right nostril the opposite effect is produced: your body cools and relaxes, and your appetites decrease. If you take the trouble to observe your own body you'll find that each nostril works for about an hour and a half at a time."

I had not observed this before, but began to do so at that moment.

"Continuously throughout the day and night your body fluctuates from excitation to relaxation and back. Yogis control this fluctuation by performing pranayama. They make the left nostril work when they want to be submissive, when they worship God for example, and they make the right nostril work when they want to command. They also strive to create a balance between the left and right nostrils, because only when the Surya and Chandra Nadis work with equal force can prana be forced into the Sushumna Nadi to move Kundalini upward."

Pandit Gopi Krishna suffered for weeks from an intensely overheated system when the tornado of prana unleashed by his awakening Kundalini moved exclusively in his Surya Nadi; only when his Chandra Nadi finally opened and calmed him down again did he get relief.

"We must distinguish here between Bhuta Agni, the ethereal fire, and Jathara Agni, the digestive fire. Bhuta Agni is predominant; it is Bhuta Agni which causes Jathara Agni to become enkindled. Jathara Agni is in charge of physical digestion, and Bhuta Agni of mental digestion. When you take in new ideas you 'eat' them; Bhuta Agni 'digests' them so that you can comprehend them. A yogi who has good control over his digestive fire can afford to use his Surya Nadi in his sadhana because he will direct the energy to inflame Bhuta Agni alone, not Jathara Agni. Ordinary people who stimulate their systems with Surya Nadi will mainly increase Jathara Agni and weaken Bhuta Agni.

"The nadis meet and connect with one another at ethereal plexuses called

chakras. The chakras exist only in the subtle body and are perceptible only to the enlightened mind, but nowadays everyone who reads a few books writes about the chakras, parroting the Tantric descriptions without understanding the inner significance. Very few people have any idea at all of what they are writing. They talk about the chakras' shapes and colors and speak knowingly about the Sanskrit letters which are present at each chakra, when in fact the only letters that exist at any chakra are the ones you create yourself.

"I can tell you this, though; if you start meditating on your chakras directly you run a great risk of exciting the nerves and nadis in the area where you have been told the chakra is. For example, suppose some guru tells you, 'My boy, meditate on the Muladhara Chakra, which is at the perineum.' If you have not been thoroughly taught about the Muladhara Chakra, if you have not been told what to expect when you get there, most probably you will never locate the chakra; you will merely inflame the nerves in the perineum and intensify the force of *Apana* (the downward-moving form of prana). This will probably turn you into a sex maniac, or some other sort of maniac."

There are five varieties of prana in the body: *Prana*, which takes things in; *Apana*, which throws things out; *Samana*, which assimilates; *Vyana*, which circulates and distributes; and *Udana*, which expresses, especially in speech. (In this book "prana" [lowercase] refers to the generic life force and "Prana" [capital] that variety of prana which ingests.) Each of these forms appears in a different part of the body: *Udana* in the head, *Apana* in the pelvic region, and so on. Any obstruction to the free flow of these five pranas causes imbalance and disease.

"This is why a good guru is so important. When Kundalini begins to awaken, a tremendous rush of energy is released. Unless the guru is strong enough to control it the disciple will be overwhelmed with desires and will become strongly attached to worldly things, precisely because the chakras are still blocked. If your sex centers are inflamed, for example, you may become so infatuated with a woman that you will create a jigsaw puzzle to prove that a *rnanubandhana* (bondage of karmic debt) exists between you and her. Probably it does exist, to have caused the attraction in the first place; but it is all imagination until you can remember your past lives, which allows you to actually know the karmic ties.

"This distortion can happen with any of the lower chakras. You know, I believe, that the Tibetans spend their lives reciting 'Om mani padme hum,' which is meant for the Manipura Chakra, the seat of the Fire Element. The

vast majority of Tibetans are not perfected yogis, so the main effect of this mantra is to inflame the fire in their physical bodies. This is good for them because they live in a cold country and have very little food to eat, so a strong internal fire helps keep them warm. Those who have plenty of food available to them however tend to develop an obsessive desire for food. Even some good lamas become gluttons, thanks to overstimulation of the solar plexus.

"If lamas, who do plenty of hard penances, can fall despite all their precautions, what do you think could happen to you if you concentrate on the Manipura Chakra in a hot country, or in a country where you have plenty to eat? Probably you would go berserk and eat everything in sight, which would just bind you down tighter to the *samsara*, the universe of manifested existence."

"I see what you mean," I inserted, excited with a sudden realization. "Some Westerners who practice Tibetan Buddhism swear that their religion requires them to eat meat, but Buddhism believes in nonviolence, so that doesn't seem likely to me."

"It is absolutely ridiculous. They are not talking; their inflamed appetites, which crave the heaviness of meat, are talking. When you arouse Kundalini before your mind is firmly under control, she will very likely self-identify even more strongly with your limitations, which can wreak havoc with your evolutionary progress. A good guru will close the doors to the lowest three chakras so that the Kundalini can never fall back into them. Then there is very little danger; otherwise the disciple will be most likely overwhelmed with the desire for food, sleep, or sex.

## The Nine Chakras

"Most people will tell you there are six chakras. An Aghori will tell you there are nine. To understand this statement you must at least know the difference between a *nara* (man) and a *khara* (donkey). If you think this is a joking matter, it is because you are a *khara* yourself."

I had grinned at the comparison, and now I grinned at his affront. He snorted and went on.

"A *khara* believes only in the three lowest chakras, the chakras which are in charge of eating, procreating and excreting. The long penis of the donkey is a good symbol for those who have big appetites for worldly pleasure.

“When I told my Roshni (his foster daughter) that she needed to get married so that she could be well set in the world she told me in return, ‘How can you say such a thing to me when you know that the world is filled with kharas? Would you give your daughter away to a donkey? If you can find a nara for me then I will marry, otherwise the game is not worth the risk.’

“I was so pleased with her answer that I said, ‘All right, I will not even make you marry a nara; I will see that you marry Narayana directly.’

“A nara lives exclusively in the upper three chakras. Only a few naras exist in the world at any one time, and only a nara can become *Narayana*, God Himself, by going to the highest three chakras. The lower three chakras are for the mundane, the *adhibhautika*; the upper three are for the spiritual, the *adhyatmika*.

“The final three are for what is beyond both the physical and the spiritual. Some people call it the astral; in Sanskrit we call it the *adhidaivika*. These three chakras are within the head, and they permit the immortals to remain in their bodies, if they can retain Ma’s grace. These chakras are secret and cannot be described in the way the other six are. They are only experienced, and they can only be experienced after the Kundalini is fully awakened. Until then there is no use in even discussing them, but I will tell you their names: *Golata*, *Lalata*, and *Lalana*.

“The first of the six chakras which can be described is the *Muladhara*, in the perineum. Then comes the *Svadhishthana* in the pubic region, the *Manipura* at the navel, the *Anahata* near the heart, the *Vishuddha* in the throat, and the *Ajna* in the center of the forehead. From the *Ajna* one moves into the *Sahasrara*, which is not a chakra at all. You have heard all of this before, I believe?”

“Yes, I have.”

“So you know that each chakra has the form of a lotus of a particular color with a particular number of petals. Have you ever thought to ask, ‘Why a lotus? Why not another flower, or something besides a flower?’”

He had me there. “No, I have not.”

He smirked in triumph. “Well, the lotus is used as a symbol for purity because although it lives in mud it is not soiled by the mud but rises above it. Thus the analogy of the lotus of discrimination and the mud of *Maya*. But there is more.

“The lotus opens only when touched by the morning sun, and closes just as the sun sets. Likewise, the lotuses of the Six Chakras open only when the Kundalini Shakti is present within them; otherwise they remain closed. Also, even if the sun is shining a lotus will close if water is splashed on it.

You too must learn to be ‘like the lotus in the water’; you must close yourself to external influences to prevent the Three Gunas from disturbing you. Try this when you are full of shakti and see how hard it is.

“Each chakra has a different number of petals—four, six, ten, twelve, sixteen and two, in ascending order—because of the different modes of discrimination which pertain to that chakra. Each petal is a separate *Bija Mantra* (seed sound) for that particular chakra. By performing the appropriate ritual with that *Bija Mantra* the knowledge of that mode of discrimination is obtained.

“The *Sahasrara*, the ‘Thousand-Petaled Lotus,’ is at the top of the head. Although it is a lotus it is not really a chakra because there is no plexus of nadis there; there is only one nadi, which connects the *Sahasrara* with the *Ajna Chakra*.”

“Sort of like the stem of the lotus.”

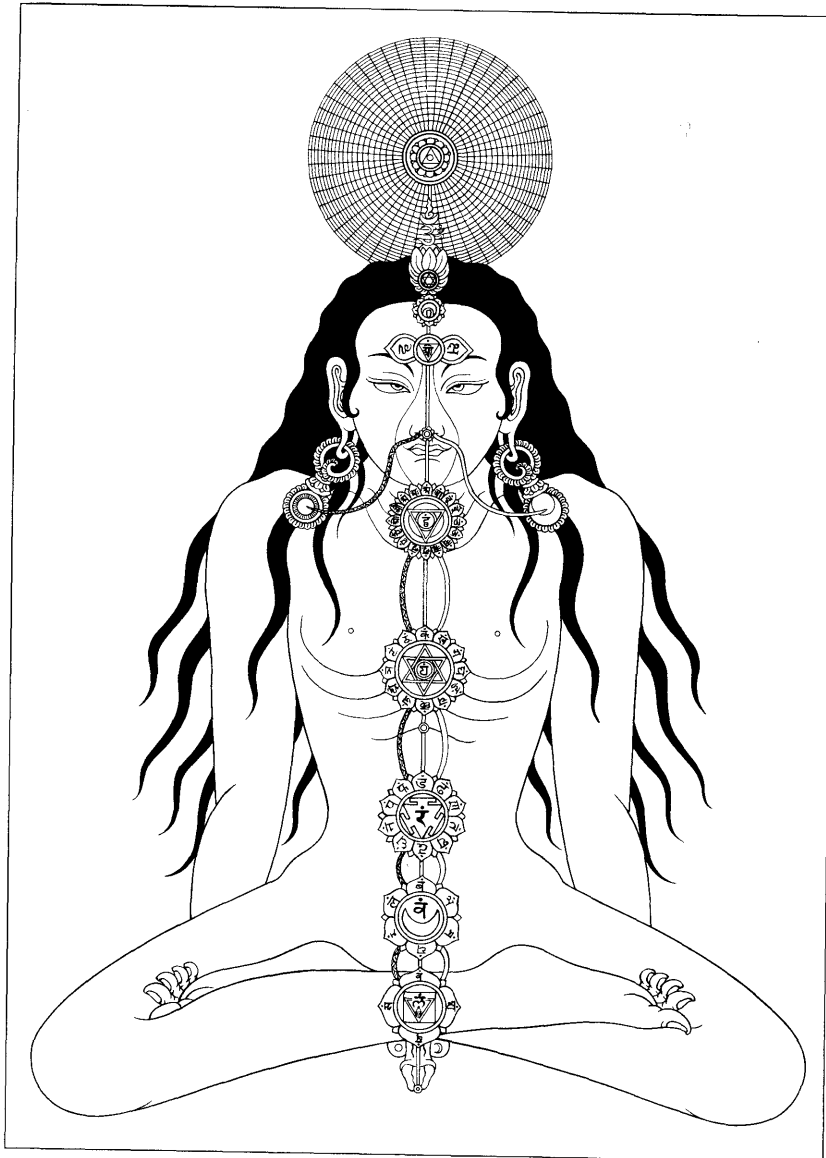
“Indeed. The lotus of the *Sahasrara* has the largest number of petals. The next largest number of petals is in the *Vishuddha Chakra*, which has sixteen. All of its *Bijas* are vowels, since vowels are the basis of vocalization, which has its origins in the throat, the location of the *Vishuddha Chakra*.

“Kundalini lies coiled like a snake in the *Muladhara Chakra*. She has three and a half coils: the three refers to the Three Gunas, and the one-half to the cobra’s mouth, the seat of ego. It is one-half because ego is Shakti, which is only half of Shiva, the Shaktiman or controller of Shakti. The purpose of Kundalini Yoga is to reunite Shiva and Shakti, to create the eternal form of Shiva, *Sadashiva*.

“*Sadashiva*’s left side is female and right side is male; the two principles have united but have not merged. If they were to merge that would be the end of the play, and that would be no fun at all. *Sadashiva* exists on the cosmic scale; in an individual this deity is called *Ardhanarishvara* (‘the Lord Who is Half Female’). In order to manifest *Sadashiva* the Kundalini must be made to rise fully, because the highest manifestation of Shiva in the human being is in the head, the highest part of the body.

“In an ordinary person Kundalini is asleep at the base of the spine, and so Shiva is bereft of Shakti. Such a person is not Shiva but merely *shava* (corpse). I look at everyone I meet as a skeleton because that is what they are; until a person’s Kundalini Shakti awakens and begins to dance on Her Shiva, that person is as good as dead.”





The Nadis and Chakras

Ascending through the center of the subtle body is the median Nadi of Sushumna (fire), to the left and right of which ascend the Chandra (moon) and Surya (sun) Nadis respectively. These channels are described as being a thousandth of the thickness of a hair. The lunar and solar nadis enter or unite with the Sushumna in the Muladhara chakra and ascend to the region of the Anja chakra where they then descend to the left and right nostrils, while the Sushumna rises to the Sahasrara chakra. From the two nostrils extend the channels of prana which carry the breath to the distance of twelve finger widths.

At the base of the Sushumna is the Muladhara chakra (perineum), in which Kundalini lies coiled and sleeping with her head sealing the bulb (Kanda) or entrance to the Sushumna. The Muladhara chakra is described as having four petals (plexus of nadis) and sealed with the square yellow element of earth. Above this is the Svadhithana chakra (pubic region), having six petals and sealed with the white half-moon of the water element. At the navel is the Manipura chakra of ten petals and sealed with the red triangle of fire. Near the heart is the Anahata chakra of twelve petals and sealed with the blue hexagram of air. At the throat is the Vishuddha chakra of sixteen petals and sealed with the white circle of the element space. At the center of the forehead is the Ajna chakra with two petals and sealed with none of the five gross elements, but with the subtle essence of Mind. At the crown of the head is Sahasrara, the brilliant thousand petalled lotus.

Each of the chakras is described as having various deities and bija syllables at their centers and on each of their petals. (It need hardly be said that it is not supposed that there are any actual lotuses or letters engraved thereon. These and other terms are employed to represent realities of yoga experience.—Arthur Avalon).

The three secret chakras of Golata, Lalata and Lalana are said to be located on the uvula at the back of the throat, above the Ajna chakra, and within the soft upper palate. Their main inner yoga practice is in Khacari Mudra, although Vimalananda possibly refers to a practice even beyond this. In Khecari Mudra the linguæ under the tongue is progressively severed and the tongue is gradually lengthened by stretching until it can extend to a point between the eyes. The tongue is then turned inwards and upwards to press on and enter the duct of "the two headed snake and seal the tenth door" within the cranial cavity above the soft palate. The pressure of the tongue on the "Ama Kala"—the receptacle of lunar nectar, causes the lunar nectar (*amrita*; *soma*) to flow downwards abundantly and permeate the entire body with supreme bliss. Attainment of Khecari Siddhi confers a divine body of immortality which is free from aging, corruption and disease, endowed with the eight great magical siddhis.

The "two headed snake" is the channel that extends from the back of the throat to the "moon" just above the Ajna chakra. The "tenth-door" is the tenth orifice or aperture of the body. The "Ama-Kala" is the true philosopher's stone of immortality.

## Raising Kundalini

I had to shake my head in appreciation and agreement, it was so true.

“To make Kundalini rise from the tip of the spine you must create enough pressure to force Her out of the Muladhara Chakra. The upward motion will continue only so long as the pressure remains; without it Kundalini drops back down to the bottom, due to gravity. Because humans stand erect, gravity acts only on the tip of the spinal cord, not on the whole thing as it does in other animals, whose spines are horizontal or nearly so. This is one reason why it is easier to awaken Kundalini in a human than in an animal.”

I wanted to ask how one goes about awakening Kundalini in an animal, but he wouldn't let me get a word in.

“You might wonder how Kundalini, an ethereal force traveling in ethereal nerves, can be affected by gravity. Well, gravity must also have an ethereal form, mustn't it? All the Five Great Elements have ethereal forms, and gravity is mainly due to the Earth Element. Ethereal gravity is in fact more difficult to overcome than physical gravity. Besides that, as long as Kundalini is asleep She is completely self-identified with the body, which includes the nervous system, so the effect of physical gravity on the nervous system will disturb any attempt to pry Her away from physical consciousness.

“You will never be able to raise Kundalini until you can control the movements of the prana in your body. Kundalini can only leave the Muladhara Chakra when Prana, which ordinarily moves upwards, is made to move downwards and Apana, which usually moves downwards, is made to move upwards. Only when Prana and Apana meet and their 'mouths' touch can Kundalini's upward motion begin.

“And just because you begin to feel some upward movement from the Muladhara does not mean that that chakra has been fully opened! When Kundalini leaves the Muladhara Chakra for good, She throws off all connection with the Earth Element, all the accretions of millions and millions of births. These pass through your consciousness on their way out, and you learn all about the Earth Element. Actually, this is just a review of everything you have learned about Earth in all your previous lives. When you gain full knowledge of the Earth Element you can be sure that the Muladhara has become fully activated, not before. When you finally relinquish the Earth Element you must also let go of acquisitiveness and greed, the emotions which are based there. Earth is the only solid element, the only thing you can 'hold on to.' When you give up needing to hold on to anything you can progress.

“After the Muladhara Chakra comes the Svadhishthana, the seat of the Water Element and of procreation. When Kundalini leaves the Svadhishthana for good the *sadhaka* (anyone who practices sadhana) learns everything about the Water Element. In each chakra you obtain full knowledge of the Element it represents, as all the accretions of past experiences are dredged up from your causal body. You must conquer lust, the instinctual drive to procreate, before you can move beyond the Svadhishthana.

“From the Svadhishthana Chakra, Kundalini moves up to the Manipura Chakra, the seat of the Fire Element, where metabolism takes place. The lowest three chakras are meant for the mundane world, physical existence. When asked about their future prospects Indians frequently say that it all depends on what is written in their fate, pointing to their foreheads where fate is supposedly written. But fate is not written on the forehead. Fate is simply the sum of all your past karmas, good and bad, and it is written in your three lowest chakras. Rnanubandhana is strongest here, because these chakras pertain to the Earth, Water, and Fire Elements, which possess physical form. Rnanubandhana is not so strong with Air and Ether, which have no form.

“The Manipura Chakra is really crucial. There you learn the difference between Jathara Agni and Bhuta Agni. Whenever Bhuta Agni is strong Jathara Agni must be weak, and vice versa. You only have a certain amount of fire in your system, and you have to choose how it will be used. To progress at sadhana a *sadhaka* must progressively convert Jathara Agni into Bhuta Agni.

“It is very nice for you to learn new things,” he said, looking pointedly at me, “but you must be in a position to digest what you learn. If you are not able to do so you will vomit back all the knowledge, which is shakti, and your last condition will be much worse than your first. When you try to take in too much energy before your Bhuta Agni becomes strong, much of that undigested energy gets converted into anger, the emotion that is characteristic of the Fire Element.

“The main reason for this indigestion is the element of doubt. Until your doubts are removed you will ask questions like, ‘Why should it be like this instead of that?’ whenever I tell you anything. Just experience it and you'll know about it; there's no other way. Without personal experience there just can't be firm understanding. This is another reason why I never teach anyone. How can I teach? People spend all their time trying to understand by asking questions, and most of them don't even know which questions to ask!”

I was on the point of asking a question, so I refrained.

“Why doesn’t anyone ask about *Granthi Bhedana*, the Piercing of the Knots which obstruct the free movement of Kundalini in the nadis? There are three principal knots: the Brahma Granthi, the Rudra Granthi and the Vishnu Granthi. Kundalini cannot be completely awakened until She pierces these knots.”

“Where are they?”

“Ah, now you ask!” He laughed. “We’ll talk about it sometimes.”

I suspected as much. “Some people blame almost all physical and mental diseases on ‘blocked chakras,’” I continued, “Does that have anything to do with these knots?”

“It does, but not in the way they think. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. The chakras exist in the subtle body, and their connection to the physical body is very subtle. It is true that both the physical and subtle plexuses may become blocked, but in most people the Kundalini is fast asleep in the Muladhara Chakra, and their chakras are absolutely closed and play no part in their day-to-day lives. It is because everyone’s chakras are blocked that Kundalini Yoga is so necessary. As long as you are full of attachments to life your consciousness will never be able to get close enough to any chakra even to smell its fragrance, much less experience it.

“But in a way what these people say is true: if you try to take on too much shakti before removing these knots, the shakti will get blocked along the way, and then either your nervous system will overload and collapse, or all the energy will be ‘vomited out’ into your system and you will go berserk. Shakti magnifies and expands everything, including especially attachments. You need good guidance at every step of the way or down you will go, dive-bombing back into the samsara.

“Above the Manipura Chakra is the Anahata Chakra, the first of the upper three chakras which are meant only for spiritual activities, like sacrifice. The Vedas enjoin the performance of sacrifice, and today many priests loot in the name of the Vedas, performing sacrifices without knowing why, just to make money. The Sanskrit word for sacrifice is *yajna*, which is a word of two syllables: *ya* and *jna*. *Jna* of course stands for spiritual wisdom (*jnana*); ‘*yam*’ is one of the chief Bija Mantras for the Anahata Chakra. This suggests that a *yajna* involves ethereal worlds, which is very true. In fact, one of the main purposes of a *yajna* is to feed and satisfy various ethereal beings with the fragrance of the smoke from the various burnt offerings. It also suggests that Bhuta Agni rather than the Jathara Agni is to be used in a *yajna*, and that only a person whose Bhuta Agni is truly enkindled can properly perform a *yajna*.

“When you move into the Anahata Chakra, the chakra of the Air Element, you learn all about ethereal beings, the ‘spirits of the air’ which move about just like the wind does. Anahata means ‘unstruck’; at the Anahata Chakra you begin to hear the *Anahata Nada*, the ‘sound which does not arise by striking.’ Associated with the Anahata Chakra, on the right side of the chest, there is a little organ referred to by its size: ‘the thumb-sized person.’ It is most useful; it acts as a universal translator. You can understand any language with its help because it provides a simultaneous translation into your own mother tongue. Language is sound, and sound moves in air; when you learn all about Air, you develop a comprehension which is good for all languages.

“From the Anahata Chakra the Kundalini moves into the Vishuddha Chakra. *Vishuddha* means ‘especially pure,’ and here you gain knowledge of the Ether Element, the subtlest and so purest of the Five Great Elements. You also go beyond the Six Tastes, since taste is only a permutation of the Five Elements in food. All that remains to obscure the Kundalini now are the Three Gunas. When Kundalini is in the Vishuddha Chakra your exhalation will move only two fingerbreadths beyond your nostrils, which indicates that your mind has become very calm. You’ve noticed, I presume, that in times of great anger, at the moment of orgasm, and in other intensely emotional situations your breathing becomes faster and more forceful, and your mind becomes more chaotic?”

I thought for a moment, and then said yes.

“Such breathing is useless for sadhana, for which you must have a conditioned mind. Yogis practice pranayama because they know that control of the breath causes control of the mind. The opposite is also true: whatever controls the mind controls the breathing.

“When your mind is well-conditioned, Kundalini will move from the Vishuddha Chakra into the Ajna Chakra, at the ‘third eye.’ Its lotus has only two petals, indicating only two Bija Mantras: one for Shakti and the other for Shiva. *Ajna* means ‘command.’ Here ‘ajna’ stands for ‘guru ajna,’ ‘instructions from the guru.’ Shiva is the world’s guru, and at the Ajna Chakra He can be clearly perceived.

“Do you know how the tribe of immortal beings known as *Naths* address the Kundalini Shakti? ‘Whore!’ Yes, ‘Whore!’ They say, ‘So, strumpet, You have been playing about with others! Now You come to me. You will never be allowed to flirt again!’ They mean that their individual shakti, which has been busy self-identifying with all sorts of external sensory objects under the delusion that She is the body, must be forcibly brought up into the Ajna

Chakra where She will have only one to self-identify with: Her Grand Consort, Lord Shiva.

“At the Ajna Chakra the breathing is almost completely stopped, because here the *Shunya* state (emptiness, nothingness) begins. In the Shunya state all names and forms become extinct, and all you are aware of is your own individuality; otherwise only the Void remains. Everything in the universe is contained in the Shunya state, in unmanifested form; you can no longer perceive it. Although people call the Shunya state the Void, it is not empty; it is full.

“As long as Kundalini is still concentrated in the lower chakras, even the Vishuddha, there is still danger of self-identification with the body. Once Kundalini rises above the Vishuddha Chakra there is no possibility of any mundane thought because there is no longer any *manubandhana*, any bondage of karmic debt. How can there be? You have gone beyond the Five Elements which compose the physical universe; no physical tie remains.

“When Kundalini moves from the Ajna into the Sahasrara the final shreds of identity are lost and the *sadhaka* merges completely with the Universal Soul. In the Ajna Chakra there is still duality—the *Ardhanarishvara* or *Sadashiva* form, Shiva and Shakti united in one body—but in the Sahasrara they merge completely. All differentiation is lost, and the result is *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, the *samadhi* (state of profound one-pointed consciousness) in which nothing is perceived except the Universal Soul. All determination and indecision drop away, all fluctuations of the mind disappear. You are finished! Gone to the land of no return!”

## Samadhi

“I have always said that life is a memory. There are actually two types of memory: conscious and unconscious. The conscious memory is very fickle and inconstant; it is directed outwards towards mundane objects, which are temporary and transitory but seem eternal to the ignorant mind. The unconscious memory is permanent; it has been collecting all your karmas from tens of millions of births without any lapse or distortion. So the unconscious memory is actually conscious, since it perfectly records everything that happens to you, and the conscious memory is actually unconscious. People say, ‘I did it because of the force of circumstance,’ when what they mean is that they were not conscious enough to remember not to yield to

the pressure of all the karmas encouraging them to do it.

“The result of the above is *Maya*. Through *sadhana* you can make the conscious memory truly conscious, and you can return the unconscious memory to unconsciousness. When these two merge, the result is the superconscious memory—the consciousness of reality—and in that state you exist in the causal body. Then you must go even further, from *vijnana* to *ananda*, the unlimited bliss of pure existence. When the last shred of ego is dissolved only awareness is left: *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*.

“Ordinarily no one ever comes back from *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. Once the Kundalini Shakti enters the *Muladhara Chakra* the entire Earth Element must be transformed before She can move to the *Svadhishthana Chakra*. If even a tiny bit of Earth remains untransformed there will be no further rise. She can remain partly awakened, but She will be unable to awaken completely. This is true for every chakra. When Kundalini finally reaches the *Sahasrara*, therefore, She has relinquished all connection to the Five Elements, and the soul can no longer remain in the mundane world, where you must be imperfect in order to survive.

“You cannot last for more than twenty-one days in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*; if you stay longer you can never return to your body. For the first twenty-one days you are in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* your body does not decay. Not one hair falls, no animal bothers it, no insect disturbs it. After that it begins to decay because the causal body ceases to exist. Without a causal body how can the subtle and physical bodies continue to exist? You have become desireless.

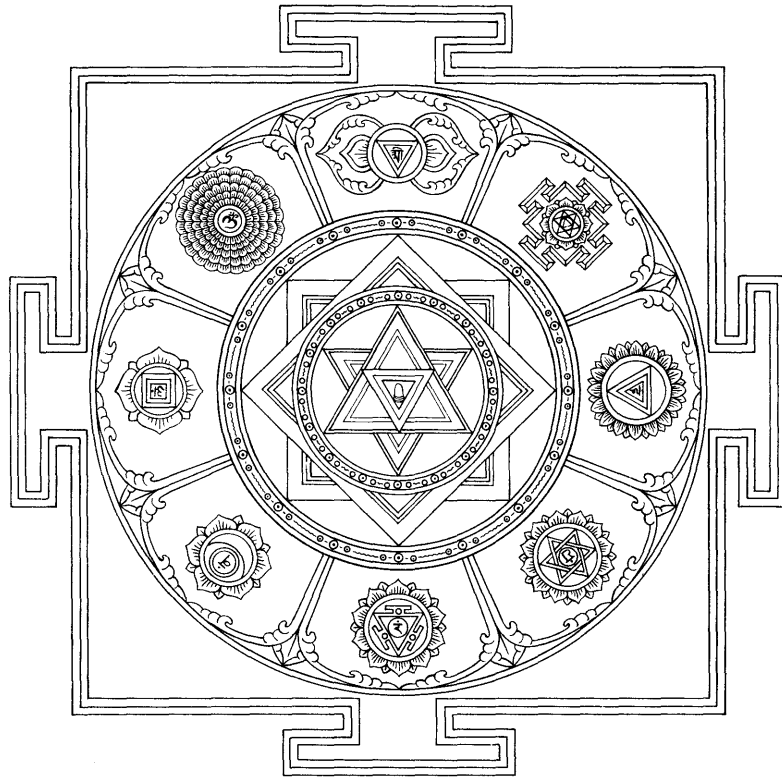
“You can return to Earth from *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* only if Nature has a mission for you. If that is the case, or if you get permission to return to Earth to conduct your own research or just to play about, then you must select some karmas with which to self-identify to enable you to drop back into your body. They may be karmas from a tree, or a rock, or any sort of being; but there is no other way to return. You are like an insect that has escaped its cocoon, a cocoon of karmas. Once a worm becomes a butterfly it cannot return to wormhood unless it takes on new karmas, like Jesus did.”

## Kula Kundalini

“If you hope to continue to exist after Kundalini is awakened completely you must be able to make Her go from the *Muladhara* to the *Sahasrara*, and then in the reverse direction, downwards from the *Sahasrara* to the

Muladhara, under perfect control. Prana and Apana are then perfectly united. Apana is represented as a downward-pointing triangle, and Prana as an upward-pointing one. Their union forms a six-pointed star.

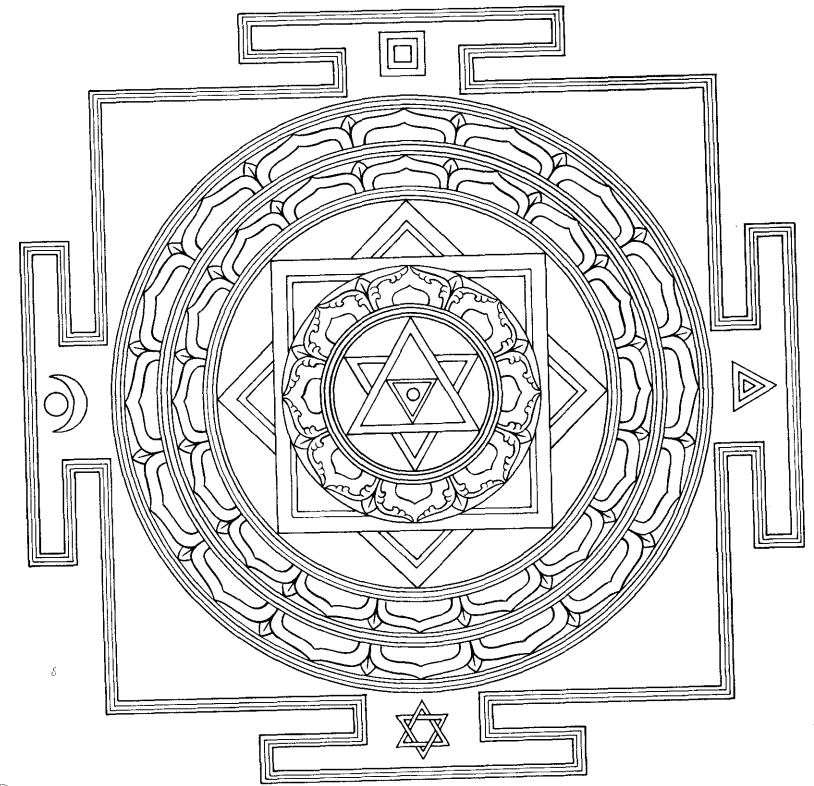
refers to 'form,' because the job of the Kundalini Shakti, the Supreme Consciousness, is to finitize, to give form and limits.



**Kundalini Yantra**

At the center of the yantra is the goddess Kundalini coiled around a linga within a downward pointing yoni triangle. This rests on two intersecting triangles placed over two intersecting squares, which represents the union of Kundalini Shakti with her Shiva. On the eight lotus petals are the six chakras, the Sahasrara and the yantra of Shiva and Shakti in union.

“We call this freed Kundalini by a special name: the *Kula Kundalini*. Like every Sanskrit word, the word *kula* has many different meanings. Its most important meaning here is ‘Supreme Consciousness of the Universe.’ It also



**Yantra of Shiva and Shakti**

“In the astral sense *kula* means ‘family.’ The *Kula Kundalini*, the Kundalini once She is uncoiled and straightened out along the Six Chakras, takes the form of the Goddess Who is meant to be worshipped by the family into which you have been born. Kundalini is by herself formless and pure, but when She moves through the body She must be qualified, possessed of attributes, so She takes the form of one of the Great Goddesses and guides you. The particular form She takes is determined by your ancestry. Then you realize why you were born into a particular family, which allows you to understand your karmic debts, which in turn gives you knowledge of your past births.

“Take my own deity, Smashan Tara, for example. The word *tara* comes from a root, meaning among other things to swim. You know that when you swim you must remove all your clothes. To swim across the ocean of *samsara* you must remove all the ‘clothes’ of your attachments. This is one reason why Tara is always shown naked except for severed arms and heads, which represent the karmas and emotions that ‘clothe’ you, preventing you from seeing Her in Her full, unalloyed purity and beauty. Tara is meant to be worshipped only by the select few who need to worship Her to fulfill their destinies. Only they are fit to worship Her; only they can succeed.

“If this sounds complicated,” and he could see that it did, “it is because it has a lot to do with your heredity and the state of your consciousness. As long as your ego self-identifies with your body your consciousness resides in your brain and is affected by the chemical environment there, which is influenced by the tastes in your diet and by the hormones produced by the brain cells. The hormonal pattern is determined by your genes and chromosomes, which are in turn determined by your ancestors.

“You told me a few days back that scientists have discovered a gene which produces a protein which causes depression. These scientists have a long way to go yet; they will find that many previously unsuspected things are included in our hereditary material. One of the main differences between ordinary humans and Rishis is that Rishis can play about with genes and chromosomes, and we humans cannot.

“Your genes and chromosomes determine which *rasas* you can manufacture yourself and which you have to imbibe from the world. When I say *rasa* (flavor) I mean both the physical tastes of your food and your emotional ‘tastes’ and tendencies. If your guru gives you the correct form of Ma to worship you can, by obtaining Her Shakti, perfect your personality, which involves bringing your brain chemistry into perfect balance. Then it becomes very easy to merge with the infinite.”

“Does *Rasa Vidya* (Tantric alchemy), which I have been studying in Ayurveda, also help do this?”

“Of course! That is the whole purpose of *Rasa Vidya*. *Rasa Vidya* is a *sadhana* by means of which you gain control over your *rasa*, and transmute it into *Maha Rasa*, a transcendental flavor, within you.”

Oh my. “No one talks about this at the Ayurvedic college,” I complained.

“No one knows about the real *Rasa Vidya* over there, my boy,” he said, and returned to making his point. “The followers of Tantra who perform this practice of making Kundalini into Kula Kundalini are called *Kaulas*. When the ordinary *sadhaka*’s Kundalini is awakened the experience is so over-

whelming that Nirvikalpa Samadhi is followed by cessation of individual existence. But with Ma’s grace Kaulas deliberately come down to duality again and remain in those final three chakras that I mentioned earlier: Golata, Lalata, and Lalana. What they do there I can’t tell you, but think about this: Krishna lived as a cowherd in Gokula—*go* + *kula*, the ‘family of cows’—when He was young, and He herds the ‘cows’ (sense organs) of those of His devotees who reach Him in Goloka. The head is a Gokula itself, a ‘family of sense organs.’ Goloka cannot be described; it can only be experienced, in one of these chakras.

“After you become Kaula, *abhisheka* (ritual initiatory bath) is performed on you to make you *Maha Kaula*. But mind you, you become eligible for *abhisheka* only when you surrender yourself completely to your guru. Only when you are completely empty can you be filled with shakti. The liquid used for *abhisheka* is first charged with mantric energy, so this *abhisheka* is a kind of *Shaktipat Diksha*, initiation by transfer of shakti, and it permanently alters your personality. In India a king (*raja*) used to be given a *Raja Abhisheka* in order to fill him with sufficient shakti to govern well. This practice was not limited to India, mind you: Jesus’s baptism by John the Baptist was a kind of *abhisheka*, as was the ancient Hebrew practice by which kings were anointed by prophets.

“When the Kundalini of a *Maha Kaula* is completely awakened he becomes *Maha Atharvan*. *Maha* means ‘great,’ ‘immense,’ ‘cosmic’; *Maha Atharvan* is he who has gone beyond the limitations of the Atharva Veda, which is the source of Tantra. As I tell you constantly, the results you can achieve with the Vedas and Aghora are exactly the same; only the paths differ.

“In spite of all this explanation you may still wonder, ‘Just what exactly is the Kundalini Shakti?’ Shakti is shakti, whether it is the Kundalini Shakti, Chit Shakti, Maya Shakti, or some other shakti. Energy is energy. Einstein tried for twenty-five years to prove it with a Unified Field Theory, but he couldn’t do it because he didn’t look deep enough. He was stuck in the physical universe. To fully understand the Kundalini Shakti, you must go beyond Her external manifestations, for which *sadhana* is necessary.



## Comment

## The Snake

As Joseph Campbell documents in his book *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, the force that the Tantras call Kundalini has been represented as a serpent in many world cultures, including the Sumerian, Chinese, ancient Irish, Aztec and Greek (the *caduceus*). Images of Kundalini as the Serpent Power predominantly reflect Her power of possessiveness, of Maya. Indian cosmology describes seven netherworlds beneath the surface of the earth in which dwell *asuras* (the “selfish” or “jealous” gods) and *nagas* (semi-divine snake beings). In the microcosm the ‘surface of the earth’ is the Muladhara Chakra; ‘dwelling beneath the earth’s surface’ means living wholly in objective reality, within the realm of Maya, which is the skin of the universe.

So long as ahamkara predominates within you, Kundalini exists for you as a snake. After Kundalini has been awakened and controlled, the once deadly snake turns protector. Vimalananda explains:

“Snakes are usually poisonous, and as long as your ego, which is a fragment of the Kundalini Shakti, self-identifies with your body and your limited personality you will be full of the poison of the samsara, which is the poison of selfishness. Once Kundalini frees herself of all limitations, that poison is transmuted into *Amrita*, the nectar of immortality. The Jain religion talks about Twenty-Four *Tirthankaras*, or ‘Ford-Makers.’ A *Tirthankara* is one whose Kundalini has successfully passed through all Six Chakras (24 = 2 + 4), who learned how to ford the river of samsara, to pass over from imperfection to perfection, the other shore of existence.

“In Jain iconography some *Tirthankaras* are always represented with a serpent hooding their heads. That serpent is a symbol for Kundalini, the Serpent Power, and the fact that it is above their heads shows that their Kundalinis have entered the Sahasrara. The serpent acts as an umbrella for the *Tirthankara*; here, an umbrella indicates protection. Such beings are protected from pollution by reason of their fully awakened Kundalinis. The snake above the head of the *Tirthankara* has filled that *Tirthankara* with *Amrita*, and if you follow him you can obtain that same *Amrita*, as well as the bliss of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. Sometimes you see Buddha depicted with a snake as well; the meaning is the same. And Vishnu, of course, sleeps on *Shesha Naga*, the Cosmic Serpent.”

Although the snake is regarded as demonic in the mainline Judeo-Christian tradition, the Gnostics believed that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was trying to free Adam and Eve from bondage to a limited world-god and to give them knowledge of the Absolute. Vimalananda, who refused to entertain the concept of Original Sin, also regarded the story of Adam and Eve as a Kundalini myth, a representation of the descent of consciousness into matter. Because Kundalini’s self-identification with matter is essential for embodied life, Vimalananda argued that Adam and Eve first had to leave the Garden of Eden that they might eventually consciously return to the perfected state.

Jesus Himself used snake imagery when in conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:14) He likened Himself to the serpent of bronze elevated by Moses in the wilderness (Numbers 21:5–9), and Campbell’s book reproduces a striking image, possibly originating from the ‘ophitic’ tradition (*ophis* = serpent in Greek), of Christ-as-Serpent on the cross flanked by the two thieves. It does not seem unreasonable to draw a parallel between this image and that of Sushumna, filled with Shakti, flanked by the Chandra and Surya Nadis.

Another implication of Kundalini as serpent: as long as She sleeps, you and your temporary personality can remain ignorant and healthy, but once you rouse Her from Her slumber you must either digest Her venom or die; there is no other alternative. Only if you are ready for such a jolt, as Moses was, will you survive Her. In Biblical times it is said that a priest would enter the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem once yearly, bells on the hem of his robe and a rope tied around one leg. An unconsecrated priest would not survive; the bells would testify to this calamity, and his body would then be dragged out with the rope. Some would say that God killed him, when in fact he had killed himself by pouring God’s Shakti into his unprepared nervous system.

## The Chakras

Even though the chakras of the subtle body have been identified by other cultures, such as the ancient Egyptian and the Navajo, they have never been directly introduced into popular religion, for good reason. Having our Kundalinis unawakened and our chakras closed is a form of protection; existence is possible for embodied beings solely because their chakras are

normally blocked. In fact, many Kundalini-generated disorders are due not to the blockage of a chakra but to the *lack* of blockage thereof. The delusion that the chakras are the cause of physiological imbalances stems from the confusion that exists between the chakras themselves and the other structures that exist in association with them. The chakras mentioned above, the Muladhara and the rest, function only when Kundalini moves within them; at all other times what functions are their corresponding but more superficial structures. Arthur Avalon comments that:

... from an objective standpoint the subtle centres, or Cakras, vitalize and control the gross bodily tracts which are indicated by the various regions of the vertebral column and the ganglia, plexuses, nerves, arteries, and organs, situate in these respective regions. It is only therefore (if at all) in the sense of being the gross outer representatives of the spinal centres that we can connect the plexuses and so forth with the Cakras spoken of in the Yoga books. In this sense only the whole tract, which extends from the subtle centre to the periphery, with its corresponding bodily elements, may be regarded as the Cakra. (*The Serpent Power*, pp. 161–2)

The chakras are the knots that bind ahamkara into self-identification with the substances that make up the universe. Each of the lower five chakras is the place where ahamkara and one of the Elements meet and interact; the chakra plugs ahamkara into the frequency of that Element, in effect broadcasting that Element into the organism's consciousness.

Ahamkara continues to recognize and manipulate that Element within the body only as long as this connection remains intact. Conscious effort to open the chakras, such as visualizing them and repeating their Bija Mantras, may cause one or more of them to open prematurely, which will disrupt ahamkara's ability to manipulate that Element within the organism. Once these knots are untied it is as difficult to retie them while cosmic energy is flooding the system as it is to mend a hole in a dam while millions of tons of water are trying to flow out through it. It is always preferable for the chakras to open on their own when they are ready to open, which happens once Kundalini's three coverings have been removed through sadhana.

## Kula Kundalini

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of the book of I Samuel describe the capture by the Philistines and the eventual return to Israel of the Ark of the

Covenant. While it is difficult to draw direct correlations between otherwise unrelated ancient cultures, it is striking to note that during the period that the Philistines possessed the Ark the idol of their god Dagon was mysteriously toppled and disfigured, and the entire population was struck low with hemorrhoids. It would certainly seem that neither the Philistines nor their god could digest the Ark's shakti. When they consulted their diviners they were told to return the Ark to Israel with a trespass offering consisting of five golden hemorrhoids and five mice, also made of gold. Is it a coincidence that hemorrhoids appear in the physical body near the location of the Muladhara Chakra, or that the mouse is the vehicle of Ganesha, the Lord of the Muladhara? Or does this imagery reflect similar subtle realities?

*Siddhi* means success at sadhana. While a "siddha" is technically anyone who succeeds at sadhana, Vimalananda used the word *Siddha* exclusively to mean one who has achieved immortality and supernatural powers as a result of sadhana. The freeing of Kula Kundalini is a sort of siddhi, though it may not necessarily make one immortal.

*Kula*, which also means "totality," "the giving up of egoism," and 'the road of Sushumna,' is Shakti, the manifested universe, while *Akula*, Shiva, is the Absolute Unmanifested. A Kaula maintains that since Shiva without Shakti is inert, and may not even exist, the two are perforce equal in our world. In the human body as in the universe, consciousness may come down from on high, but it must be manifested from the bottom up; Adam and Eve must leave the Garden if the world is to flourish. Creation occurs when Kundalini projects from Akula into Kula, and destruction when She returns to Akula. It is in this context that Kundalini is called a harlot, because She alternates between union with creation and union with Shiva. Unless your Kundalini is under your conscious control these two states fluctuate so fast that they seem to exist simultaneously.

Vimalananda's reference to "the family into which you have been born" is not limited to one's consanguinous family:

"Yoga is meant to make every home a happy home. When every family member is giving out his or her best to unite the family and make it a success, that is real Yoga. And I don't mean the family you were born into or married into, necessarily. Whoever you live with is your family. As we say in Sanskrit, "vasudeva kutumbam"—we are all members of God's family." (*Aghora*, page 43)

The idea of a "kula" as a family of like-minded sadhakas who after reforming their errant Kundalinis follow similar paths toward Reality may have been inspired by the Vedic idea of *gotra*, or lineage. A gotra is a cowpen, a



“protection for the cows”; because a group of families from a single lineage used to protect its cows together in a single pen, the word came to refer to the lineage itself. *Gotra* also means “protection for the senses”; each *gotra* originated from a Rishi, its members sharing genes and chromosomes which would enable them to easily succeed at a particular variety of *sadhana*. Perhaps as time passed it became more difficult to transmit one’s spiritual lineage directly to one’s child via the *gotra* system and so the *kula* system arose. Only a few genealogical families in India have preserved their spiritual lineages; most teachers, like Vimalananda, find that their spiritual children come to them from other biological parents.

## PRELIMINARIES

Not long after I met him, Vimalananda suggested changes in my eating habits to address the dysentery which tormented me periodically ever since I had been in Africa. Once I had adjusted to a strict regimen limited primarily to milk—a diet which I was proud to share with the Masai—I realized that his purposes were not limited to the merely medical.

One day when he asked me how I was enjoying such fare I replied, “Just fine, thank you, and not so hungry as I was before.”

He smiled knowingly.

“Was that,” I went on, “part of the plan?”

Smiling more knowingly, he nodded corroboration.

“There are many ways to apply pressure to Kundalini to encourage Her to move upward,” he began. “Certain *asanas* (Yoga postures), some of which you know—”

He paused and I interjected: “—and practice—”

He continued: “—can help, especially those in which the Muladhara Chakra is firmly pressed with the foot. You understand why, I think?”

“They prevent the downward movement of Apana.”

“Exactly: they help Apana to rise. Since Apana is that form of prana which is in charge of excretion, however, constipation is likely to occur, which may unbalance your system. Have you noticed this?”

“I have, when I overdo those *asanas*,” I replied sheepishly.

He smiled again. “Yes, like me you have a tendency to overdo things. To prevent disease, though, you must avoid doing anything that might aggravate Apana while you are trying to make Kundalini rise, especially because of your history of dysentery. By reducing your food you reduce the volume of urine and feces, and therefore limit the harmful effects of the constipation. By reducing or eliminating sex you prevent the discharge of semen or vaginal fluid, both of which requires strong downward movement of Apana.” I was at that time sexually chaste.

“Reducing your sleep is also important. I had to learn the effects of sleeplessness when I was in training to become an Aghori. My guru sneered at me and said, ‘You think you can stand the strain? Try it.’ After two days without sleep *bandha kosktha*, the state of absolute constipation, began. I can’t describe the agony. I started to bleed, and fissures developed. But I was obstinate and went beyond it.

“Ordinary Kundalini Yoga is difficult enough, but an Aghori makes it even more intense. Do you know how you feel when you are full of lust? You can’t wait to enjoy sex; you will rip off your own clothes, and then rip the clothes off your partner. Likewise an Aghori, filled with the desire to experience Reality, rips the coverings, the clothes, off the universe when he wishes to love it. If you really want to progress at Kundalini Yoga you must forget your body, that thing which is clothing your consciousness, and to do that you must first forget food and water. After three days without water you begin to feel dizzy, your blood thickens, and so on. After five days you begin to gasp, and unless you are really dedicated you will decide you don’t want to die, and you’ll drink. Aghora is the fast, direct way, but it is too difficult for most people.

“If you don’t want to force yourself to quit eating, and want to progress by stratagem instead, which is the way of the clever *sadhaka*, you must first understand the nature of food. To do this you must first thoroughly understand the nature of the Three Coverings of the universe, which are—?”

“The Three Gunas, the Six Tastes and the Five Great Elements.”

“The Six Tastes are within the body, not outside. Have they taught you this yet in the Ayurvedic college?”

“They have alluded to it.”

“Oh, they have *alluded* to it, have they? Anyway, if you want to do do without food and drink entirely and live only on air you must manufacture all the tastes within the body; then there is no need to take them from outside. Amrita, the ‘nectar of immortality,’ is a glandular substance created within the body which is necessary for this purpose.”

That too had been alluded to in Ayurveda, with little explanation.

“We exist only because of the Three Gunas: Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas. Most people do not know that Sattva and Tamas are two sides of the same coin. Sattva is Amrita, which is of the essence of the Fire Element. The Amrita in your head, this glandular substance, is a physical manifestation of pure Sattva. Tamas is Visha, deadly poison, which is of the essence of Water Element. The metabolic toxins in your body poison both it and your mind. When you remove the bad qualities from poison it becomes nectar, and if you add bad qualities to nectar it will become poison. Ayurveda is full of examples of how poisonous plants and minerals can be used for medicine, and of how improperly used medicines act as poisons. I believe I am correct?”

“Yes, you are.”

“Rajas is the bridge between the two. Rajas can transmute Tamas into Sattva, and it can degrade Sattva into Tamas. Rajas is pure shakti, energy, the very incarnation of illusion, of Maha Maya. Rajas does not know what it is doing; it just does it, so it must be well controlled. When Rajas is properly controlled almost anything can be achieved. And the only being Who knows how to control Shakti is Shaktiman: Lord Shiva.

“The name *Rudra*, which is another name for Lord Shiva, indicates the shedding of tears. Rudra brings you nothing but tears, but there is a big difference in ordinary and extraordinary tears. Before the Rudra Granthi is pierced the *sadhaka* sheds tears of misery, of Maya, because he cannot be sure of himself, or of the existence of God. This doubt continues until that Knot is pierced, when all doubt is removed. The glands of the body then begin to secrete Amrita; they ‘shed tears.’ This Amrita causes the devotee to shed tears of joy.

“Shiva drinks poison, but He converts it into Amrita. In order to do this you must know the relation between *visha*, which is poison, and *vishaya*, which means sense object. The world of sense objects is the true poison because it is impermanent. People fleetingly regard it as permanent, and this leads to delusion. During sex, for instance, a man feels, ‘Oh! What bliss I am enjoying!’ But suddenly, *pfsst!*—emission. Then he realizes, ‘No, it is no longer there.’ His dream construction of heaven has evaporated.

“Everything Shiva takes in is converted into Amrita, which is called Amrita because it is permanent, not transitory. And that is why it is connected only with Lord Shiva, Who is your real Self, your soul. As long as you are in the world your consciousness is connected with sense objects; it is the state of transience, of ignorance. Only when you come to Shiva can you find Amrita.

“To obtain Amrita the grace of your guru is also necessary, at the very end when you are just on the threshold of progress. It is like a Rishi’s goat sacrifice. The Rishi who kills the goat will send it into a higher womb, but the goat doesn’t know that and feels great pain at first. The sadhaka who wants to do without food also suffers, but a good guru is relentless, and finally the Amrita is obtained. The disciple goes beyond food and becomes a Siddha, an immortal.”

Which of course was a secret ambition of mine at the time, as Vimalananda knew. I listened more carefully.

“This is the fast way of doing things, but even if the disciple is not tough enough to become an Aghori and do fast and terrible sadhanas he can still learn to do without food. First the guru will allow the boy to eat whatever he likes for a short time. When his major cravings have been placated his diet will be restricted. Naturally the boy will still occasionally feel hungry in spite of himself. Since this is not his fault, though, the guru will make him fall asleep, even for a few moments, when this happens. The disciple will be overpowered with an irresistible urge to sleep, and the sleep will make him forget his hunger.”

Here he threw me such a mischievous sidelong glance that I burst out laughing. I have long been notorious for dozing off in any position, but during this stage in my life it had become almost a daily affair, and observers had been kidding me about it. So he was behind it all!

Vimalananda began to chuckle too, and then continued as soon as the mirth died away: “A hungry man usually cannot sleep; hunger and sleep are opposites, and opposites can be very useful. After a few days of occasionally uncontrollable sleep the disciple’s system will adjust to the new diet. He will continue at that plateau for awhile until he is completely established in it, and then there will be further restrictions and further periods of adjustment. Finally the goal is reached.”

I couldn’t resist: “Am I going to be falling asleep at lunchtime for several years now?”

“It might take that long, you know. Success at this method is still far off, for you or anyone else, especially nowadays during Kali Yuga when almost all of our prana comes from food. There is another way: you continue to eat, but you lose all your taste for food. This is the way of Aghora.

“Actually, to do this you must lose your taste for all sense objects, because sense objects can disturb your consciousness. Because we are living in Kali Yuga, the age in which almost all of our prana comes from food, you cannot expect your mind to be pure if your food is impure. Your consciousness is a

chemical phenomenon which exists at the mercy of the chemical composition of your diet.

“The food you eat can definitely disturb your sadhana; so can the water you drink, and the air you breathe. This is why Tantra lays such stress on the purification of the Elements that make up your body. Even if you have to start out with materials which are polluted by the desires and attachments of others, you can still use them safely after they have been purged of all these negative influences. This is why an Aghori can use either sewage or Ganges water for his rituals; he converts both into the same pure substance. How else do you think Telang Swami could dare to worship Kashi Vishwanatha with his own urine and feces?”

Good question. Vimalananda had already told me some stories about Telang Swami, the Pride of Benaras; some of these appear in *Aghora*.

“Other things beside food affect us, I suppose?”

“Everything affects us. Take my Roshni. She is very lucky to be able to wear my mother’s bangles. My mother wore them for sixty-five years, during which all day long she would recite the mantra her guru had given her. It is no wonder that Roshni’s mind has become so clear since she began to wear them, since bangles are worn on the wrist where certain important nadis are present. If I were to make Roshni wear her own mother’s bangles you would see in a few days’ time how her mind would become prejudiced and dull. I would caution you therefore not to wear any jewelry unless you know its antecedents.”

Point taken. “Of course, the fact that the bangles are gold has some effect, doesn’t it? I mean, if they had been made of steel she would not have got the same result, would she?”

“No,” he replied, “they would have had a different effect. Wearing iron or steel bangles prevents you from being possessed by certain classes of lower spirits, but they also dull your mind. Anything you wear will affect your consciousness according to the innate qualities of the material it is composed of. But more important than the ornament itself are the vibrations attached to it. My mother recited mantras all day long, and the vibrations of those mantras penetrated her bangles through and through. *That* is why her bangles are valuable, not because they are made out of gold. They would be valuable if they were made out of clay. This goes for any ornament, any article of clothing, *anything* that you use, but the effect is more for food because the food goes inside you and becomes part of you.

“And that also applies to the place where the food is grown. Did you know that the very ground on which Bombay is built is cursed? Yes, the

ground itself is cursed, which means that the very gravity of Bombay affects the minds of everyone who stays here. And since this curse is present in the ground, any food that is grown here and any water that is taken from here transmits those negative vibrations into anyone who consumes them. One effect of this curse is that everyone who comes to Bombay forgets all sense of morality and immediately thinks of how to earn money as fast as possible, even by selling his grandmother if necessary.”

A thought-provoking concept. “And this effect is independent of what you mentioned before about the pollution that comes from the desire and attachment of others?”

## Food

“Yes, that is a separate thing, but it is still the same principle: the food acts as a carrier, a *via media*, for whatever vibrations are added to it. Remember that Shaktipat Diksha can be given with water, or with some other substance that the disciple ingests. Every time you eat something, you are imbibing unaware all sorts of vibrations, all sorts of shaktis, some of which may be very unbalancing to your system.

“Old-timers in India complain about the quality of the food being produced in the country today, and there is a lot of truth in these complaints. In the past the grains of wheat, for example, were small but heavy, and one *roti* (whole-grain tortilla) would satisfy you more than three rotis made from today’s over-fertilized large, light grains. Back then there was less food, true, but people ate better.

“There are at least six faults in the food we eat today. The first fault comes from the farmer who is greedy for a better price for his crop and so adds plenty of fertilizer, with results as we have noted. The grain acts as a vehicle to transmit his greed to us.

“This greed is compounded by the middleman who buys from the farmer. He cheats the farmer with adulterated weights—the second fault—and then adds chaff or filth to the product to increase his profit when he sells it to a merchant, which is the third fault. The shopkeeper himself is the cause of the fourth fault, because he cheats on his measures when he sells to the public.

“The fifth fault comes from the cook, who is in a hurry to go do something else and so does not approach the food with the proper reverence.

Eating home-cooked food is still better than eating in a restaurant, though; a restaurant cook is a paid hireling who cares nothing whatever about your health. If he is angry with his boss for low wages no one knows what he may add to your food!

“The sixth fault occurs when the eater of the food forgets to offer thanksgiving to the Creator of the food before it is eaten. With all these faults is it any wonder that food is no longer as nourishing as it once was? This is the effect of Kali Yuga.”

This was a new idea to me, this idea that one’s thoughts and desires project onto and “stick to” one’s possessions, or the things one wants to possess. I did not quite understand why this should be so characteristic of Kali Yuga, but I knew Vimalananda would tell me about it eventually if I simply expressed the thought, so I did not interrupt his soliloquy.

“I always prefer simple food,” he went on, “because you can taste it, or even look at it, and very easily know exactly what the cook was thinking about it when he or she was cooking it. So you immediately have some idea of what is going on in the household, because those thoughts are carried to you through the vehicle of the food. This is why it is so important to be choosy about whose food you are willing to share. You don’t want nasty thoughts ruining your own consciousness, do you? Definitely not, if you are trying to perform some *sadhana*.

“This is one reason why it is generally best to be vegetarian if you want to do any serious *sadhana*; it makes your mind much clearer. The violence involved in killing animals gets transmitted to your consciousness when you eat their flesh. People who want to justify the murder of animals say, ‘But plants are alive too. Don’t you kill and eat them?’ To which I answer, ‘Yes, they are alive, and they feel pain when they are chopped for the pot.’ Whenever I hold a cabbage in my hand I think, ‘Oh, Ma, now I am going to cut you. Don’t worry, it won’t hurt for long, and I will take care of you.’”

I had to smile, for I had seen him do this so many times that I had also taken up the habit. Vimalananda’s ready love and compassion for all things, even empty matchboxes and flaking paint, was so natural, so real and so sincere, that it was difficult not to follow his example.

“The point is that plants have less power of expression than animals, so less karma is involved in eating them. The curse that they give you for eating them is milder than the curse an animal gives you for killing it.

“Another problem with meat eating is that meat is flesh, after all, and when you make your *Jathara Agni* identify with flesh in order to digest it you encourage your *ahamkara* to self-identify more strongly with your own flesh,

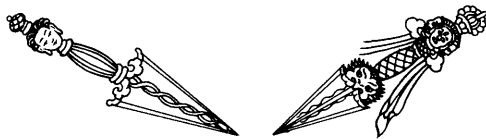
which will not help you in disentangling Kundalini from Her bindings. Plants at least provide less for ahamkara to self-identify with. Yes, meat is sometimes used in the Tantric ritual known as the Panchamakara Sadhana, but that is something different altogether.”

“What is it?”

“It’s something else entirely, which I will tell you about later. For now, think about food. The best way to avoid all the negative influences in our food is to do without it altogether. To do this you must proceed stepwise: first you become a vegetarian, then you limit yourself to roots and fruits, then to milk alone. Milk is freely offered by the cow, and it transmits some of her maternal love to the drinker; this is the real reason yogis like to drink milk. Eventually you move on to water alone, and finally to air. Those who live on air alone get their prana directly from the atmosphere. They do not use their mouths to eat; they eat with every pore of their bodies. But it is essential for them to get sunlight, just as it is for plants.”

“Oh. Another reason why the Rishis worship the sun,” I hazarded.

“Yes. A Rishi does Gayatri and exists on the energy of the sun alone. But that is too far ahead. Ordinary people like you and me must eat. And now I’m hungry, so let’s eat!”



Vimalananda always preferred to cook his own food, to protect the purity of his consciousness. His food was always cooked to perfection, light and easy to digest, and a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach. Before long I was spending quite a lot of time in the kitchen. Soon he began to teach me to cook in his own unique style, although because of my dietary restrictions, only rarely did I eat anything that he or I cooked. Several of his officious friends made wailing noises about “how hungry poor Robby must be,” but I like dairy products and did not miss eating ordinary food very much. Vimalananda would sometimes tell me, after such a busybody had left, “Such people go out of their way to show how much they care for you, but they don’t really care; this is just a ploy to make you think more highly of them. It’s all superficial, just a sophisticated frothy bubble.” I knew he was right, so I ignored them and continued to relish my culinary duties.

One afternoon after tea, when the topic turned again to food and its faults, and I asked again how to prevent them from affecting me, hoping for a new angle on the subject, Vimalananda launched into an explanation of how to purify the Five Great Elements that make up the body. Characteristically he began by considering the most extreme of the purification methods: Panchamakara. As soon as he mentioned Panchamakara my ears awakened, for he had referred to it obliquely on more than one occasion without elaborating, knowing that I would be especially attentive when he did finally explain it to me.

## Panchamakara

“You know, the whole purpose of Tantra is to free us from all limitations. The world is full of negative influences that limit our consciousnesses, and one of the greatest of these limitations is that of the Five Great Elements which make up the universe. If you can purify these Elements within you you can free yourself from their influence, and then your Kundalini will be free to rise unimpeded. As I have told you before, Bhuta Shuddhi is the essence of Tantra. All *puja* (ritual worship) is really Bhuta Shuddhi, and it is impossible to worship Shakti unless you use representatives of the Five Elements in some form or another to help purify those very Elements.

“The simplest possible puja, one which is performed by tens of millions of people daily, involves offering to God flowers, to represent the Ether Element, incense for the Air Element, a lamp for Fire, food for Water, and sandalwood paste, or another fragrant unguent, for Earth.

“Panchamakara also uses representatives of the Five Elements, but they are different from the ones that most people use. Panchamakara means ‘the Five Ms’: *mamsa*, *matsya*, *mudra*, *madira*, and *maithuna*. Normally these are translated meat, fish, parched grain, wine, and sexual union, and one of the reasons Tantra has a bad name today is that people have read or heard about this ritual and believe that you must be a drunken carnivorous libertine in order to be a Tantric. Ha!

“The people who babble on about such things don’t understand what they are saying. It is so typical. Think of this: How many Catholics have ever considered that by eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking His blood, as they say they do during their communion, they have become cannibals? If you love Jesus, can you ever think of eating his flesh and drinking His blood? Never!

Unless, of course, you are an Aghori, but none of these padres are Aghoris—far from it. This is why I say there are very few real Christians left. Almost all those who claim to be Christians just follow the ritual without any idea of what they are doing—like most Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Parsis and followers of all other religions who also perform their rituals mechanically. At least people should think of the implications of what they believe and practice.

“Each M of the Five Ms represents a different Element. Grain corresponds to Earth, fish to Water, alcohol to Fire, flesh to Air, and sex to Ether. In this way the universe itself is used as the articles of worship. This is why the Tantrics can say, ‘Liberation is achieved by use of that which causes bondage.’ Normally the use of meat, fish, other stimulating foods, alcohol or sex binds you down more tightly to the world, but if you use these same substances in the Tantric way they can be the source of your liberation from bondage, by stimulating the free movement of Kundalini. The key of course is to use them in the right way.

“In the physical type of Panchamakara most of the stimulation comes from the substances themselves. In small amounts alcohol increases appetite; it is a very hot substance, and hot things always stimulate the flow of blood in the body. Fish has a lot of phosphorus in it. When you remember that phosphorus burns whenever it is exposed to air you can imagine how hot it is. Phosphorus increases the appetite by increasing blood flow to all organs, including the brain. This appetite stimulation makes you hungry enough to eat the meat and the parched grain, which further increase this blood flow. All the extra circulating blood dilates the capillaries in the brain, filling its cells with extra energy. This makes the sex ten times better than normal, since full excitement is present. Full excitement improves satiation and helps turn the mind away from sex for its own sake. The sex itself of course increases the excitement even more. If you know what you are doing, all this excitement will help you awaken your Kundalini.

“Only a few people are fit to use these Five Ms,” he concluded, delivering another blow to my spiritual ambitions. “Others can use substitutes, or better yet, if they are well advanced, they can perform the spiritual Panchamakara directly. Can you imagine how that might be?”

I shook my head no.

“In the spiritual Panchamakara *mamsa* is the tongue. You ‘eat meat’ by preserving silence. *Matsya* is the breath, and ‘eating fish’ means holding the breath via pranayama. *Mudra*, ‘eating grain,’ is the holding of the body in a certain posture to encourage free movement of Kundalini within it. *Madira*

is the ‘wine’ of Amrita which drops from the glands within the head into the body, and *Maithuna* is the union of the Kundalini Shakti with Her Shiva in the Sahasrara.

“There is even an adhidaivika version of Panchamakara, but it is too advanced for you to even hear about right now. Suffice it to say that the Adhidaivika Panchamakara involves fiddling about with the genes and chromosomes. The world of the adhidaivika is very difficult for most humans to comprehend, because it is the world of the gods and goddesses, the embodiments of cosmic forces which have assumed personalities in order to interact with other beings.

“The puja in which Panchamakara is performed is called *Chakra Puja*. Chakra here means circle or ring, because during Chakra Puja the participants sit for worship in a large circle. There are Sattvic versions of Chakra Puja, like the Bhairavi Chakra, and there are also Rajasic and Tamasic versions. Most forms of Chakra Puja are varieties of the Panchamakara Sadhana.”

“Does ‘chakra’ also refer to the chakras in the body?”

“Definitely. Such names are never chosen arbitrarily. I once wanted to go to the West and start a Chakra Puja cult, but of course my mentors would not permit me.”

When he didn’t want to answer a question he would change the subject.

“I really admire Westerners, and Americans in particular, for their practical attitude. They are the true Vedantins in this respect, not like our gasbag preachers of Vedanta here in India. Westerners, or at least a few of them, could learn how to do Panchamakara properly because they are not as inhibited as today’s Indians are. The only thing is, I’m not sure they could do without sex long enough to gain control over it, because sex has become so free and so common over there.

“The Tantras state that eating, excreting, sex, and sadhana all should be done strictly in private. Both the West and India have deviated from this ideal, but in different ways. Westerners believe in open sex, sex in any public place, but they are strict in insisting that you must eliminate your bodily wastes in private. Here in India, on the contrary, we don’t care where you piss. What if you are an old man? You will be troubled if you have to hold your urine for very long. But we don’t believe in open sex; we believe that love should be secret. We believe in getting rid of the filth within us, and Westerners believe in holding onto their filth and displaying their treasures in front of everyone where they can be stolen.”

That was going too far, but I knew he was exaggerating for effect so I let it pass.

“The only way to progress, at least in the beginning, is to throw sex out completely. Forget even the existence of sex and you will be able to make progress; otherwise you will always be yielding to temptation, mentally if not physically. This is why most sadhakas who experiment with sexual sadhanas before they have become really firm inside succeed only in dissipating themselves. Sexual sadhana is one thing, and ordinary sex quite another; ordinary sex and sadhana just don't mix. If you try to both raise Kundalini and continue with ordinary sex at the same time you may develop a ravenous appetite for sex.

“I still believe that the best way to deal with the problem is to ignore the opposite sex in the beginning, until your consciousness is firm. Until I was in my twenties I never had anything to do with girls. I was a wrestler, and wrestlers are supposed to shun sex. Once I was going to have a bout with a wrestler named Imam Bux, so I went to an old man to get suggestions as to how to fight him. As soon as the old man saw me he said, ‘This boy has never even seen a vagina, much less used one; how will Imam Bux be able to fight him?’ And in fact I had no trouble defeating Imam Bux when I did fight him.

“The old man could say this because he knew that before you get caught up in this sex business you are completely innocent, and if you set your mind to something you can easily achieve it without any distraction. But once you see a vulva, or a penis if you are a female, it has such a queer effect on your mind that sometimes for no reason at all you will remember it and your concentration will be broken. This is true of everyone, not just you and me. Even a Rishi as powerful as Vishwamitra fell prey to an apsaras.”

The *apsaras* are dancing girls in the court of Indra, the king of the gods. Famous for their bewitching beauty, they are powerful beings whom Indra sometimes sends down to Earth to delude sadhus into sexual excesses.

“Vishwamitra had been meditating with perfect concentration for ten thousand years when one day the Apsaras Menaka strolled by. Suddenly a gust of wind blew away the flimsy diaphanous garment she was wearing, exposing her full, firm, voluptuous body to his gaze. Without warning Vishwamitra's eyes led him astray, and he was overwhelmed with lust. He took Menaka aside to fornicate.

“Their sexual embrace lasted for thousands of years, until one day Vishwamitra told her, ‘O beautiful woman, it has been pleasant dallying with you here for these few hours, but now I must prepare myself for the evening worship.’

“She told him, ‘What are you saying, Maharaj? That afternoon when we

first met was centuries ago. Here is our daughter Shakuntala.’ As Vishwamitra suddenly realized the depth of the Maya into which he had fallen Menaka slipped quietly away, knowing how potent a Rishi's curse can be.

“Any fool can tell this story, but how many can, or will, explain its esoteric meaning? Indra means *indriya*, sense organ; Indra is Lord of the Senses. An apsaras, in the esoteric sense, is a particular mode of movement of prana in a particular nadi which causes you to suddenly become sexually excited for no reason at all. Once prana starts to move in that nadi it is hell to remove it. Vishwamitra's mind never really recovered fully from being shaken by Menaka, and eventually he married again. There was no need for him to marry; he had been a king in his youth and had had plenty of wives whom he had all given up for sadhana. But after renouncing sex and then being reminded of women he could never quite forget them again. Forgetting sex is really a chore.

“And what about Indra himself? He is described as having one thousand eyes, but did you know that those one thousand eyes were once vulvas? He was burdened with one thousand vaginas because he seduced Ahalya, the wife of Gautama Rishi. Indra allowed his consciousness to be dragged away by his sense organs, and was cursed by Gautama as a result. Indra became extremely embarrassed when he found he was covered with vulvas, and so he meekly propitiated the Rishi, who modified the curse, and the vulvas were converted into eyes. Can you guess what this story means?”

I could not.

“Those one thousand vaginas represent the thousands of ‘holes’ you can fall into, the thousands and millions of wombs which can trap you into being reborn when you crave the enjoyment they offer. They became eyes because you are usually led into temptation by your eyes.”

He fell silent briefly to let this sink in, and then continued.

“This tendency to be tempted into sense pleasures has been with us from the very beginning, of course, but it is much, much stronger during Kali Yuga. You have probably heard about the Four Yugas?”

I had: “The Four Yugas are the Four Ages through which the world passes, over and over again. Each one lasts for so many thousands or millions of years. Kali Yuga, our current age, is supposed to last for 432,000 years. Are these real calculations, or are these numbers mainly significant numerologically?”

“They are mainly numerological.”

Joseph Campbell found that while the number 432 (4 x 108) is numerologically significant in Indian, Norse, Babylonian and Jewish myth it is also

significant in the world of physics. 432 results when one divides the 25,920 years in one cycle of zodiac progression by 60. A heart beating sixty times a minute beats 86,400 times a day ( $864 \times 2 = 432$ ), and lungs breathing fifteen times a minute breathe 21,600 times a day ( $216 \times 2 = 432$ ). Even the Wilson Company, after long research, concluded that its golf ball should possess precisely 432 dimples for maximal flight.

“Each period of creation, or ‘day’ in the lifetime of the Creator, is called a *kalpa*. Each kalpa is named; our current kalpa is called the Sveta Varaha Kalpa, the White Boar Kalpa. Each kalpa lasts for billions of years, and is divided up into fourteen periods called *manvantaras* which are ruled by a *manu*, a being who is the progenitor of the races who live on the earth during that time. We are currently in the Vaivasvata Manvantara, the seventh manvantara of this Kalpa.

“Each manvantara is made up of about seventy cycles of the Four Yugas. The Four Ages are *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dvapara Yuga*, and our era, *Kali Yuga*. We are now living in the twenty-eighth Kali Yuga since the beginning of the current manvantara.

“At the end of each Kali Yuga there is a *pralaya*, a period when all societies and communities are destroyed, usually by natural calamities. Then there is a period of rest, and *Satya Yuga* begins again. At the end of each manvantara there is a more extensive destruction, and at the end of the kalpa the entire cosmos is temporarily resolved into its elements while the Creator ‘sleeps.’ When He wakes, the cosmos is again recreated by His thought. We are all actors in the Creator’s dream.

“At the end of the Creator’s life even He is resolved into the Absolute, and although He is currently in the second half of His life there is no need for concern since He will die trillions of our years into the future. Even after He dies another Creator will eventually be born and the cycle will continue. Creation and destruction, destruction and creation: time marches on.

“The influence of the time in which we live affects both our desire for God and our ability to fulfill this desire. As long as you are mortal you are subject to time, and you will be molded by whatever Yuga you take birth in. In *Satya Yuga*, which lasts at least four times as long as our present age, people have at least four times as much righteousness as they do today. There is nothing like religion during *Satya Yuga*; everyone worships by identifying the individual Self with the Universal Soul. During *Satya Yuga* (which is also known as *Krta Yuga*), people obtain everything they need by power of will. There is no disease, no discord, and nothing to interfere with your *sadhana*.

“In *Treta Yuga* one-fourth of this righteousness is lost. Sacrifices begin,

and people get what they want through sacrifice. Then in *Dvapara Yuga* another fourth of righteousness disappears, and plenty of diseases and calamities arise, and so penances become necessary. People in *Dvapara Yuga* achieve their desires thanks to their austerities.

“Now, in *Kali Yuga*, only one-fourth of the normal amount of righteousness remains. Or maybe less, considering what I see going on in the world today. Everything is in flux and always changing, and you are likely to get contrary effects from any religious rituals you perform. But, the texts say that *Kali Yuga* is the best of all ages because it is the age in which everyone, regardless of caste or karma, can realize God. The problem is, most people are so overcome by *Maya* that they have no desire to know God.

“*Kali Yuga* eventually develops into the *Ghora* (‘terrible’) *Kali Yuga*, when things get really bad in the world, at which point the gutters are overflowing with filth. Nature then cleans out the gutters, by whatever means She sees fit to use, and *Satya Yuga* begins again.”

“These yugas seem to be some sort of cosmic seasons,” I interjected.

“Yes, they are, and just as each season has its own characteristics, so does each yuga. Even the types of beings which predominate in the universe differ according to yuga. During *Satya Yuga* the *devas* (literally, ‘the shining ones’) have a chance to exhibit their play. The *devas* or *suras* are what most people call gods. They are very high ethereal beings who like to help humans out if we request their help in the proper manner. They have an excess of *Sattva* in their natures, so they are very benevolent beings. But they are not pure *Sattva*, because we find that they are always getting into trouble in some way or other. Not only that, they are complacent. Once they have achieved something, they try to hold on to it; they don’t want to progress further. Complacency is a characteristic of *Tamas*. Because of their complacency they are always getting conquered by the *asuras*.

“The *asuras* (‘anti-*suras*’) are also highly evolved spiritual beings, but they are jealous and selfish. They are creatures of *Tamas*; they are eternally plotting wars against the *devas* to challenge them for dominion of the universe. But they also possess some *Sattva*; if they didn’t they could never get the idea to perform penance, and they can perform terrific penances, austerities which the *devas* could never dream of doing. Unfortunately, when they obtain *shakti* as a result of these austerities they always misuse it. For example, they have learned how to control the minds of other beings. If they were to use this power for good they could be very beneficial to the universe. But they use it only to delude.

“There is a big difference between *Sattvic* intellect and *Tamasic* intellect,



between the intellect of the devas and that of the asuras. A Sattvic man who has an animal looks on it as a living toy and watches it enjoy its life. An asura, who has a Tamasic intellect, looks at such a toy and wants to crush it, kill it, and eat it. An ordinary American will look at a cow and think, 'Sirloin steak'! But an ordinary Indian will look at a cow and the way she feeds her calf and licks it clean and think, 'Mother!' Asuras have no use for that type of love. They are not fools; they are knaves. What does one do with a knave? You tell me. A fool one can forgive, but a knave? Better just to leave him and let him continue as he is. Why bother?"

"Would it be fair to say that *sura* means 'su' (good) + 'ra' (the Bija Mantra for the Fire Element), and that the devas have 'good fire,' while the asuras, the 'non-suras,' have 'bad fire'?"

"That is exactly what I just said. The devas have Sattvic intellect; their Bhuta Agni is strong, and they are not so dedicated to the physical existence as are the asuras, whose Jathara Agni is strong and whose brains are filled with Tamas. Asuras direct most of their energy into their bodies, not their consciousnesses."

"Which is why we don't worship the asuras," I added helpfully.

"There are some people who worship the asuras, but they usually regret it in the end."

"Couldn't the universe have done without them, and only had altruistic gods?"

"You can't have the one without the other. If only devas existed, the universe would stagnate and nothing would ever change because the devas believe in the status quo and change only when the asuras force them to change. Asuras believe in change; they are always willing to try something new, whereas the gods are stuck where they have always been. But if the asuras alone existed they would destroy the universe in no time because of their selfishness. Nature has created the two groups to balance one another. Which is natural; if there were no evil, could there be any such thing as good?"

"The asuras get a chance to demonstrate their play in Kali Yuga. Satya Yuga lasts for millions of years and Kali Yuga for just a few thousand. Satya Yuga is slow-moving, nearly static, reflecting an almost complete absence of the power of the asuras. Because of that, if you want to reach God during Satya Yuga you must do penance for at least ten thousand years. Kali Yuga, on the other hand, shows the ascendance of asuric power: fast change that is very hard to maintain. You see, the basic difference between devas and asuras is that the devas have more awakened and far-reaching intellects. An

asura will usually do exactly what he should not do, and he will not understand his mistake. Asuras are rather like children: they can be both very kind and very cruel.

"Asuras can achieve great things, but they also make great mistakes and cannot be trusted with authority. In their own ways they can become very good Siddhas. They can even become Nathas and *Munis* (higher-ranking immortal beings), but never Rishis."

"Why not?" I was beginning to understand his concept of hierarchies among ethereal beings.

"How can he? The Rishis are in charge of the universe. If an asura were to become a Rishi then the whole world would be finished in no time. An asura can never change his nature to the extent of becoming a deva, even though he can merge with the Ultimate, which is nearly as good. Fortunately for us not all asuras are experts at sadhana. The majority of them are very, very foolish. For some time they will follow the rules and restrictions of sadhana nicely; then suddenly they will break it—eat meat, have sex, or what-have-you. This is because they have no inherent sense of purity.

"It is a great blessing to be a guru to a bunch of asuras, or to be their king, because then you are in a position to make them into true knowers of Reality! And that is beautiful. Unfortunately they tend to fall back into their old habits very easily, since their innate natures cannot change, and so even the guru of the asuras became tired of them after a while. I call most Americans, and many Indians, asuras; even when they have the desire for sadhana they have great difficulty ever succeeding, because they cannot persist in following the basic rules of discipline. And so I too have grown tired of them."

He fell silent for a moment, and I thought of a story from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad: The men, gods and asuras came to their father Prajapati and asked him, "Please instruct us." Prajapati told the gods, "Da," and asked, "Have you understood?" Thinking that he meant the word *dama*, which means "restraint," they said, "Yes, we have. You are telling us to control ourselves." Prajapati said, "Yes, you have understood," for the devas are naturally unruly. Prajapati then told the men "Da," which they understood to mean *dana*, "give," for men are naturally avaricious. He also told the asuras "Da," which they interpreted as *daya*, "have compassion," as asuras are naturally cruel. The story ends by suggesting that a person should learn all three "Da-s," since unruliness, avarice and cruelty are present in everyone to some extent.

So I asked, "If the devas have Sattvic intellect and the asuras Tamasic intellect, I suppose humans must have Rajasic intellect?"

“Of course; our world is the world where things can change. This is why even the gods vie to be born down here, so that they can progress. Wherever there is change there is Rajas. Change occurs because of desire; the whole universe is created by desire, and each human is created as a result of sexual desire. If you follow the path of the devas, you go toward Sattva; if you follow the asuras, you develop more and more Tamas.

“This is all on the cosmic level. On the microcosmic level, your own personal devas are your good thoughts, your unselfish thoughts. Every selfish thought and attitude that you have are your asuras. We say that the asuras are so good at sadhana because most people who have selfish reasons for doing sadhana—who believe they will profit from it somehow—are really enthusiastic about doing it.”

“Can everything that has been written about the devas and the asuras be interpreted internally?”

“Everything. I will give you some specific examples about the devas and the asuras another day; right now though, let us concentrate on the Yugas and their esoteric meaning—one thing at a time. Most people who talk about the Four Yugas do not realize that they also exist inside each of us, in our heads. Satya Yuga is the mind itself. Treta Yuga is formed by the three eyes, the two physical eyes and the hidden ‘third eye’; *treta* means ‘the third.’ Dvapara Yuga is represented by the two nostrils; *dvapara* comes from the Sanskrit word meaning ‘two.’ Kali Yuga is the mouth.

“Now see why this is so. In Satya Yuga, the perfect mental age, no one bothers to talk because all communication is telepathic. Everything is mental in that age; there is no need to use any of the sense organs. People eat mentally, taking in prana, the life force, directly with their minds. Even reproduction is mental. In Satya Yuga a man can look at a woman with such intense affection that she will conceive, or he can make her conceive merely by wiping the sweat off his forehead and giving it to her. Such is the tremendous mental power available in those days that people can even create beings without bothering to use the womb.

“In Treta Yuga *trataka* is performed. *Trataka* is a form of meditation in which one stares fixedly at an object. If done properly *trataka* can open the third eye. In Treta Yuga people use *trataka* to obtain prana from the sun; they eat with their eyes. They communicate with glances and make romance with significant looks. This ability exists together with telepathy, which is only possible after the third eye is opened.

“The quality of time changes further in Dvapara Yuga, and it becomes more difficult to use your eyes alone for all your work. The people of Dva-

para therefore begin to take in prana through the nose instead of through the eyes or the mind as before, and they practice pranayama as their primary sadhana. Some of this emphasis on the breath survives even today, as among the Eskimos and the Hawaiians where the traditional greeting is an exchange of breaths.

“In Kali Yuga we receive most of our nourishment from food, through the mouth. And what’s more, we talk—no telepathy. And that is why they say that in Kali Yuga the best penance is repetition of the name of God, because it controls everything we do with our mouths, and purifies the prana we take in.”

“Then why bother with things like Panchamakara?”

“Well, remember that I said that Panchamakara is not for everyone; it is only for those who can avoid being tainted by Kali Yuga.”

“Just like Bombay is only for those who can avoid being tainted by it.”

“Precisely. Even though Kali Yuga surrounds us everywhere, there is no need for Kali Yuga to exist on the inside. As long as you have your mind and sense organs, and you control and cultivate them by sadhana, you can create and live in whatever Yuga—Satya, Treta, Dvapara or even Kali—as you so desire, internally.

“This is how the Rishis did it when they lived on earth: They would begin before dawn by practicing samadhi, perfect equilibrium of consciousness in which the mind is utterly still and inactive, for three hours. This was equivalent to Satya Yuga. At dawn came three hours of *dhyana*, *dharana*, and *pratyahara*—meditation, concentration, and withdrawal of the senses—which represent Treta Yuga. For three hours until noon came Dvapara Yuga: pranayama and asana.

“The three hours just after noon were reserved for food, for conversation and for interacting with other beings according to the rules of good and bad conduct, *yama* and *niyama*. These last two are particularly necessary in Kali Yuga, when humans must live by regulation. At the evening twilight the Rishi would perform certain rituals, and after night fell he would take another meal, enjoy sexual intercourse, and sleep, all of which belong to Kali Yuga. Do you recognize all these practices?”

The eight limbs of the Ashtanga (‘Eight-Limbed’) Yoga of Patanjali, are those very eight practices, in reverse order: *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, *samadhi*. Since he had already made clear to me his belief that Patanjali’s method as it is commonly taught today is not appropriate for Kali Yuga, he was now stressing that he respected it when implemented in the proper way at the proper time.

“We who are not Rishis may not be able to perfectly imitate their lives, but we can learn from their examples. We must begin where we are, in Kali Yuga, and work our way back to Satya Yuga. The first step is to learn yama, external disciplines. Do you know the Five Yamas Patanjali mentions in his Yoga Sutras?”

Oops. “Uh . . . nonviolence, truth-speaking, refraining from theft, sexual continence, or if you are married, monogamy, and, uh, . . .”

“And noncovetousness. After you establish these disciplines to prevent bad habits, then you must introduce good habits, which are collectively called *niyama*. Patanjali’s Five Niyamas are purity of body, mind and spirit; contentment with whatever one possesses; penance; study and recitation of sacred scriptures; and devotion to God.

“*Niyama* is a very meaningful word. ‘Ni’ represents constraint or control. Take the ‘ni’ away from *niyama* and what do you have left? *Yama*, life’s essential restraints. *Yama* is also one of the names of Death, which means that if you take the control away from your *sadhana* you’re heading for failure. No matter how hungry a lion may be he will never stoop to eating grass. He is a meat-eater, and he will eat meat and nothing else or he will die. It should be the same with you; when you follow your *niyama* you should follow it strictly. If one day you cannot get the food you are permitted to eat it is better to starve that day than break the rules. Ultimately you will find that it was all worth it.”

I nodded thoughtfully; it made visceral sense to me.

“Do you know the story of Nachiketas?”

“Yes. His father performed a sacrifice in which he gave away as alms old, lean, hungry cows. Nachiketas was grieved by his father’s miserliness, and asked him sadly, ‘Father, to whom are you going to give me?’ His father flew into a rage at his son’s seeming impertinence and replied, ‘I give you to *Yama*!’” I paused to let him pick up the thread and tell the rest of it; I loved to hear him talk.

“Yes. When he heard this, Nachiketas did not wait to be collected; he walked all the way to *Yama*’s abode. *Yama*, who drags souls off to the afterworld, was out doing his work, and Nachiketas had to sit alone on the doorstep of *Yama*’s home for three days and three nights without any food or water.

“When *Yama* finally did return home he was amazed that a human could have located his house. Then he became concerned about the bad karma involved in forcing a small Brahmana boy to suffer from hunger and thirst for three days. A guest is equal to God, after all. In recompense *Yama* offered

to grant three boons, one for each day that Nachiketas had had to wait.

“For his first boon Nachiketas requested that his father should be pleased with him. His second boon was for the secrets of the fire which leads to heaven. *Yama* granted both these boons readily. The third boon was, ‘Tell me the truth of the identity of the Self.’ By asking for this Nachiketas was really asking the god of death, ‘Who are you? Tell me your nature.’ *Yama* knew that to answer such a question would be equivalent to giving Nachiketas full knowledge of birth and death, so he offered the boy all sorts of material benefits if he would withdraw it. But Nachiketas stood firm, however, saying, ‘All that you have promised me is useless, because my sense organs are feeble, and my life is limited and will someday end. I have requested my boon.’ Finally *Yama* had to answer the question, realizing that Nachiketas was a fit pupil. As a result of what he learned Nachiketas became immortal.

“Many people know this story, but few ever ask the obvious question: When *Yama* is able to take thousands of people and millions of animals every day all over the world, how was it that he could not even locate one little boy for three whole days? The answer is very simple: Nachiketas was following *niyama*. Anyone whose *niyama* is strong is always protected; *Yama* can never come to such a person. Nachiketas was practicing a particular type of *sadhana* to the exclusion of all others; that was his *niyama*, and he stuck to it. When you break your *niyama* it loses its first syllable, and then you once again become prey to *Yama*.”

“That’s not all there is to this story, is there? There must be some deep esoteric meaning to it.”

“Of course there is.” But he had no intention of talking about it at that moment.

“The hardest *sadhanas* and *niyamas* are often the simplest. The *Ajagara Sadhana*, for example, is easy to describe but very, very difficult to practice. ‘*Ajagara*’ means python. You know about pythons; they don’t eat very often. If a python eats a big meal today it may not eat again for days, or even weeks. Whenever it is not eating it lies around peacefully, totally inert.

“In the *Ajagara Sadhana* you become just like a python. You are not allowed to move from where you lie. All your appetites—for food, sleep, sex, whatever—have to go; you must lose all desire to ‘eat.’ You are only allowed to eat when someone comes to you and takes pity on you and puts food into your mouth, and even then you can accept only what is offered without asking for anything more. Does this sound simple and easy to you? Oh, no! But Aghoris go even further. They learn not only not to move, like

pythons, they learn how to melt their bones, so that they cannot move even if they want to. Of course such drastic niyamas are far away for most of us, because we have to allot a good portion of our attention just to remain in one piece.”

“I can just imagine what would happen to me if I was to practice the Ajagara Sadhana downstairs on the street in Bombay today.”

We snickered at the thought of what would follow. “But there are many other niyamas that you can follow. For example, since today we are living in an age in which everyone you meet is ready to cheat you in some way or another, learning not to cheat in return is a fine niyama. What about our dhabawalas? They practice a true niyama, a niyama that is practical for today. They are an amazing illustration of the power of niyama.”

“What about them?” The *dhabawalas* are men who bring hot home-cooked lunches to hundreds of thousands of workers in Bombay every day. Each morning they carry long racks of neatly stacked metal lunch pails by train from the suburbs to downtown Bombay, and then tote them on their heads from office to office, distributing them to their owners. Because most dhabawalas are illiterate the pails are identified with a complex series of symbols, but so well does the system work that almost never do mixups occur.

“What about them?” he retorted indignantly. “They live in Bombay, and yet they have not been affected by the curse which ruins everyone else’s mind. They have never gone on strike; if they ever did Bombay would grind to a halt, because there would be no way for everyone to eat.” That I knew for a fact.

“They have never been known to molest any lady, though they have plenty of chances to do so since they collect and return the lunchbox from the worker’s home every day when only his wife and other female relatives are there. Dhabawalas don’t even look lustfully at women. Compare this to America, where milkmen are well known for entering the house to enjoy the wife once the husband has gone to work. This never happens among our dhabawalas.” OK; I nodded sagely to agree.

“Why is this?” he went on. “It is because they are all followers of our Jnaneshwar Maharaj. They all worship Vishnu in the form of Vitthala, and to a worshipper of Vishnu everyone is a family member, a member of ‘vasudeva kutumbam’ (‘Vishnu’s family’). Who will such a person cheat, or have an affair with? The dhabawalas go on regular pilgrimages, and spend their time reading the Jnaneshwari and singing God’s sweet name. I think these are the people to be respected, not all the priests and all the so-called saints and

swamis who have sprung up everywhere. These dhabawalas have really put Krishna’s teachings into practice: ‘Do your work, and offer all the fruits of your work to Me.’”

As he fell silent we both traveled mentally to Jnaneshwar’s shrine in Alandi and bowed to the saint who had such compassion that even after seven hundred years he was still guiding and inspiring whoever came to him.

“Eknath Maharaj, thanks to whom we have the Jnaneshwari, is another example. His fellow Brahmanas hated him because of his love for the common people. One day as Eknath was returning to his home after bathing in the sacred Godavari River one of these vicious Brahmanas spat on him. Eknath, saying nothing, turned around, walked back to the river, and bathed again. Again when he emerged the Brahmana spat on him; again he turned back to bathe. This happened many, many times; some versions of this story say that it happened as many as one hundred times. It went on until finally the spitter realized Eknath’s greatness and fell at his feet begging for forgiveness. But Eknath said, ‘My friend, I think that I should thank you, because it is thanks to you that I have had the blessing of bathing so many times in the sacred Godavari.’

“Eknath’s control over his temper was something superb, the product of a powerful niyama. To dedicate yourself never to become angry no matter what the provocation is a terrific niyama, one which is not easy to keep. Although such control is essential nowadays in Kali Yuga it is very hard to achieve, unless you have help, like I do. I used to be a real firebrand; now, thanks to my mentors, I have cooled down considerably. Around here I think I need it.”

I knew exactly what he meant.

“Although I have lived with Roshni’s family for many years, Roshni’s mother has never changed. She will not change, no matter what you tell her. If her mind was directed to God she would have been able to do unique sadhanas, but it is impossible. I have tried for decades, but I have had to give up; I am tired.

“The Ramayana says that you should always live near someone you can’t get along with because they will help you remember God, and this lady certainly does help me remember God. You know very well that often I will expect that the preparations for lunch will be ready for me by a certain time, but when I ask I find that she has forgotten something. It happens time and again, and when I ask her about it all she will say is, ‘I forgot.’ Then what can I say? I have to keep quiet, and remember niyama.

“But I am fortunate, because whenever this happens, call it coincidence or whatever you like, I find that within fifteen minutes or so a knock will come on the door and there will stand someone who has brought some food to me, for no apparent reason. My Tara will not let me go hungry. You know this, Robby; you’ve seen it so many times.”

Yes, I had, and I continued to see it. Once he and I were on a train going from Copenhagen to Paris, and I had forgotten to purchase any French money while in Denmark. It was Sunday; no banks were open; the vendors on the train refused to take any other currency. We were hungry. But then a lady got on the train in Namur, Belgium, and after a few miles opened her sack and offered each of us a Christmas cake. How good they were! In Tokyo, when everything was closed, the cook himself shouted to us from a restaurant and made us come in, and then all Vimalananda had to do was to look at the proprietress with a certain ‘sweet gaze’ in order to get vegetarian food even though it was not on the menu. Ma never let him down.

“This is all because of *niyama*. In Patanjali’s system *asanas* were to be practiced only after *yama* and *niyama* were perfected. Here is another thing I get angry about: the people who have so debased Yoga that it is now simply a system of physical jerks. I agree that a flexible body is useful in *sadhana*; but you cannot become enlightened just by standing on your head. *Asanas* are for other purposes too.

“The word *asana* comes from the Sanskrit root meaning ‘to sit.’ To ‘make your *asana* perfect’ means to learn to be able to sit comfortably without squirming or fidgeting for at least three hours at a time. In the past, the real yoga gurus would tell their students, ‘Go into that room and sit there for six months.’ After sitting for that long the student’s mind and nervous system would automatically become calmer, which would make the next step—*pranayama*—safer and easier.”

Some years later I heard Baba Hari Dass tell of an old guru who used to test his disciples by making them sit in a cross-legged position and then fill their laps with dirt and plant grass seeds. When he returned a few days later to inspect the crops, only those students whose sprouts were rising straight and true passed the test; only they had obviously not moved. Those disciples whose sprouts sprawled every which way failed.

“I believe you have been taught *Shavasana*, the corpse posture, in your yoga classes?”

“I have.”

“And I’m sure your teacher has taught you to do it at the end of an *asana* session in order to relax.”

“He has.”

“But was the corpse pose created just to help you relax? Of course not! It’s another example of how superficial today’s spiritual teaching has become. The purpose of *Shavasana* is to make you into a *shava*, a corpse, to make it easier for you to control your *prana* and disengage your mind from the outside world. When you do *Shavasana* you should become just like a corpse, not just with your muscles but also with your mind. In Aghora we believe in sitting on corpses, it is true; we believe in sitting on our *own* corpses. We say, ‘Make your own body into a living corpse’; let the body live and perform its actions and you be away from it.”

It made immense sense.

“Now think about *pranayama*, which means ‘control of *prana*.’ It is not necessary to hold your breath in order to control *prana*; if your mind is controlled your breath will slow and eventually stop automatically. Any method which slows the breathing is a form of *pranayama*. The purpose of *pranayama* is to slow the breathing as much as possible. Whenever your breathing is deep, slow and calm your mind is slow and calm; whenever your breathing is fast, shallow and agitated so is your mind.

“After *pranayama* comes *pratyahara*, which is detachment, withdrawal of the senses from their objects. The senses like to ‘eat’ things, to take in impressions from the outside world. *Pratyahara* (which can also be interpreted to mean ‘against eating’) occurs when the calmed mind stops craving sensory pleasures. Once your mind is disengaged from its cravings it is ready for *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*: concentration, meditation, and that perfect equilibrium of consciousness which is the goal of ordinary *sadhana*.

“But perfect equilibrium of the consciousness is a difficult thing to achieve during Kali Yuga. There are so many distractions! Having sufficient time is not the problem; on the contrary, you can make very fast progress in Kali Yuga. In Satya Yuga it takes ten thousand years of penance to catch even a glimpse of God, because everyone in Satya Yuga is righteous and sincere in their worship, and God is in no hurry to appear before them; He tests them thoroughly. But in Kali Yuga the force of illusion is so powerful that only a few people want to worship God, and most of them don’t know how to do it effectively. In Kali Yuga God feels so lonely that no one is remembering and loving Him that He will appear to you very easily. This is why Kali Yuga is the best Yuga of them all for *sadhana*. In Satya Yuga you have to sweep your guru’s floor for years and years before he will deign to initiate you, much less teach you anything.”

Another reference to my situation. I did appreciate his willingness to spend time to teach me, and I could not claim to be a worthy student.

“In fact, Kali Yuga is the time when all the experts in all fields are writing books and selling their knowledge, begging people to take it away from them. For just a pittance you can obtain knowledge that they have worked a lifetime for, and you don’t even have to steal it from them. Read, Robby, read, keep on reading; you can never learn enough, because there are always new things to learn. Just remember that learning is also a form of Maya. It is very valuable, no doubt, but you can still become attached to it, just as you can to any form of Maya.

“The force of Maya is so strong during Kali Yuga that it is easy to get caught up in learning and forget to do anything with what you learn. This is where niyama comes in. As long as you make everything you do a sadhana, as long as you direct all your energy to achieving your goal, you will only want to learn those things which will help you progress, and you will use them to help improve your sadhana. If you want to practice Tantra sadhanas, you have to start with an unshakable niyama.”

## SADHANA

### Khanda Manda Yoga

Natural potential for spiritual development becomes valuable only by careful cultivation. All spiritual practices are sadhanas, but all sadhanas are not created equal. Vimalananda explains:

“The Rishis, India’s Seers, have understood our plight, and in their great magnanimity have created sadhanas by which we can extricate ourselves from our limitations and make progress. The Rishis have created many different sadhanas because there are so many different types of people, each of whom have special requirements. We Aghoris believe in using fast, terrifying methods of sadhana because we ache to return to God immediately; we cannot bear being separated from Him.”

An Aghori meditates on burning corpses to force the consciousness beyond all limitations of the personality. The hardest concretions of identity are the most resistant, and steel-wool penances are needed to scour them away. Aghoris take no chances with potential ego-inflations; Aghora sadhanas destroy everything down to the ground of consciousness and rebuild from the bottom up. Then there is nothing to fear, because the new personality is engineered to be totally surrendered to the Will of God. Khanda Manda Yoga is a good illustration of Aghora’s approach to personality development. Vimalananda described it thus:

“One of the most terrifying and difficult of all Aghora sadhanas is *Khanda Manda Yoga*. The practitioner of Khanda Manda Yoga cuts off his own arms and legs with a sharp cleaver, and throws them into a roaring fire. After twelve hours these limbs reemerge from the fire and rejoin his body. Some sadhus can do Eka Khanda Yoga, the cutting of one part of a single limb, like a foot; a few like Tailang Swami could do Tri Khanda Yoga, involving three parts, like the foot, the lower leg, and the thigh. But very, very few—perhaps only one or two up to now—can do Nava Khanda Yoga, using nine body parts, including the head.

“And beyond even Nava Khanda Yoga is Agni Khanda Yoga, in which a guru heats his firetongs white-hot, and then inserts them under his disciple’s skin at the nape of the neck, running them down parallel to the spinal cord. A yogi who is really solid in his being will not even flinch when this happens.

“This is the physical Khanda Manda Yoga, and its benefits are many, including imperviousness to any weapon, and even physical immortality. It is really a wonderful sadhana, though I suspect you might faint at the sight of all the blood if you ever saw anyone perform it. Most people are very attached to their bodies, and don’t like even the hint that some part of that body might be chopped off. Obviously you can only perform Khanda Manda Yoga once you have developed a certain objectivity about your body. But this is not so easy, you know; it is only possible once you have complete control over your Kundalini Shakti.

“The mental Khanda Manda Yoga is somewhat different; it has to do with thought. Did you know that *mandana* (creation) and *khandana* (destruction) of thoughts are going on continuously within you? For instance, if your lady love is not with you, you will emit from your heart incessant wishes to see her, be with her, embrace her, and so on. You continue to project these desires until you see the girl and fulfill your desires, at which point the projected forms are destroyed. This is a form of khandana, but it is imperfect. You will be rid of the desire only for a short time before it begins again because you are only projecting an image of how you want her to be, for your gratification. This image will always change because your desires are always changing, and because she is always changing.

“Most people never realize that these thoughts are simply temporary manifestations. They try to cling to them or avoid them, depending on whether they give pleasure or pain to the mind. True khandana would destroy that desire utterly. The true khandana is absolute and permanent destruction of your false personality, which is composed of all the desires,

tastes, aversions, and what-not which have accumulated over millions of births. Only when all the imperfect projections are eliminated will you be able to see what is real. The other side of khandana is mandana, and the true mandana is projection of a permanent form, construction of a true personality. Mental khandana and mandana make up the real Khanda Manda Yoga.

“There are only two ways to perform khandana and mandana, just as there are only two types of medicine: external and internal. Either you get a doctor to treat you, or you cure yourself with your own force of will; there is no third way. Likewise, khandana can be external, by complete satiation of desire, or it can be internal, by complete control of desire. Suppression of desire will not work. Like a coiled spring a suppressed desire remains immobile only so long as it is pressed down. When the pressure eases up it will bounce with extra strength. The true mandana can only occur after your desire for limited, impermanent forms has dropped away, either through gratification or control.”

After drilling the idea of *niyama* into my head, Vimalananda began his long-term lesson on sadhana, which was a sort of mental Khanda Manda for me, on a juvenile scale. After demolishing one of my preformed concepts about spiritual practices he would offer me little pieces of information, here and there, from which I was expected to synthesize a new concept. He would then test me periodically, without warning, to ensure that I had understood, for he believed that “the key to testing someone is to test them when they least expect it and are least prepared for it. Then you have an accurate idea of how much they really know.” Only after he was convinced that I had learned something would he proceed to the next step.

## Name and Form

Every month or two, when the mood possessed him, Vimalananda would take me and Roshni with him to the Lakshmi-Narayana temple in Central Bombay, to look upon the face of God. The images in this temple are carved from pure white marble, and their sweetness and sublimity effortlessly pierce the hearts of those who gaze at them in faith. All the humans there—the temple trustees, the priests, the watchmen—knew Vimalananda, and all were happy to see him arrive, all except the musicians, who were envious of his superior musical abilities. After making our offerings Vimalananda

would sit down at the harmonium to play and sing for Narayana and Lakshmi. The sound of his voice, the incense's soft burning, and the transcendent equanimity permanently etched on the faces of the Lord and His Lady filled the hall with the palpable sweet ache of a devotee for his Beloved.

After one of these musicales, when we had returned home and I had poured a glass of Scotch for Vimalananda, he began to talk, tears glistening now and again in his eyes as emotion welled up and spilled over the banks of his everyday personality:

"Did you see how Narayana was dressed tonight? So *beau-tiful!* You know, you have the choice of worshipping God as a Formless Absolute or of worshipping God with form, and I have always recommended to everyone that they worship God with form. We are all human beings; God is supposed to have made us in His image; why not then make God in our image? It is so much easier to worship a God with a human form. Can you comprehend the immensity of the totality of the billions of universes? *No, n-o.* But you may be able to comprehend the compassionate eyes of Jesus, or the bewitching eyes of Krishna.

"There are so many different types of eyes in the world. Some are entrancing, some cruel and calculating, some innocent, some lifeless. But there have never been any eyes like the eyes of Krishna and Jesus. Their eyes make you go mad when you see them, mad with love. Krishna's eyes are bewitching; they are so full of sweetness that they turn you into a lunatic. And Jesus' eyes? His eyes are brimming over with divine compassion. Oh, my *God!* When I think of the eyes of Jesus I think of His chest. So broad it must have been, to gather everyone in to it and take over all their karmas—to be able to say, 'Come unto me.'"

"Something that I have been thinking about lately," I began hesitantly, averse to disturbing his mood, "is the fact that I was born and brought up a Christian, and now here I am involved in Aghora. I know that you are a great devotee of Jesus, but isn't there some contradiction in there somewhere?"

"Well, have you forgotten Jesus? Do you still love Him?" Vimalananda inquired gently.

"Yes, I do," I replied.

"Good. Because if you had told me otherwise, I would have told you to get out!" He smiled. "What is a deity after all? A deity is the One Consciousness expressed in a particular way, a certain aspect of reality which has a specific form. All deities are therefore limited to some degree. Jesus was a great being, but even He had some limitations. So did Rama and Krishna, so does

Shiva; any being that has a name and a form is limited, if only by that name and form."

"Doesn't Advaita Vedanta teach," I had to ask, "that while the Absolute is true, the Relative, which is the Manifested Universe of name and form, is inherently false, and so one should only worship the Highest?"

"Who says so?" he thundered. "Only one version of Advaita Vedanta teaches that, the version that Shankaracharya propagated. Other versions of Advaita Vedanta are not so limited. But it is true that the Highest is beyond all name and form, which is why I believe it is better not to worship the deities at all."

I tossed a confused look at him. He enjoyed catching me off guard; once a wrestler, always a wrestler.

"I believe that it is better to worship the One behind the deities, and to respect and appreciate the deities for how well they play the roles assigned to them. Do you see what I mean? There is a subtle difference. You love the deities, but you worship the Absolute that created Them and dwells within Them. Worship of a deity is a good way to get started on the spiritual path for so many reasons, but mainly because it is easier to love a form than it is to love the Formless. You may not choose to visualize the Universal Reality as Shiva; maybe you prefer Krishna, or Jesus. It doesn't matter; you will achieve God in whatever form you imagine Him or Her to be, so long as you worship with sincerity and love."

"So it is only when you distinguish one deity from another as if they were really different that there is a contradiction?"

"Exactly. You have worshipped Jesus since you were born. Can you forget Jesus now, even if you wanted to? Never! Jesus will never let go of your hand, even if you try to flee from Him; that is the depth of His compassion for you. But neither will He interfere, nor will He be upset, if you also want to worship God in another form. Jesus cares nothing for form; He cares only for pure love.

"You began by worshipping Jesus, and you must continue to worship Jesus. However, you personally can make faster progress if you perform certain Aghora sadhanas, because you have negative traits in your personality which need to be removed."

"This is like fighting fire with fire, I suppose? Using harsh measures to eliminate my own harshness?"

He nodded agreement as he sipped his drink. "You know, today's false swamis and other so-called experts go on and on about Satya Yuga, 'the Golden Age,' and Kali Yuga, 'the Iron Age.' Why can't they explain it



directly without beating around the bush so much?" He was rapidly warming to his subject.

"It is just the difference between a gold sword and an iron sword. Both are used to cut through the *Ashta Pasha*, the Eight Snares which bind us to the world: lust, anger, greed, delusion, envy, shame, fear and disgust. A gold sword does not cut very well. Get into a swordfight with a gold sword and you'll soon see what I mean." We chuckled together over that image. "People in the Golden Age couldn't be good killers; they believed in mandana, not khandana. They believed that you should remove the *Ashta Pasha* by creating beneficial new *samskaras* (personality characteristics), which after taking root in the individual would eventually crowd out all his or her limitations.

"In Kali Yuga people believe in khandana. An iron sword will cut you very well, and aren't most people today killers? Either you become a killer or you get killed in today's world. The word *pashu* means 'he who is snared by a pasha.' *Pashu* also means an animal. As long as you are in the grips of one of the Eight Snares you are no better, and are probably worse, than an animal.

"All of us today are *pashus*, animals meant for sacrifice, trapped by the Eight Snares. The best way to get rid of the *Ashta Pasha* in Kali Yuga is to cut through them with Tantra and Aghora. If you can withstand the pain of having your personality ripped from you, then you can sacrifice yourself, and then when you are dead to the world new *samskaras* can be created. This is what Aghora is all about."

For a fleeting moment I felt sorry for myself, for being so profoundly snared that I could be redeemed only through butchery.

As usual, he caught my thought. "Do you think that only lechers, meat eaters and drug fiends are animals? Oh, no. The Tantras talk about spiritual *pashus*, who are just as animalistic as any other *pashus* but in a different way. Spiritual *pashus* are sectarian; they slander anyone who doesn't share their beliefs, or who worships a different deity. They are much more concerned with outer than with inner purity; they like to make a show of their worship. So many of the Brahmanas, the so-called spiritual caste, are the worst sort of *pashu*.

"Only a *pashu*, an animalistic human, will think of the deities as being fundamentally different from one another, and will be willing to kill for one god or another. Muslims have been notorious since the beginning for slaughtering as infidels anyone who did not believe as they do, but what did the Christians do for so many centuries? They fought and killed the Muslims as infidels, all right, but worse than that, the Protestants and Catholics

slaughtered each other mercilessly. And for what? So that each could claim that they had a monopoly over the love of Jesus? Can anything be more ridiculous?"

"It is still happening even today, in Northern Ireland."

"Yes, it is still happening today, and not only among the Christians. Within Islam the Shias and the Sunnis still kill one another. Here in India it is not so bad—people kill each other for other reasons—but Hindus and Muslims still kill one another occasionally. And even among the Hindus some Krishna worshippers will abuse worshippers of Rama, and vice versa, and many worshippers of Vishnu think that worship of Shiva or the Goddess is nothing but piffle.

"All around the world the people who are really spiritual never look at the outer clothing of a person—what language they speak, what god they worship. They look only at the inner being. So I say, forget all this foolishness; leave the arguments to the *pashus*, and you worship God in whatever form you please."

"Provided that I know how to do so," I added, fishing for more guidance.

"Of course. You need to have at least a basic understanding of the process in order for it to proceed properly. If the blueprint is correct the structure is bound to be correct; that is my principle. I believe that the very first step in spirituality is to forget to merge your consciousness with external things. To keep aloof from the world, and especially from this sort of sectarianism, is to get closer to your deity. So long as you are attached to the world you are detached from God. Once you become attached to God it is inevitable that you will become detached from the world.

"Someone once told me that Rodin's famous sculpture *The Thinker* was a good example of detachment. I told him, '*The Thinker* is simply thinking. He has not gone so far into himself that he has become absolutely lost. If he had, there would be no need for him to be making such an effort to think. It is obvious that he is still stuck in his senses. In fact, I think he looks very much like a gorilla.'"

We chuckled again, and Vimalananda's tone intensified.

"Thinking about your limitations is no way to change them; in fact, if you think about them very much you will most likely reinforce them. This is why I have little use for most psychologists. They spend all their time making their patients remember all the bad things that happened to them, and never try to erase those bad memories and replace them with good *samskaras*, which is what you do when you visualize a deity."

"Freud once said, 'Neurosis is reminiscence.'"

“Unfortunately Freud himself was a neurotic; otherwise he would never have come up with some of the bull that he tried to pass off as knowledge. He thought he understood sex, but all he understood was sexual abnormality, and that not too thoroughly. But that particular saying of his is true: neurosis happens when you are trapped by your memories into perpetuating your limitations. This is why sadhana is so necessary, especially in Kali Yuga, when everyone has limitations to spare.

“I believe in the old Indian Law of Caterpillar and Butterfly, the Kita Bhramari Nyaya. Within the misshapen caterpillar is an image. Perhaps it is not a truly mental image, but is only present in the genes and chromosomes; but isn't that also an image? You are splitting hairs if you say it is not, because that image must exist somewhere in the caterpillar's consciousness for it to become a butterfly. It is there, at that rudimentary level, because of the ego. The caterpillar's ego continuously concentrates on its body, just as your ego is continuously self-identifying with your own body and your own personality. Otherwise you couldn't exist.

“But at some point the caterpillar's ego stops self-identifying exclusively with its caterpillar form and begins to self-identify with its butterfly form. It imagines itself to be a butterfly for so long that in the end it becomes a butterfly. Actually it always was a butterfly, and only time and concentration were necessary for cause to reveal itself in effect. Cause is effect concealed; effect is cause revealed. It's the same way with sadhana: Whatever you imagine you will most surely become. You might not achieve as fast as some do, unless you have already done a lot of sadhana in previous births and you have a powerful guru to initiate you into your mantra in this birth. But eventually you are bound to achieve, if you are patient and persistent. There is no instant payoff in worshipping God.”

“So sadhana is basically just a matter of preventing Kundalini from identifying with a limited human personality so that She can identify with a cosmic personality?” I was becoming comfortable with the concept.

“Yes; in fact, if you identify with the new image strongly enough you will even start to look like the deity you worship. I knew a sadhu in Girmar who was a great devotee of Anjaneya—I like to call Hanuman 'Anjaneya' because it reminds me of His mother, Anjani. This sadhu concentrated on Anjaneya with such fervor that he actually grew a little tail! There was another who started to drink poison like Shiva does; he eventually became poison-proof! If you repeat “Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola” all the time you may not start to taste Coke, but eventually you will *become* Coke.”

Hmm—another unusual image that interrupted the usual flow of my

mind, as it made me suddenly realize that we have almost as many deities in the West as there are gods and goddesses in India. We have rock and roll stars, sports heroes, movie stars, cartoon characters—all sorts of images to imitate with appropriate mantras and hymns so that we can recreate ourselves in their image. Somehow I preferred the images Vimalananda was providing me.

“Visualization and repetition of mantras reinforce the new image being created within, then,” I said.

“That's right. All the sacred books tell us that in Kali Yuga the greatest sadhana is to repeat God's name, but why? Always ask why! The reason is because name and form are identical; when you call the name you create the form. Each deity has a name because each name is a mantra, a way of creating the form of that deity.

“Mantra means 'man ki tarana': that which saves the mind from the perils of samsara. In Tantra and Aghora we believe in making use of the power of the mind to achieve the goal. Some Yogis say, 'Destroy the mind,' but I say, 'Why destroy something which can be of great use? Control the mind.' You should only destroy something that is dangerous and that you are afraid of, and the only people who are afraid of the mind are those who are not in control of it. So many of these 'yogis' are real hypocrites.

“Remember the words of John in his gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' When you repeat God's name you actually create God's form within your consciousness, which gives your Kundalini Shakti something good to self-identify with. Repetition of the deity's name while visualizing His or Her form is the best sort of worship we have available to us.

## The Soma Yaga

“If you are working to awaken your Kundalini and you try to do everything on your own, you only need to make one slip and you are gone; but if you worship and self-identify with a deity He or She will protect you when the energy becomes too strong for you to control. This is especially true if, like an Aghori, you are in a hurry to succeed, and you decide to practice dangerous sadhanas like Panchamakara. Meat, fish, wine, parched grain and sex are all intoxicants, and the purpose of intoxicants is to stimulate your nerves to be able to withstand the force of the Kundalini Shakti. You can use

alcohol, sex and the rest to make fast spiritual progress only if you know how to use them properly; otherwise you just bind yourself down more tightly to the wheel of existence.

“If you do choose to use them, you must never lose your presence of mind. This is why I only permit one line of talk, one topic, during a session at which intoxicants are consumed.”

“Like tonight,” I said pleasantly.

“Like tonight. If you take intoxicants and then you switch from topic to topic your mind may wander; staying on one topic encourages control. Control is absolutely essential when you take intoxicants, no matter what anyone may tell you. If you hallucinate when you are intoxicated, it indicates that your system is not yet ready for that quantity of Shakti.

“I have used intoxicants for many years, and only once did I fail to finish a ritual because of them. That happened when someone fed me a tremendous quantity of marijuana without my knowing it. By the time I realized what was going on and took steps to counteract the effect I had missed my time for worship. I had to start the whole ritual over again, and this time I refused to accept any food from anyone’s hand. I completed it successfully.

“Some years ago some people tried to poison the ears of my mother and father, telling them I was an alcoholic and spent all my nights drinking. I am a drunkard, as anyone can see,” he said without pride or guilt, proffering his glass to me to be refilled, “but I am not an alcoholic; I am in perfect control of myself. So one evening I decided to demonstrate to my parents what I was doing with alcohol.

“After dinner I produced a bottle of Scotch and a glass, and started to drink the Scotch, neat. My father was annoyed, but he didn’t say anything; he just glowered. My mother wanted to tell me that it was wrong to drink, and whatnot, but then I announced, ‘Now let us discuss the Upanishads.’

“Now, the Vedas and the Upanishads were my father’s pet subjects, and he used to take pride in his knowledge of them. But after I completed my discourse there were tears in his eyes, and he said, ‘I never realized that you knew.’ My mother said nothing at all, but the next time I visited them and we were sitting together after dinner she produced a bottle of Scotch and said, ‘Here, son, take this and talk.’ I’m proud that my parents appreciated my talks, and understood that I was not ruining myself with my drinking.

“The reason I am not ruining myself with my drinking,” he continued, punctuating his words with a sip from his glass, “is that I perform a Soma Yaga, or Soma Sacrifice, when I drink.”

People have been arguing over the meaning of the Vedic Soma Sacrifice for

many years, and many authorities have claimed to have discovered *the* plant from which the divinely intoxicating drink *Soma* was made. Vimalananda had no patience for such scholarly presumption, maintaining that the divine intoxication of Soma can be produced by a variety of substances, each of which can be made into Soma only in the context of a specific place, time and method of preparation and a particular consumer.

“The Soma Yaga has nothing to do with drinking the juice of some plant, although that external ritual still does exist in some places. I perform the Soma Yaga in quite a different way. When I drink alcohol I convert it into Soma with the help of a mantra. The mantra is necessary because Soma is full of Sattva and alcohol is full of Tamas. In addition to the karma of having crushed the life out of the yeast cells during the brewing process there are also powerful curses which must first be removed from the alcohol before you drink it. Alcohol has been thrice cursed: by Brahma the Creator; by Shukracharya (the planet Venus), the guru of the asuras; and by Lord Krishna Himself. If you drink without the proper mantra you will suffer from the effects of all three curses, and then you are sunk.

“Alcohol develops Sattva when all the miserable little yeast cells who gave up their lives in the brewing process are given jnana. When this is done they enter my body and instead of perverting my consciousness they begin to dance for joy. Then both they and I get some benefit out of drinking. This is only possible if I offer the drink into the fire of the Bhuta Agni, so that it can reach Smashan Tara. This is the sacrifice part; the alcohol is sacrificed to Her, and She takes the prana that all the wretched little yeast cells contributed to the alcohol and then saves those cells. What do I mean by ‘save’? I mean that She fills them with jnana, and makes them be born again in higher wombs. This process is entirely internal, which is the best way to perform a yajna.”

I had started to read Arthur Avalon, so I interpolated: “And this is why the Tantras call wine ‘Tara Dravamayi,’ the ‘Savioress Herself in Liquid Form.’”

“Yes, and how wonderful it is, to feel Her dancing within you; I just can’t describe it! Intoxicants are wonderful—but you can’t just start with these things directly; you must do plenty of sadhana first, to make sure that your control is strong. I will repeat this again and again: unless you know this process you should not drink, because sooner or later the curses will come upon you, the alcohol will start to drink you, and you will be finished.”

## “Make Everything into a Sadhana”

“But I know you have said before that you don’t have to renounce everything in order to achieve.”

“No, you don’t; but you do have to make everything into a sadhana. Offer every morsel of food to your deity; go to sleep at night remembering your deity. And as for sex, you don’t need to know any complicated sexual rituals in order to offer a mantra with each stroke of the penis into the fire of the vagina. Always offer whatever you do to your deity, and He or She will always take care of you. However, how easy is it to remember to offer a mantra with each stroke of your penis once your sexual embrace becomes really intense? This is why I say that the more potential addictions you remove the faster will be your progress.”

“From what I have learned, food at least has the potential to produce Sattva, sleep definitely creates Tamas, and sex generates tremendous Rajas,” I added.

“And what I have learned is that any substance or activity can produce any of the Three Gunas, depending on how well you digest it. In the beginning you have to accumulate Sattva; this much is clear. When your consciousness is full of Sattva your power of discrimination becomes predominant, so you can judge easily what is good or bad for you. If you allow excess Rajas or Tamas to collect in your consciousness either your ego will run amok, or you will become a slave to your senses, or both.

“In the Sattvic Tantras you are given a mantra along with a description of its visual form for meditation. With that mental image you construct the deity in your astral body, and eventually that deity projects and shows Himself or Herself to you. Visualization is essential because of the primacy of the eyes. Not everyone is fit to visualize, but if you are you will eventually perceive the deity right before your eyes. What you will see is not the real deity; it is your own creation, from your own astral body. Do you know the Bimba-Pratibimba Nyaya?”

Let’s see. . . “the Law of Image and Reflection?”

“Yes. When the moon rises over a still pond you see a perfect reflection of it on the water. It looks like the moon but is not. What you create within you by Tantric sadhana is only a reflection of the image you have of your deity. But since you have given that image all the powers of the deity that reflection can do your work for you, and eventually it will lead you to the real deity. This is the sure way; it takes a little time.

“In Aghora, which is purely Tamasic, you do not bother with sweetly inviting the deity to come to you. You demand that God come, and you catch God by the hair and drag Him or Her if necessary. Aghoris use intoxicants and other sorts of aids because they want a quick blitzkrieg process. But this results in excessive Rajas and Tamas, and if you make even the slightest miscue down you go, dive bombing. And do you think that God likes to be dragged by the hair? God will say, ‘OK, if this guy thinks he is so great, let us see what happens when I give him a taste of his own medicine.’ And then you had better be ready to endure God’s Tamasic play, which is no joke. Aghora and Tantra are dangerous things to fool about with.”

“So I should be patient,” I said with a twinge of bitterness.

“You *have* to be patient. My case was different, I admit; quite different from most. I never intended anything to occur; from the beginning of my spiritual career until now I have never requested any specific sadhana from anyone. Jina Chandra Suri tricked me into sitting on that corpse (see *Aghora*), but had he not done so I would never have realized Ma so quickly. I have always had faith that Ma will teach me what I need to know, and so She has. Faith is the key, and the best way to gain faith is to repeat the sweet name of God, and turn your entire existence over to God. This is the essence of sadhana.

“One reason you will have to be patient is that deities don’t like to come to you if They can avoid it. They are more like animals in that way. In the forest, will a deer come to you immediately, even if you call it with love? No, because deep down is the fear that one day you will come and catch its throat. Similarly, the deity is afraid that if He comes near you you will catch Him and give Him work to do. To overcome this fear you must know the likes and dislikes of your particular deity. You must offer Him that which He craves; then how will He be able to hold out? Deities love to play about, and may try some stunts on you in return. If you don’t allow anything to affect you, you’ll be OK. If you waver or fumble then you’ve had it.

“Deities are very simple, really; They’re a lot like children. When They love you They love you without any restraint; but if you cheat or harass Them They’ll never forget it. If you really want to become close to your deity, you have to become just like a little child. Remember the words of Jesus: ‘Unless you become like a little child you will not be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’

“You have to be able to say to your deity, in all sincerity, ‘I’m so lonely; I don’t have any other playmates. Please come and play with me.’ But let me tell you, it is extremely difficult to forget your position and ego and what-

have-you and become a child again. It takes years and years of hard work to reach this stage, the stage when you can say to your Beloved without an iota of cunning or craftiness, 'Look, I have this chocolate; if You will come to me I'll give it to You.' A child doesn't know how to bribe, so it's permissible. But you know, and you have to forget."

"And so one of the names for Shiva is *Smarahara*, 'the Killer of Memory.'"

"Yes. Only He can erase all your memories of who you are, which is how He kills you; He makes your Kundalini love Him so much that She forgets in that instant to self-identify with you."

"And if you do this willfully in sadhana—if you 'die while still alive'—then She can be made to identify with a new personality."

"Yes. One of the reasons saints love to remain in solitude is that they need time away from other humans to enable them to forget themselves. You know that to achieve success at Tantra you need strong virility; you must be powerful to perform sadhana. The more sadhana you do the more *ojas* you will create. Do I need to tell you what *ojas* is?"

"No." *Ojas* is an Ayurvedic concept; it is that essence of physical energy which produces your aura and your immunity to invasion by diseases or other unwelcome visitors.

"When you have plenty of *ojas* your aura becomes tremendously enhanced, which will attract plenty of people to you who will come and bother you. This happened to Ramakrishna Paramahansa at one point. He actually had to ask Bhavatarini Ma to make him outwardly normal again, and to make him 'inwardly attractive' instead. Because he preserved all his *ojas* inside he was able to perfectly self-identify with Her; he dissolved into Her.

"Once you reach a certain stage in your love for God all you will be able to do is love, and you won't be able to express your love in words even if you want to. This sometimes happens between humans, too, if they really love one another. It can also be true of animals, which is why I like dogs. Dogs have pure, unselfish love for their masters, which is why I would like to become God's dog, totally devoted to Him alone."

Vimalananda's dog, Lizoo, an astute canine, overheard us discussing dogs, and jumped into his lap, as if to say, "And I am *your* dog, totally devoted to you!"

He petted her tenderly. "People frequently come and tell me, 'I am getting less and less peace the more I repeat my mantra.' Whenever troubles increase like that during sadhana you can be sure that you are getting closer to your deity. You cannot realize your deity until your consciousness

becomes clear and clean, for which you have to burn off all your bad karmas. As you become firmer in your sadhana, more and more of your bad karmas from this life and from thousands of previous lives are liberated from your causal body. You are bound to be affected by this—everyone likes to spend, and no one likes to pay the bills—but don't let that stop you. Continue on, continue until you achieve; then you will understand that it was 100% worth it.

"This is Kali Yuga, though, and as soon as most people start getting this negative effect from the removal of their bad karmas they think that it is somehow the fault of the mantra and they quit their practice altogether, just at the point they should be doing it more vigorously. Is it any surprise that they never get any result from their sadhana?"

"It is no surprise," I echoed sardonically.

"There was once a man who did penance of Lord Shiva for one hundred years without every having any personal experience of Him. As this fellow lay dying he thought to himself, 'What is this? Is all my penance for nothing?' He should have remembered that just as matter is indestructible all action must bear its fruit; it is only a question of time. Time exists only for us mortals, not for the immortals. Nature's wheels turn very slowly, like those of the steam roller, but like the steam roller Nature crushes everything in Her path.

"The man was reborn as a bee. He forgot the mantra he was repeating, he forgot his ritual, he forgot everything, but at the back of his mind was the lingering tendency to worship Shiva; at least that much carried over from his previous life.

"It was probably this lingering tendency which led the bee to fly one day to Benaras, Shiva's chief city. He reached the garden of a merchant, and seeing the beautiful lotuses there began to suck their nectar. He had forgotten all about Shiva and everything else; he was thinking only of nectar. He became so drunk on nectar that he didn't notice that night fell and the lotuses closed while he was inside one of them. He was trapped. What to do? He had to wait until morning to escape.

"Next morning before dawn the merchant went out into his garden, cut the lotus that held the bee, took it into his worship-room, said, 'Bhole!' and put the lotus atop his image of Shiva.

"When the sun rose its rays fell onto the lotus, which opened and allowed the bee to exit. Lord Shiva, who knows past, present and future, said to Himself, 'Wah, wah! Here is a man who worships me and does penance for a hundred years and then dies and comes back as a bee to sit on my head!

*Varam bruhi!* (Ask for a boon!)

“The bee said, ‘What “varam bruhi!” now? That would have been useful when I was a man. Now make me like you are.’ And immediately he became just like Shiva. In fact, he became one of Shiva’s close attendants, an immortal.”

At this point Lizoo jumped up and began to lick Vimalananda’s face insistently, demanding immediate attention and so ending the conversation. This struck me as a sort of omen, a confirmation of all that Vimalananda had been saying, a reinforcement of his lesson.

## The Sun, the Moon, and Fire

During the afternoons Vimalananda’s conversation usually revolved around the racecourse, since most of the people who dropped by to see him at that time were interested in the hot tips which are the sustenance of those who gamble on horses. Those who were more interested in hearing him discuss spirituality would come in the evenings, when he would relax and let his mind focus on Reality. One night, after overhearing a couple of his spiritual “children” speaking knowingly of “devotion” and “knowledge,” he felt a need to put the record straight:

“In sadhana, either there can be ‘my wish’ or there can be ‘Thy wish.’ If ‘my wish’ exists I follow the path of jnana, trying to become a jnani; if only ‘Thy wish’ exists I follow the path of bhakti (devotion), aiming to become a bhakta, a devotee. These are the only two possibilities. ‘Our’ wish cannot exist, because then duality is present. Duality is something in between, neither here nor there, and ‘in between’ is of no use in spirituality. You should either be ‘here’ or ‘there.’ If you are ‘here,’ worshipping the divine in your own being, then you are a jnani, and your wish exists. If you are ‘there,’ you worship an external form of the divine, and you are a bhakta. There is no third way.

“On the path of jnana the guru helps the disciple take out his astral body while his physical body is still alive. It hurts the disciple a little, because his astral body has completely forgotten its true nature. It self-identifies so completely with the physical body that it is hard to make it split off. But when it is finally done the disciple knows that it was worth it, because now he can enter his own causal body and choose the karmas he wants to pay off at his own pace on his own terms. All he has to do now is follow the *adesha* (com-

mands, instructions) of the internal guru. *Adesha* means *Adya Isha*, the First Deity, the internal voice which tells the disciple what to do when.

“On the path of bhakti the guru arranges everything, and the disciple’s only job is to maintain continuous devotion.”

“Which is better?” asked a listener who came infrequently to Vimalananda’s den.

“There is no better or worse; it depends entirely on the sadhaka and the guru. The result is the same. Once Jnaneshwar Maharaj was traveling on a pilgrimage with a group of other saints. It was very hot that day, and they were all thirsty. The only well they could find had no bucket. How to get the water?

“First Jnaneshwar’s brother Nivritti Nath, who had taught Jnaneshwar the path of jnana, used his yogic powers to go down himself into the well and bring up water. Next Namdev, who had taught Jnaneshwar the path of bhakti, started to sing a song in praise of the Lord. His devotion was so profound that every living being in the neighborhood, even the trees and plants, became filled with the love of God. Soon even the water of the well began to overflow its rim out of sheer joy at hearing Namdev sing God’s praises. Then Jnaneshwar realized that he had seen the end result of both the paths of knowledge and devotion, and he asked his beloved deity Vitthala for permission to leave his body, because there was nothing left for him to see in the world.”

Silence descended for a moment as we all contemplated that scene, and then Vimalananda continued:

“Let’s think about it in terms of the subtle body, the nadis and Kundalini. Bhakti and jnana are the two roads to the Ajna Chakra. Whoever follows the path of jnana must concentrate on the sun. The ancient Vedics all followed jnana, and they were all basically sun worshippers. What happens to a man who looks into the sun? He becomes blind; literally blind, if he looks literally at the sun, and blind to the world if he stares at the Sun of Jnana. When you become blind to all differentiation, all name and form, you can see nothing which is not the One Reality. A sun worshipper follows the Ganga, which here represents the right nostril, the Surya Nadi.

“The man who follows the path of bhakti uses in his rituals the left nostril, the Yamuna, which represents the moon. This takes a little longer than the path of jnana, and even in the external world the Yamuna River is longer than the Ganga; it meanders, whereas the Ganga is direct. Yama, the Messenger of Death Himself, who happens to be the brother of the river Yamuna, says that if one takes a bath in the Yamuna on Bhau Bija (Brother’s

Day), then all one's karmas are washed away. So people flock to bathe in the Yamuna on that day, but they are fools. What Yama means is the Yamuna of the body, the left nostril."

After pausing briefly to let us gnaw on the idea of bathing oneself in a nadi, he shifted his tack:

"Of course, for a man to be overcome by bhakti is rare, though it is easy for a woman. A man must develop a waxen heart, a secret, internal love. What happens to someone who stares at luna, the moon? Lunacy, madness. When you achieve *Maha Bhava Samadhi*, emotional highlights, you go mad, mad with uncontrollable love and joy. The moon stands for the mind, and is cool. You get a delicious coolness and lunacy from the moon. It is this sweet madness that makes falling in love so wonderful. The sun also loves you, but the sun is so intense that it burns you to a crisp, without any interval of loveplay in between. The sun teaches you selflessness. Selfishness is your worst enemy, true, but without at least some selfishness there is no love.

"Rama, Perfection Encompassed (*Maryada Purushottama*), is of the solar race; His way is the way of penance. Krishna, Perfection Personified (*Purnat-maka Purushottama*), is of the lunar race; He loves to play hide-and-peek with His devotees, never letting them catch Him until the very end. The moon gets its light from the sun, but you can't look at the sun; you'll go blind. You can look at the moon, but you'll go mad. The choice is yours.

"Which is better therefore depends on you. But remember, if you choose to follow the path of jnana you will be using Surya Nadi, which will heat you up. The path of knowledge is dangerous nowadays because there are so many temptations. If your physical appetites are even slightly stimulated, it becomes most difficult to control them. So many good yogis have gone to the West and ruined themselves. They had good intentions, but did not realize, or perhaps forgot, that a yogi cannot be a *bhogi* (an enjoyer of sense pleasures) at the same time. Bhakti is much safer than jnana, because you use Chandra Nadi, which keeps you cool. It takes longer, but there is no danger of falling.

"It is because of these dangers on the path of jnana that Brahmanas, the priestly class, are supposed to wear their sacred thread, which is called a *jahnavi*, or *yajnopavita*. Jahnavi is also a name for the Ganga, which refers here to the internal Ganga, the Surya Nadi. The purpose of this sacred thread is to control and enhance the functioning of this 'sun channel,' which helps in the study of the Veda; the Veda is the path of jnana, and Brahmanas are supposed to be 'knowers of the Absolute.'

"I see that you are wearing a jahnavi," said Vimalananda to his visitor. "Do

you know its significance?"

The man folded his hands in the universal Indian gesture of respect, and replied, in English, "Sir, I was born a Brahmana, and I have worn this for many years, but no one has ever explained it to me to my satisfaction. I hope you will please do so."

"Please don't call me 'sir'; I have not been knighted by the queen," said Vimalananda, also in English, laughing. "The jahnavi is always worn from the left shoulder down to the right waist, except when certain rituals like *Pitri Tarpana* (ancestor worship) are performed when it is worn opposite (right shoulder to left waist). Great people like kings, princes and generals usually wear their swords, bandoliers or sashes left to right as well. A sash creates both a mental and physical sense of command; a jahnavi creates a spiritual sense of command, which is necessary for the path of jnana. This is its effect on the mind.

"A true jahnavi is handwoven of raw cotton, not wool or silk, since these materials have a different electrical potential. It has three strands of thread, with three peculiar knots added. Very few people today know why this is so. It has to do with the body's three most important nadis and with the three principal knots which must be pierced if Kundalini is ever to be fully awakened.

"What specifically does a jahnavi do to the physical body? Well, it certainly makes the right, or masculine, side of the body predominant. By wearing it over the left shoulder it helps a man accumulate and harness shakti. A woman has no need whatsoever to wear a jahnavi, because she is the embodiment of shakti. Unfortunately, I will bet that the only time you even think about your jahnavi is when you gather it up and drape it around your right ear whenever you go to the toilet. Am I right?"

The man nodded, sheepishly and vigorously.

"This is necessary because of its connection with Apana, the downward-moving form of the body's shakti. What connection? We'll have to discuss that later.

"Back in the Vedic era the jahnavi was an integral part of sadhana. When a boy was ready to begin studying with a guru he would, on an auspicious day, undergo the *Upanayana* ceremony, the initiation into Vedic studies during which boys first put on a jahnavi. First he would strip naked and have his head shaved, and then he would appear before his guru, who would show him how to tie his loincloth, which was one long piece of cloth, not the sewn thing that people use today. It had to be properly tied so that it would press on a certain vertebra, and thus stimulate certain nadis. This sig-

nified the beginning of the period of the boy's life during which he would be a celibate student. Celibate, to prevent Kundalini from getting stuck in the sex center.

"Then the boy would do a full prostration to the guru, who would touch the boy's head and bless him. While holding the boy's head the guru would use phrenology to check out which parts of the brain were most fully developed, to determine which branch of knowledge the boy should pursue. A well-developed occiput would indicate a talent for mathematics, and so on.

"This was an opportune moment to test the boy's other capabilities as well. Suppose the guru wanted to know whether or not the boy could succeed at alchemy. He would pour mercury into the palm of the boy's hand, and tell him to pour it back into the bottle without spilling a drop. If he could do this, he was fit. He would be able to do this only if he had one long, straight line running across his palm, so this is a form of palmistry. Since the lines on the palm are created by certain genes, examination of the palm means examination of the genes. And since the genes are closely related to an individual's karmas, we will have a good idea of what will happen to him in the future.

"When the guru had decided what the boy was fit to study he would initiate him into that version of the Gayatri Mantra which was most suitable for him, and would make him wear the jahnavi. Then the boy's parents would beg for him to return home. If he really wanted to succeed, he would ignore them and stay with the guru. Those others, who did it only for show—everyone nowadays, since no one knows the process—would return with their parents, and in the course of time would forget the mantra and remove the loincloth. Then what would be the use of their continuing to wear the jahnavi?

"Many people wear jahnavis today, but most never know what they are meant for. How can you be a knower, a jnani, if you don't know anything about what you are practicing? No, it is always better today to follow the path of devotion."

## Gayatri

"Do you believe," the visitor inquired, "that repeating Gayatri is a good thing?"

"I do smashan sadhana," Vimalananda replied, "because I am fit for it,

and because it is fit for the age we live in. Some people, though, still try to perform sadhanas that were more appropriate for Satya Yuga. There are many people who claim to repeat the Gayatri Mantra, and claim to obtain all manner of believable and unbelievable benefits from it. They babble on about how 'A man who achieves success with the Gayatri Mantra attains to supreme realization,' and whatnot. But do they know that the mantra that they are reciting as Gayatri is not really the Gayatri Mantra? And that the form which they visualize as they do their *japa* (repetition of mantra) is not the real form of Gayatri?

"And do they know what will happen if they do too much *japa* of Gayatri? If you think I'm trying to be funny just try it sometime; your head will become overheated. Once a man came to me to learn the Gayatri mantra. I told him, 'Gayatri is certainly one of the most ancient and powerful of our mantras, but the mantra which is printed in the books is not the real Gayatri; it is the Savitri. You are not in a position to know the real Gayatri, so please don't try to do it. It is only meant for Rishis, not for you.'

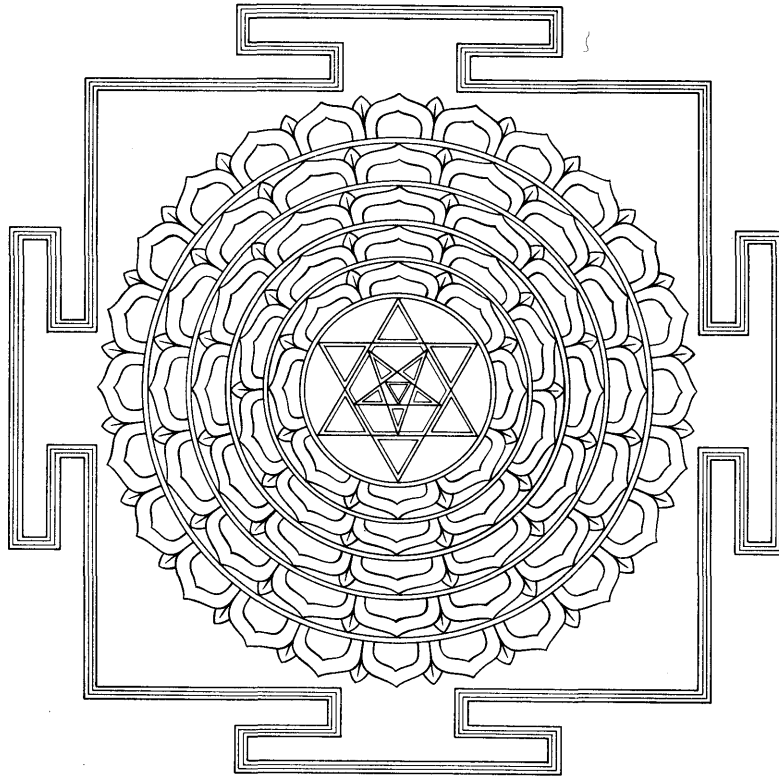
"When he insisted, I gave him only one syllable of the real Gayatri and told him, 'You should not even try to do this, but because you insist I will give you a fragment of the real thing. You are not strong enough to handle the whole mantra.' I told him to repeat it only eleven times a day.

"Because he had already done plenty of sadhana he thought he was far beyond such a beginner's limit and he overdid it; he repeated it one hundred and eight times the first morning. That evening he suddenly told his wife, 'I am Narayana and you are my Lakshmi. Massage my legs!' As she did he repeated slowly, 'All in one, one in all.' Then he walked into the bathroom, complaining of a headache.

"When he didn't come out of the bathroom for quite a long time his wife panicked and called the neighbors to break down the door. They found him sitting with his head under the tap, trying to cool down the tremendous heat which had been created in his head. He did not survive long after that; he realized himself and threw off his 'earthly shackles.'

"Gayatri must always be performed in water. Since Gayatri is the power of the sun, the Surya Nadi works more strongly when it is repeated. It is not healthy for only one nadi to function continuously, so water, which is ruled by the moon, is recommended in order to encourage the Chandra Nadi to counteract any ill-effects of excessive solar influence. This keeps the sun and moon in equilibrium. If this man had repeated that single syllable only eleven times as he had been told to do, that excess of fire which did him in would never have happened."





**A Gayatri Yantra**

I thought again of Pandit Gopi Krishna and the sufferings his Surya Nadi caused him when it functioned continuously.

“When I first met my Junior Guru Maharaj he told me to repeat Gayatri, and to do it in water. I thought I would be clever and do it in my bathtub in the comfort of my own home, but he vetoed that idea and insisted that I do it in the ocean. Every night for more than three and a half years I would go down to the Arabian Sea around midnight and would finish by dawn. The currents would carry me several miles south during the night, and the waves were sometimes several meters high during the monsoon. But Smashan Tara was holding me in the palm of Her hand at all times and I never came to the least harm—not even a fish bite. I got into the routine so well that Guru Maharaj had to return to Bombay and order me to stop doing it. He didn’t

want me to go too far too fast.

“As for the benefits of doing Gayatri, well, you get the power of the sun. Let me put it this way: the great saint Samartha Ram Das, who lived right here in Maharashtra, did Gayatri for twelve years, and he could raise the dead. My Junior Guru Maharaj has been doing Gayatri for more than sixty years, a lot more. Think of what he must be able to do. He also worships the fire, but without any ostentation; he is too shrewd for that. He doesn’t want anyone to know what he can do, or for that matter what he is doing.

“Gayatri is the only mantra repeated in Satya Yuga. As the Yugas advance all the other inferior mantras arise. Gayatri is the mother of all the Vedas. Only the Rishis, and no one else, know everything there is to know about Gayatri. There are twenty-eight types of Gayatri, and each Rishi specialized in one type; that is his special knowledge, his vijnana. For example, only one Rishi knows the full form of the Gayatri for creation, the Brahma—Gayatri. The Rishis obtain the power of the sun all because they repeat the Gayatri Mantra.

“I think you can see now that the Rishis were very advanced indeed in the spiritual line. A Rishi actually ‘sees’ the Truth. This perception of Truth spontaneously manifests in the form of mantras. Only a part of the Truth can ever be manifested here in our world, the World of Death, where things are imperfect and have to be imperfect in order to remain here. Each aspect of Truth has its own phonetic value, which is expressed in the vowels, consonants, rhythm, pitch, and intonation of the mantra. The mantras which were perceived in this way were collected in a coherent way to form the Vedas.

“They say that the Rishi Vasishtha composed a good number of mantras of the Rg Veda, and that Angiras composed so many for the Atharva Veda, and so on, but I do not believe that the Vedas are the product of many Rishis. I think that each Veda must be the product of only one Rishi. How could there be complete coherence in their subject matter if there were many different Rishis responsible for them, each of whom has his own individual vijnana, his own unique Gayatri? There must have originally been a Veda for every Rishi, because each Veda was an exposition of his own knowledge.

“What I am trying to make you understand is the essence of the Vedas and their fundamental teachings. The Vedas are a labyrinth to those who don’t know the inner meanings of the mantras, and only a select few people know this now, or ever did. That is why certain junior Rishis had the duty to write Upanishads, as explanations of that essence. When people can no

longer understand Truth directly, religions spring up to explain Truth to them. Some people then take advantage of the situation and become priests to extract benefits for themselves.

“A priest will not tell you that his purpose is to maintain control over the people, but he will tell you that he is an authorized intermediary between you and God, which is the same thing. When people have to go through priests to get to God, naturally the priests will become powerful. But that is all bull. You must forget all about priests and go looking for God on your own; you must carve out your own niche.

“But if you take on yourself the responsibility of carving out your own niche you have to follow the directions of your teacher to the letter. What happens when you don't follow instructions is what happened to this man to whom I taught Gayatri. I knew how much he could safely take, but he did not. Now he is happy, no doubt. Not happy—blissful! He is one with Narayana. But what about the weeping wife he left behind? Who is responsible for having made her a widow? I am. Now I no longer give people mantras. If people knew how dangerous it is to give out mantras they would think a hundred times before they ever did it.

“This applies to even ‘harmless’ mantras, like the one to control snakes, or the one for *Svapneshvari*, the goddess of dreams. Even *Svapneshvari* can be abused. You might send her to trouble someone else needlessly in their dreams, or you might tell her, ‘Now I want to see Marilyn Monroe.’ You will see her, but then if you say, ‘Now I want to see her labia minora,’ you will certainly see those too, but that will not be good for you in the end. A mantra is not a thing to use frivolously.

“Used properly, though, mantras can work wonders. For this we have the Rishis to thank, since all methods of sadhana have originated from them. You see, each Rishi is a scientist, with his own researches to conduct, and when he succeeds in his research the result is beneficial in so many different ways, like ‘three-in-one oil.’

“For example, snakes possess different types of poisons. One poison paralyzes the nerves. Another thins out the blood so that internal hemorrhages occur. Some poison thickens the blood; it coagulates, clots form and the tissues are not properly nourished. Sometimes a clot might cause an embolism, which could kill the patient.

“Now, the ordinary man who learns a mantra against snakebite will use it only against snakebite. Maybe every year or two he will have a chance to use it and save someone's life. But someone whose intelligence is awakened will examine the mantra and discern its more general purpose. He may find that

a particular mantra for snakebite thins out the blood and makes it rush through the blood vessels. Then he will realize that the same mantra can be used in every case where that effect is needed, such as an embolism, arteriosclerosis, and the like. And how many people suffer from these diseases? Millions.

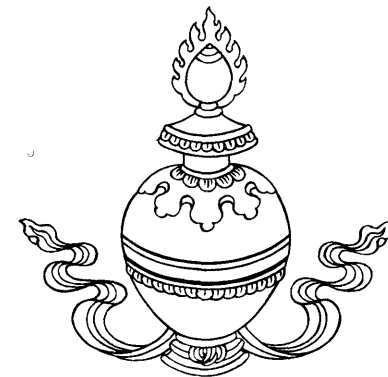
“Such a man will be able to cure thousands of people with that mantra, whereas the ordinary man may help only ten or twenty in his entire life. This is the true knowledge of the mantra. If you know it, wherever you go you can hold your own against anyone, thanks to the Rishi who ‘saw’ the mantra.”

He fell silent for a moment, and then turned to me.

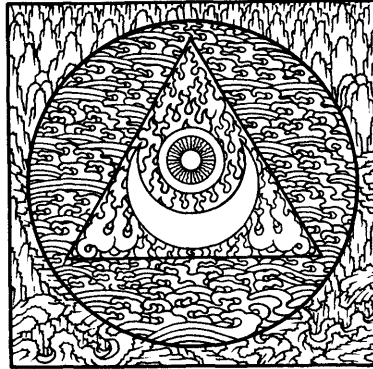
“You know, Robby, all this mantra and tantra is very nice, but it is limited. There are things far beyond mantra, things the tongue cannot speak. And when you get to that point, there is no need for mantra. When you realize those things, you realize that mantra is just a toy. When you have the power of the sun at your beck and call, will you ever bother to use an Eveready battery? No, you won't, and the comparison is the same here. On the one hand, Gayatri and the power of the sun, the lore of the Rishis; on the other, Aghora.”

“But until we get to that stage, we have to make use of mantra,” I piped up.

“You have no choice,” replied Vimalananda, and we all began to laugh.

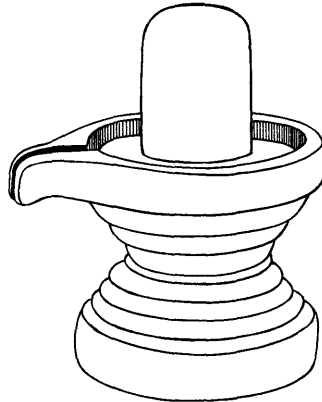


Treasure Vase



### The Five Elements

Earth (square); Water (circle); Fire (triangle); Air (crescent); Space (moon).



Shiva Linga

# MANTRA

“Once there was an Englishman, a District Collector (government administrator), who told his servant, ‘When any great saint comes, tell me. I want to get jnana from him.’”

Vimalananda and I were sitting in Poona. It was mid-morning, breakfast was over, the preparations for lunch were under way, and he was in a good mood.

“One day a saint came to town with a large group of his followers, chanting the name of Krishna: ‘Radheshyam, Radheshyam, Radheshyam.’ When the Collector’s servant saw this he immediately remembered his master and decided to tell him about the saint, hoping for a reward. When he heard that a saint had come the Collector said to his servant, ‘Go and make arrangements for my visit. I am coming for jnana.’”

“The servant returned to the place where the saint was doing his chanting and started getting everything ready for his boss’s visit: a nice chair with a red sash in a prominent spot for him to sit on, and whatnot. When the saint asked the servant what was going on, the servant replied that a ‘great man’ was coming. The saint said, ‘All right, but first remove that chair.’ The servant said, ‘If I do that, you don’t know what sort of trouble you will be getting yourself into.’ At that, the saint told his followers to ignore the fellow and start chanting again.

“When the Collector arrived he ordered everyone to stop singing and said, in Hindi, ‘Look here, I have come for jnana.’ The saint looked up at

him and told him, also in Hindi, 'Dear boy, just repeat God's name,' and told his followers to resume chanting.

"The Collector asked a second time and received the same reply. He asked a third time, adding, 'I don't like this noise.' The saint looked at him and said in Hindi, 'Shut up, *sala!*'

"*Sala* means 'brother-in-law.' If I call someone my brother-in-law it means I am sleeping with his sister. This is a serious insult here in India.

"The Collector became absolutely wild on being called '*sala*' and lost his temper. He shouted, 'Now you want to see who I am? Call the police,' he said to his servant, 'and have this man taken away!'

"The saint asked, 'What have I done?'

"The Collector answered, 'You have insulted me.'

"And how was that?'

"You called me *sala*.'

"Then the saint smiled and said, in fluent English, 'Now see what has happened to you: one little word has made you uncontrollably angry. And it is not even possible for me to be your *sala* because you have no sister! When one bad word can affect you so profoundly think of what a good effect you would get if you spent your time repeating God's name.'

"The Englishman was stunned. He had never dreamed that the saint knew English. Then suddenly he realized, 'How could this man know that I have no sister?' He immediately prostrated himself to the saint and said, 'I have received the wisdom I came for.' He went home, bequeathed everything to his servant, and without any delay became a *sadhu*. I know that this story is true; I met this man in Girnar. This shows you practical proof of the power of God's name."

He paused to light a cigarette. A troop of monkeys passed overhead heading for the nearby cemetery, as they did every Saturday.

"God's name produces results in any language in which you repeat it. Once you approach near to God and God begins to speak to you He will speak in your own mother tongue, the one in which you feel most at home. The priests of the various religions will tell you, 'No, God can speak only in Latin, or Sanskrit, or Arabic, or Hebrew, or Pahlavi,' but it isn't so. Who created all the languages? He did—capital H. So why can't He speak in any language that He pleases?

"And likewise you can speak to God in any language you like, and He will hear you, if you are sincere. Because each grouping of sounds has its own phonetic value, however, some languages are better than others for certain

purposes. Arabic, for example, is very good for mundane magic. And Sanskrit is very good for creating deities. Each sound of the Sanskrit alphabet is a Bija Mantra. A Bija Mantra is a seed which when planted in the consciousness gives rise to a certain effect. Repetition of the appropriate Bija Mantra is a quick way to create the form of the deity you are worshipping because the vibrations of the sound itself produce the form."

"But of course this is applicable only to Indian deities," I interjected.

"Absolutely not!" he countered. "Someone who knows the phonetic value of various sounds can create a mantra that will be applicable for any deity. You have worshipped Jesus for many years; there is a Bija Mantra for Jesus also, and if you know it and know how to use it you can reach Jesus very quickly. Mantras can be very useful."

"If this is the case then why don't more Christians follow this path and get the result?" I inquired.

"Who bothers about these things?" he replied indignantly. "All the *padres* are too busy converting other people to worry about their own development. I say, forget about other people and worry about converting yourself. Convert yourself into the form of your deity; that is a *real* conversion. That is the beauty of Tantra.

## Mantra Siddhi

"Many people talk about *Mantra Siddhi* (the manifestation of the deity inherent in the mantra), but I am afraid that most of them have missed the boat. Let's say that I want to locate you, and I know your name. But that alone is not enough. I must also know what you look like and where you live, because there may be many people with the same name. Only if I know your likes and dislikes, your temperament, all the facets of your character, do I really know you. Then I can locate you.

"It is the same in *sadhana*. When you call a particular deity with the help of a mantra, which is nothing but that deity's name, you must have a mental image of what He or She looks like. Day after day you call; where will your Beloved go? The deity must come to you, and will come as soon as you forget everything else. At first you will only be able to draw your deity to you occasionally. Then, as you get onto His or Her wavelength, you will be with that deity at all times. This stage is called *tanmayata*, or 'togetherness.'

"Eventually your own individuality becomes completely dissolved, and

you and your deity become one consciousness. When you become identical with your deity you have reached the stage of *tadrupata*. At this stage there is *mantra chaitanya*: there is total union of your consciousness and your mantra. Every cell in your body becomes a resonator for your mantra; every pore becomes a mouth with which you speak God's name."

The Tantras maintain that the consciousness of a certain region of the physical body is its deity. Since every mantra is a deity, the entire human body is composed of mantras, and is a mantra itself. By repeating mantras you are continuously recreating yourself in a new image. Eventually, when you are truly purified, your original personality becomes totally effaced, and only the image of your deity remains. Vimalananda illustrated with a story:

"One day while traveling from place to place a wandering sadhu came upon a boy herding buffaloes. He was hungry, so he asked for some milk to drink, and the boy gave it to him readily. When he had drunk to his satisfaction the sadhu began to feel generous, and asked the herdsman, 'What would you like? I'm feeling so fine, I'll give it to you.'

"The boy chuckled and said, 'I really don't need anything. I do nothing all day long but herd my buffaloes, and I'm satisfied with that. Besides, Maharaj, you came to me as a beggar and I gave you alms. How can I expect anything from you in return? I am the giver, not you.'

"The sadhu was taken aback by this answer, and realized that this was no ordinary buffalo-herd. Then he thought he would do a good turn for the fellow anyway, and asked, 'What is it that you love most in the world?'

"'Why, this buffalo,' the boy replied innocently, 'the one whose milk you just drank. She is the largest I have. She gives me more than ten gallons of milk a day, and she is so broad and strong, so loving and beautiful and well-behaved, that I love her best of all.'

"'All right,' said the sadhu, 'please do one thing. Go sit in that cave over there and imagine that you are this buffalo. Think of her; keep her picture with you in your mind. Completely self-identify with her; become her. As you sit repeat to yourself, "Bhaisoham, bhaisoham" ("I am a buffalo, I am a buffalo.") Don't worry about a thing; I'll look after your buffaloes.'

"The herdsman did as the sadhu instructed, and when after three days the sadhu entered the cave to check on the boy he found him sitting motionless with his eyes closed, repeating, 'Bhaisoham, bhaisoham.' Then the sadhu said, 'So, young buffalo-herd, how have you progressed? Come out now.'

"The herdsman answered, 'Don't call me a buffalo-herd! I am a buffalo. Can't you see that? Look at my broad back! How can I leave this cave? My

horns are too broad to go through the entrance. Now don't be foolish; go away and leave me alone or I'll gore you and toss you out with these beautiful horns of mine.'

"But the sadhu persisted and said, 'Try to remember, my boy. I told you to sit and do this. Now, instead of repeating, "I am a buffalo, I am a buffalo," start to identify with Shiva. Repeat, "Shivoham, Shivoham" ("I am Shiva, I am Shiva").' The herdsman did that, and in about fifteen minutes he was in a deep trance. He realized his goal: the Universal Soul in the form of Lord Shiva.

"The sadhu was astonished. Tears came to his eyes and he said to himself, 'This fellow sits only three and a half days and achieves, and I have wandered around practicing without success for years and years.' Then he had to take that buffalo-herd as his guru, and finally he also realized.

"That the buffalo-herd could achieve so quickly is of course the result of preparation from previous births. The same thing happened to Ramakrishna Paramahansa. What it took his guru thirty years to achieve Ramakrishna achieved in a few days. Time is not the criterion; if the desire is strong enough the result must occur without delay. You must forget everything except the name and form of your deity; then you can achieve the highest."

"Is 'Soham' the same as 'Shivoham?'" I asked.

"Not exactly. Many saints tell their disciples to repeat 'Soham,' which means 'Sa aham', 'I am He,' 'He' meaning the Universal Self in Its formless aspect. This is all very fine, except that it is not quite what is desired. It's not so easy to identify with the Universal Self, which is impossible to imagine, much less put into words. If the mantra is inversed, however, it becomes 'Hamsah,' which is the Bija Mantra of Sarasvati, the goddess of learning. Whoever repeats that mantra gets the benefit of Sarasvati's Shakti, which will lead the repeater step by step to Soham. It is always the Mother who shows the child the face of its Father, as Bhavatarini Ma did for Ramakrishna.

"The sadhu gave the boy a name and form on which to concentrate his mind because he had to do some preliminary work, no matter how minimal, with the help of a form. Both name and form are essential for worship. One part of the mind takes the shape of an object; that is form. Another part of the mind identifies and distinguishes it; that is name. To go directly to the highest type of samadhi is almost impossible. Even Ramakrishna had to worship Mother Bhavatarini for many years before his consciousness became one-pointed enough to achieve The Formless."

“Why a buffalo?”

“A buffalo was the logical choice for the buffalo-herd, because he lived around them, and loved them; he had a strong affinity for buffaloes. You may not choose a buffalo for your concentration, since after all a buffalo is the very embodiment of inertness and stupidity; it is Tamas personified. You will probably prefer to use a deity to prepare yourself, and that too one with whom you have an affinity.”

## Using Mantras

“How will I know which form I have an affinity for?”

“That is the job of your guru, to assign you the proper mantra and the proper form. He will know which mantras are appropriate for you. If you are of a very tender nature and you start to repeat a mantra for some terrifying deity like Smashan Tara you may scare yourself to death. If you are prone to greed and you worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, you may simply enhance your greed, which will not help you progress. This is why a guru is necessary: to teach you what you need to learn. People are amazing nowadays; they tell the guru what they want to learn from him, instead of trying to find out from him what they need to know. Is there anything more ridiculous?”

“You must also be sure that you have the proper form of the deity that goes with your mantra; otherwise you may waste years in fruitless effort. Most deities have many different forms. For example, it is possible to worship Krishna as a baby, a young boy, a handsome young man, a lover, a king, a warrior, Arjuna’s friend, and so on. You can see Him in many different forms, including even His universal form. But name and form are identical, so each different form must have a different name, a different mantra. Without a guru’s help, how will you know which is best for you? You can only know which is best for you if you have already understood both your own nature and the inherent nature of the deity.

“It may take ten years of hard penance for a man to achieve success with a mantra for Anjaneya, since most men relate to Anjaneya as the greatest of heroes; but a woman can satisfy Anjaneya in ten days. Most people will tell you that women should not worship Anjaneya since He is celibate, and this is true in the sense that romantic or erotic love is useless. But Anjaneya must respect and love one woman: His mother Anjani. So if a woman wor-

ships Anjaneya as if she were Anjani and He were a tiny baby monkey she can get results very quickly. It’s wonderful, isn’t it? People worship Lord Krishna in the same way, in the form of Lallu or Gopala, just as they worship the Baby Jesus. A man could do the same thing, but men are not innately motherly like women are; it may take a man years to develop real motherliness.

“Not only must you know the right form of the deity, but you must have perfect faith in that one aspect of the Godhead if you hope to succeed. One whom I’ve known for several years came to visit me recently and was boasting that he worships one deity, does japa for a second, prays to a third, and sometimes approaches others as well. How can he ever succeed in propitiating one when he divides himself among so many, like a prostitute?”

Another striking image: the spiritual harlot.

“And he is not alone; look in the worship-room of almost any Indian and you’ll find pictures of images of fifteen or twenty gods, goddesses, saints, wonderworkers, and what-have-you. This is just a sign of a chaotic mind. If you ever hope to achieve you must select one form and stick to it; that is part of *niyama*. Look at the great poet-saint Tulsidas. When Lord Krishna came to him, he said, ‘Lord, I know that you are nothing but Vishnu in a different form, and you are in no way any different from Lord Rama; in fact You are the Universal Self. But still I prefer to see the form dearest to my heart, my Raghuvira, my heroic Rama.’ And Krishna smiled and showed it to him.”

After a brief intermission, during which the rice was put on the fire to cook, Vimalananda continued.

“Even if you have been given an appropriate mantra, and know the correct form to visualize with it, and follow good *niyama*, you still cannot hope to succeed just by repeating your mantra without any discipline. It is always good to repeat God’s name, and so it is good to repeat your mantra all day long, whether you are eating, sleeping, making love, or sitting on the toilet. But do not expect that this will be sufficient to achieve Mantra Siddhi. For that you need to follow a specific process called *purashcharana*.

“For one *purashcharana* you decide how many repetitions you can do in a year. You must do the same number every day. After you finish, ten percent of that amount must be offered as oblations, that is, as offerings into a *homa* fire. Then ten percent of the number of oblations must be offered with water; this is called *tarpana*. Ten percent of that number must be then recited as you sprinkle water about your body in a particular way; this is called *marjana*. Finally, ten percent of that number is offered as *bhojana*, gifts

of food, usually to children. When all this is complete so is your purashcharana.

“In Kali Yuga they say that you need to do only three purashcharanas correctly to bring about a mantra’s full effects. In truth, if you really desire God to come He can come in three days, or three hours, or even the minutest instant. But today Maya is so strong that very few can do even one purashcharana properly. Why do you think Maya tests everyone? Not because She wants to ruin us; oh, no! She is the Mother; She has given everything to us. It is because She has to know if our love is really meant for Her, or only for Her creations, that She tempts us; She loves us so much that She always wants us to get exactly what we want.

“Because a year is such a long time to follow strict discipline during Kali Yuga, God in his wisdom has established another, easier way of performing a purashcharana. According to this reckoning a purashcharana is made up of three anushthanas. One *anushthana* is made up of the minimum amount of japa required to perfect the mantra. Before you become so great as to do a full purashcharana you must first succeed at an anushthana.

“When we talk about ‘perfecting’ a mantra,” he said pointedly to me as I furrowed my brow, attempting to understand, “we mean purifying it, and ourselves, so that it can exert its effects without any obstructions, so that its Shakti becomes available to us. The number of japas needed to perfect a mantra varies according to the mantra, but is often one hundred thousand or more.”

“How many is it for the mantra I am repeating right now?” I had been repeating this particular mantra for many months, and a little voice was now telling me, “You haven’t been paying attention to how many you’ve been repeating! How will you ever achieve this way?”

“For right now, assume that you are repeating a mantra for which one hundred thousand repetitions are necessary. Suppose you were to decide to do an anushthana, to repeat this mantra one hundred thousand times in a controlled, consistent way.” I decided then and there to do so. “You can do them in as many days as you please, but you must do the same number each day. Then you must offer ten percent of that number, i.e., ten thousand, as homa. Ten percent of that, or one thousand, must be offered as tarpana, one hundred as marjana, and finally you must feed ten people. Each deity requires a different sort of human ‘mouth’; for Anjaneya small boys are needed, for Ma little girls, and so on.

“So this is why I should keep track of how many oblations I offer at each homa,” I said. “Should I do some of this tarpana and marjana, and feed peo-

ple, after I do homa?”

“Of course you should! Then your worship will be complete. Each segment of a purashcharana or anushthana relates to one of the Elements. Japa purifies the Air and Ether Elements in you, homa the Fire Element, tarpana the Water Element, and marjana the Earth Element. Bhojana is your final offering to your deity, whom you see in all those people you feed. Unless you know how to apply this sort of knowledge you can never be successful with any mantra. This is practical Bhuta Shuddhi, purification of the Five Great Elements which make up the universe, which is the essence of Tantra. You are not yet ready for Panchamakara, so you can begin with this.

## The Five S’s

“Both anushthanas and purashcharanas require you to follow what we call in Sanskrit the path of the Five S’s: *sthana*, *samaya*, *sankhya*, *samagri*, and *samyama*. The purpose of these rules is to achieve the *sa-guna* or manifested form of the deity. You know Sanskrit; translate these words.”

“‘Sthana’ means location.”

“So first you must stay in one location throughout the duration of your penance and not travel about. Moreover, you must sit in the same place each day, face in the same direction, and if possible sit in the same position.”

“‘Samaya’ means time.”

“Fix a time limit for your program—eleven days or forty days or whatever—and stick to it. Also, you must sit at the same time every day. Five minutes variation here or there is permissible, but no more. If you miss the time, you cannot count the repetitions you do that day in your total.”

“‘Sankhya’ means number.”

“You must decide the total number of repetitions you will do, and then divide that number by the number of days to determine how many you will do each day. And don’t decide to do five hundred and then one day become busy and do only one hundred, and hope to make up for it by doing a thousand the next day. You must do the same minimum number every day; you can do more but you cannot do less, or you cannot count that day.”

“‘Samagri’ means the materials used for worship.”

“These must be the same every day; no substitutions permitted. And ‘samyama’?”

“I’m not exactly sure, probably related to *niyama*?”

“Yes. Here *samyama* means complete control of the sexual organ; that means abstinence! Also, a woman cannot count the repetitions she does while she is menstruating. She should not even sit at her normal place of *japa*. In fact she should not even visualize intently, since that could imbalance the *Prana* and *Apana* in her body. Menstruation is a time for the body to purify itself; once it is over she can resume her previous routine.

“Only if all five of these *S*’s are fulfilled can the performance give results. A *sadhaka* must be rigid about this. Also, you must concentrate on what you’re doing when you do your *japa*. You cannot do a few repetitions and then start to worry about where your son is or whether your wife is cooking dinner or not. You must throw out all external attention and concentrate on interiority. And, you must be careful of your temper. While you are doing your *japa* your mind approaches God; if you become angry afterward all that you achieved in that department is immediately lost.

“There may be other restrictions too. For instance, a specific diet may be indicated. Whatever the diet you should not do *japa* for up to two hours after having a full meal. You should never even discuss mantras, astrology or any related subject for two hours after a meal. Why? Because your mind can only concentrate on one thing at a time, and if there is food in your stomach your mind will have to concentrate on that food in order to digest it.”

“What about fruit or milk?” I asked, since that was my diet at the time.

“At least an hour after eating fruit, and at least half an hour after drinking milk or juice. You should even wait for fifteen minutes or more after you have drunk some water. Once you no longer need your mind in order to digest your food this restriction will no longer apply; but you have to be able to die while still alive in order to do that.”

Ever the showman, he paused dramatically; but it was only a feint, for he then broke into a smile and said, “Now let us stop here and eat!” We went in to lunch.

## Secrecy

Some days later when I was in Bombay I accompanied Vimalananda on an uneventful visit to K., one of his old friends. Afterward I noticed that Vimalananda was quieter than usual, so after we reached home and had tea I casually asked him, “Have you known that gentleman for very long?”

He replied, “There are many restrictions to follow if you really want to perfect a mantra. One of the most important is that you must never tell anyone which mantra you repeat. When you tell someone else your mantra you allow them access to the *Shakti* you are trying to accumulate, which is tantamount to giving them a blank check and asking them to clean out your bank account. Anyone who needs to know your mantra will be able to find out without asking you; whoever cannot find it out without asking does not need to know.

“About twenty years ago K. wanted me to give him a mantra to repeat. He pleaded with me so long and so insistently that finally, against my better judgment, I gave in. K. was proud of his new acquisition, and when my Junior Guru Maharaj came to Bombay in 1959 and K. came to pay his respects, Guru Maharaj asked him what kind of *sadhana* he was doing. K. told him, ‘Vimalananda has given me a mantra which I am repeating regularly with great care.’

“Now, Guru Maharaj did not ask K. about his *sadhana* because he wanted to know about it. He already knew about it; finding out such things is child’s play for him. He asked because he wanted to know how solid K.’s dedication to *sadhana* had become. When Guru Maharaj learned that his dedication was not at all solid he decided to teach K. a lesson.”

“He knew it was not solid because K. was willing to speak about it, you mean?”

“That’s it; he knew the rules. Anyway, Guru Maharaj got wild and told K., ‘Who does Babuji’—meaning me; he always calls me Babuji—‘who does Babuji think he is—God?—that he is giving out mantras? Besides, he has not told you the entire mantra. He is trying to keep something from you; he has left out one syllable.’

“K. became alarmed; if the mantra was incomplete he might repeat it for many years and nothing would happen! So he said, ‘Oh, Maharaj, please take pity on me. Tell me the rest of it.’

“Guru Maharaj played his part well. At first he refused, but K. begged, pleaded and wheedled so sincerely that eventually Guru Maharaj took ‘pity’ on him and gave him the ‘additional syllable.’

“The result? Since 1959 K. has repeated that mantra faithfully every day for ten to twelve hours. Ten to twelve hours! He passed the ten million mark long back, and is probably near the twenty million mark now—but there has been no concrete result whatsoever. That extra syllable changed the entire phonetic effect of the mantra’s vibration. It didn’t belong there, of course; Guru Maharaj added it just to teach K. a lesson. But what a lesson!



Twenty or thirty years of sadhana down the drain! To Guru Maharaj, of course, twenty or thirty years means nothing at all, but to us mortals it is our lives. It just serves K. right for speaking his mantra aloud.”

I had heard stories of Guru Maharaj before, and after meeting him I found him to be as strict as Vimalananda portrayed him. At this stage in my life, however, such stories made me lose all interest in ever meeting Guru Maharaj myself, which is the effect Vimalananda intended. And he was right, of course; had I met Guru Maharaj then I would have been lucky to escape still wearing my skin.

“This is why people hate my Guru Maharaj,” Vimalananda continued, noting my reaction with satisfaction. “When people come to him he sees to it that they have a good purge of bad karmas from their causal bodies. All that person knows is that he went to Guru Maharaj and suddenly everything started to go wrong, so Guru Maharaj is blamed. But he doesn’t care. You can say he is just doing his job. He is very strict about doing his job, and rarely lets anyone escape if he finds out they are exceeding their limits. His lessons are really tough.

“Secrecy is always the best policy in sadhana. There is even a proverb to this effect: ‘maunam sarvartha-sadhanam.’ Translate please.”

“Uh, ‘silence accomplishes everything.’”

“Right. Consider this: whenever we are having a good discussion about spirituality some idiot always comes along to spoil it. Why? Because God does not like his secrets to be discussed so easily. How much more must He hate to have His mantras spoken?

“Knowing all these things I still allowed K. to have that mantra. Well, Guru Maharaj taught me a good lesson from this experience too: test an aspirant thoroughly before you teach him or her anything. If you give a monkey a razor, do you think he will shave himself or chop his neck? Very few people can understand the sort of play I have with my mentors.”

I certainly didn’t understand it.

“If I were to put my mind to it,” he went on “no one, including you, would ever be able to get anything out of me. Once when I was living the life of a naked sadhu in Girnar some baba heard about me and came to me to see what sort of knowledge he could extract. He brought a 5-barrelled *chillum* (straight pipe) along with him, and filled each barrel with a different sort of intoxicant: one held marijuana, another hashish, a third opium, a fourth chendool, and I don’t recall what was in the fifth. Chendool is certainly the worst; I don’t know what its equivalent is in the West, but it is very, very addictive.

“The baba, who thought he was being very smart, didn’t realize who he was dealing with. I smoked that chillum, and asked for more. He refilled it, I smoked it, and I asked for more. For the third pipeful all he had left was a piece of hashish the size of a walnut. I finished that too.

“After I was done I told him, ‘All smoked up? I’m so sorry; what I had to tell you has been burned up by all this smoking. Now get out!’ How did I do it? Well, that’s my secret. But it has something to do with mantras.”

## Pronunciation

I could see that mantras were really very useful things.

“Telling your mantra to someone else is fatal, but there are other mistakes which can also ruin you. Mispronunciation is one of the worst. The way a word is pronounced has a lot to do with its meaning. For instance, when you come in and I say, ‘Hello, Robby, how are you?’ with a pleasant voice and a smiling face, how do you feel?”

“I feel like you’re in a good mood.”

“Naturally, and so your confidence grows and you ask me questions. But if I just say ‘good morning’ in a cold voice you would immediately think, ‘Oh, he is off his mood today,’ and you would keep quiet or leave. Isn’t that it?”

“It is, most certainly; I have done that before.”

“Yes, I know. Well, it is the same with mantras. When the mantra is pronounced precisely and correctly the result is inevitable. One mantra pronounced in two different ways will have two very different, and perhaps even entirely opposite, effects. That is why the Vedas lay such stress on prosody and intonation. You cannot get any benefit from the Veda unless it is pronounced perfectly without any error. No mortals today know how to do this properly, so while I like to listen to you and Freddy recite certain Vedic hymns I don’t want you to recite most other portions of the Veda aloud. The game is not worth the risk.”

He paused to permit me to demonstrate compliance with his request, which I did by saying, “I will remember that advice, and I will pass it on to Freddy.”

“Good. I tell all my ‘children’ to always recite their mantras silently, mentally, and I want you to do the same thing. How many people can properly pronounce Sanskrit nowadays? Very few. Sanskrit is called a mantric lan-

guage because each of its words can be used as a mantra. This is why Sanskrit is not to be taught to just everyone. It should be taught only to those who can pronounce it properly, because if the name is incorrect the form will also be wrong, and then everything will be in a mess.

“Long ago conditions were different. Sometimes two Rishis would meet and gather all their best disciples together. One Rishi would say, ‘This boy has been reciting such-and-such a part of the Veda with such-and-such an intonation, and just look at the result!’ Then that boy would recite and the result would be demonstrated. The other Rishi would then show, with one of his own pupils, how an entirely different result could be gained by using a different intonation for the same passage. This is how Rishis used to compete.”

## Four Levels of Speech

“Of course the Rishis and their disciples knew how to pronounce Sanskrit properly.”

“Yes they did, and they knew other things as well, including how to best make use of all four levels of speech.” As I racked my brain for any information I might have collected on that subject, he continued. “You know, speech is not a product of the mind; speech is an independent creative faculty, a sense which operates through the mind. Kundalini is the power of an individual’s self-expression, which means that speech is simply the verbal expression of Kundalini. This is why the lotuses of the chakras have Bija Mantras for petals, and why mantras are so important for awakening Kundalini.

“What sort of speech you use will be determined by where your Kundalini happens to be when you speak. As long as Kundalini is still asleep, or predominantly so, you will speak mainly in gross verbal speech, the speech used habitually by so-called normal people. As She awakens, your speech becomes progressively subtle. The sort of manifestation you can generate with your mantra depends on the sort of speech you use when you repeat it. Whatever a Rishi speaks will come to pass, because Rishis speak divine words. God’s Word is very different from your words or my words because God’s ability to create is very different from yours or mine.

“The four levels of speech are, from lowest to highest, *Vaikhari*, *Madhyama*, *Pashyanti* and *Para*. *Vaikhari*, vocal speech, is only for mundane

things; it is physical speech, which always has an external object. Dullards and ignoramuses like you and me use *Vaikhari* to communicate. *Vaikhari* is only useful for living beings; once you are dead you can no longer hear *Vaikhari*. You can hear the thoughts of those you left behind, but not their words, which is probably just as well, since so often humans say one thing when they really mean another.

“*Madhyama*, as its name suggests, is midway between the mundane and the spiritual. People who have good intentions use *Madhyama*, which is mental speech, so its object is internal. *Pashyanti* is only for spiritual things. *Pashyanti* means ‘seeing’—seeing with the divine eye, clairvoyance. Actually, it is not seeing; it is perception, because the physical organ of sight plays no part or a very minor part in it. The eye acts only as a vehicle for this perception. Immortal beings like Naths and Munis who are aware of the significance of what they speak use *Pashyanti*. And *Para* is meant only for Rishis. It is beyond perception; it is telepathic speech, the highest.

“In *Satya Yuga* almost everyone communicates telepathically by using *Para*. Even in *Satya Yuga*, though, there are a few bad apples in the barrel, a few people whose consciousnesses are relatively impure, whose natures are more animalistic than the others’. These people use *Pashyanti* and *Madhyama*, which are still basically non-verbal forms of communication but are grosser than *Para*. When most people in the world can no longer communicate by *Para* you know that *Satya Yuga* is over. *Satya Yuga* is *satya*, truthful, because of *Para*, which can never be false. *Satya Yuga* lasts for eons because it is so full of truth.

“People can do better *sadhana* in *Satya Yuga* than we can now because they can speak in *Para*. Anything spoken in *Para* is millions of times more powerful than anything spoken in any other form of speech, especially *Vaikhari*. You should never express your love for anyone in *Vaikhari*; the fire in your tongue will only burn it. If you want to express love, whether for a person or a deity, always use at least *Madhyama*, if not *Pashyanti* or *Para*.

“This is why kissing is so wonderful. When kissing you cannot repeat your mantra in *Vaikhari*, and you may not remember to repeat it in *Madhyama* either; probably whatever you communicate will be in something higher. Just as in *Vajroli* (sexual yoga), give and take of energy is possible through kissing. Passing energy through a kiss is one hundred times easier than passing energy through *Vajroli* because much less energy is involved. If you have the intention to share your energy with someone when you kiss them, even if you have no idea of the technique, some transmission will occur, though it will be less efficient.

“Kissing with the lips still leads to loss of energy, however. Some energy does get transmitted, but most is lost because the attention gets trapped in the softness of the lips. In the past people used to kiss only on the forehead. As time went on they gradually moved down the face until they got to the lips. Kissing with the lips usually leads to sexual intercourse; the upper and lower lips are related. Kissing so that the underside of the tongue is involved stirs up the most energy because of the many nerves there. But what is the use of stirring up a lot of energy if you can't communicate well in Pashyanti or Para? Then very little of your energy will be successfully transmitted during intercourse; most of it will be burned off in passion. This is Kali Yuga, when Maya, including especially the Maya of the body, is very strong.

“Vaikhari, Madhyama and Pashyanti are predominated by Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva respectively. Since the world as we know it, Maya, is the result of these Three Gunas, the use of these three forms of speech is limited, imperfect, because they all exist within Maya. The state beyond the Gunas is the state beyond Maya. That state is perfect because it is absolute, and that is Para. There is no need for mantra in Para; mantras arise as the intent filters down into the grosser levels of existence.

“Look at it this way, with the help of the sacred syllable Om. The three and a half coils of the Kundalini represent the three and a half letters of the word Om: a, u, m, and *anusvara* (nasalization) at the end. But Om also has a *bindu* (orthographic dot) over the *anusvara*. *Anusvara* and *bindu* cannot exist without one another. *Bindu* is a point: position without dimension, as they define it in mathematics. *Anusvara* is pronounceable in Vaikhari and Madhyama, but *bindu* can be ‘pronounced’ only in Pashyanti and Para. How do you pronounce a dot? You can't; but the intention to pronounce it can be present.

“Intention counts for nothing in Vaikhari; a clever con artist can have you in tears while he is laughing inside over how easily he has duped you. Intention counts for something in Madhyama, and for a lot in Pashyanti. But intention counts for everything in Para. In fact, Para is nothing but intention: the purified intention of a purified ego, a Kundalini Shakti which has been magnified millions of times by intense penance. *Bindu* is used when the Kundalini moves from the Vishuddha Chakra into the Ajna Chakra, when Shunya begins. That is the very nature of *bindu*: emptiness, which is the source of all sound, the field from which sound arises.”

It seemed complex, so Vimalananda provided me with an Ayurvedic image.

“Here is another way to look at it. What is the word for ‘sweet’ in Sanskrit?”

“Swadu, or madhura.”

“Of all the sweet things in the world only honey is called *madhu*, because only honey can offer sweetness to the body without being digested first. This is because honey has already been digested by the bees. *Madhura* has an extra ‘ra’ in it; that ‘ra’ refers to the Fire Element. Anything that is *madhura* must first be digested before its sweetness can be released into the system. Of all forms of speech only Para is truly *madhu*. Para goes directly to its target and exerts its effect immediately, just as honey does in the body. All other speech must first be digested by the hearer before its effect can be felt. Pashyanti is always *madhura*, at least, and Madhyama usually is, which is why they are so useful. But Vaikhari is only sometimes sweet, because it is under the control of all Six Tastes. This is why sometimes we speak sweetly, and at other times our words are sharp, or bitter, or sour, or salty, or cold and hard.”

## The Four Classes

“And all this is due to the chemical composition of the speaker’s consciousness,” I volunteered, as I thought I knew which direction Vimalananda’s discourse was heading.

He nodded his assent. “And this chemical composition determines what sort of *sadhana* is appropriate for you, what you can succeed at. There is no lack of people today who claim to have located the keys to the Vedas, and who claim that they are living a ‘Vedic’ life, and teaching their disciples ‘Vedic’ *sadhanas*. Most of them are gasbagging; they are talking out of their wits. Think, for a moment, about the caste system. India has been plagued by casteism for centuries, but the caste system started out as something quite different from what it has become.

“The Vedic literature talks of the body of society in this way: the *Brahmanas* or priestly class are the head, the *Kshatriyas* or ruling class the arms and chest, the *Vaishyas* or merchant class the abdomen, and the *Shudras* or laborers the feet. Some imperialist *Brahmanas* have used this description to justify their domination of everyone else, but the only reason for this classification was to illustrate the innate tendencies of each group.

“Suppose you want to teach a mantra to a ‘child.’ If the ‘child’ is a *Brahmana* he or she will use the mantra to gain knowledge; the head represents knowledge. A true *Brahmana* will use this knowledge for self-realization and

to assist others to realize. Any Brahmana who uses knowledge to control others is a false Brahmana. 'Brahmam janati iti Brahmanah' (a Brahmana is he who knows the Absolute Reality), so how many true Brahmanas do we have today? Almost none!

"If you teach a mantra to a Kshatriya you can be sure that he will go out and use it. This is what the chest and arms are for, to do things. And because Kshatriyas are natural rulers they will tend to use the power they gain from austerities to conquer others. Kshatriyas can go much, much farther with penance than Brahmanas can because Kshatriyas have a natural immunity to pain, and an innate belief in 'kill or be killed'; succeed or die. Once a Kshatriya starts something either he will finish it or it will finish him. A Brahmana often tries to do ten things at once, motivated by intellectual curiosity. A Kshatriya does only one, but does a thorough job of that one.

"King Vishwamitra was easily defeated by the Rishi Vasistha's spiritual power when Vishwamitra and his army tried to steal Nandini, the wish-fulfilling cow, from Vasistha. This defeat made Vishwamitra realize that physical might was infinitely inferior to spiritual prowess, and he decided to perform austerities until Vasistha himself acknowledged him as a *Brahmarshi* (a 'god among Rishis'). Once he decided upon this course of action he forgot everything else, and concentrated on it alone.

"Vishwamitra performed terrific austerities, and was awarded various divine titles by various divine beings, but not the title he wanted. Eventually he decided to force Vasistha to give him what he wanted; he was born a king, after all, and kings are accustomed to getting what they want. Vishwamitra harried Vasistha mercilessly, but nothing seemed to affect Vasistha, not even the death of all of his many sons. Finally Vishwamitra became totally desperate, and crept up in the underbrush near Vasistha's ashram, holding a sharp knife with which to murder the Rishi who would not acknowledge his accomplishments. Just as he was getting ready to strike he heard Vasistha say to his wife Arundhati, 'Of all the Rishis today only one deserves the title of Brahmarshi, and that is Vishwamitra. I don't know why he is so much against me; how have I offended him?'

"When he heard these words Vishwamitra dropped his knife and ran to bow at Vasistha's feet, saying, 'Please forgive me.' Vasistha murmured, 'But, Brahmarshi, there is no need for forgiveness. I am honored at your visit.' And he blessed him. It was all Vasistha's play, after all; the play of the Rishis is something that is very difficult to fathom.

"A real Brahmana is too refined to be the kind of monomaniac that Vishwamitra became—but then, Vishwamitra achieved towering heights

because of his one-pointed determination. Brahmanas are not better than Kshatriyas, nor Kshatriyas better than Brahmanas; they are different, that's all. A good Brahmana tends to develop Kshatriya fearlessness, and a good Kshatriya, as he accumulates knowledge, should become more like a Brahmana. A good king is never a good fighter; it is impossible. To fight, one must be willing to kill, and killing always introduces crudeness into your nature. A good king is always absolutely refined and sophisticated, and such people are absolutely no good on the battlefield.

"Anyone who is a Vaishya, a merchant by nature, will commercialize the knowledge he or she is given; he will sell it to fill his belly. Look at what is happening in America. Almost all Americans are born business people, and they have merchandized whatever jnana they have received. It is part of their nature. And Shudras? Shudras are people who slog. It is important to know all this, and to know how to recognize these classes of people. If you teach a mantra to a 'child' and he or she misuses it, part of the bad karma comes onto you, because you taught it, enabling him or her to abuse it thereby."

"You say that this business of caste depends on your own inherent nature. What about this business that you have to stay in the caste you are born in?"

"This is a more recent addition. Every human has a physical and a mental heredity. Your physical heredity is the inheritance of all your ancestors. If your forefathers have been warriors for the past several generations the genes which produce aggression will be reinforced in you, and you will most likely make good warrior material. This was the basis for the old caste system.

"Originally the caste system was not rigid; you could do whatever you liked with your life. But if you were born into a family whose traditional occupation had been business for many generations it is probable that the genes controlling the skills needed to do business would have been reinforced through each successive generation, and you would naturally take to business, like a fish takes to water. It would literally be 'in your blood,' in each cell, in your genes and chromosomes.

"Darwin understood a little bit about heredity, but he applied it too exclusively to physical characteristics. In fact, the principle of natural selection applies to society as well. If you are a businessman and you have three children, you will most likely leave the family concern to the child who shows the greatest aptitude for the business. And if this happens for fifteen or twenty or thirty generations in a row, the business genes will become stronger and stronger as a result of this 'natural selection.' This is what happened for centuries in my own family; we have been businessmen for more than fifteen generations.

“Because the Rishis understood all about genetics they inaugurated the gotra system. Each Rishi had a different field of expertise, and could manipulate the genes and chromosomes of his disciples to make them fit to receive the knowledge he wanted to pass down. Each disciple would get a different piece of knowledge. Because this genetic pattern would be passed from generation to generation, the children born into that family would develop tendencies which would make it easy for them to succeed in mastering that branch of the Veda which the Rishi had assigned the family.

“Suppose you want to use the Vedas for your own personal sadhana. First you must know your gotra, so you can know which branch of the Veda you should study. Then, you have to know the mantra and ritual which apply to your branch. But most people have forgotten this mantra and ritual, and so they wander around in the labyrinth, and fail to achieve. I know the truth of this; it happened to my own father. He was an authority on the four Vedas and their commentaries, but he did not know the mantra and ritual which are appropriate for our branch of the Veda. He did not even bother with the mantra for Bhrigu, the Rishi who began our gotra. He had his own guru and guru mantra, but if he had first achieved success with the mantra for Bhrigu Rishi, Bhrigu himself would have taken over and directed his entire progress from then on.

“This esoteric knowledge was never available to the masses, to whom gotras are important only in marriage negotiations. Marriages within gotras have always been forbidden, to prevent inbreeding; the Rishis understood eugenics long, long ago. But marriages within ‘castes’ were encouraged—Brahmanas marrying Brahmanas, Shudras wedding Shudras, and so on—so that the parents would have a clear idea of what their children would be fit for, and the children would find it easy to fit into the roles which they were destined to play due to the weight of their inherited karmas.

“But we live in Kali Yuga now, when everything is jumbled up. If Westerners are by and large innovative and clever, it is partly because they are ‘mixed breeds’: Vietnamese marrying Swedes, Nigerians marrying Scots, and so on. This allows new patterns of genes to develop, which tend to promote new ways of looking at things. It also causes lots of uncertainties and difficulties for the children, whose new pattern of genes and chromosomes may attract a spirit who has little affinity for the parents who conceived it. This lack of mental affinity may lead to the break-up of the family, since they cannot see eye-to-eye on many subjects. A child who becomes estranged from the family and who cannot find any other place to fit in may become delinquent, which then leads to the break-up of society. So the mixing up of genes has

both good and bad effects.

“Different from your physical heredity is your mental heredity, which you carry with you from birth to birth. Your physical body represents your past, the karmas which you have performed whose fruits you are now reaping. Your subtle or astral body, which is your mind, is your present condition, and how you use your mind to act in the world determines your future. Every action produces karmas, and all these karmas are stored in your causal body where they wait patiently for the right moment to project into your mind. If you have been a musician for many births you will be drawn to music in this birth as well, even if you have to become the son of a farmer, because of the weight of your karmas. This is what happened to me: I had no interest in business at all, only in spirituality, because of my work in previous births.

“This explains why the caste system fails nowadays. Originally those spirits who had affinity for business would naturally gravitate to the wombs of businessmen’s families. Now stronger influences like the manubandhana between children and parents operate, which allow persons of differing tendencies to enter the same family. If you are born into a family of priests and you had been a priest often in your previous births, no problem; but if you are a spiritual type born into a family of materialists, or an artist born into a family of butchers, there will be conflict.

“People are reborn with limitations because of the weight of their bad karmas. Those who have accumulated good karmas get the opportunity to be reborn in a higher state. Any human who has more good karmas than bad will naturally be better able to shine out than someone who has more bad karmas than good. The Rishis never said that the lower classes of human were animals; they simply recognized that the animalistic nature is greater in those people who have more bad karmas. The Rishis always want everyone to make progress according to their own innate capabilities, which is only possible when everyone recognizes their limitations.

“So when I talk about Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, I don’t necessarily mean those terms to mean castes. The Rishis, who believed in ‘free love’ and were more like today’s hippies than like today’s bigoted Brahmanas, never believed in castes, and neither do I. When I talk about Brahmanas or Shudras I mean the innate tendencies of a particular individual, which are determined both by the parents and by the previous births. This is why I call your friend Freddy a Brahmana; his Brahmanical tendencies are much greater than those of most so-called Brahmanas! A human being is by nature either a priest, a ruler, a merchant or a laborer, and

it is very hard to change this nature. We see the importance of pedigree every day at the racecourse; you can't deny it. You cannot discount human heredity either, but you may be able to go beyond it."

"By sadhana."

"By sadhana, which is why having just the right sadhana is very important. Now, can you explain to me the difference between 'shuddha' and 'shudra'?"

I was stumped there. "They differ only in one Sanskrit letter."

"Yes, they do. *Shuddha*, which means pure, contains 'dha,' which is replaced by 'ra' in *shudra*. The Sanskrit letter 'dha' indicates firmness, the power of concentration. Concentration creates purity. You are a chemist; isn't that what chemistry is all about, purifying substances so that those substances may be used in concentration?"

"Yes, I guess so." A good play on words.

"Ra,' as you well know, is the Bija Mantra for Fire. In this case 'ra' stands for Jathara Agni, the fire of physical digestion. A Shudra is anyone who is concerned more with feeding his belly rather than his mind. All food except milk was once a living being, and even milk is extracted from a living being. We deprive other beings of life in order to preserve our own lives. Is this not extremely selfish? The willingness to kill and eat epitomizes this selfish desire to feed at another's expense. This attitude alone is sufficient to disqualify such a person from studying the Vedas, but there is another more practical reason: when Jathara Agni is strong Bhuta Agni is weak, and Bhuta Agni is essential for spiritual progress.

"Everyone whose Jathara Agni is stronger than their Bhuta Agni is a Shudra, and such people are not fit to recite the Vedas because of the effect of Fire on what they speak. This is why I have told you and Freddy not to recite Vedic mantras. Eventually, if your Bhuta Agni becomes very strong, this will no longer be a problem. But for right now, remember that the effect of Fire on bindu and anusvara is always 'r + na = rna,' karmic debt. When the Fire Element in your body acts predominantly on food it becomes impure, and in that condition reciting powerful mantras will only add to your karmic debts."

"Shudras and mlecchas are different, right?"

"Correct. Shudras are not mlecchas. A Shudra lives a life of toil, bringing things to life and then killing them for profit, but still follows a sadhana and retains faith in Nature. Shudras are part of the Vedic system, but mlecchas are totally outside the pale of the Vedas. A *mleccha* is, by definition, anyone who loves filth, anyone who loves meat, alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling and

other indulgent intoxications and has few redeeming qualities. Some bigoted Indians call all Westerners mlecchas because they have eaten beef; they are concerned only with outer, not inner, purity."

Vimalananda knew that I had already been called a 'mleccha' a few times. "They refuse to see how Westerners like you and Freddy have changed their ways, and they also ignore the fact that millions of Indians are adopting the worst of the West and are converting themselves into mlecchas.

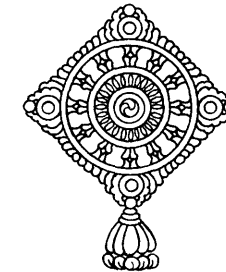
"But why should anyone be trying to do Vedic sadhana at all during Kali Yuga? It's just not possible to do it properly, especially not today when everything has become polluted. Other sadhanas are more appropriate for Kali Yuga. In fact, Kali Yuga is the age in which Shudras are better equipped to realize God than even Brahmanas are. Shudras can get experiences of God which Brahmanas can never aspire to. If you were to meet God in person what would you do?"

"I'm not sure."

"You would, I hope, fall at His feet. You would not walk up to Him, squeeze His cheek and say, 'Hello there, God! I've come to love you.' No, you would prostrate yourself to Him. Shudras know how to be humble; anyone who serves someone else must learn humility. Until you possess sincere humility you are not fit to touch the feet of God, or even the feet of a good saint. Brahmanas have to overcome the pride they have in their learning, but anyone who is humble can say, 'Lord, I am stupid and I know it. You are my only hope. Save me!' And He will."

"Which of these four types are you?" I meant it playfully, but Vimalananda's visage solidified perceptibly, and his words became weighty.

"You want to know who I am? By birth I am a Vaishya, a merchant's son. By training I am more advanced than most of the Brahmanas we have in India today. When I do my austerities and rituals my determination is superior to that of most born Kshatriyas. And when I go to the smashan for sadhana I am much worse than a Shudra; what I do there no Shudra would dare to do. It is too horrible for the average person. But, then, this is Kali Yuga."





# TANTRA

## Time, Eclipses and Nights

In his youth Vimalananda had studied astrology with Jina Chandra Suri, and I frequently witnessed his amazing ability to cast an accurate horoscope from a visitor's face alone. Though astrology is a respected means of diagnosis in Ayurveda it is no longer taught in Ayurvedic colleges, and I held out some hope that Vimalananda would teach me himself. But every time I asked for instruction he would refuse, saying, "You have more important things to learn right now." He relented only with regard to those aspects of astrology which he felt would be materially beneficial to my sadhana.

"Do you remember the three wise men?" he began one day.

"Sure," I replied confidently, for I had learned their names in Sunday School: "Balthazar, Melchior, and Caspar."

"Right. One was an Egyptian, one an Assyrian, and one a Babylonian. They all followed the cult of the Magi, which originated in Babylon and was practiced in all three countries. It was a sort of Tantra. These three men performed their calculations independently, and when they met and exchanged notes they found that they had all independently reached the same conclusion: a prophet would be born. Then they set out to follow the star, and they found Jesus.

"This was a unique occasion, of course, but it shows the practical benefits

of astrology. In fact, knowledge of time can pay dividends in all sorts of ways. Suppose you should find a rare white-flowering Flame of the Forest tree. This in itself is not so easy; I have found only two in the whole state of Maharashtra, and they are entwined together. If you can find one, though, and if you can take its wood during a certain astrological conjunction you can work wonders with it; you can even fly. But you must collect the wood at precisely the right moment. All of Tantra is based on time. If you do something at the right moment you get the result, otherwise, no.

“Do you remember that first night you came with me for homa?”

“Of course.”

“Do you remember what we did with the cow dung?”

It took me a moment, but then it came to me: “We took some cow dung, mixed it in water, put it in a pan, and then balanced a pestle upright in it.”

“And that pestle remained upright as long as the eclipse continued. As soon as the eclipse ended it fell, automatically. You saw it; how do you explain it? How will scientists explain it?”

“I have no idea.”

“We explain it on the basis of the strange gravitational effects that eclipses cause. Eclipses are excellent for people like you and me because their gravitational effects multiply the effect of our sadhana. If you do one hundred repetitions of your mantra during an eclipse it is like doing one hundred thousand repetitions on an ordinary day. If you offer one oblation into the fire it is like a thousand oblations. And nothing beats this time for offering prayers and performing rites for your deceased ancestors.

“Of course any time period which is this powerful can have negative effects also, so some precautions are in order. Never look at an eclipse; the rays have a very disturbing effect on the mind. A pregnant woman should not even go outside during an eclipse, lest her child be affected. Take nothing internally, not even water, while the eclipse is going on, and for as long as possible, up to twelve hours, before and after. If you can follow this niyama you can make any eclipse work for you.”

He had told me all this before. I waited patiently for him to get to his point.

“Eclipses happen irregularly, of course; you cannot rely on them. Fortunately, though, predictable moments for enhanced sadhana occur every year, in every season. India is such a wonderful place that even our festivals occur at those times when success at specific forms of worship will be easiest. The Rishis systematized these festivals in order to help sadhakas become clairaudient and clairvoyant.

For example, Ma, the Great Goddess, is worshipped during three periods of Nine Nights during the year because during those periods it is easiest to come into contact with Her.

“The Rishis, who created the universe, are well aware of the effects of the various Yugas on our minds. They also knew that these doctrines that we have been talking about are far too complex and subtle for the average individual, so they created seasonal festivals. When the common folk celebrate these festivals their minds become somewhat detached from the mundane and attached to the spiritual, while those who know the esoteric significance of the festivals use them to spur their spiritual progress.

“The festival season in the fall begins with Shravana, the month in which Shiva is worshipped, during which Krishna is born. Then comes the Ganesha festival, followed by the fortnight during which the ancestors are placated. Once both Ganesha and the ancestors are happy Kundalini can be safely raised, which happens during Nava Ratri, the Nine Nights which are sacred to the Goddess. Finally, we have Dipavali, the Festival of Lights, sacred to Vishnu in the form of Krishna, when each vertebra of the spinal column becomes a point of intense, pure light.

“The spring festival season is similar: it begins with Ganesha’s birthday, followed by Maha Shiva Ratri, which is as you know the most important night of the year for Shiva worship. A fortnight later comes Hutashani, or Holi, a harvest festival which commemorates the burning of the demoness Holika, and after another fortnight another Nava Ratri begins, which culminates in the birth of Vishnu in the form of Rama. The birthday of Anjaneya, the monkey god who is an incarnation of Shiva, follows six days later.

“During these various festivals there are four important nights (*ratri*) which are ideal for ritualists like me because they are meant for specific practices. The first is *Maha Ratri*, the Great Night, which is Maha Shiva Ratri; it falls each year on the night before the new moon during the lunar month of Magha (February or March). The second is *Krura Ratri*, the Cruel Night, which is Holi, the next full moon after Maha Ratri. Then comes *Moha Ratri*, the Night of Delusion, which is Krishna’s birth night. Krishna deluded everyone with His Maya! It falls in the month of Shravana, usually during August. The last is *Kala Ratri*, the Black Night, the night just before Dipavali, the new moon of the month of Ashvin. Dipavali occurs in October or November.

“On Maha Ratri people try to stay awake all night long, because it is said that Shiva will come, just for a moment, to anyone who does not sleep at all. But Shiva is too clever for us mortals, and almost everyone who tries this



nods off for at least a minute or two just at the moment when Shiva is near them. He has to test those who want to see Him, doesn't He?"

"I suppose so." I had already tried this a few times, and had dozed off, as predicted, for a few moments each time.

"Krura Ratri commemorates the burning to death of the demoness Holika by her nephew Prahlada. Holika possessed a magic cloak which would incinerate anyone who wore it. Her brother Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada's father, ordered her to kill Prahlada by throwing the cloak over his shoulders. When Holika took Prahlada on her lap he realized what she was going to do and slipped out from under the cape as she unfurled it. The cape fell on her and burned her alive.

"It took great power to destroy Holika, and that sort of power is obtained most easily at this time of year. Krura Ratri is useless for anything auspicious, but it is excellent for practitioners of black magic, especially the *Shat Prayoga*, the Six Rituals which cause death, delusion, discord, hatred, obstruction, and enchantment.

"Moha Ratri is meant for worship of Krishna, and Kala Ratri is best for sadhanas meant for obtaining control over spirits. A number of things can be accomplished on that day, like Munda Sadhana."

*Munda* means "skull."

"You require five human skulls for Munda Sadhana. Four are placed in the corners of a square and one in the middle. In between each pair of human skulls you put the skull of an animal. Which animals you use depends on the specific ritual you are doing and the result you want to obtain. When all the skulls have been properly placed and aligned in the proper direction you cover the whole thing carefully and sit on top of it. Then you begin your japa. Do not try this on your own! When I want you to do Munda Sadhana I will tell you."

Though Munda Sadhana interested me, I knew it would be useless to try to press him for details and so another question formed in my mind. Vimalananda answered it before I could speak.

"You have more than once asked me why, if Tantra is such a wonderful thing, the Six Rituals exist at all. This is a good question that has more than one answer. One reason they exist is to protect society. A priest has the responsibility to help defend the kingdom in which he lives, and these Six Rituals can be used to kill enemies of the state, to sow discord among foes, or to entice wavering rulers into alliances. They thus become agents of policy. They are also used in romance, business, and so on, but with less justification.



### The Panchamamsa Sacrament

Central to many tantric texts are the rites of Panchamamsa—the five M's, and the Panchamamsa—the five great spiced meats. Since these passages in the tantras are written in symbolic "twilight" language they present several layers of outer, inner and secret meaning. The drawing shows the homa rite of the five great meats which are compounded to produce pills that confer various siddhis. The drawing shows the five meats of a man, cow, elephant, horse and dog, boiling in a Brahmin's skull with the five ambrosias of fat, faeces, urine, blood and semen. The skull rests upon a firepit of human heads above a downward pointing triangular fire mandala and an upward pointing wind mandala. The rite of Panchamamsa has a direct resonance with the practice of Munda Sadhana.

"More important than any political use, however, is their use in sadhana. Suppose you want to make use of enchantment. If you perform the prescribed ritual correctly, the first effect will be that all the women in your

neighborhood will begin to find you irresistably attractive.” I had read about this; one text says, in fact, that they will rush to you ‘oozing copiously from their swelling, dangling vaginal lips,’ meaning that the desire created in them by this ritual will completely overcome their modesty and discrimination

“So,” I interrupted, “this is some sort of super-duper aphrodisiac?”

“No; it is not essential that women become sexually excited when they are exposed to this effect; but because most people strongly self-identify with the body most women will inevitably experience this attraction sexually.

“Attracting the women is not so difficult; the difficult part comes after they have been enchanted. If your mind is firm you will not be tempted at all by these excited women; you will continue with your ritual, knowing that you are making progress. Soon the enticement will extend to other female beings, especially those in the ethereal realms. If you can resist all the temptations they will offer, then you will eventually attract the attention of a female deity. If you are sure of yourself you may request Her to teach you like a Bhairavi; if not, you should regard Her as a mother and not permit sex to have anything to do with the relationship. Then you are made.”

Wow.

“So I think you will agree that the Six Rituals can be quite useful.” Indeed I did. “Enticement is certainly one way to achieve; but in my experience it is not as good a way as pure, selfless love. It is not easy to preserve your balance of mind when a passionate *Yakshini* (demigoddess) or *Naga Kanya* (serpent princess) entwines herself around your body; but there is no danger of falling when you can say to God, honestly, ‘Make me an ugly prostitute for thousands of births, if You want to, but always keep me near You.’ When you can honestly say this, you are ready to become a true devotee.

“You must begin all sadhana with *niyama*, but you do not have to practice *niyama* forever. There will come a time when you will be so absorbed that you will remember the deity at all times. At that stage you won’t be able to remember how many repetitions of your mantra you are doing, much less any *niyama*. Finally you’ll forget even to repeat the mantra. But that is a much higher stage.

“Hazrat Bulleh Shah, who eventually became a great saint, was very conscientious early in his career about following a strict *niyama*, and about keeping track of how much *japa* he would do. He counted his *japa* one by one on his *japamala* (rosary) until one day he overheard the milkmaid who brought him his milk talking to her best friend.

“The milkmaid was in the habit of giving milk away free to her lover, and the friend asked her, ‘Don’t you keep track of how much milk he is drinking? How else can you know how much he is eating into your profits?’

“The milkmaid replied, ‘Can there be any accounting in love? My profit is the love he gives me.’

“Hazrat Bulleh Shah sat stock still when he heard this. Then he looked at his rosary and thought, ‘This milkmaid has taught me something today. If I really love God, can I do any kind of accounting with Him? What a fool I’ve been!’ He threw the rosary away at once, and never used one again.

“In the beginning a rosary is useful, and strict attention to time is essential. Once you become devoted, however, limitations lose their meaning; in devotion, just as in romance, there is no such thing as the limitation of time or space. If you can remember what time it is, you have no capacity for love.”

## Nyasa

“But since right now I do know what time it is,” I said, “all these *anusthanas* and so on will not only help awaken my mantra but will also help me develop my devotion.”

“That’s right.”

“Are there other practices I should know about?” I asked, knowing well that he expected me to continue asking even if I did not know what to ask.

“Well, there is *nyasa*. Very few people talk about *nyasa*, because so few people know about it. But without *nyasa* there is no Tantra.”

‘*Nyasa*’ was another word that no one had been able to explain to me clearly and accurately, so I began to pay even closer attention.

“‘*Nyasa*,’ which comes from the Sanskrit root meaning ‘to place,’ helps infuse your being with the power of the deity you are worshipping, by placing that deity in your body. If you have already purified yourself to some extent by removing a good bit of the heavy overlay of filth in your consciousness, you have dissolved part of your old being. This is a type of *khandana*. Now the deity’s ethereal body can be invoked into you, and His or Her limbs will take the place of the ethereal limbs which you have dissolved or chopped and burned by your sadhana.

“*Nyasa* is important because it enables you to identify yourself with your deity. The more you think of and visualize your deity the subtler your con-

sciousness becomes. When your thoughts have been perfectly transformed, so that there is no khandana of projected desires, then your being is transformed. Nyasa also helps you by balancing the energy in your physical body and making it steady, which makes your worship steady.

“Steadiness is always best in sadhana. This is why I encourage all my children to repeat their mantras mentally. Mental recitation is best because of the problem of pronunciation, and also because it enhances the firmness of your consciousness. When you recite a mantra nothing in your body should wag: not your limbs, not your cock, not even your tongue—nothing. Only when you are absolutely still and stable can the mantra’s shakti fill you; any movement will distort the effect and weaken it.”

“What about the people who claim that when you recite your mantra your body will automatically begin to move into strange contortions, which proves you are making progress?” I knew what his answer would be.

“It’s all just so much bull. If you are singing *kirtans* and *bhajans* (devotional songs) you may be so overwhelmed with devotion that you will begin to dance. That is a good thing; it shows that your kirtan is doing what it should. *Kirtana* actually means *kartana* (cutting) of karmas; the ‘i’ indicates that it is done musically. As your karmas are cut and you feel lighter, won’t you dance? But this has nothing to do with mantra sadhana, for which your body must be firm.

“When you do it properly nyasa can be very powerful. Once in the jungle I met an old sadhu, whom I saluted respectfully. He got wild: ‘Why don’t you touch my feet to show respect to me like you know you should, you insolent young fool?’

“I told him, ‘Maharaj, I am happy to do that, but I have been busy practicing my nyasa. If I touch your feet you will be finished, which I don’t want to happen. That is why I do not touch your feet. If you insist, give me your wooden sandals and I will salute those.’

“When he did I touched them, and they turned to powder. He got the shock of his lifetime, and realized what kind of force he was dealing with. I don’t claim that I am so great and powerful,” he added, seeing a certain glint in my eye, “this is just the result you get when you do these practices correctly.”

“I remember your telling me that each syllable of the Vedas is supposed to be pronounced with emphasis on a different part of the body; is this a sort of nyasa?”

“Yes. There are so many things that are only hinted at in the texts, that most people never even suspect their hidden meanings. Always remember

that both the Vedas and the Tantras are interested in the external mainly as a symbol of what is going on internally. Consider this: that aspect of pranayama which is concerned with holding your breath is called *kumbhaka*, from the word *kumbha*, which means pot. But which pot?”

I had no idea, which seemed to irritate him a little; since I had been studying Yoga I suppose he expected me to know. But no one had yet explained it to me, so how was I to know?

“Here the pot they mean is the pot of the torso, the chest and abdomen, in which you can store prana. You have seen how a potter makes pots; here you ‘make’ a pot by making your body completely steady. Once this happens you can proceed to the stage of kevala kumbhaka, when there is a cessation of breathing for minutes at a time. Only when there is kevala kumbhaka can your mind become completely firm, and your worship will only be as steady as your mind is.”

“So this is what pranayama is for?”

“Pranayama is for what its name suggests: control of prana. Most of the people teaching Yoga think that this means you should achieve control over your prana by holding your breath. But kumbhaka does not mean actively holding your breath; it means the balancing of your inhalation and exhalation so that they cancel each other out. For kumbhaka to be of any value to you, it must be effortless; you must learn how to forget to breathe.”

I had never told him the details of how I had strained myself by trying to hold my breath in the ‘approved’ Yogic way, but I knew that he knew anyway. Suddenly I became aware of how little most people who try to teach Yoga really know about it.

“So as far as pranayama is concerned, the ‘pot’ means the body. But don’t assume that pots always represent the body! Oh, no! What meaning a pot, or anything else, has depends on the specific practice. Every part of a Tantric ritual is significant, but you can’t just do guesswork about it; you have to know its precise meaning.

“You probably have seen that in formal ritual worship there is always worship of a pot. During Nava Ratri, when we worship Ma, a pot is the central focus of attention. The pot, here called *ghata*, is infused with shakti in the procedure known as *Ghata Sthapana* (The Establishing of the Pot). Now, what do you think the ‘pot’ represents here?”

I didn’t hazard any guesswork.

“Here the pot is the pot of the head, filled with Amrita and other ‘juices’ or hormones, just as during the ritual the pot is filled with water before shakti is invoked into it. We worship the pot to make our minds firm, and to

fill our minds with energy so that our worship during the Nine Nights will be totally steady.”

“Which will help to awaken Kundalini in a controlled way.”

“Exactly. As soon as you learn to control your Kundalini Shakti She will be at your disposal. But remember: only one who knows Shakti can control Her. If you hang a sword on your wall it may injure a child who tries to play with it or a servant who comes to dust it. As long as it exists, even for thousands of years, a sword retains its inherent nature, which is to slice, to sever. This is the true test of shakti: there should be no limitation of time.”

“Another reason why it is difficult to control Kundalini.”

“You should say, ‘why it is almost impossible,’ because the average person’s personality is simply not strong enough to deal with cosmic energy. Which is why I say, over and over again, that the only safe way to awaken and raise Kundalini is to personify Her. Convert Her into a goddess and worship Her, love Her like your Mother, and then you will be safe.

“I always prefer to call Lord Shiva’s Grand Consort Uma, instead of ‘Parvati’ or one of Her other names because ‘Uma’ is made up of the same letters which make up the word ‘Om,’ which is actually ‘Aum.’ Uma is not inherently different from Aum any more than Shakti is different from Shiva; they differ only in form. ‘U’ stands for Vishnu, the Preserver. ‘Uma’ is therefore ‘U’ + ‘Ma,’ ‘the Mother Who Always Protects,’ who shields the child from any danger or calamity. What can be higher than that? You can achieve Uma if you can learn how to love her.

“And if you want to learn how to love Ma you need to learn how to love Her creations. Every being has its own variety of love, some of which we humans can’t even comprehend. I personally think rocks have the best form of love, because they are so stable, so firm. Once they love you they never change. A rock has its own forms of expression that you may not be able to understand. Suppose you heat it. After a certain temperature it starts to flow; it makes an offering of heat and light to you. How many people understand how to love a rock? Very few, but those who do, know something of how to love Ma.”

He left me with that thought to think about until our next conversation, at the end of the next Nava Ratri.

Vimalananda usually went into retreat during Nava Ratri, fasting and repeating mantras, requesting his beloved Tara to enter and enliven him. I loved to meet him on the day he finished his worship, for he was quite a sight to see. His entire countenance would be filled with an intense otherworldly radiance, and the talks he would give in the expansiveness of that mood were particularly pleasing.

On this occasion he began: “Even yogis and sadhus are not spared the poison of ahamkara. One day someone was reciting some verse from Tulsi-das, and suddenly my friend Chotu said, ‘Why are you repeating what those fellows used to say as if it were because of them that they had written it? If they were really sincere in their absorption in God why should they have added their own names to so many of their verses? Was it necessary for them to write so often “Kabir says” or “Raidas believes” or “in Tulsi’s opinion”? Why should that ahamkara of name be there? Why should they worry about whether future generations will praise them as the authors? If their words are really *prasadika vani* [words gifted from God], then how can the poets be considered the authors at all?’ The other fellow didn’t know what to answer. What could he answer? Chotu was right. Sometimes Chotu says the most amazing things.”

“So even doing intense sadhana and developing great devotion, as all these saints did, is no guarantee that ahamkara will be totally kept in check,” I suggested.

“It is no guarantee at all. So long as you retain your individual existence ahamkara must identify with your personality, even to a very tiny extent—and even a single thought of ‘me’ and ‘mine’ is enough to ruin everything.”

“What is the answer, then?” I asked, despairingly.

“The answer? You know the answer: Throw yourself at God’s feet. Offer everything you have to God, including your very existence. If your donation is honest, God will accept it, and will direct your path from then on, so long as you always remember Him or Her. The moment you forget God, ‘you’ return. I have told you many times, and I still maintain, that it is much easier to surrender to a personal God than it is to surrender to some cosmic form. It is all well and good to appreciate the vastness of the cosmos, but how can you grab hold of it to love it? You can’t; but you can grab hold of Krishna, or Ma, or Whoever, though, and love Them.

## Mental Worship

“Now, although there are many different ways to worship, I have always believed it is best to worship mentally, if you can. Physical worship is always limited, especially now during Kali Yuga, when not even the experts are always able to do their physical worship properly. Even the most proficient devotee must occasionally make a mistake in his or her ritual; even the best trained mouth must sometimes mispronounce a mantra. And in some sadhanas if you make even a minor mistake you are gone. To avoid all possibility of error it is always better to worship mentally instead of physically. There is nothing to misplace, nothing to spill, and no fear of mistake. This is what the Tantras mean when they call for ‘internal sacrificial rites.’ Do you think this is so easy? In almost every case nowadays only the show remains; the internal techniques have been lost, except to the chosen few.

“You can do any sort of worship internally. I have taught you to perform homa, no doubt, but homa is an external form of worship, and its limitations are those of all other external forms of worship. It is often easier to do external worship in the beginning so that you do not have to visualize everything you are offering, but everyone must eventually progress from external to internal worship. The special value of homa is that it purifies the Fire Element, which controls the sense of sight. As the Fire Element in your body becomes purer and your Bhuta Agni increases, your ability to visualize, which is utterly essential for internal worship, will improve. You are going to learn quite a lot about internal worship by the time I am through with you.

“Let’s start with fire worship. Even if you cannot perform homa with an external fire every day—and how many people can nowadays?—you can still do homa every day and get benefit from it if you offer to your digestive fire everything you put into your mouth. Yes, it is not so pure as a well-tended external fire, but it is always ignited, always ready to accept offerings. You don’t even need any special mantras; just offer each bite with the mantra you repeat daily, and see the result. This is a form of internal worship.

“Orthodox people go to temples, but I believe that the true temple is inside the mind. Why waste time worshipping physical objects when you have everything you need inside your own mind? Your concentration will be much better if you perform internal worship, because you do not have the distractions that trouble a person performing external rituals: the constant worries of obtaining the right substance at the right time, misplacing something, spilling something else. It is much easier to self-identify when your

mind is not distracted by external things, even if they are your articles of worship. On the inside, everything is always ready for your use, if you make the effort to locate it.

“It is useful to worship in a temple that is filled with Shakti, true; but how many of those are there nowadays? A temple will be useful to you only if its *Prana Pratishtha* has been properly performed. Prana Pratishtha is the rite by which life-force is infused into the image, making it live. Every temple has had a Prana Pratishtha done for the image which is worshipped therein, but if the Prana Pratishtha is not done properly the image will not come to life. You can test this at the very end of the Prana Pratishtha ceremony when a mirror is offered to the image, so that deity which has been invoked into the image can see itself. If the job has been properly done, the mirror will shatter. Only then can you say the image has any power, not before.

“Even if an image has no power it can still act as a focus for your mind to concentrate on, of course. The only disadvantage of mental worship is that the mind has no such focus until you create one.”

“This is a big disadvantage for most people.”

“Yes it is. Many people come to me and claim to meditate for one and two hours at a time. I always tell them, ‘First learn to concentrate and then you can meditate.’ Try to concentrate on one thing for even three minutes and you will find that it is impossible unless you have had long practice in that department. Then try to imagine keeping all your articles of worship fixed in your mind for an hour or more, and you have an idea of the effort required for real mental worship. But it is definitely worth it.

“Once there was a poor man by the name of Bulaki Das who worked as a farm laborer for a big landlord just so he could get something to eat. He got into the habit of taking a half-hour break before his lunch and performing mental worship. After some time he found it so enjoyable that he began to sit for an hour, then two hours, three hours, and sometimes longer. The other laborers had no idea what he was doing, of course, and became indignant about it. They told the landlord, who came out to the field one day to see for himself.

“Back then landlords could do anything they pleased to their workmen, and in this case when the landlord saw that Bulaki Das was not working he gave him a good kick. Bulaki Das awoke from his trance and said, ‘Oh my, look what you’ve done. I was giving food to all my saints, and only the yogurt was remaining; but now you’ve disturbed all that.’ Then he opened his hand to show that the yogurt which had been in his palm had fallen to the ground. Bulaki Das’s concentration had been so intense that the yogurt

was actually created, in the physical world, as a result of his mental worship.

“When the landlord saw the little mound of yogurt on the ground near Bulaki Das’s hand he immediately realized his mistake, bowed to him, and took him as his guru. They both became saints; they belonged to the Sant Sampradaya, like Dadu and Rajab.

“There is nothing higher than perfection in mental worship. You can actually create whatever articles you offer mentally, just like Bulaki Das did. You do run the danger of becoming totally useless to the world, of course, because the joy you get from your mental play is far more intense than any physical joy you might experience. When you advance far enough into mental worship your deity will come and play with you, and then you get yourself absolutely lost in that play. Beautiful!”

“It almost sounds too simple,” I said suspiciously.

“Well, let’s put it this way. Even a pashu can somehow or another perform ordinary physical, adhibhautika worship; but Kundalini must be at least partially awakened if you hope to perform internal, adhyatmika worship, since only when Kundalini is awakened does Bhuta Agni become truly ignited, and without a strong Bhuta Agni you will never be able to create a firm image in your astral body. But there is another form of worship also: the astral, or adhidaivika.

“Let’s assume you are worshipping Ganesha. Externally you can offer things dear to Ganesha, such as sugar cane, into a physical fire with an appropriate mantra. Internally you offer your mantra of Ganesha into the fire of your Bhuta Agni. You must make use of your own personal goddess, your Kula Kundalini, in order to perform the adhidaivika worship. Kula Kundalini is essential to adhidaivika worship because only Kula Kundalini knows how to locate Ganesha.

“If you want to do adhidaivika worship, first make your Kundalini Shakti descend to the Muladhara Chakra where you make Her self-identify with Ganesha, the presiding deity of that chakra. Kundalini can self-identify with anything; by Her perfect self-identification with Ganesha She actually becomes Ganesha, and then Ganesha Himself performs the worship. Only when the deity exists within your own body can you do perfect worship. Then you know exactly how to propitiate Him or Her, because you have become Him or Her.”

“And so the Tantras say, ‘First become Shiva, and then worship Shiva.’”

“How else can you comprehend Shiva, unless you have become Him?”

Hmm. Just as I was about to proceed with this line of questioning some guests arrived, and Vimalananda deftly changed the flavor of the conversa-

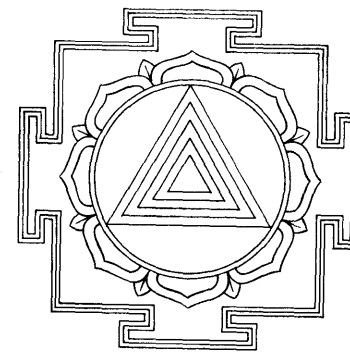
tion. Clearly he expected me to work on this for awhile.

## Ganesha

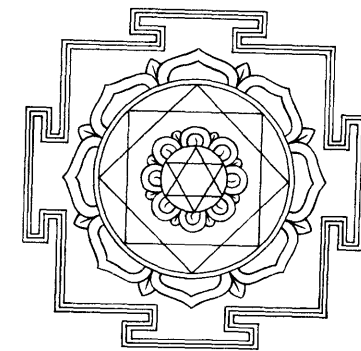
Vimalananda delivered the next in this series of musings at a Ganesha temple. I can no longer recall which temple it was, for he was very fond of Ganesha and we paid regular visits to several images of the elephant-headed god. The area around Poona has been associated with Ganesha worship for centuries, and Ganesha is still one of the most beloved of deities of that region.

After we had finished our worship and were relaxing, he began to address me thus:

“You have to be able to deal with all sorts of temptations when you start to raise Kundalini, because your prana will try to move in unusual ways. This is why sadhana of Ganesha is so important. Ganesha is ‘Gana’ + ‘Isha,’ ‘Lord of the Attendants.’ Usually people think of the ganas as spirits who are Shiva’s attendants, but in Kundalini Yoga the ganas are the sense organs. Ganesha is Lord of the Senses; He is also called the Remover of Obstacles, because if He becomes pleased with you He will remove all obstacles from Kundalini’s path as She rises.



Shiva Yantra



Ganesha Yantra

“The Muladhara, where Kundalini sleeps, which is the seat of the Earth Element, of gross physicality, is ruled by Ganesha. This is why you must worship Ganesha before you worship any other deity. You must request Ganesha to permit you to go beyond your physical nature, to admit your

consciousness into the astral regions. Ganesha's blessing is essential for Kundalini to be able to leave the Muladhara Chakra. You know the story of Ganesha's birth, I think?"

I did. "Parvati, Lord Shiva's Grand Consort, created Ganesha from the dirt on Her body to protect Her privacy while She bathed. Ganesha was on guard when Lord Shiva arrived and wanted to go in to His wife. Ganesha prevented Him from doing so, and since Shiva did not know who Ganesha was, a battle ensued, during which Shiva slew the boy. When Parvati came to know of this She became so enraged at the loss of Her child that She threatened to destroy the entire universe, and would have done so had Shiva not placated Her by replacing Ganesha's severed head with the head of an elephant. Then She calmed down."

"And now what about the esoteric meaning?"

"I'm not sure."

"Ask me about it. The name 'Parvati' means 'She Who is born from the mountains'—in this case, the chain of 'mountains' known as the spine, within which resides the spinal cord. Parvati is the Kundalini Shakti. 'Chain' is a good word to use here: until you awaken and free Kundalini, the spine acts as a chain to bind you down to earthly existence. Ganesha was created from the dirt on Her body—the Earth Element, the Element associated with the Muladhara Chakra. Shiva, the individual's consciousness, tries to break through to the dormant Kundalini by force, but this threatens to be the end of the sadhaka, because the Muladhara is the 'root support' of the body. When Shiva realizes this He regenerates the Muladhara with the help of an elephant, a beast known for its intelligence.

"If you want to awaken Kundalini, therefore, it is best to allow this intelligence to direct the awakening, instead of barging in like a bull in a china shop and wreaking havoc on yourself. Instead of meditating on the Muladhara Chakra and trying to forcibly open it, it is wiser to transform it, with Ganesha's help.

"Now here's a question for you: how did it happen that Lord Shiva, Who knows past, present, and future, Who is Parvati's husband—how did it happen that He could not even recognize His own son?"

A good question. I couldn't open my mouth.

"Think about it for a while. You know, Ganesha is one of the gentlest of gods, if properly approached, most helpful and very sweet. But He can also get upset. He is a small child, and you know how children can be when they become angry. And think of how wild elephants can be when they become angry! When Ganesha does lose His temper He changes in a moment from

the Remover of Obstacles to the Creator of Obstacles—and then you are in real trouble.

"Once I gave a man a Ganesha mantra and told him that after forty days of repeating it Ganesha would come and stand in front of him."

I knew this story well, but Vimalananda's tone of intense seriousness alerted me to his strong desire for me to listen to it yet again.

"Unfortunately something happened to break his *niyama* before the forty days were up, so I ordered him to start all over again. Finally, after he completed forty days, nothing happened. I told him, 'You are very close now; don't stop. Continue it for just a few days more.'

"The man said, 'Look, this is all foolishness, there is nothing behind it. I can't stand being away from my wife. I am going home now to have some good sex.'

"I warned him, 'You've gone too far for that now. Ganesha will become very angry if you do that, and I won't be able to save you. Just do it for three more days and I guarantee that you'll succeed.'

"What more could he have wanted? It was only a question of three days. But Mahakala, the God of Death, must have already grabbed hold of him. He told me, 'No, I'm through listening to you. I've really got to have some sex. Good-bye!'

"At first his wife tried to prevent him from climbing on top of her, but he forced his way into her anyway and enjoyed her, twice. Satisfied with his labors he fell asleep.

"In a dream he saw an enraged elephant charging at him. He tried to run but it was useless. When the tusker caught up with him he gave the man a solid blow to the jaw with his trunk. The next morning the man's entire face, jaw and all, was swollen to twice its normal size. He was taken to the hospital. The doctors couldn't find out what was wrong with him. I went to the hospital too, and he asked me, from his hospital bed, if I could rescue him. But there was nothing I could do, because his nervous system was blown to shreds. It was too late; he had gone too far. He died that night. After that experience I decided I would only assist people in their own *sadhanas*, and never suggest new *sadhanas* to anyone.

"Iron discipline is necessary whenever you commit to a *sadhana*; without it something is sure to go wrong. So don't start trying for this kind of perfection of a mantra unless you are so obstinate that you will finish it. If you decide that you must have meat for a few days, or that you must have drinks or sex, then you are ruined. Not only will you never succeed, but you will have to suffer for trying to act smart. If you know your willpower is limited it

is better not to do anything at all. To break your vow and then say, 'Oh, I'll ask forgiveness of God and He will look the other way,' is only cheating yourself, no one else. Once you commit yourself to a sadhana you are really at risk unless you finish it off properly."

"Do you mean that God will not forgive any mistakes?"

"Of course not! God is always ready to forgive, if you go to him with humility. But there is nothing humble about this sort of sadhana; you are demanding attention from God. You are saying, 'Come on; I want to play with you on your terms.' If you tell God that, then you had better be ready for whatever God wants to dish out."



## MUSIC

Teaching me about, and getting me involved in, the worship of Ganesha was part of Vimalananda's grand design for my development. As he explained, "Our method is very systematic: first you worship Ganesha, at the Muladhara Chakra; then He gives you the permission, and the know-how, to worship His mother, Ma, Who takes form with the help of your Kundalini Shakti. Ma teaches you how to worship Her Grand Consort, Lord Shiva, at the Ajna Chakra, and once you achieve Shiva He will take you to Vishnu in one of His forms: Jesus, Rama, Narayana or, if you want it and you are destined for it, Krishna, in Goloka."

Vimalananda was an expert musician, both vocal and instrumental, and many mornings I sat quietly for hours listening to him practice, sometimes accompanying him on the tanpura. Once or twice a week Narayanrao Indurkar, a reputed tabla player, would come to accompany him, and after the practice was over I would serve them tea while they told stories of the old maestros. It was in the aftermath of one of these sessions that, following Narayanrao's departure, Vimalananda introduced me to music as a sadhana.

"What is music?" he asked rhetorically as I lit him a cigarette. "People have been trying since the beginning of time to find out. What is that thing which can please us with its harmony? Sound, when it becomes music, is the only thing which can so possess people that they drop all their inhibitions and, just for a moment in this precious life, they dance! *That* is the real



music. 'If music be the food of love, play on!': Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*. I think I remember my Shakespeare."

"You certainly do."

"Real music has emotion in it, and this is why real saints love music so much; it helps them do their work. Shiva is rhythm, the father of music, and His Shakti is the mother, the sounds or notes. The child is Ganesha, the song: Rhythm + Notes = Song. Ganesha has an elephant's head, so he never forgets; he remembers everything, just as through song you can remember your true personality. And the musician? He is the bee who carries the pollen from flower to flower, giving rise to creation. And it is he who really enjoys the bliss of this creation. The gods, and especially the avatars, are those celestials who create and who enjoy the music of the spheres."

I had read that scientists have learned that the sun is ringing, just like a bell; probably one component of the physical aspect of the "music of the spheres," I thought to myself.

"The greatest music is written by *gandharvas*, celestial musicians who incarnate on earth. When a *gandharva* comes down to Earth he can't remember his previous state, but subconsciously longs to return to it. *Gandharvas* find it as hard to relate to ordinary humans as humans find it hard to relate to animals, and most *gandharvas* lead miserable, misunderstood lives. Many of the great Western musicians were *gandharvas*, like Beethoven, Brahms and Mozart. Even Strauss was a *gandharva*, but he was lucky; he had a son to follow him, someone who could understand him.

"All this emotion comes out in the music. A *gandharva* will be a prodigy, a musician right from the beginning, and anything he produces will be good, no matter what variety of music he might learn in this lifetime. Think of Beethoven, who composed some of his greatest work after he became deaf! What concentration he must have had, and what innate talent!

"Gopal Naik was a *gandharva*; music flowed from the very pores of his body. Unfortunately he lived in the time of the Emperor Akbar, and Tansen, Akbar's chief musician, became so jealous of his prowess that he conspired to have him killed. Gopal's body was dumped in the deep jungle.

"When Gopal Naik's mother learned of her son's murder she set out to find his bones so that she could burn them. When people asked her, 'How will you know whether or not the bones you find are his?' she would tell them, 'He had music right down to his bones; I will know them.' As she wandered through the forests of North India she would hold up to her ear every human bone that she found, and would listen to it intently.

"Finally one day she heard faint music coming from one of the bones she

held up to her ear, and then she said, 'These are my Gopal's bones.' She collected them and cremated them."

This story may well be apocryphal, but Vimalananda cared nothing for historical accuracy. He was interested only in "emotional accuracy," that attention to emotional detail which enables a tale to so possess a person that he drops all his inhibitions and, just for a moment in this precious life, he weeps from the fullness of his heart.

"Jim Reeves was a *gandharva*; that's why I love his songs. Like many *gandharvas*, he had an untimely death. He died in a plane crash; he 'fell to Earth.' What a rich baritone voice he had! And the wordings to some of his songs are really beautiful.

"My favorite song of his is 'You Love Me Daddy.' I don't know why, but I always cry when I hear that song. It's about a little boy who doesn't always do what his daddy wants him to do but whose daddy loves him anyway, because the little boy is his own son. No matter how naughty a child is its parents always love it. Whenever I hear this song I think of my own Big Daddy, my mentor. No matter how much I have disobeyed my mentor he has still loved me, in a way in which no one else has ever loved me. I don't think anyone else will ever be able to love me in the same way; certainly not a human.

"In fact, why don't you turn on the cassette player and let me hear 'You Love Me Daddy' right now?"

I did so, and the song brought tears to all four eyes in the room, as we both knew it would. After it was over Vimalananda was silent for several minutes while the wave of emotion swelled, broke, and receded, and then he spoke again.

"The right kind of music acts as a way of bringing light into one's consciousness. Music is a manifestation of sound, and sound exists wherever there is energy, which means heat, which means light. When a Siddha hears music he can self-identify with it, and with his astral body he can go to wherever the music is. When a sadhu hears music he is so overwhelmed with emotion that from an exuberance of joy things begin to happen.

"And it doesn't matter if it is recorded or live music. Whenever I hear 'La Paloma' I am always reminded of my guru and the fun we had together. After I hear it a few times the work just gets done on its own. You've seen it happen, Robby; you know. People have made millions out of me by playing 'La Paloma.'"

He looked at me sideways for a moment, and then said, almost in the tone a child would use to beg candy from a well-meaning but uncompre-

hending adult, “Would you play ‘La Paloma’ for me, just once?”

He knew that, after his heart attack, intense emotion would not do that organ any good. He also knew that Roshni, his foster daughter, was stricter in enforcing this sort of restriction than was I. I knew that he could perfectly well turn the stereo on himself, so I acquiesced and turned on his current favorite of the many versions of ‘La Paloma’ in his tape collection.

This time he did not weep; his face became calmer and clearer, and when he spoke again he did so resolutely.

“My Senior Guru Maharaj is the shrewdest possible person. Normally no one can get anything out of him. But if you give him the right type of music he will experience such intense emotional bliss that he will give away the results of years or decades of penance without knowing it. Only when the emotion leaves him will he realize what he has done.

“Once he and I and a Mr. Bilimoria hosted Acchan Maharaj, a descendent of the court musicians of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh. Wajid Ali Shah was a ruler who had been a gandharva. On Earth, he became a great devotee of Krishna, though he was a Muslim by birth. When his musicians Kalika Prasad and Bindadin played for him he would go into Bhava Samadhi, emotional highlights, and Krishna would enter his body and dance. Wajid Ali Shah was an expert at the variety of dance known as Kathak, and this expertise was passed down to Acchan Maharaj. His son Birju Maharaj is today the greatest Kathak dancer in all of India.

“So Acchan Maharaj had a good pedigree, and we were all looking forward to his dance. When he arrived, he sat down and drank one and a half bottles of whisky—alone. After quite some time had passed we asked him if he would kindly consent to show us a little of his artistry, but he snarled, ‘Who can play percussion for me?’ While we were thinking of how to deal with this problem he drank the last half of the second bottle of whisky—straight from the bottle.

“Suddenly my Senior Guru Maharaj took me aside and told me to prepare my car for a drive. We drove to a lamppost in south Bombay under which a Muslim man was standing. The man never said anything, and never looked up, but just got into the car. We returned to the house, and when Acchan Maharaj was shown his accompanist he snorted, ‘No one has yet been born who can accompany me.’

“To make a long story short, not only did that Muslim fellow accompany Acchan Maharaj, he began to make Acchan Maharaj dance to his own ‘tune.’ And when a percussionist can do that, well, he is something. We all watched amazed, entranced both by the artistry of Acchan Maharaj, who

was indeed great, and by the wizardry of that Muslim on the tabla. My Senior Guru Maharaj, music-lover that he is, was ecstatic. Finally tears came out in Acchan Maharaj’s eyes and he said, ‘I’ll pay anything to have this man as my permanent accompanist.’ But my Senior Guru Maharaj said, ‘He doesn’t play for money.’

“All this time the tabla player had said nothing, nor had he looked up. Nor did he look up when I dropped him off in front of the same lamppost from which I had picked him up. I doubt that he was a human being, the way he was playing. What a night!”

Silence descended for a few moments, and then lifted again.

“If music can affect its listeners so powerfully think what it must do for its players. A real musician becomes completely devoted to his or her music. There was one *sarangi* (Indian fiddle) player I knew who used to carry a bamboo with him everywhere he went. Even when he went to buy vegetables, he would haggle about the price and pay with one hand while constantly practicing fingerings on the bamboo, as if it were the neck of his *sarangi*, with the other. This is real dedication to music, the kind of dedication that is necessary in *sadhana* also.

“Music should not be an end in itself for you; it should be a *sadhana*, a means of getting to your goal. Mantras are one way in which to make use of sound in *sadhana*; music is another. The Vedas are mantras set to music, but the Vedas are too far away for most of us, while music is available to everyone. If you are lucky, meaning if you have worked hard in previous lives and God is kind to you, your music can be sufficient to draw God to you.”

“Regardless of whether it is Western-style or Indian-style music,” I interrupted.

“Of course. Western religious music is very good, but it is limited; it can only make you realize the love of a servant for his master, or of a child for its father. Indian music can make you realize your deity in any relationship: as servant or father, and also as lover, spouse, or friend; as your own child, as your mother.

“The greatness of Western music is that many musicians together can cooperate to create a tone poem. An Indian musician paints his complete musical picture with one instrument only. Indians are good solo artists, but large ensembles and orchestras don’t thrive here. But then, after all, *sadhana* should be done alone.

“In Indian music each *raga* (melodic scale) has a specific picture which must be visualized as you play or sing it. If you do it right the true image of

that raga will manifest. For the Raga *Megha* (the Cloud Melody), for instance, you must imagine a cloudy sky and all its background. If you want rain you play *Megha* in a certain way and rain will come.

“If you play Darbari Kannada Raga properly, you will see the court of Akbar the Great, Emperor of India. He will be there smoking a little hookah; then he lifts a flower to his nose. Tansen wrote that raga by using the raga called Kannada and changing it slightly. If you play Kannada you won’t get the same effect, because the tonal patterns are different.”

“Isn’t it true that one of the meanings of the word *raga* is ‘passion’?”

“And that is what music should be: a matter of passion. Tansen had so thoroughly mastered the Raga *Deepaka* (the Kindling or Igniting Melody) that when he sang it at dusk all the lamps in the palace would light themselves, automatically. Once he sang *Deepaka* for too long, and he became overwhelmed with heat. For six months he was in agony; nothing relieved the heat until in a village he came across a pair of sisters, Tana and Riri, who were experts in *Megha*. When they sang *Megha* for him the heat finally abated. Even music can be dangerous!”

“And this had something to do with the Surya and Chandra Nadis.”

“Naturally. The whole purpose of music is to help you stimulate your consciousness so that Kundalini can be triggered up. When Tansen overdid it his prana was affected.”

“Maybe he should have been self-identifying with a deity instead of with a flame,” I put in.

“Maybe so,” said Vimalananda, laughing. “The great benefit of Indian music is that it helps you self-identify with your deity. Whenever Narsi Mehta (a famous poet-saint from Gujarat) played the Raga *Kedara* (the Field Melody), for example, Lord Krishna would come and dance before him.”

“Can anyone learn to call Krishna with *Kedara*?”

“No, *Kedara* is not specific for Krishna; you would not necessarily see Krishna even if you learned to play *Kedara* perfectly. It is only because Narsi Mehta visualized Krishna dancing whenever he played *Kedara* that Krishna Himself would come to dance.

“You mean he used *Kedara* like you use ‘La Paloma,’ to remind him of Someone he loved.”

“Yes, he made *Kedara* into his sadhana, and it got him into serious trouble one day. A sadhu asked Narsi for some money to go on a pilgrimage. Narsi wanted to help the sadhu but was broke, so he mortgaged *Kedara* to a grocer in order to get the money.”

“He mortgaged *Kedara*? How could he mortgage a raga?”

“He promised never to sing it until the money was repaid. Back then people’s words were their bond. If a man mortgaged his moustache to you, for instance, he would not fail to repay you because he would rather die than have his moustache shaved off. Think of what a tremendous penance this was for Narsi! He mortgaged the thing he loved best—the dance of Lord Krishna, which he could see whenever he played *Kedara*—to help someone else out.

“Unfortunately the sadhu never returned. That in itself would have been bad enough, but meanwhile those people who were jealous of Narsi Mehta’s success had been busy poisoning the king’s ears against him. Finally the king, Rao Mandlik, called for him and said, ‘I hear that whenever you sing *Kedara* Lord Krishna appears. Do it now! Prove to me that you are not a false saint.’

“Narsi Mehta told him, ‘Maharaj, I can’t do it; I have mortgaged *Kedara*.’

“The king of course lost his temper at being refused, and said, ‘Well, I see now that you are indeed a false saint. Tonight you shall be tied to a post in front of the Krishna temple so that you can reflect upon your crimes. If Krishna does not save you by tomorrow morning you will be executed.’

“Now Narsi Mehta was really in a fix. There was nothing for him to do but remember Krishna as he waited for sunrise. But Lord Krishna is never so cruel to His devotees. He loves His devotees more than anything else in the universe. That evening a mysterious person—it was Krishna in disguise—went to the grocer and paid Narsi’s debt, and just as day was dawning the cancelled mortgage note wafted from out of nowhere into Narsi Mehta’s hand. Narsi began to sing *Kedara*. Suddenly the locks on the door of the temple undid themselves, the doors flew wide open, and the necklace which was around the neck of the deity flew through the air and landed around Narsi’s own neck. The cords binding him to the stake dropped away.

“This of course created a big commotion among the people who had gathered to watch Narsi’s execution. They started to mob him, to get him to intercede with Krishna for themselves, and he started to run. They pursued him, close behind.

“Outside of town an Aghori was sitting, enjoying the excitement. As Narsi approached him, frantic, the Aghori said to him, ‘Here, take the shelter of my back.’ By the time the crowd arrived there was only the Aghori in sight, and Narsi Mehta was never again seen in the world of men.”

## Nada Yoga

“So any kind of music, Western, Indian, or anything else, can give you results if you are sincere about it and make it into a sadhana,” I said.

“You can. I am sure that if Tukaram Maharaj, who lived here in Maharashtra almost four hundred years ago, were to come here to Bombay today and we were to play some nice Western song for him he would sit quietly and listen and enjoy it—or at least he would look as if he were enjoying it. All the time on the inside he would be hearing his mantra—‘Rama Krishna Hari, Jai Jai Rama Krishna Hari; Rama Krishna Hari, Jai Jai Rama Krishna Hari’—set to the rhythm and melody of the music.

“In my own case, whenever I ride a train pulled by a steam engine my own mantra starts to repeat itself in rhythm with the engine. The same was the case when I worked with textile machinery: the noise of the spindles would give me a rhythm. People who are serious about their mantras and put them into their hearts and souls will say them all the time. In fact, I personally find Western music better than Indian music for doing japa, because Western rhythms are simpler than Indian ones, which require more attention to avoid getting lost.” Aha! No wonder he enjoyed the rock music I brought for him.

“Of course, there is more to using rhythm in sadhana than merely repeating your mantra to the rhythm of the driving wheels of steam locomotives or to the sound of the electric guitars of Barbados. I think you have heard me play the *Ganesh Paran* before.”

“Yes, I have.” It is a little-known rhythm designed to invoke Ganesha.

“Once, in a small Indian principality named Datia there was a *pakhawaj* (large two-headed drum) player named Khudav Singh. He was an expert at *pakhawaj* because he worshipped the Goddess Durga. In fact, before he would begin to play he would throw the *pakhawaj* into the air and Ma would strike it three times. Then he would catch it and start to play.

“The sister of the Maharaja, a young girl of sixteen or seventeen, loved Khudav Singh’s music and used to listen to him play whenever she could. Eventually she fell in love with Khudav Singh himself. This enraged the Maharaja, who told her to give him up. When she refused, the Maharaja demanded that Khudav Singh reject the girl. But Khudav Singh said, ‘She loves and appreciates my art. Why should I tell her to go away?’ The Maharaja then said, ‘All right, since you have disobeyed me you will be crushed under the foot of an elephant.’ Kings dispense justice like that.

“The king invited all the people of the kingdom to the execution as a warning to them not to act foolishly like Khudav Singh had. The elephant was fed wine until its eyes became red, absolutely. The Maharaja asked Khudav Singh if he had any last request. He replied, ‘My *pakhawaj*, which has been my life to me, should be crushed along with me.’ He was given his *pakhawaj*. As the elephant advanced, Khudav Singh began to play the *Ganesha Paran*. When it is played properly Ganesha must come before you; He has no choice, He can’t escape. This was a way for Khudav Singh to call his chosen deity: ‘Mother Durga, please call Ganesha, help me!’

“Durga, who is after all Parvati in another form and as such is Ganesha’s mother, requested Her son to aid Her devotee. Ganesha agreed, and entered the body of the elephant. The elephant then sat down in front of Khudav Singh and began to caress him with its trunk. For half an hour the soldiers prodded, poked, and goaded the elephant, but it refused to attack.

“Then the Maharaja realized his mistake and said, ‘Let my sister be given to Khudav Singh, and let the elephant wander freely in my kingdom. Wherever it goes, those lands are to be given to Khudav Singh.’ And until a short while ago Khudav Singh’s family possessed those lands.”

“Will the *Ganesha Paran* work for anyone?”

“It will if you know how to play it properly, and if you visualize Ganesha in the right way while you play it. It is a musical sadhana, created especially for the purpose of invoking Ganesha.

“All the various sadhanas which use music are part of *Nada Yoga*. In *Nada Yoga* you worship the *Nada Brahman*, the music of the spheres, the Absolute expressed as the sound Om, which emanates from Lord Shiva. If you follow this sadhana to its conclusion you will finally see that you and the universe are not different—One-in-All, All-in-One. This is what I mean when I say, ‘Everywhere I see, everything is Me!’

“Anything that has sound has shakti, and all shakti has sound associated with it. The Absolute Itself is silent; It has no qualities whatsoever, which is why there is no Bija Mantra for Lord Shiva. Shiva has no melody to Him; He is pure rhythm, the father of music. This is why Shiva is always depicted carrying a *damaru* (small two-headed drum), the first musical instrument ever created. Since *laya* means both rhythm and dissolution, a *Pralaya*, the periodic dissolution of the universe, is merely the return of everything to the *Pra-thama* (first) *Laya*, the first rhythm: the Absolute. The sound ‘Om’ is the first sound to arise when creation begins, and it is the last sound to disappear at the time of the *Pralaya*. But even after the melody—the manifested universe—has totally disappeared, its rhythm lingers on, first as *anusvara* and then as *bindu*.

“You know that in Indian iconography Shiva wears a crescent moon on His forehead; do you have any idea of what that suggests?”

“None.”

“In the Sanskrit alphabet the sign for anusvara is a crescent.”

I slapped my forehead in disgust; I knew that!

He smiled. “Here the crescent moon is an external sign of Shiva’s internal consciousness, a sign that His consciousness is full of Nada, and that if you worship Him your mind can be filled with Nada too, which will enable you to follow that sound back to anusvara and bindu, to the source of sound.”

“Oh. Is the bull He rides on related to all this also?”

“Of course. One of the Sanskrit words for bull—*go*—also means both ‘sound’ and ‘sense organ.’ This indicates that Lord Shiva ‘rides’ His senses—He permits them to function but controls their movements perfectly—and that He moves with the help of Nada.

“I have told you that bindu is the source of all sound, which in the human begins with intention and culminates in vocal speech. Laya involves withdrawal of all our projections into bindu, the source. Speech begins with Para, progresses through Pashyanti and Madhyama, and then reaches Vaikhari, verbal speech. This is the path of *pravrtti*, creation. If you want to use sound to follow the path of *nivrtti*, the path back to the source, you have to begin where you are, in Vaikhari, and progressively refine your consciousness back through Madhyama and Pashyanti to Para, to bindu.”

“Nada Brahman is central to Kundalini Yoga. You may recall that when Kundalini passes through the Anahata Chakra you hear the sound known as the Anahata Nada. It may sound to you like Krishna’s flute or like Shiva’s drum, depending on what sort of sadhana you are doing; it is the same sound, interpreted differently by different minds. At first you hear this sound in your right ear, because the left ear is meant for spirits. Remember this: when you hear someone talking only in your left ear it is sure to be a spirit.

“Each individual hears a slightly different nada. There are 108 *gatis* (gaits, or modes) of nada;  $108 = 1 + 8 = 9$ , the number of chakras in the body, according to Aghora. Which mode of nada you hear depends on your past karmas, present tendencies, ancestry, and other things as well. The *gatis* are many, but once Kundalini reaches the top of Her course you hear only one sound: the Nada Brahman, the Great Sound.

“All rivers go to the ocean and not vice versa. If the ocean were to go into all the rivers, what would happen to the rivers? They would be finished, and

so would be the surrounding land. In sadhana of Nada that ocean is the ocean of *bhava*, intense emotion. The rivers are the nadis, and the land is the human body. First you follow your rivers into the sea, and then if you are meant to return to embodied existence the sea will flood the rivers, which will overflow their banks and fill you with an overwhelming divine intoxication, which is Bhava Samadhi. If you keep at it you will progress to Maha Bhava Samadhi, which can lead to Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Did you know that the story of Krishna and the gopis is actually a step-by-step description of this type of sadhana?”

“No.”

“I’ll describe it to you sometime,” he said as we went into the kitchen for lunch.

## Krishna and the Gopis

He described it one evening shortly thereafter, over Scotch.

“My family belongs to the *Pushti Marga*, the spiritual path (*marga*) whose greatest exponent was Vallabhacharya, who lived more than five hundred years ago. Some people translate ‘Pushti Marga’ as ‘Path of Prosperity,’ and others as ‘Path of Grace.’ But when I think of pushti I remember a phrase from the Maha Mrytunjaya Mantra.” He looked at me expectantly.

“You mean, ‘sugandhim pushti vardhanam?’” I asked.

“Yes. The Maha Mrytunjaya Mantra is addressed to Lord Shiva, the God of Death. When you repeat it you are requesting Him to preserve your life and enhance your welfare. Vallabhacharya’s philosophy is called *Shuddha Advaita*, ‘Pure Non-duality,’ and follows the principle of ‘One-in-All, All-in-One.’ Vallabhacharya never taught people to run away from the world and become renunciates; he taught everyone to live a Vedic life, to live in the world without becoming part of the world.”

“So this is also Advaita Vedanta?”

“Most certainly! Thus far you have been exposed only to the Advaita of Shankaracharya, and the proponents of that school want people to believe that theirs is the only Advaita Vedanta. They like to debate reality; it’s only natural, since that is what Shankaracharya did his whole life long.

“Shankaracharya taught ‘Brahmam sat, jagan mithya’: while the Absolute Unmanifested is absolutely true, the cosmos, the Manifested, is *mithya*, false. But Vallabhacharya believed, as we Aghoris believe, that since God

created the universe, and pervades it, the universe is as true as God is, which means that everything is true, since everything is part and parcel of God. Vallabhacharya did not care too much for debate; he preferred to spend his time worshipping Krishna and enjoying the bliss of the nectar of His sweet name and form. I like to call the Pushti Marga 'the Path of Sweetness,' because of the many sweet songs Vallabhacharya wrote, in Sanskrit, about his Beloved. Probably the most famous of Vallabhacharya's songs is the *Madhura-ashtaka*, the 'Eight Verses in Praise of the Lord's Sweetness.' Of all deities only Krishna is Madhu: pure, unalloyed sweetness. In fact, one of His names is Madhava, the 'Sweet One.'"

"Why isn't this sect better known?"

"Well, there is a lot of esoteric meaning in their doctrine, which makes it too complicated to explain easily. The Gaudiya Math, from which the Hare Krishnas developed, teaches devotion to Krishna in His exoteric, external form, and rejects any kind of esoteric doctrine; this makes it easier to comprehend. The Pushti Marga believes both in the obvious and the hidden, and that is why I think it is superior, not just because I was born into it. If Westerners were to study Vallabhacharya's teachings they would really learn something about Advaita Vedanta, about the hidden meanings of Krishna's play, and about how to be sweet.

"Krishna was something else entirely," said Vimalananda appreciatively, shaking his head in amazement. "You know, the word Krishna has two and a half syllables, and so does the word *prema* (romantic love). So it is only natural for Krishna's play to be full of *prema*. But He is no ordinary lover. In fact, He is a true thug; that's why He is called Chaliya, 'the Inconstant One.' He will play about with you when you worship Him. Some days He will be very close; other days you won't be able to find Him at all.

"As He plays with you, you will be run through the wringer; you will ache with longing. When He finishes with His play you will be completely tired out. You will cry with all your being, 'When are You coming to me?' When He does come He will catch hold of your hand and will never let go, not even through millions of births—except that there can't be millions of births for you once He has hold of your hand. Finally you reach the state of *tadrapata*—'two hearts but one beat'—and then you are identical with Him, if that is what you want. But most devotees of Krishna never want to unite with Him; they always want to maintain their own identities so that they taste His sweetness over and over again, forever and ever.

"Although He is Perfection Personified, Krishna still has to come to our world to play about. Do you know why? Because of His beloved, Radha.

Why does the name Radha sound so sweet to the ear? Turn the word around and you get *dhara*, the power to hold or fix. In this case it is the power to hold Krishna in mind. Everyone who has perfect *धारणा* of Krishna, whose mind is firmly fixed on Him, actually calls Krishna to them. He goes wherever He is called. The person who calls may not see or sense Him, but Krishna plays about with such a person, and causes him or her to do so many things.

"Krishna is called Perfection Personified because of a *siddhi* he had which was far beyond all ordinary *siddhis*. This *siddhi* is called 'Kartum, Akartum, Anyathakartum.' *Kartum*: that which is difficult to do, but is doable. This refers to the *adhibhautika*, the mundane world. *Akartum*: that which is impossible for ordinary beings, which refers to the *adhyatmika*, the spiritual world. *Anyathakartum*: that which is beyond both the spiritual and the mundane and is inconceivable to humans, referring to the *adhidaivika* or astral world. This suggests that Lord Krishna has unlimited power in all three realms, which means in the entire cosmos. Krishna had only one fault: He had a habit of promising to do the impossible. He would set up a situation, promise to change it, and then change it—and no one would know what He had done. All the time this was going on He would stand to one side, admiring His own play.

"But even Krishna was baffled by Radha; even He could not understand her. Do you know the depth of Radha's devotion to Krishna? Even Krishna Himself could not know it. Her *bhakti* was so intense that when she was away from Krishna she felt as if she were being stung by thousands of scorpions all at once. If you want to awaken your Kundalini completely by means of *bhakti* your devotion must be equally intense, otherwise there will never be enough pressure to force Kundalini to rise into your head."

Oh.

"Radha was a *gopi*, one of the milkmaids with whom Krishna carried on a secret romance. They would work all day long taking care of their homes and families, and when night fell they would sneak out and make love to Krishna. Esoterically, Krishna is the Soul, the *Shaktiman*; the *gopis* are the *nadis*, the nerves of the astral body. *Gopi* literally means 'secret'; naturally, because no one else but the *sadhaka* can know what is going on within his body. The *gopis* went about their daily work as usual, but their thoughts were only of Krishna. Likewise, a good *sadhaka* goes about his own daily life while his consciousness is fixed entirely on Krishna.

"They say that Krishna had sixteen thousand wives, and of those sixteen thousand He was fondest of one hundred. This means that of your seventy-

two thousand nadis sixteen thousand are predominant, and of those sixteen thousand one hundred are most important in Kundalini Yoga. Of these, three are supremely important, and of these three Sushumna is most important. Radha, the most beloved of Krishna even though she was not even His wife, represents Sushumna.

“Do you remember when I demonstrated to you and your friend Sergei how through the manipulation of just one nadi in the second toe a woman can become aroused, and even have an orgasm?”

“I remember it well.” And so does, I am sure, the woman he demonstrated it on.

“Can you imagine what would happen if all your seventy-two thousand nadis were stimulated at once?”

“I can imagine it with some difficulty.”

“Well, that is what love of Krishna can do for you. If that ever happens to you then you will know something about Krishna’s Lila. Do you know the two main Sanskrit words for ‘play’?”

“Yes, lila and krida.”

“*Krida* is unconscious play, like *rati krida* (love play). *Krida* is play which is controlled by someone or something other than the being who is playing. In love play the glands and the genitals do the controlling, not the two people who romance each other. The Rishis play is *lila*, cosmic pastimes in which they are always in control. This is why we talk about Krishna’s Lila and Rama’s Lila, the divine play of Lord Krishna and Lord Rama.

“Everyone here in India knows when Krishna was born, but how many people know the real significance of Krishna’s birth? Only when the causal body begins to burn to ash is Krishna really born. At that time the Kundalini Shakti merges with its Lord in the sadhaka’s head, and then all the seventy-two thousand nadis begin to dance in the cosmic rhythm. Each nadi vibrates with bliss, thinking that she alone possesses Krishna, but in fact Krishna being the Soul is everywhere, and dances with them all. This is the way the Rishis celebrate Krishna’s birthday: they enjoy the cosmic dance between Krishna and the gopis in their own bodies, utilizing the Kundalini Shakti. This is the real Rasa-Lila of Krishna.”

“So it is at least theoretically possible to experience the *Rasa-Lila* (the divine dance of intense emotion), even now during Kali-Yuga.”

“Let me put it this way. When Narsi Mehta was kicked out of the house by his sister-in-law he ran in desperation to a Shiva temple and threw himself across the Shiva Linga. He lay there for seven days and nights, forgetting

to eat or drink, allowing snakes and insects to crawl over him as they pleased. Finally Lord Shiva was pleased with his penance, and appeared to him to offer a boon. Narsi Mehta told Him, ‘Lord, just give me whatever you like best.’ Shiva said, ‘Well, I love best the Rasa—Lila of Krishna, so I will give that to you.’ Some people say that Narsi Mehta is the only human in Kali Yuga who has ever seen the real Rasa-Lila of Lord Krishna.”

“Of course that is too faraway for most of us,” he added when he saw the far away look in my eyes. “But if you sing of Krishna’s exploits with sincere devotion you can develop intense love for Krishna, which will give you immense bliss. And if you know the esoteric meaning behind the songs, they can send you into ecstasy.

“In one a gopi complains to her companion: ‘On the banks of the river Yamuna, Nanda’s son (Krishna) flung a stone and broke the water pot on my head, which caused all the water to flow out and lighten my load.’ You know that Indians frequently carry their heavy loads on their heads. The gopis, like most Indian women, used to fetch water from the river in large pots which they would carefully balance on their heads as they carried them back to their homes. Krishna, to tease them, would throw rocks and break the pots. This is the surface meaning, easily understandable by every woman who has ever carried a pot of water on her head. Such a song thus helps even illiterate village women to increase their devotion to Krishna.

“When you sympathize with someone you self-identify with that person to some extent. If you can sympathize with the gopi in this song it will be easier for you to relate to Krishna, even if it is only to scold Him for breaking the pot. We in India do not believe that devotion has to be respectful and polite at all times. When you are in love with someone, is the course of your romance always smooth? No, it is not; it can’t be, if you are really in love. Sometimes you will fight, sometimes you will weep, and so on, if you really love your partner. True devotion means falling in love with your deity.

“So, the gopi in the song seems to complain about Krishna’s antics; this is the surface meaning. The esoteric meaning is something quite different. Never take anything here in India only at surface value. Our sacred writings are mostly esoteric and you should not take them at face value any more than you should take the books of Moses, which are also mostly esoteric, at face value.

“In this song the Yamuna River represents the Chandra Nadi, which flows in the left nostril. Bhakti requires the functioning of the Chandra Nadi. The gopis are the other nadis of the body. Krishna is the gopis’ lover; He is the Soul, that which causes vitality and awareness in the nadis. The

Soul also causes blood to flow in the arteries, and so on. Doesn't your blood flow faster when you see your beloved?

"The water pot is the head, which is full of so many juices. 'Juice' is not limited to physical juices like hormones; it also includes 'mental' juices like tastes and emotions. Because an unenlightened person is selfish this water is poisonous, poisoned by the venom of selfishness."

"From the snake of the untamed ahamkara," I tossed in.

He nodded, pleased that I was following his meaning. "Krishna 'lightens' the gopi of her burden, making her 'enlightened.' After her head is lightened of the venom of the world the gopi becomes clairaudient and clairvoyant. Then all she wants to see is Krishna, all she wants to hear is the sweet music of His flute, and all she wants to do is dance with Him in the divine Rasa-Lila.

"Once Krishna hid in a tree near the Yamuna and waited for the gopis to come down to bathe. After they had undressed and entered the river Krishna stole their clothes, and when they realized what He had done they were too embarrassed to come out. But Krishna insisted, and they all had to emerge from the water and stand before Him naked."

"Naturally He wanted to see them naked; He was their lover."

"Yes. Before Krishna will dance with the gopis they must remove all their clothes: the three coverings which obscure Kundalini. The gopis are embarrassed in the beginning—their egos hesitate to leave familiar self-identifications—but Krishna is firm with them, and eventually they must become naked. Then the Kundalini Shakti becomes free to move through the various nadis in the body, and those nadis begin to dance."

## Krishna and Shiva

He paused to sip his drink.

"When Kundalini enters the Anahata Chakra you begin to hear the Anahata Nada, which will sound either like Krishna's flute or Shiva's drum depending on which path you follow. Other Nadas are also described in the books, but these two are the most important.

"Let me try to explain to you the differences in Nada by describing how Krishna's hair differs from Shiva's hair. Krishna's hair has been compared to a swarm of bees. What does a bee do with its time? All day long it moves from flower to flower, enjoying the nectar at each one. The flower longs for

the bee to come and take its nectar; many flowers in fact exist only because of bees. Likewise, Lord Krishna moves from girl to girl, from Shakti to Shakti, and enjoys with each one. They long for Him to come to them; they exist only for Him. By their longing they draw Him to themselves. Every sincere devotee of Krishna is female, no matter what sex the physical body might be.

"Bees are always buzzing, and the sound of Krishna's hair is likened by the Rishis to the murmuring drone that arises from innumerable intoxicated bees. That buzz is Nada. If you use this image to improve your concentration on Krishna you will begin to perceive this Nada when your concentration on Krishna becomes perfect.

"Lord Krishna has long, flowing, luxurious hair. Lord Shiva's hair is also long, but it is matted into thick locks; what do the West Indians call them?"

"Dreadlocks."

"Like dreadlocks. His hair, which is called a *jata*, is compared to a snake because it is long and ropelike, and because if you listen carefully you may hear a low hiss like a snake's coming from it. This is Shiva's Nada."

"And of course Shiva wears a snake around His neck."

"Yes he does. And yes, Kundalini is the Serpent Power. Think of this: Shiva wears a cobra around his neck, and Vishnu sleeps on Shesha, a thousand-headed snake. Just as Shiva allows Kali to dance on Him while He remains an inert corpse, a sadhaka who awakens Shiva in himself allows Kundalini to play about on him, but is never tempted to allow Kundalini to identify with any aspect of limited existence.

"Krishna has also subdued Kundalini, in a different way. Once He danced on the head of a venomous serpent named Kaliya in the middle of the Yamuna River, the Lunar Channel; Krishna used lunar energy to bring Kundalini under His complete control, and then He danced on Her! Normally Ma dances, but Krishna turned the tables on Her. This is why Shiva loves Krishna's play. But Krishna could do this only because His mind had been made totally firm by Shiva, which is why Krishna loves Shiva's play.

"How many people realize that sadhana of Shiva is sadhana of Krishna, and vice versa? Shiva cannot do without Vishnu and Vishnu cannot do without Shiva; it is a mutual bondage of love and necessity. It has to be; They are merely two aspects of the same Being. If you follow the path of jnana you must worship Shiva. In fact, only when you actually become Shiva will you really know how to worship Krishna. If you follow the path of bhakti you must worship Krishna, or some other aspect of Vishnu, and when you achieve Krishna, He will teach you about Shiva—that is, if you can still



remember Shiva as you gaze at Krishna's beauty. One is the Absolute Unmanifested, the other is the Perfection of Manifestation."

"So on the path of jnana you actually become Shiva, while on the path of bhakti you worship but remain separate from Krishna."

"Yes; it is the difference between non-duality and duality. Shiva contains everything within Himself; He is the ultimate jnani. When the god of love came to Him to tempt Him, He incinerated that god with a single glance from His third eye, the eye of jnana. When there is no lust, no desire, there is no outward movement of energy, and the universe ceases to exist. The god of love was reborn as Krishna's son, because Krishna is *rasatmaka*, full of blissful emotion. This is why He dances the Rasa-Lila, and why He is called Ananda Ghana, the 'Mass of Bliss.' He loves all the fineries and luxuries of life; it is all His Maya. If you have become tired of Maya and want renunciation you must go to Lord Shiva. No other being in the universe has ever renounced as Shiva has. He has not renounced everything out of pride in His renunciation, but because He loves only Krishna, and always craves to see Him. He has renounced because He has given everything to Krishna.

"How few people understand Shiva! Shiva says, 'My Gopala loves beautiful clothes; let Him have them! To remind me of Him every moment, I will never wear clothes. Instead I will wear the ashes of burnt bodies. My Gopala loves jewels; I will wear a cobra, to remind me that I have offered all other garlands to Him. I will drink poison; all other food I offer to Him,' and so on. No one wants to come near Shiva in this state, so He plays with spirits; He doesn't even crave devotees. All He craves is Gopala. Once He went so far as to actually turn Himself into a gopi so that He could take part in the Rasa-Lila Himself.

"And if He craves Vishnu, don't you think that Vishnu will crave Him in return? It is only natural; Vishnu loves His devotees better than He loves anything else in the universe, and Shiva is His ultimate devotee. Do you know how strong Krishna's love for Shiva is? You have probably never thought about it. Even Krishna, Perfection Personified, died when He met Mahakala face to face; His love for Mahakala was so intense that He could not remain living separate from Him.

"It is this way for everyone. While they are alive people say, 'Rama, Rama,' or 'O Krishna' when they are in trouble; they invoke Vishnu and ask for His help. You rarely hear anyone saying, 'Hara, Hara,' because everyone is afraid of death. But really their love for Lord Shiva is much stronger than their love for Lord Vishnu. The moment they see Shiva they have to die, the emotion is so intense. This is how He performs His duty.

"Shiva is the Great Giver, and because He sees Krishna in every living being He gives people unlimited boons when He is properly propitiated. The problem is really not how to propitiate Him; the problem is how to get his attention. He is in perpetual samadhi, and it takes quite a lot of intensity to drag Him down into the consciousness of His surroundings.

"To give you an idea of what kind of giver Shiva is, let us take just one verse from the Shiva Mahimna Stotra, the 'Hymn to the Greatness of Shiva.' This verse describes how Vishnu was in the habit of daily offering one thousand lotuses to Shiva. One day Shiva stole one of the lotuses, as a test. When Vishnu found that one was missing and that His offering might be incomplete He thought to Himself: 'My eyes are described by my devotees as "lotus eyes." Therefore they are fit offerings to Lord Shiva.' He thereupon plucked out one of His two lotus eyes and offered it. Shiva was so pleased by this offering that He immediately appeared and converted the lotus eye into the *Sudarshana Chakra*, the discus which is Vishnu's favorite weapon."

"Does this story have anything to do with the Vishnu Sudarshana Mantra?" I wondered.

"It may." Though pleased that I remembered that reference of many months before, he was not so easily distracted from his point. "Here is a part of the esoteric meaning of this verse—not all, just a part. Vishnu's one thousand lotuses are in the Sahasrara; He offers them to Shiva daily by offering these internal shaktis to His internal Shiva. One day Shiva took one; what is that one? The ego, Vishnu's own personal Shakti. This naked Shakti then embraced Her Shiva. Remember the difference between Shakti and Ma: Ma is the maternal aspect and is very sweet—'Be prosperous my child,' and so on. Shakti, on the other hand, is immediate and impartial, like a knife: fast, sharp, cutting. This accounts for the 'plucking' of the 'lotus.'

"After the loss of His eye of duality (because it was Shakti) Vishnu had but one eye left: the eye of non-duality. Shiva took the Shakti and returned the Sudarshana Chakra. *Sudarshana* means 'good sight': clairvoyance. And why a chakra? Ask me that."

I tried to ask him that, but he continued to talk: "I'm not going to tell you the answer, though. What is the use of my telling you everything? There are some things you have to find out for yourself by experience.

"Shiva is pure consciousness. When you succeed in propitiating Shiva your own consciousness is transformed into a divine consciousness, so that forever after as long as you live you are in the world but out of it, like the lotus which grows from the mud but remains unsullied by it. The lotus is dear to Shiva because it is the very embodiment of discrimination.

“Ordinary people have minds filled with the heat of passion, caused by the friction generated by the mental turmoil due to *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* (certainty and uncertainty). Desire and heat are the same thing.”

“Of course; *raga* means both ‘passion’ and ‘melody,’” I said, “and in Ayurveda *raga* means ‘inflammation.’” And, I thought to myself, it is cognate with the English word rage.

“Good. Coolness, on the other hand, means lack of mental turmoil. Lord Shiva is always doing penance, destroying the passions day in and day out, just as He destroyed the god of love with a single glance from His third eye. Shiva’s terrific penances create heat, and so He needs to be continuously cooled off. This is one reason why he wears a crescent moon on His forehead, and a cobra around His neck. Snakes are cool to the touch, and are usually quiet and immobile unless disturbed; it is only when you disturb them that they will bite you. The image of Lord Shiva sitting immobile in samadhi in the extreme cold on top of Mount Kailash observing silence indicates the complete absence of *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*. Lord Shiva’s mind is always as firm as a rock; this is why the *linga* is His symbol.

“Why does Shiva need to do penance when He has already achieved such a high state? Because He swallowed the terrible *Halahala* poison, the poison of *samsara*, which threatened to destroy the world. To protect creation, because He sees Gopala Krishna in all beings and cannot bear to see His Gopala troubled in any way, He drank this poison, and it stained His throat blue.”

“Which is why He is called ‘Nilakantha’ (‘The Blue-Throated One’).”

“Exactly. *Halahala* manifested at the time of the Churning of the Ocean of Milk. We will discuss that event someday, but for right now consider that ‘Ham’ and ‘Lam’ are the Bija Mantras for the Vishuddha and the Muladhara Chakras respectively, so ‘*Halahala*’ represents the poison of everything which exists in the lower five chakras, meaning everything made up of the Five Elements. Because Shiva holds the poison of *samsara* above His Vishuddha Chakra and never allows it to affect him He is always above the *samsara*, in perennial samadhi.

“Ganga, the Ganges River, flows from the celestial regions down onto the earth, and Shiva catches her in His matted locks, breaking her fall so that Earth is not troubled by the force of her descent. It is well known that bathing in the Ganga can wash away one’s evil karmas. The River Ganga was proud of this ability of hers until she learned that it was given to her by a Rishi who purified her each day, not for her glory but to provide coolness to Shiva. This Rishi loves Shiva so much that he is willing to take on millions of

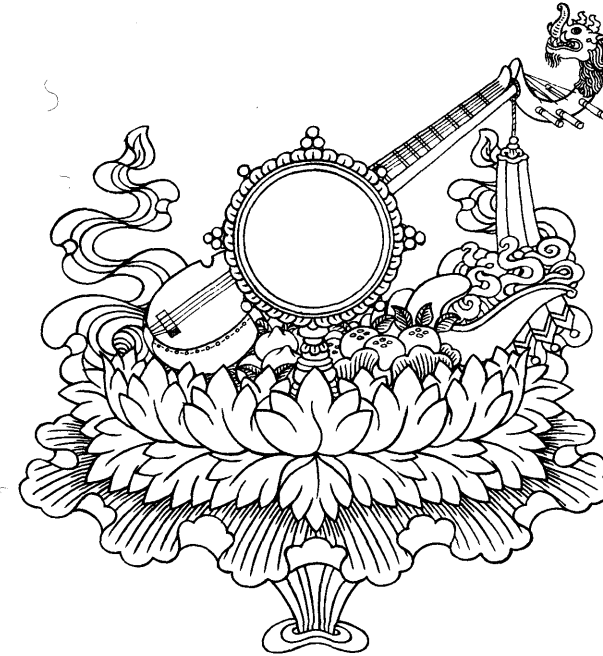
bad karmas daily just so Shiva will not be troubled. Only a Rishi could be so magnanimous.”

“But there is probably an esoteric meaning to this story also.”

“Of course there is, just as there is with bathing in the Yamuna. Evil karmas are definitely washed away when you take a bath in your internal Ganga, the right nostril. This is the bath of *jnana*.”

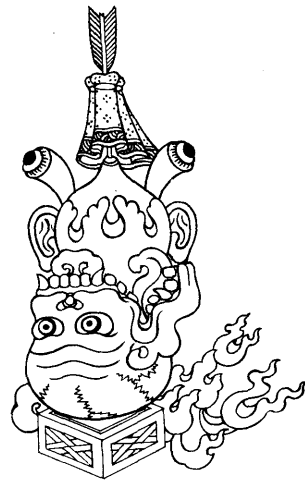
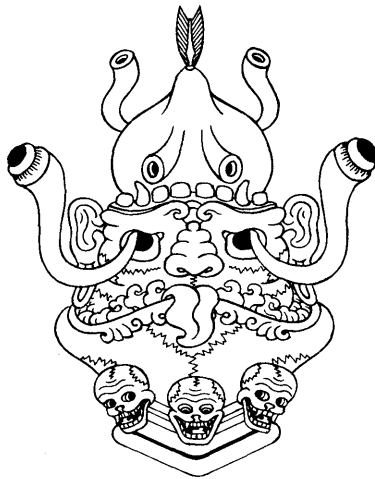
“So finally it comes down to the two rivers, the Ganga and the Yamuna.”

“Yes. Shiva and Krishna, *jnana* and *bhakti*; call them what you wish, they are the two paths to the Absolute.”



### Peaceful Offering of the Five Senses

Mirror (sight); Lute (sound); Fruit (taste);  
Perfumed Conch (smell); Cloth (touch).



### Wrathful Offering of the Five Senses

Eyes (sight); Ears (sound); Nose (smell); Tongue (taste);  
Heart with Feather (touch).

# IMMORTALS

## Siddhas

“The universe is endless and beginningless.” Vimalananda was in a mood to talk, and plenty of time lay before us. “If you are sincere and work hard you will eventually reach the state of continual awareness that you are the Universal Soul, the One, the Atman or Brahman. Then you can truthfully say to yourself, ‘Aham Brahmasmi; I am Brahman.’ Our mortal consciousness has three normal states: waking, dream, and deep sleep. Turiya is the state beyond these three. In Turiya you are continually aware of being Brahman, the Absolute Reality, and of Brahman being all. But it is only the beginning.

“In spite of knowing yourself to be the Brahman you cannot do everything the Brahman can. You cannot create, preserve, and destroy universes. It is all very well to know you are the Brahman, but there is an immense difference between imagining that you can create your own universe and actually being able to do so. While you and I are limited to the universe in which we live, a Rishi can create as many universes as there are stars in the sky. The difference between you and a Rishi lies in the power of will.

“To know that you are the Brahman is jnana, ordinary spiritual knowledge. When there is full knowledge of the Brahman no iota of ego remains; discrimination, doubt, and determination disappear. This is Nirvikalpa Samadhi. You can be satisfied that you have reached the Absolute once you

have achieved Nirvikalpa Samadhi, but there is no joy in it; it is dry, it has no juice, no rasa. How can joy exist when everything—observed, observer, and observation—has ceased to exist? Jnana is good, but vijnana, special knowledge, is far better. When you reach the state of vijnana you realize, ‘Oh, so there is someone behind the scene who is playing about and directing everyone else.’ When this happens you become a Siddha. Only when you go beyond Turiya can you understand and know Siddhas.

“A Siddha is one who returns from Nirvikalpa Samadhi to perfect his vijnana. Here is how it works: You go from the state of ignorance in which you possess attributes to the attributeless state of jnana and then back to the qualified state again, with a difference. Just compare it to being in the belly of the Mother, from which you will have to be born over and over again, with being on Her lap, where you can play about as much as you like and She will keep an eye on you. You exist in relation with Maya either way, since you are manifested, but there is a big difference between being in the samsara and being on top of it. A Siddha does experience joy and sorrow, and the other pairs of dualities, but not in the same way as before.

“Both an ordinary man and a Siddha cry when they visit the smashan, which is the true temple of God, the place of Eternal Reality. An ordinary man cries tears of misery, because he suffers from separation; he thinks he has lost something he thought he possessed. A Siddha cries tears of joy, because he understands the play of Mahakala, the Lord of Time. Mahakala can have no effect on a Siddha, who has gone beyond time, space and causation. A Siddha can safely admire the play of Nature as an inviolate observer.

“Nowadays everyone who gets a little siddhi becomes a ‘siddha.’ Such people are only fooling the gullible and cheating themselves. Anything you strive to obtain is a siddhi, and you will find that in Kali Yuga many people are ready to strive for siddhis, for supernatural powers, but few are willing to strive for God. There are plenty of supernatural powers to be had, and many of them are very easy to obtain. One of the simplest is for the control of snakes. You can succeed at it in a single day. Our friend Chotu has done it. He doesn’t show off any more, but in the beginning just for fun he would go up to a cobra or a krait, pick it up and hang it around his neck as if he were Lord Shiva, and the snake would not do a thing; it dare not. Even if he sticks his finger into its mouth nothing would happen.

“You Westerners have siddhis too, of course. You have made great technological advances in a very short time. You have learned how to see and hear across vast distances, how to fly through the air, how to harness the power

of the atom. All these are supernatural powers. You have done your own researches and have demonstrated the results, and it is only right that you insist on seeing the results of our researches before you believe in what we say. The only thing is, all these achievements are outside the body. They are gadgets, external things which can always be lost or broken. Here in India we have turned our attention inward, and the results we get can never be mislaid or destroyed. This is the big difference between India and the West.

“Most gurus will tell you to shun siddhis like the plague, and this is correct, in the sense that it is so easy to get attached to them. Obtaining a siddhi is a great achievement, and when you obtain one it is natural to immediately think of showing off its power to others, but to do so is very foolish and dangerous. The real purpose of siddhis, which exist in the subtle body, is to remove one’s karmas from the causal body, which is basically just a warehouse of karmas, and then to repay these karmic debts. The subtle body is the intermediary between the causal and physical bodies. It is less subject to gravitation than the physical body, so when it is released from the grasp of the physical body it can go higher and higher; there is no limit to the heights it can reach. But its main job is to go into the causal body and remove the karmas stored there.

“Being able to do this still does not make you a siddha. It is easy enough—relatively speaking—to learn how to take out your astral body. It is a greater achievement to be able to sit in one place and maintain consciousness of many different places and many different planes of existence all at once. But even that does not make you a Siddha.

“You must search long and hard before you find a real Siddha. You cannot become a Siddha over a weekend; nor can you follow a correspondence course and get a diploma by mail. No; you have to work your behind off, literally, sitting in meditation or sitting and performing rituals for lifetimes on end.

“And even after so much penance you must still be tested. Naturally the test for becoming a Siddha is very rough. I know the Mahapurusha in Girnar who is responsible for the testing of sadhus. He might come to a sadhu in any form, and his test would take only a minute or two. If the sadhu passed, wonderful. If not, his matted locks would be cut and he would have to leave Girnar. 99.5 percent failed. Five-hundred-year-old, one-thousand-year-old, even five-thousand-year-old sadhus couldn’t pass. So it is no joke to become a Siddha.”

Vimalananda used the term *Mahapurusha*, which literally means “Great Soul,” to refer to any being who has become immortal as a result of sadhana.

Rishis, Munis, Naths and Siddhas are all Mahapurushas.

“But it is all worth it. To become a Siddha is a unique accomplishment, because you go beyond all the Elements and you can then play about with them as you please. A Siddha has no physical restrictions. You become immortal, which means that you are ethereal, but whenever you wish you can materialize a physical body for yourself and move about. Such a body is just like anyone else’s body, as solid as can be. Once you’ve finished whatever it was you wanted to do, you just dematerialize; it’s that simple. Each Element goes back to its source: Earth to Earth, Water to Water, etc.

“Once a Siddha was gracious enough to demonstrate this to me. He sat in front of me and within seconds, on the ground where he had been, there was a pile of some solid material, a little puddle of water and a warm breeze. Just to convince myself, I put out a finger and touched the water; it was real. After a few minutes of being discorporate he remanifested himself. But there was a flaw on his arm, as if some of the flesh had been dug out. When I asked him about it he replied, ‘Didn’t you remove a little of the water?’ Then I understood. But even that is only the beginning. I know a Mahapurusha who has such perfect knowledge of the Earth Element that if he even shakes one of his matted locks with his hand the earth will quake, and giant waves will roll in the ocean.

“Mortals cannot understand how Siddhas play about. Sometimes, if he feels like it, a Siddha may remove his head from his body and walk around with it in his hands. People will be so amazed to see it that they will run after him just to find out what it might be. When they start to make too big a noise about it he will replace it on his shoulders as if nothing had happened. After staying in one place for some time he may become famous. Then, to prevent being trapped and made to do others’ work he will discorporate and no one will be able to find him.

“Siddhas are too far away for most people. Unless a Siddha wants to meet you, you will never succeed at meeting him; it’s just impossible. Besides, even if you could meet a Siddha would you know how to react? There are only two ways to react to something which is unknown to you. Either you do as most people do and define the thing according to all the old notions that you have been given by your relatives, friends, teachers, priests, and so on, or you look at it in a new, non-verbal way. If something is really new to you how will you be able to describe it verbally, since no word exists for it? For example, would you please describe for me the taste of sugar?”

“Ah, well, it’s . . . sweet.”

“Yes, but that doesn’t describe anything. ‘Sweet’ can only be tasted, it

cannot be described in words. You may hear about ‘sweet’ all your life, but until you taste sugar you will never really know what sweetness is.

“Likewise, you may get the general idea of a thing by talking about it, but words are no substitute for experience. The verbal way is second-hand, which is of no use to a jnani, who wants to experience Reality. How then can it be of any use to a Siddha, who is three steps higher than a jnani?”

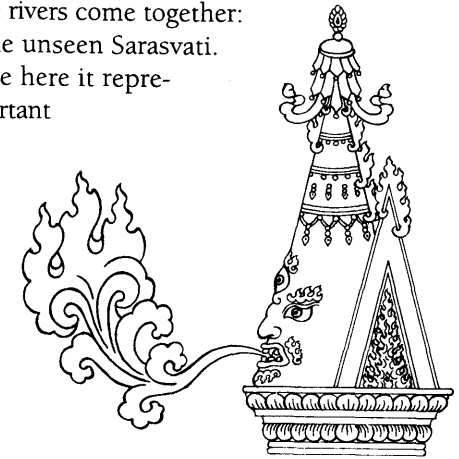
“Siddhas can experience things which most humans would never be able to imagine even after millions of lives. Just one example: the ancient bathing festival called the Kumbha Mela, the ‘Pot Festival,’ which is held every three years by turns in Hardwar, Prayaga (Allahabad), Nasik, and Ujjain when particular conjunctions are in the sky. They say that a bath in the appropriate holy river at these particular times gives you a drop of Amrita from the celestial pot of nectar.

“The most important of these festivals is held in Prayaga, at a place called the *Triveni Sangama* where three rivers come together: the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the unseen Sarasvati.

The Sarasvati is hidden because here it represents Sushumna, the most important of the nadis, the nadi which carries Kundalini to the Unmanifest. Sushumna’s course is hidden in the body, just as the River Sarasvati’s course is hidden on Earth.

“Now, although a bath on the appropriate day in the Triveni Sangama provides some benefit, the Kumbha Mela is basically an esoteric festival. On Kumbha Day a Siddha need not bother to go to Prayaga for his bath. He has his own Triveni Sangama and his own pot of nectar right inside him. His Triveni Sangama is his Ajna Chakra, where the Surya and Chandra Nadis meet Sushumna. You know the two roads to the Ajna Chakra: the right and the left nostrils, jnana and bhakti. Whichever path you take, your own Triveni Sangama exists in the Ajna Chakra. A Siddha sits wherever he is and he—his ego, his Kundalini Shakti—takes a dip, by which he obtains a drop of Amrita from his own pot of nectar, his own head.”

“So here,” I interposed, “the ‘pot’ is like the pot of Ghata Sthapana and does not refer to the chest or to pranayama, even though the word *kumbha*



is used.”

“Oh, but it does refer to pranayama as well. On the specified day at the specified time the Siddha sits in a certain posture and concentrates his prana in the Vishuddha Chakra. His breathing slows down to two finger-breadths, then to only one. This is not forcible restraint, remember; this is the true ‘kevala kumbhaka,’ in which the breath slows and then stops automatically when the two flows become perfectly balanced. Once the Siddha has balanced his breaths he draws the prana from both into the Ajna Chakra. *Ajna* stands for what?”

“For *guru ajna*, instructions from the guru.”

“Yes. Here the guru is the sun, the world’s guru. Breathing slows almost to a stop when the Kundalini Shakti reaches the Ajna Chakra. It is not a question of holding the breath in; it is not inhalation, but rather continuous and complete exhalation. If you go for a swim and dive but inhale you will float. If you exhale you will sink right down to the bottom, which is necessary here. The ego must dive in and sink to the very bottom of the stream to be cleansed of all her blemishes. When she is totally cleansed she becomes the Kula Kundalini. At that point, when the Kundalini Shakti is in her purest form, she becomes eligible for holy nuptials with her Shiva. The result is Sadashiva, the eternal form of Shiva.

“Just as Krishna insists that the gopis show themselves to Him naked, Shiva will lie with Kundalini only when She becomes completely naked, completely stripped of all the three coverings, especially the Three Gunas. When I was a naked sadhu I would always ask any other naked sadhu I might meet, ‘Just by taking off your clothes do you achieve anything? Do you become liberated? Only if you can remove Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas have you really taken something off; otherwise, no.’

“You probably were not very popular as a sadhu,” I opined.

“No, but why should I be popular? I was not trying to win any popularity contests. A sadhu should be searching for truth, not approval, and to get to the truth you have to become truly naked. You have a phrase in English: ‘the naked truth.’ Translated into Sanskrit it becomes ‘nagna satya,’ which could also mean, ‘Truth is naked,’ or, ‘Nakedness is Truth.’ I like that last version: Nakedness is Truth. The true nakedness comes when you peel off the three coatings of the ego: the Three Gunas, the Six Tastes, and the Five Elements. Only then does She become true. They say Sanskrit is a dead language, but I think we’ve just created a new word.

“A water bath will not remove any of your real stains; it takes a mental bath to do the job. The stream of Amrita in which the ego bathes is a glan-

dular substance, a secretion of the pineal gland. The conjunction of the constellations causes the pineal and pituitary to hypersecrete, releasing a stream of Amrita in which to bathe the ego. So, by bathing in one of the four holy cities on Kumbha Day you get your physical bath, and by this internal process you take a spiritual bath. Then you become eligible for your astral or adhidaivika bath, which unfortunately is indescribable. People come and go, enjoying the external Kumbha bath over and over again, but this spiritual bath is something quite different. No one ever likes to return from this internal bath.”

## Rishis, Munis, Naths and Siddhas

After pausing to light a cigarette, Vimalananda continued.

“To become a Siddha is wonderful—marvelous—but it is not the ultimate. If your Kundalini should ever reach the Sahasrara you will see so many things that you will be amazed. You will see hundreds and hundreds of flowers of all colors. Each of those flowers is a shakti, and if you pluck one of them you will get that shakti, which will keep you on the periphery. You will form a little orbit for yourself, and you may remain there for ages. Siddhas usually stay in their own orbits because they are so fascinated by what they have achieved. Only if they are forcibly pulled further by some higher authority will they move ahead, and when they do they see that there are much better orbits to move into.

“To progress as a Siddha you must forget about everything else except going closer and closer to the center. It is almost impossible to reach the center, which is the preserve of the seniormost of the Rishis, but you can get closer and closer to it. If at any time you decide you’ve had enough of existence, you can completely efface your personality and merge into the center.”

I strained to conceptualize it.

“Try to get some perspective on what I am talking about here. Even after you become a Siddha it takes time to progress further. Of course, a Mahapurusha, who has gone beyond time, space and causation has no value for time; but to you and me it seems impossibly long. After thousands of years of penance a Siddha may be permitted to meet a Nath and learn from him. If a Siddha works really hard he can even become a Nath.

“Naths are Aghoris. They make everything in their being self-identify with Lord Shiva even under the most trying and tempting circumstances. Their

motto is 'Alak Niranjan'; *Alak* means 'a-laksha,' 'free from attribution or discrimination.' *Nir-anjana* means 'completely clean,' free of any fault, stain or blemish. What is that thing which is undefined and undefiled? The absolute imperishable Brahman.

"Most people would be terrified to see a Nath in his real form, with matted locks, big firetongs, bag full of ashes and fierce unblinking eyes."

"So all the Nath sadhus who dress this way are actually dressing in imitation of the real Naths, the immortals?"

"Yes, and each part of their costume has some meaning behind it; it's not just fanciful. Nath sadhus are known as 'Kan-Phatas' ('Pierced-Ears') because of the large earrings they are given by their gurus when they are initiated. The earrings stay in for as long as the sadhu lives, and the rule used to be that if an earring should break the sadhu should immediately commit suicide. I suspect that very few Nath sadhus follow this rule nowadays. Does the word 'earring' remind you of anything?"

"It reminds me of Kundalini, since *kundala* means 'earring.'"

"Correct. So there is a connection between the earring and Kundalini, or more precisely, between where the ear is pierced and Kundalini. The ear is full of important nadis, which is why the Chinese have gone in for ear acupuncture in such a big way. Nath sadhus are expected to be celibate, and one reason why they pierce their ears is because when you pierce the earlobe in just the right place you can prevent hydrocele, which may become a complication of celibacy. Of course if you are slightly off target you will become permanently impotent, so it is better to know before you pierce."

"If they are supposed to remain celibate what difference does it make if they become impotent; on the contrary, that should make them happy, shouldn't it?"

"Think about it; if they lose their sexual energy entirely, what will they have left to use to help awaken Kundalini?"

"Oh, right." You have to be virile to practice Tantra.

"The immortal Naths are passionately devoted to their guru *Dattatreya*, and they dress as they do in honor of *Adi Nath*, the first Nath: Lord Shiva. Thus Shiva is not the guru here; He is a fellow disciple of *Dattatreya*, the first of all Aghoris. Can you imagine what sort of being *Dattatreya* is if his original pupil was Shiva Himself?"

I tried to imagine Lord *Dattatreya*.

"Wah, wah," said *Vimalananda* admiringly, "Naths are really 'naths' (masters). They are masters of the ten senses. A special nerve is created, the eleventh sense, which permits them to receive their instructions telepathically.

Naths are higher than Siddhas because they get telepathic transmissions directly from their bosses, the Munis. This is why Naths are always waiting for *adesha*, for instructions: 'That which is heard without the ears, seen without the eyes, spoken without the tongue.'

"Because they are immortal and have complete control over their senses, Naths are masters of the physical world also. Just by pissing, or even spitting, on a rock a Nath can produce gold. In alchemy you have to use metal as your raw material, but a Nath only needs a rock. He has eaten and digested all types of poisons, which has changed his metabolism so much that he has become a touchstone himself. So naturally a Nath will have no value for gold, or for people like kings who do value it. They only have value for the gold of pure consciousness. A Nath is really a spiritual touchstone. Whoever comes in contact with a Nath must become spiritual, must become a real man or woman of God whether they want to or not. This is the power of a Nath.

"The Naths have a different way of teaching altogether. Once while *Gorakh Nath* was sitting at his dhuni he saw that the king's wife had died and that the king was crying as if his world had come to an end. *Gorakh* decided to go and meet the king. He brought along an earthen pot, and when he entered the king's presence he suddenly dropped it. It shattered into a hundred pieces, and *Gorakh* began to wail, 'I have lost my beautiful pot that I loved so dearly! Now it is gone forever!'

"The king looked at him in amazement and said, 'Have you gone mad? Are you crying over an old pot? You can buy hundreds of them at the market.'

"*Gorakh* said to the king, 'Maharaja, you are the ruler of the country, and in your harem there are many beautiful women. And besides, you can obtain any woman that you desire. Where is the need to cry over one lost woman?'

"The King replied, 'But she was so beautiful, so wonderful, and she had so many virtues that endeared her to me.'

"In answer, *Gorakh* took some ash from his shoulder-bag and threw it on the ground. Immediately two living women appeared, each a perfect copy of the king's dead wife. *Gorakh* asked the king, 'Can you tell me which of these is yours? If you knew her so well, you should be able to recognize her.'

"But the king couldn't distinguish which was his wife; both looked exactly alike. And then *Gorakh* said to him, 'King, you cannot even recognize your wife, and yet you are pining away for her. Now who is a fool, you or I?' And the king understood.

“The Naths are actually the creations of certain Munis, who in turn are merely the manifestations of a few Rishis. But each group in turn is kept in ignorance of their true nature so that the Lila, the cosmic play, can go on. They are limited in their new existences in order to perform certain tasks. If the Naths and Munis knew who they were, they wouldn’t perform their duties properly.

“A Nath waits millions of years to meet a Muni, and after long austerities a Nath can finally become a Muni. Actually, a Muni should be called ‘Mauni,’ one who observes silence. He does not speak in Vaikhari at all; he communicates only with his eyes or telepathically. A Muni must wait Yugas or Manvantaras to catch even a glimpse of a Rishi, and then, if he is meant for it, after many billions of years of being a Muni he may get a chance to become a Rishi. The lower categories of Mahapurusha are all in orbit; each has his own orbit, but all are bound, however slightly. A Rishi, though, is totally free. He can travel to any star, any solar system he likes, in the twinkling of an eye.”

“Does this apply to women too?”

“A woman who succeeds to the attributeless state comes back as a *Bhairavi* or *Yogini*; here also the hierarchy is very strict. After so many Yugas she moves up to become a Great Goddess, and finally she retires to the background, like the seniormost Rishis do, to let others enjoy the play. Actually those in the background control all the players, like a puppeteer pulling the puppets’ strings. But no one is aware of it except the seniormost Shaktis and Shaktimans.”

A flicker of confused emotion crossed my face, and Vimalananda increased his vehemence.

“Yes, I know what I am saying. The Rishis are the puppeteers, and all other beings in the universe, mortal and immortal, are their puppets. The Rishis go around creating *mas* (karmic debts) for people to work off, to bind people down and help them progress. If you want to quit being a puppet, you must perform *sadhana*.

## Notable Siddhas

“To meet a Nath, Muni or Rishi, or one of the Supreme Shaktis, is almost impossible. But you may be able to meet Siddhas. I was very fortunate to have met Telang Swami (see *Aghora*), who was a great Siddha. When I was in

the Himalayas I met Babaji, the Siddha who Yogananda talks about. Babaji is a good Siddha, no doubt, but his sister is even better than he is!

“Let me tell you about another Siddha I met. He is a very unusual person, even among the many unusual people in this universe. Some years ago a policeman saw a man wandering around in the backwaters of Cochin, in what is now the state of Kerala. When the policeman stopped him and asked his name the man replied, ‘My name is Prabhakaran, and I have come to look after the interests of my great-great-grandchildren.’ The policeman thought he was trying to be funny and asked him his age. The man replied, ‘More than seven hundred years.’ The policeman ran him in.

“Prabhakaran told the policemen at the station house that he did not eat or drink anything, so the jailers informed him, ‘We are going to keep you in solitary confinement without food and water, and no toilet either.’ Prabhakaran said, ‘O.K.’ When five days, six days later Prabhakaran was still in perfect shape the jailers had to admit to his abilities.

“Then they asked him, ‘Does anyone know you?’ Prabhakaran replied, ‘Ask C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar; I once saved his life.’ As soon as they telephoned Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who was then the Prime Minister of Travancore (also now part of Kerala) he immediately flew to Cochin to meet Prabhakaran, and insisted that Prabhakaran return with him to Travancore. But Prabhakaran said, ‘No, I prefer to go back to the sea.’ As soon as he had seen to the well-being of his descendants he walked out into the ocean. But that was nothing for him. He had already spent four hundred years in the Himalayas, and two hundred years in the sea. He is a Siddha, after all.”

I recently learned that a man whom some had identified as Prabhakaran had been living on land for some years in an ashram, spending most of his time dancing in *Bhava Samadhi*. Eventually he announced to everyone that he had had enough of existence after seven hundred years, and that he had decided to leave his body in ten days. And so he did.

“And then there was Vishuddhananda. He was the pride of India, a real Siddha, not like these babas who produce ash from the air and so on. On the day I first met him in Benaras he was in such a fine mood that he began to press the area around his navel, and suddenly a lotus stalk came out, like the one at Vishnu’s navel! As he continued to press, it became longer and a red lotus blossom appeared. Why red? Because red represents the Fire Element, which resides at the navel, the *Manipura Chakra*. There was a beautiful fragrance. After some time he pressed it, and it returned into his body, back through the navel. You may believe it or not, I don’t care.”

Nor did he pause to discover whether or not I believed it.



“The navel is really a very interesting structure. If you know the technique you can take in water through your navel and excrete it through your penis. Everyone in the world today performs creation, or rather procreation, with the penis, but Brahma, the Creator of the cosmos, does it with his navel, because He is Himself created from Vishnu’s navel.

“After this performance Vishuddhananda’s chief disciple, Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj, who was the greatest authority on Indian culture of his time, permitted a big smirk to escape onto his face. He was thinking, ‘Yes, my Guru Maharaj can do this. What can you do, you bedraggled Aghori?’ I looked at him and said, ‘Have you ever heard of Vajroli?’ He said that he had. ‘Bring me some mercury,’ I told him.

“Now, Vishuddhananda was doing research on mercury and there was plenty on hand. They brought a fifty-six-pound sealed tin and opened it in front of me. I sucked the mercury up with my penis. They were all gaping. Then I said, ‘Aghora Nath is going to show you a little something about mercury. Wring my hair!’ And all the mercury that had been taken inside was recovered from my matted locks. That put us on a more equal footing.

“Vishuddhananda was an expert at *Surya Vijnana*, the knowledge of how to make best use of the sun. Do you think this is simple? Never! Only when you understand the significance of the phrase ‘Surya Putra, Agni Mitra’ (‘son of the Sun, friend of the Fire’) can you even hope to know *Surya Vijnana*. It has something to do with purification of the Fire Element in the body, of course.

“Vishuddhananda would take an ordinary object, like a cookie, and put it on a large tray. Then he would direct sun rays onto it through certain yantras and the cookie would become a little puppy! Yes, it would come alive and move about. He would allow it to play for a bit, and then he would change the yantras slightly and the puppy would become a flower. Another change and a living human baby would appear. Finally he would change the thing into a sprig of *tulsi* (holy basil), and would give it to someone to be offered to the River Ganga.

“He would store the beads of his rosary in his arm. When he wanted to do japa he would remove them, string them, and use the completed rosary to count his japas. After finishing the number of japas he had decided to do he would unstring the rosary and replace the beads in his arm. And there was no hole, no scar, nothing to show where they had gone in or come out. He even used to keep a Shiva Linga made of solidified mercury in a hollow in his palate.

“I spent some time with him in Benaras. One day while he and I were

together he became rather intoxicated with his powers, and suddenly a skull he was holding began to move its jaw, as if it were talking. I got the idea, and suddenly two rocks lying nearby began to knock into one another, over and over again, until they were pounded into rubble. And he also got my idea: when two people compete, the outcome can only be destructive, just as the rocks destroyed each other.

“Vishuddhananda was a true Siddha: he learned his *vijnana* at Lake Manasarovar in Tibet. But even he had one fault: he showed himself off to too many people, and when he was ready to leave his body for good he had to suffer from diarrhea to purge all the *samsara* from him. Excess in all things is to be rejected.”

Vishuddhananda lived for many years on the portal of the main post office in Benaras, so it was not easy for him to avoid people. The Law of Karma, however, makes no allowances.

“He did not need to die, of course; he was a Siddha. But he wanted to die so that he could continue to make further progress. To become a Siddha is a great accomplishment, but it is nothing compared to being a Rishi.”

## Rishis

Vimalananda lit yet another cigarette.

“Nothing is ever lost in the universe. Even things which happened millions of years ago can still be known, because their sound still exists. Sound, which is vibration, a series of waves, can be transmitted in many ways. Light can carry sound; even modern science has proved this. Humans usually perceive sound via molecules of air that vibrate; in light something else vibrates, but sound is there within light all the same. It may be in a form subtler than the ear can hear, but it is there nonetheless, and anyone who has access to subtle sounds can hear it.

“This is why the Veda is called *shruti*, ‘that which is heard,’ to distinguish it from later texts written by men, which are called *smrti*, ‘that which is remembered.’ Think of what happened to the first person to become aware of this subtle sound. One day, as he is sitting blankly, he starts to meditate on ‘what is’; it’s natural to do so. After prolonged meditation he remembers the first sound, the original word, the strongest mantra of shakti. This first sound that he hears is the *Adi Natha*, the most ancient: the sound Om, which is none other than Lord Shiva. As he continues with his meditation

he progresses from stage to stage to become a Paramahansa, then a Siddha, a Nath, and a Muni, and finally a Rishi.

“The word *rishi* means ‘he who sees.’ A Rishi is a Seer who sees with the divine eye of perception; who hears, with the divine ear, everything that has happened in the past. And when he speaks he speaks with the divine tongue; whatever he says must take place. The Vedas are made up of mantric hymns which were ‘seen,’ not composed, by certain Rishis. They ‘heard’ the subtle sounds which make up these hymns, and translated them into words, sounds that the human ear can hear. These mantric hymns can provide evolutionary leaps in the progress of those who know how to properly use them. The Rishis throw these hymns around, checking to see who can take their power.

“Some sadhus and yogis call themselves Rishis, but I’m afraid they are all talking out of their wits. The Rishis are very different from ordinary humans like you and me, in every way. A Rishi is an immortal being, a being who lives for spans of time which are almost inconceivable to us humans. A Rishi can create a body for himself whenever he pleases, and whenever he is through with that body he can dissolve it. In this way a Rishi can know every particle of every dimension, because he knows the characteristics of and has experienced every possible womb.

“The books say that there are eight million four hundred thousand wombs in which to be born. The numerological significance of this number is  $8 + 4 = 12$  and  $1 + 2 = 3$ , the Three Gunas which make up the ocean of Maya in which we are all floundering. Actually, though, no one knows how many wombs there are in the universe, because wombs are innumerable. Any situation into which your consciousness is riveted when you die acts as your womb.

“Once Narada asked Lord Shiva this question of how many wombs there are in the universe. Shiva replied, ‘I only take life, I do not create it. Please ask Vishnu.’ But Vishnu told Narada, ‘I only preserve life; I am not in the business of creating either. Please go to Brahma.’ And Brahma said, ‘Listen, I just create the wombs. I haven’t been keeping count of how many I have created. You’ll have to ask someone else.’ But there was no one else to ask. Only certain Rishis have experienced all the existing wombs, so only they really know how to commiserate with all suffering beings. This is why a Rishi is a *Mahanubhavi*, a ‘Great Experiencer.’ This is also why a Rishi is the embodiment of motherliness, and why there is so much to learn from a Rishi—if you can ever locate one.”

“That, of course, is the problem.”

## Time and Space

“It is a problem only because you lack patience. If you decide that locating a Rishi is the thing you want most to do you will set about doing it, no matter how many lifetimes it may take. It is only a matter of time, after all.

“Being immortal the Rishis are not subject to time as we know it. They have gone beyond the reach of Mahakala, the God of Death, whose name is Time. Mahakala is the center of all the universes, the boundary between form and formlessness. Death provides limitation to form with the help of time. All of us who are born are destined to die, and as long as we live all of us exist within the stream of time. Once we die we drop out of time until we are reborn.

“While we are alive time is real for us, but it is relative; you see this every day in your own life. At the office time seems to pass so slowly; it just drags by, especially if you have no love for your work. But when you are busy doing something that you enjoy, like sex, then you say, ‘Oh, my goodness, how time flies!’ Time actually passes at the same rate; the difference is only because of your point of view. But if such a small difference in viewpoint can have such a major effect on how you experience time, you can imagine what a difference there must be between the human viewpoint and the cosmic viewpoint.

“You can only know a particular time or space if its frame of reference is appropriate for you. A human would find it difficult to live for long on the moon or other planets because the human body is made to live in the time and space of Earth; Earth is our frame of reference. The Rishis, who are able to use the sun as their frame of reference, do not have this problem. While you and I count our years according to how long it takes the earth to move around the sun, the Rishis count their ‘years’ according to how long it takes the sun to revolve around—well, around something else. Obviously their perspective on time is very different from ours. They have gone beyond all limitations of time, so they can experience time in any frame of reference that they choose.

“Since all time cycles are relative, and depend on the observer’s frame of reference, doesn’t it seem at least possible that a Rishi, who has harnessed the power of the sun, should see things according to the sun’s life cycle? Because of this different viewpoint a Rishi’s senses of sight, hearing and memory extend to cosmic days the way the human memory extends to ordinary days. With this sort of perspective a Rishi can both plan well into

the future and see far back into the past. Each Rishi likes to contribute what he can to the cosmic Lila, the play of existence. Just as countries create five-year plans to facilitate their development, the Rishis create developmental plans, for our world and for all the other worlds in the cosmos. And their plans are in an entirely different time frame from ours.

“Since Rishis are beyond all limitations of time, and since time and space form a continuum, as our modern scientists tell us, can the Rishis have any limitations as far as space is concerned either? No, they can move wherever they like in the universe in the twinkling of an eye. Einstein believed that nothing could ever go faster than light in a vacuum, but he was wrong. Thought is faster than light. A Rishi merely thinks that he wishes to go somewhere, and he arrives there immediately.

“The Rishis are beyond all limitations of time and space that we can conceive, but even they have some exceedingly subtle limitations which they must live with. They never quite transcend all attributes and distinctions; if they did, how could they continue to exist separate from the cosmos? So they continue doing their penances, getting closer and closer to absolute perfection without ever reaching it. They are totally perfect from our frame of reference, but from their frame of reference they still fall short of the Ultimate. How must they feel, if you and I feel bad that we haven’t made much spiritual progress?

“But whatever their limitations, the Rishis are far, far beyond us humans. By now you should have some idea of how little you can understand the state of a Rishi, and about how fortunate we are that the Mahapurushas come here to play about. The Rishis are especially interested in our world of death and impermanence because it is here that beings can change their innate natures very quickly.”

“But you are always pointing out to me people who in spite of all their efforts to improve remain as crooked as a pig’s tail, and saying about them, ‘Jati svabhava na munchyate’ (inborn characteristics don’t change),” I protested.

“And I’ve just got through telling you that time is relative. Most people will not be able to totally transform themselves within the space of a single human lifetime, although as you well know there are those who can and do; what about Jean Valjean? But from the cosmic viewpoint things happen here in the World of Death at breakneck speed. In just a few lifetimes you can achieve great things, whereas on other planes of existence it may take you millions or billions of years to get anywhere. Even the gods vie to be born here.

“The Rishis, in spite of being completely unlimited by any orbit, love to come down to Earth and play about, to help lighten Mother Earth of Her load. They visit all parts of the world, but they find the earth of India most to their liking.”

“Does India have some sort of monopoly over them, then?”

“No, no; why they prefer India has something to do with the gravity here. There have of course been other civilizations, like that of Atlantis, which have made great spiritual progress. The Atlanteans, and the people of the civilizations which were related to them, like the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians, could take out the astral body and move about with it, but they could never progress as far as our Rishis did. They produced a few Siddhas, but they were really too conscious of the physical world to advance much spiritually. How can I say this? Well, look at the pyramids and the sphinx and what-have-you. How massive they are! The kings and their priests were more interested in this sort of worldly glory than in true spirituality.

“Incan culture was also based on that of Atlantis, but it never quite reached the same stage of advancement. You know, the Incas used to worship a form of *Bhairava* (Shiva as ‘The Terrifier’), to whom they offered human sacrifices. The priestesses knew a crude form of *Vajroli*, enough so that they could regenerate themselves. They worshipped blonde people; most of the royalty was blonde, in fact. They were shorter and better built than the Red Indians, which suggests that they were of different stock.

“Atlantis sank under the ocean, and the ancient cultures of Egypt and Peru and the rest have vanished almost without a trace. But in spite of all the destruction that has happened here some part of India’s ancient culture still remains, thanks to the blessings of the Mahapurushas who come here to enjoy their Lila.

“Even when the Rishis lived here openly, in physical bodies, they never wanted anyone to know them, since then they would have no peace, because even in Satya Yuga there are plenty of people around to trouble Rishis with requests for help. So, since they need peace and quiet for their researches, the Rishis would pretend to be ordinary people, and would live quiet lives with their wives in ashrams in out-of-the-way places. They always worship fire internally, but just to fool everyone they would make a show of worshipping the fire externally. If people knew that they did not need an external fire, everyone would rush to the Rishis and insist that all their work be done immediately.

“Of course, if you were clever you could recognize who was a Rishi; some-

thing would give them away, like their voices. Rishis would not talk much in words, of course; they usually communicated in Para Vani. But when they would talk their voices would be like thunder! I loved that picture *The Ten Commandments*, but one thing I have never been able to figure out is how Cecil B. DeMille was able to imitate God's voice so well. It sounded exactly like a Rishi's voice; maybe it could have been a little deeper, but that richness was there, just like a Rishi. Where did he get the idea, I wonder? Such touches are what make a film maker really great.

"Almost all our ancient Rishis were householders, which is another reason they could commiserate with the plight of embodied beings. No one is ever turned away from a Rishi's ashram, and everyone who comes there is automatically benefited. Tigers, rabbits, jackals, deer and other wild animals all live peacefully together inside the ashram's precincts. If a tiger should chase a deer into the ashram the tiger's personality will suddenly change as soon as it crosses the boundary, and it will forget to kill for as long as it remains there.

"The Rishi makes sure that all the ashram's inhabitants—plants, animals, humans, even rocks—feel confidence in themselves, so that they grow to become the best they can be, in their own ways. No one is told that he or she is bad, foolish, hopeless, or helpless. In return, all the inhabitants, even the trees and the flowers, always try to contribute their best to the ashram. Even a very dull boy who comes to the ashram, one who cannot understand even the simplest sadhana, is taken care of. The Rishi will assign him an ordinary task, like farming, or caring for the ashram's cows. When he sees that the boy is finally ready then the Rishi will initiate him, and then he too can progress.

"Actually, a Rishi is the embodiment of motherliness. In the old days, when a Rishi's wife would scold one of her husband's spiritual children for some foolishness, the Rishi himself would take the disciple aside and say, 'Don't worry about it. Do you want to do this? All right, go ahead and do it, I am here to look after you.' Don't ask me how I know all this."

He chuckled, and then spoke more softly.

"A Rishi and his wife also have a beautiful play together; far more beautiful than any of the modern relationships I see. Because the wife is half and the husband is half, it was a beautiful partnership back then; the wife would see to the details of running the ashram, the mundane aspects of life, and the Rishi would take care of the spiritual and astral aspects for both of them.

"Veda Vyasa was the Rishi who wrote the Mahabharata, and who divided the Veda into four parts. His wife was totally devoted to him and never ques-

tioned what he told her to do. She knew he was Shaktiman, the directing, controlling factor, and she knew from experience that whatever he would direct her to do would be the right thing. He in turn never had any reason to question what she did, because he knew she was the perfect executive. What a partnership!"

"Do you believe then that a woman should never question her husband?"

"What do you think?" he replied testily, to show his contempt for the foolishness of my question. "No woman should obey her husband blindly unless she is sure he never makes mistakes. Yes, if her husband is a Rishi that is one thing; but not every woman can marry a Rishi. Now may I continue with my story?"

I kept quiet.

"Because of her tremendous faith in her husband, which was her form of *niyama*, Vyasa's wife could carry water without a pot. Food should be filling, full of love and emotion; but the water you drink should be light, almost ethereal. Vyasa's wife simply carried a cloth whenever she went for water, and the force of her purity made the water so light that she could bind it in the cloth and carry it home with her. This is no ordinary capability, let me tell you; such power was involved that it was almost on a par with the ability to make solidified mercury impervious to the effects of fire, one of the most difficult of all transmutations.

"One day when she went down to the river to fetch some water she happened to see a pair of Gandharvas sporting in the water. She admired them, and thought, 'Ah, if only God had seen fit to permit us to have a child!' This was her only thought on the matter. She did not dream of returning to the hermitage and indulging in love-play with her husband; she did not envy the Gandharvas their romance. She just thought that one little thought—but that was enough to ruin her concentration. When she tried to pick up the water in the cloth as usual, it all spilled out.

"She tried again two or three times, with the same result. She began to get flustered, knowing that she had to bring some water for her husband. Finally she went and got an earthen pot and filled it, and returned to the hermitage.

"That evening Vyasa, who had been in *samadhi* all day long, came back to the ashram and asked his wife for a drink of water to soothe his parched throat. As soon as he drank the water he knew something was wrong; the water was heavy. Naturally it was heavy; it had been in that pot, and had absorbed some of the qualities of the earth of which the pot was made. One of the Earth Element's chief characteristics is heaviness.

“Very gently he brought this fact to the attention of his wife, who told him the whole story. Now it was his turn to make a mistake, because he accused her of being enamoured with the desire for romance, the base desires of the flesh. She showed him how wrong he was.

“Indignantly she replied, ‘All I did was admire them, and you accuse me of falling into the trap of sensuality! Never would I do that!’ To prove her point, she added, ‘If my words are true, the cloth will again hold water!’ And it did.

“Vyasa then had to retake his words. This is the play of Shakti and Shaktiman. She had previously been able to hold the water in the cloth on the strength of her husband’s austerities, but when she made the cloth again hold water, it was her own power which did it. Jnana versus bhakti; isn’t it beautiful?”

## Anasuya

“It is very beautiful.”

“A Rishi’s wife is an amazing being in her own right. What about Anasuya, the wife of the Rishi Atri? Her very name means ‘absence of envy.’ What more could one want in a wife? And just as she was without envy, everyone was envious of her. Even Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Parvati, the wives of Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva, became envious of her, and one day they got together and decided to tell their husbands to go and disturb her penance so she would not stand out as the example of what a wife should be. Being henpecked, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva gave in to their wives, and decided to disturb Anasuya’s penance.”

A theatrical pause, to emphasize how ill-advised this action was.

“First of all, what gave Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva the right to disturb her penance, even if Their fiat rules the whole world? Nothing; even though They are gods They had no right to interfere with a Rishi’s Lila. Right from the start, then, Their mission was doomed to failure because They were trying to do something They had no right to do.

“They visited the hermitage of Atri and Anasuya in disguise, choosing a time when They knew Atri would be away. Anasuya invited Them in and, knowing that guests should be treated as gods, asked Them what They would like to eat. They replied, ‘You may serve us whatever you like, but please feed us only after you have become naked; that is our desire.’

“This was the second mistake these three mischief-makers made. What right did They have to embarrass her modesty? None whatsoever. The time had come for Them to pay for Their evil karmas.

“Confronted by this most impertinent and unreasonable request, Anasuya decided to act. She went to her husband’s *kamandalu* (water pot) and took some water from it. Sprinkling it over the three gods she said, ‘Shishuvat bhava!’ (‘Become like babies!’) And in that instant the three chief gods of the universe were changed into babies.

“Then Anasuya became naked. She took off her clothes, and she also took off the ‘three coverings’ from her ego; she became a perfect example of ‘naked truth.’ Since Brahma is the personification of Rajas, Vishnu the personification of Sattva, and Shiva the personification of Tamas, by removing all her ‘coverings’ she went beyond the provinces of all three of these cosmic forces.

“Once she was naked Anasuya took each baby by turn and fed Them from her own breasts. By doing this she complied with Their request—she fed Them while naked—but They could not embarrass her as They had planned to do. A baby has no idea what its mother’s breast is; it knows the breast only as a source of milk. When in the Bible they talk about Amnon ‘knowing’ his sister Tamar they mean that he had sex with her. Only when you ‘know’ what the body is meant for can you be embarrassed by it. When you are too young to know, or too advanced to care, then your mind is no longer in your body; it is in your heart, where it knows other people’s hearts and doesn’t care for their bodies one way or another.

“The ego self-identifies with whatever catches its fancy. Ma in Her infinite compassion provides one with whatever one desires. It is only when the ego says to Ma, ‘I have seen You in all of Your various costumes; now I want to see You naked, I want to see Your true self,’ that She will make you like a child and let you sit on Her lap. Then you are a true child. This is why great saints are always childlike, when they are not acting like demons or madmen.

“Well, when Atri came back to the hermitage and saw what his wife had done he was so overwhelmed with joy that tears welled up in his eyes. On the other hand, the three wives of these miscreants were sitting at home, waiting for the moment when their husbands would return to dally with them and bring them the satisfying news that Anasuya had been humbled. They might have waited there forever had not the celestial troublemaker, Narada, happened onto the scene and told them where they could find their husbands, and that they would have to find them because the hus-

bands could not find their way back home on their own, having been transformed into babies.

“Hastening to Atri’s hermitage the three wives saw that Narada’s words were indeed true. They went to Anasuya and said, ‘Please give us back our husbands!’ They knew they had to be polite.

“Anasuya said, ‘Pick out your husbands and take them away if you like.’ Unfortunately, they couldn’t. How could they? As long as they saw their husbands as gods, as the embodiments of Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas, how could they identify them as children, in which the Three Gunas have not fully manifested? And because they were limited to the Three Gunas, how could they know the bliss of that which is beyond the Gunas? So naturally they were at a loss.

“Then Anasuya, who represents the purified ego, let herself descend into the Three Gunas again, and she delivered the appropriate babe to the appropriate wife. Then the three gods, restored by Anasuya to their normal forms and looking awfully sheepish, each blessed Anasuya that she would give birth to a great son. Soma, the moon, was born as a result of Brahma’s blessing. From Shiva’s blessing was born the great Rishi Durvasas. Vishnu’s blessing was responsible for the birth of Dattatreya, the immortal guru of the Aghoris.

“It is said that Dattatreya received some of the blessing from Brahma and Shiva also, and that he is really an incarnation of all three gods, which means all Three Gunas. As guru of the Aghoris he went beyond all Three Gunas, beyond all those who blessed him. Hence the two meanings of his name: ‘given to Atri,’ which is certainly true, and ‘having given up the Three,’ meaning the Three Gunas. This makes sense, of course; since his mother was able to give up the Three Gunas and play about with them, doesn’t it make sense that her son would be able to do so as well?”

“It does.”

“This is why Dattatreya is called *Digambara* (‘sky-clad’); by removing the clothing of the Three Gunas he has become truly naked, completely unaffected by anything in the manifested world. When he decided to test his students Dattatreya took to drinking wine, and created a beautiful Shakti to sit on his lap. Most of his disciples were orthodox, and they were disgusted with this sort of behavior; they could not see beneath their guru’s outer ‘clothes.’ As Dattatreya held his Shakti’s breast he watched all but one of his disciples disappear; this last remaining student was the one he taught.”

Vimalananda sometimes used a similar method to rid himself of “excess baggage,” as he sometimes called those people of less-than-sincere motives

who tried to become his “children.” He openly flouted his drinking and use of intoxicants, made no bones about his sexual activity, and was not above inventing details of his excesses if he thought it necessary. This sort of drama was usually sufficient to turn the average “spiritual groupie” away from his door.

## Avataras

“Dattatreya is unique. But then, his father was a Rishi. Each Rishi offers his own experience to the world by sending down his essence to be born as a prophet or a saint, to guide and teach. When things on Earth come to such a pass that the continued existence of the Rishis’ Lila seems threatened, a Rishi will send down an emanation of himself to guide the errant sheep back to the fold, as Jesus tried to do. As Lord Krishna says in the Gita, ‘Whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness increases I then take birth in the world, to protect the just, destroy the wicked, and re-establish righteousness.’ Krishna, Rama and Jesus were all *amshas* (fragments, fractions) of Rishis. They were very different from you and me; they were avataras, embodiments of divinity.

“*Avatara* literally means ‘downward-crossing’; an avatara crosses back from perfection into imperfection, solely because He loves us and wants to help us out. The Rishis are beyond our limitations of time and space until they choose to live on Earth, and then they make themselves subject to some of the rules which regulate us. They allow Mahakala to rule them while they remain with us, and permit the Law of Karma to direct their activities. This is why the saints and prophets always live lives of misery; they are trying, by taking on our limitations, to show us how to live. They make examples of themselves so that we can learn from their examples.

“When one day the Baby Krishna got tired of being treated as a child by His foster mother Yashoda Ma, who could only see His body and had no idea of who He was, He opened His mouth and showed her the entire universe within it. He could do this because His Kundalini was able to self-identify with the entire universe. She naturally became speechless in amazement.

“Then Krishna realized that the play would never be the same if she was allowed to remember His real nature. After all, she and everyone else who was close to Him were celestial beings who had taken birth for the express

purpose of taking part in His Lila. Krishna decided it was more fun to play with His beloved devotee on a relatively equal footing rather than to have her remain awe-struck all the time, so He made her forget what she had seen, and she lapsed back into her normal role of being His mother.

“Jesus likewise could have enlightened His parents instantaneously, but then they would have been so fearful of offending Him that they could never have treated Him as their son any longer, and what fun would that have been? A play is really enjoyable only when the actors and actresses completely self-identify with their parts.

“Any emanation of any Rishi is an avatara. Because Jesus was the emanation of a Rishi we can also call Him an avatara. Each avatara is the projection of a particular Rishi, who appears as that avatara all during that kalpa. That role is his prerogative, his personal play, his birthright, you might say. No other Rishi will even attempt to take over his role. There are as many stars in space as there are grains of sand in the sea, so each Rishi can play as he likes on so many different planets. And they do play in many places, and in many different ways, according to the roles assigned to them.

“There have been many avataras of Vishnu, the Preserver, all of which were impelled by different Rishis, each of whom provided a different flavor to the emanation. Dattatreya is one of Vishnu’s avataras. Ordinarily, though, when people talk about avataras they mean the Ten Avataras of Vishnu, a particular group of ten emanations Who came to support and protect the earth. In each cycle of four Yugas the same Ten Avataras of Vishnu appear. Do you know why there are Ten Avataras?  $1 + 0 = 1$ , the only One—Him, capital H, the Preserver of the cosmos. But there are eleven Rudras (Lords of Death):  $1 + 1 = 2$ , duality, since it is because of the Rudras, who end our limited human play, that the world exists.

“In Satya Yuga, when the first avataras appear, mankind is very much in tune with Nature. Everyone communicates telepathically, and they know things by intuition. In Satya Yuga people are spiritually very good, very advanced, but because they don’t bother about material things they are technologically imperfect. And because they rely so much on Nature to take care of them they are more like animals than they are like the people of Kali Yuga. An animal has to rely on God; there is no other way for it to survive.

“Little by little, as the human intellect develops, people begin to think that they can improve on Nature. This is the origin of society and civilization. Still, though, they are very much in tune with Nature during Treta and Dvaparayugas. It is only in our era, Kali Yuga, that we forget all about Nature and try to do everything on our own, and you can see the results all

around us.

“Someone whose mind is subtle will see that the concept of the Ten Avataras has similarities with Darwin’s theory of evolution. In fact these avataras represent stages in man’s mental evolution during the cycle of the Four Yugas. Look at the Ten Avataras. The first is *Matsya*, the fish, who swims in the ocean—the ocean of jnana, which is perfect, undivided consciousness. Then comes *Kurma*, the tortoise, who is amphibious. The tortoise can live both in the ocean, the field of consciousness, and on land, the field of individual activity. Next comes *Varaha*, the boar, who lives only on land, but can swim when necessary. Do you remember the name of our current Kalpa?”

“The White Boar Kalpa.”

“Boars are much more closely related to humans than are fish and tortoises. Why do you think cannibals call human flesh ‘long pig’? And why do doctors use some of the pig’s body tissues for organ grafting? But there is more to it than the merely physical; we’ll come to that.

“After *Varaha* comes *Narasimha*, the Man-Lion, Who has the body of a man (*nara*) and the head of an animal, the lion (*simha*). He represents a transitional stage between the animal/primitive and human/rational natures. *Narasimha* is ferocity personified when He appears to save his beloved devotee *Prahlada*, who alone is able to pacify Him.

“Next we come to *Vamana*, who is a perfectly formed man, but is not of full stature; He is a dwarf. *Vamana* = *va* + *mana*, which indicates esoterically that the future evolutionary value (*va*) of the human race is mental prowess (*mana*); likewise the word *vanara* (monkey) indicates that after evolution (*va*) a monkey has the potential to become a human (*nara*). The *Vamana* Avatara is unique in that Vishnu in all His other Avataras gives something to the universe, while as *Vamana* He begs the cosmos back from the Asura King *Bali* who had conquered it. This begging was the foundation of the Krishna Avatara.”

“How did that work?”

“That I will explain to you—eventually. *Parashurama*, who comes next, is a man of full stature, but He is very wild and primitive. His is a life of bloodshed; He kills all the warriors in the world many times over until He is vanquished by *Ramachandra*, the perfect man Who comes next in the line of avataras. *Ramachandra*, who is usually known simply as *Rama*, was the ideal king, a perfect example of equanimity whose life everyone can profitably imitate even though He lived a million or more years ago.

“Although perfect, *Rama* is still subject to certain limitations; some duality is still present. He represents endurance; His personal life was miserable,

but He never lost control of Himself. His Shakti, His wife Sita, was external to Him; He even 'loses' Sita for some time, or rather, He fell under the delusion that He had lost her. Rama's limitations were primarily due to the absence of two of the Three Gunas: He existed in Sattva alone, and had no Rajas or Tamas at all.

"After Rama comes *Krishna*, the totally perfect man. Krishna was beyond all limitations except death. He embraced all the Three Gunas and then went beyond them. Krishna's Maya, His Shakti, is a part of Himself; the whole play is combined in one being. Both Nature and man reach their highest perfection in Krishna. There is no one else in any universe, past, present or future, who can be compared to Krishna. Even the Rishis marvel at His play.

"After Krishna leaves the earth Kali Yuga begins. Then comes *Buddha*. *Buddhi* means discrimination, and Lord Buddha represents the perfection of discrimination, though He is devoid of aesthetic experience. He is a man whose logical faculties are fully developed, but Who is trying to do without Maya altogether because of the many temptations of Maya, which increase in strength as Kali Yuga develops. He is not willing to live in the world and enjoy it; He wants out of the world. Lord Buddha is called the Compassionate One because even though He is no longer in the world He longs to help others who are trapped in the cycle of birth and death to escape also.

"The last Avatara is Kalki, who is yet to come. Kalki is actually the wrong word; it should be *Nishkalanka*, 'the One without any stain of any kind.' When Kali Yuga is at its worst He will appear and will destroy all but a handful of people. Then He will change the consciousnesses of those whom He allows to live so that they will remember something of their true selves, and Satya Yuga will begin all over again."

"So this whole business of yugas and avatars is basically one long loop of evolution from the extreme of intuitive consciousness to the extreme of intellectual consciousness, and then back again?"

"More or less."

"And it just keeps going on, over and over?"

"Yes, it does, but it is more like a spiral than a circle, since the events of one cycle act as a foundation for the events of the next. There is a continuous progression. Now, this idea of the Ten Avataras as reflections of the evolution of human consciousness is just the beginning; every concept should have many layers of meaning. The Ten Avataras also reflect individual spiritual evolution.

"You know, our ancient seers were not the simpletons that some modern historians make them out to be; they just didn't tell everything they knew. They believed in keeping the highest knowledge secret, because they knew that it would be dangerous in the hands of those who cannot digest it. If you drink a large glassful of ghee you will have a good nice purge unless you are used to it or are taking medicines which can digest it for you. Similarly, if you overimbibe knowledge you will not be able to retain it. It will all flow out of you unless you have had plenty of practice in digesting knowledge, or your guru predigests it for you.

"So I look at the ancient texts in a very different way than the historians do. For example, when the texts say that it is good to drink cow's milk, I read 'milk' to mean the 'milk' of sense perceptions, because 'go' means both 'sense organ' and 'cow.' To 'drink milk' then means to retain these perceptions inside, within the mind."

"But it also means actual cow's milk, doesn't it? You always say that if you can digest it cow's milk has a better effect on the mind than does the milk of other animals."

"It is better, no doubt; that is another layer of meaning of this saying. But I don't like to harp on the physical, because in Kali Yuga everyone is too attached to the physical anyway.

"When this milk of sense perceptions is mixed with the starter culture of discrimination and it is left for some time the yogurt of cultured intellect is prepared. But still it is not finished. This yogurt must be churned by constant discipline until the result is the butter of jnana, spiritual wisdom. This is still raw, however, because it is only theoretical knowledge. Only when this butter is boiled by the fires of intense longing will ghee be formed. This is the real ghee, the ghee mentioned in our tradition as 'ghrtam ayuh, ghrtam vishnor tejah' ('ghee is life, ghee is Vishnu's effulgence') because then you see Narayana everywhere. Like pure cow's ghee this knowledge is golden in color, the gold of truth. And yes, cow's ghee is the best fat to eat if you want to be healthy, but this is not an advertisement for cow's ghee!

"The doctrine of the Ten Avataras also has an internal meaning. Look again at the Avataras; the first is Matsya, the Fish. The Fish is born to save the Seven Rishis from a deluge, like the biblical flood. He also retrieves the Vedas from an asura who had stolen them and taken them to the bottom of the ocean. The ocean is the ocean of the body; the bottom of the ocean relates to the Muladhara Chakra. And do you remember Panchamakara?"

"So the Fish does his work via the breath somehow?"

"Correct. Next comes Kurma, the Tortoise. Have you studied pulse diag-



nosis in your Ayurvedic college?”

“A little bit.” Vimalananda never bothered with taking anyone’s pulse; he would always take his own pulse and then tell the person what was wrong with them. No one taught that sort of pulse diagnosis in my college.

“Have you heard of the ‘tortoise’ at the navel?”

Then I remembered; the plexus of nadis at the navel is sometimes called a “tortoise” because it is said to look like a turtle, with large nadis appended at roughly the positions where the turtle’s legs, head and tail would be.

“Now think about this story: The devas and the asuras had agreed to cooperate to churn the ocean of milk in order to obtain the treasures hidden within. They used Mount Mandara as the churning rod and the serpent Vasuki as the churning rope. Forget for now the celestial events that this represents; think instead of the fact that this churning of the ocean happens inside every sadhaka. The devas and the asuras are your good thoughts and your bad thoughts, respectively. The mountain represents your spine and spinal cord. Ordinarily the spinal cord is a chain which binds you down to the world, just as the causal body is a chain of karmas which binds you down to rebirth. The spinal cord binds you down because it causes you to project your consciousness out into your body. I don’t need to remind you of the significance of the serpent.

“At first attempt, nothing happens, because the mountain is too heavy and sinks to the bottom of the ocean. Then Vishnu incarnates as the Tortoise, and with the rod resting on His back the churning proceeds. What would you guess is the meaning of this event?”

“I think it suggests that you have to have a firm base when you try to use Kundalini to churn your being, because otherwise your attention will keep slipping down into the mundane again. The churning is done with prana, I take it, since the Tortoise is involved.”

“Good guess. The process of enlightenment is chemical, with certain hormones and other glandular secretions being created when these processes occur. The ‘churning of the ocean’ is also a neurochemical process, during which so many internal treasures are produced, one of which is Amrita, the glandular secretion which is the nectar of immortality.

“The first thing which happens, however, when you churn your consciousness is that you separate it from the poison of the samsara, the ocean of manifested existence. This emerges as the Halahala poison, which Shiva consumes in order to keep it from descending any further than your throat. When you become a sadhaka you must keep the outside world outside, and cultivate interiority; otherwise you will be poisoned. You must stop identify-

ing with the samsara; otherwise how will you be able to get any perspective on it? As long as the Serpent Power sleeps at the base of the spine She identifies Herself with the poison of the limited individual personality. When She awakens, She realizes She is by nature unlimited and free and She relinquishes the poison, which must then be dealt with. And there is no one in the universe like Shiva when it comes to dealing with poison.

“After the poison the treasures began to emerge: the wish-fulfilling cow, the celestial horse, the celestial elephant, the celestial tree, a celestial jewel, the apsarases—”

“Since the apsarases are really special nadis, could all these treasures be nadis?”

“They could be; but don’t jump to conclusions. Then came the goddess Lakshmi, which Vishnu took for Himself, followed by the goddess of liquor, which the asuras took for themselves, since Vishnu had taken Lakshmi. Finally Dhanvantari, the god of physicians, emerged; in his hand was the pot of nectar.

“Now, the agreement had been that the devas and the asuras would evenly divide this nectar, but since Vishnu decided that the asuras could not be trusted with it He took the form of Mohini, the Enchantress, and it was agreed that She would distribute the Amrita. The asuras were so overwhelmed with lust when they looked at Mohini that they overlooked the fact that Vishnu was doling out the Amrita only to the devas. When the spell was broken they suddenly realized their mistake, but it was too late; all the nectar was gone. A great battle ensued, but because the devas had been invigorated by the Amrita the asuras were defeated.

“Internally the same sort of struggle occurs when Amrita is produced. All the selfish aspects of your personality want their share, but your spirit, your Indwelling Ruler, deludes them until they fight back and, weakened by your practices, are destroyed. Unfortunately, like the asuras, they eventually revive and return to fight another day. This is why sadhana is so important.”

“The asuras come back to life?”

“Yes, but that is another story. Now we come to the Boar, Who emerged from one of the Creator’s nostrils. His job was to dive deep into the ocean and retrieve the earth, who had been kidnaped by the asura Hiranyaksha. So the Boar is also tightly bound up with prana and with the earth. Earth Herself was created when she emerged from one of the nostrils of Brahma, the Creator, which suggests that Earth must also have some connection with prana. This is not surprising; the earth is Mother Nature, the ultimate root of all life which lives on Her. But how exactly is She connected with prana?

You may try to reason it out for years and years and yet you will never discover it. It is beyond the process of reason.”

“Inside the body, though, the implications seem fairly obvious,” I said. “After the body is revived with Amrita and the prana is well controlled, the Indwelling Ruler can dive down to the Muladhara Chakra, the seat of the Earth Element, and bring Kundalini out from under the waters of the ocean of manifestation so that She can start Her return journey to Her Beloved. Is this close?”

“Very close. Next comes the Man-Lion. Narasimha saved Prahlada by killing his father Hiranyakashipu, who was king of the asuras. Hiranyakashipu, who had conquered the cosmos in a rage after the Boar had killed his brother Hiranyaksha, demanded that Prahlada should worship him alone. But right from his birth Prahlada, who was a spiritual type born into a family of materialists, was a dedicated devotee of Vishnu. Even when his father threatened to kill him several times, Prahlada’s faith never wavered. His very name suggests this; *prahlada* means ‘especially joyous.’

“Prahlada’s devotion to Vishnu increased his power of discrimination tremendously, which helped him survive. For example, once his father ordered him to embrace a red-hot pillar. When Prahlada inspected it closely he saw ants walking on it, and realized that his father had only made it appear to be red-hot using the magical powers which all asuras possess innately. He then fearlessly embraced the pillar. But when his father really did lose his temper and was really ready to kill his son, Vishnu in the form of the Man-Lion stepped in and saved his devotee Prahlada.”

A brief pause.

“You know, you can go on for years and years reading all the holy books, and unless someone tells you or you suddenly develop insight of your own, you will never understand any of their real meaning. Narasimha puts Hiranyakashipu on His lap, disembowels him with His claws, and garlands Himself triumphantly with his entrails. This is what the books say, and most people take this story at face value and leave it at that.

“But a person with subtle intelligence will wonder how many people have ever been so fortunate to have been taken on the Lord’s lap. The answer is very, very few. So even though he died in the process, Hiranyakashipu must have been tremendously blessed by the Man-Lion. Hiranyakashipu had performed tremendous austerities, and in his arrogance tried to rival Vishnu Himself. His envy and hatred of Vishnu were so intense that he remembered Him almost constantly, and this drew Vishnu to him, to save him by slaying him. We call this *virodha bhakti* (perverse devotion).

“Why did Narasimha rip open Hiranyakashipu’s belly? Because of the Manipura Chakra. Another name for Shiva is ‘Hara,’ ‘The Snatcher.’ When Mahakala snatches the Jathara Agni from the body life ceases, since your tissues lose their ability to feed themselves, and you die—or at least the mundane ‘you’ dies. If you have already converted Jathara Agni into Bhuta Agni, however, there is nothing for Hara to snatch, and you are immortal.

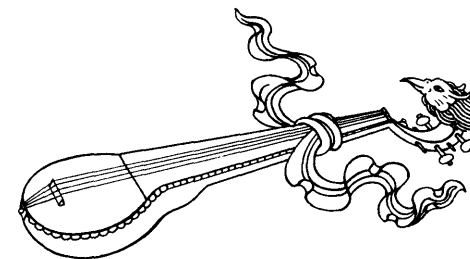
“So Narasimha split Hiranyakashipu’s belly and awakened his Manipura Chakra, causing all the Jathara Agni, all the physical digestive fire, to be converted into Bhuta Agni, the spiritual fire, the fire of life. After such a conversion there is no need to eat at all; you can digest whatever prana comes your way. This is real freedom, or at least one aspect of it. It is freedom enough to make one into a Siddha, an immortal being, which is what Narasimha did to Hiranyakashipu.

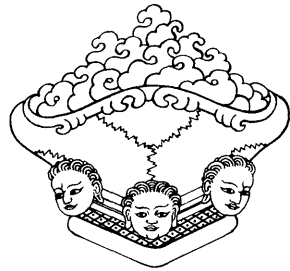
“This is the meaning of the entrail necklace that the Man-Lion wears: He has removed all the Jathara Agni, which is contained in the guts, from the asura’s body, and forcibly prevented Apana from moving downward any longer. Vishnu transmuted Hiranyakashipu’s violent anger and hatred toward Him into an intense spiritual fire. The Man-Lion can do for you, too, if you are ready for it.

“Narasimha, Who is the embodiment of Fire, was not born; He emerged suddenly from a pillar in Hiranyakashipu’s palace. This ‘pillar’ was of course the spinal cord. Sadhakas who are filled with false, demonic ego get disemboweled by the Fire Element as Kundalini awakens; the Man-Lion creates forcible purification, often at the expense of life itself. But to His devotees like Prahlada Narasimha offers His protection, and preserves their lives when they reach this stage.”

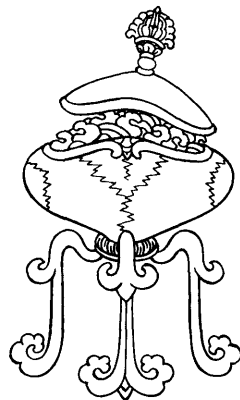
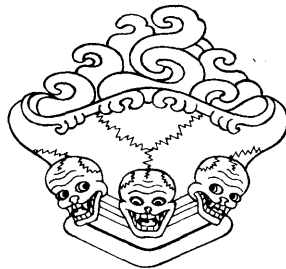
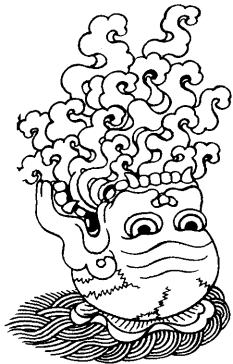
Vimalananda fell silent here, and so I prodded him: “What about Vamana, and the other avatars?”

“A little at a time, Robby. There is so much to know, but you must digest what you learn if it is to be of any use to you. And we have only scratched the surface of these stories; there are so many things left to consider. Right now, though, we have something better to do: to sing the sweet name of God!”





Skulls & Skull Cups



# THE ESOTERIC RAMAYANA

Vimalananda used to organize a small function each year on *Guru Purnima* ("Guru's Full Moon"), the day on which one's guru is worshipped. He would arise well before dawn and worship his own gurus, and then all day long his spiritual "children" would drop by to offer their thanks for what he shared with them, and to request his blessings for further spiritual development during the coming year. Lunch would be prepared and served to everyone who came, and the afternoon and evening were reserved for the singing of devotional songs.

Because of the difficulty in fitting everyone into his flat, one year we decided to rent a marriage hall for the purpose, and hired a female *kirtankar*, a sort of spiritual bard, to recount stories of the Lord for us. While we were waiting for her to arrive, someone turned on a prerecorded cassette of a recitation of Tulsidas' *Ramayana*, performed by M., a very famous *kirtankar*.

The story of the *Ramayana* is the story of Prince Ramachandra. Just before He is to be crowned king of Ayodhya His father's third wife Kaikeyi reminds His father King Dasharatha of two boons the king had given her long before. For her two boons she asks that her son Bharata be made king, and that Rama be sent to the forest for fourteen years. Rama is joined in this

penance by His wife Sita and His brother Lakshmana. After many adventures Sita is stolen by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. Rama has to search long and hard to find her again, and once He finds her He has to invade Lanka with an army of monkeys and bears headed by Anjaneya, and kill Ravana in order to get her back. This is the mission for which He was born, because Ravana had oppressed the whole world.

The tape we were listening to covered only a small fragment of this epic, and when it ended Vimalananda asked, "Do you know M's story?" I did not, and if anyone else did they did not let on. "He was once a school-teacher in Saurashtra (a region of Western India). When he was small his grandfather used to sit the boy on his knee and recite the Tulsidas Ramayana to him. Eventually M. memorized the entire book. While he had his teaching job he used to recite this Ramayana here and there for a few hundred rupees at a time.

"One vacation he went to Mount Girnar, and while wandering about came across a sadhu who was very fond of Anjaneya. The sadhu requested him to recite the Ramayana for him, and M. did it so well that the nearby statue of Anjaneya started to shed tears. The sadhu himself was so overwhelmed with joy that he blessed M.—really speaking, it was Anjaneya Himself who delivered the blessing, through the medium of the sadhu.

"And the result? M. now lectures before audiences of tens of thousands of people who sit in pindrop silence attending on his every word. People are ready to give him millions, but he doesn't accept any money, except on one day of the year: today, Guru Purnima. Which is a good thing, since Tulsidas did not write his version of the Ramayana in order to make money off it, and certainly not so that someone else could make money off it."

At this point our kirtankar suddenly arrived, and Vimalananda interrupted his story. A few days later when a convenient moment to resume it arose, I casually suggested to him that we listen to another of M.'s Ramayana cassettes. At the end of one side I switched off the tape player and looked expectantly at Vimalananda, who gestured to me to sit down and prepare to listen mindfully.

"The Rishis script everything before it ever happens," he began. "There is some room for improvisation, just as there is in any stage play, but the basic story does not change."

He motioned to me to light him a cigarette. "Thanks to the Rishis and their Lila India has been blessed with two great epic poems: the Ramayana, which as you know is the story of Ramachandra, the seventh Avatara of Vishnu; and the Mahabharata, which is basically the story of Krishna, Vish-

nu's eighth Avatara. For thousands of years these epics have been the foundation of India's culture. I have already told you a small part of the Krishna Lila, and how it relates to Kundalini Yoga.

"Most Indians know the outline of the story of the Ramayana, and there are so many people, like M., who make their living by reciting and interpreting the Ramayana. Many of them, like M., are good people; but how little most of them really know of the Ramayana and of Rama! The esoteric Ramayana, the true spiritual essence of the story, is something very few people know. But it is something you should know about, because it relates to the awakening of Kundalini.

## The Script

"We would never have had the Ramayana at all had it not been for the Rishi Valmiki and his concern over how to spread out the karmas he had incurred through his chosen profession. Valmiki was not born a Rishi; in fact, he was a bandit. His job was waylaying people and robbing them. Sometimes he would hold them for ransom, or even kill them. Occasionally he would let them go. One day Valmiki caught the celestial troublemaker Narada, and told him that he would have to die because he had nothing of value to steal.

"Narada told him, 'All right, I am ready to die, but please tell me why you rob people.'

"Valmiki replied, 'Because I have to feed my family.'

"Narada then asked him, 'Do you think that they are all as willing to share in your karmas as they are to share in your income?'

"Valmiki said, 'Of course they are!' But deep inside his mind doubt suddenly took root. Narada told him, 'Before you kill me and add to the weight of your karmas, why don't you first make sure that your family is willing to share them with you?'

"Valmiki returned to his home to inquire and got the shock of his lifetime when one after another his family members refused to have anything to do with his bad karmas. His parents told him, 'We raised you and supported you while you were growing up; now you have to pay us back. We don't care where the money comes from; that is your problem.'

"His wife said, 'I have borne your children and run your household. You owe me a living, and I am not interested in how you provide it. All your kar-

mas are your responsibility.' His children informed him, 'We never asked to be born here. You have created us, and now you have to look after us at your own expense. You will have to worry about your karmas yourself.'

"A shaken Valmiki returned to Narada, who had of course foreseen what would happen. Narada then taught Valmiki about how devotion to Vishnu can eliminate bad karmas. Because Valmiki could not pronounce Sanskrit correctly he could not repeat 'Rama, Rama,' so Narada ordered him to repeat 'mara, mara,' instead. *Mara* means 'killer,' which was something Valmiki could relate to.

"Both 'mara' and 'Rama' have the same letters, the same Bija Mantras, which means there must be a definite connection between them. There is also a definite difference in effect between them, due to the order in which the letters are pronounced, in the same way that there is both a connection and a difference between 'Hara' (Shiva) and 'raha' (secret).

"Valmiki sat down and began to recite. He sat in one position for sixty thousand years without moving. Ant hills grew over him . . ."

He paused, I interjected: "Naturally, since 'Valmiki' means 'he who lives in a *valmika* (an anthill or termite mound)."

"That's right. By repeating 'mara, mara' at top speed Valmiki actually started to repeat 'Rama, Rama.' When he finally emerged he was a Rishi.

"The Ramayana was composed long before it ever happened. First the Rishis got together and decided that they wanted a certain type of Lila. Then they commissioned Valmiki to write the script. It was just like writing the script of a drama or a movie for him. Actually it was even simpler; he simply opened himself up, and the senior Rishis wrote the Ramayana through him."

"So his sadhana made him a vessel fit to hold the shakti that the Rishis wanted to manifest in the world through him."

"Yes. This is what I mean when I say that the Rishis are the puppetmasters and we are merely the puppets. They decide what is to happen and then arrange for it to happen. The events that followed the writing of the Ramayana were entirely preordained. And people think there is such a thing as free will."

"So there is no such thing as free will?"

"There is really no such thing as free will for beings like us. Until you become a Rishi your options are to follow the script or not to follow it, and if you don't follow the script you will eventually regret it. You can however choose just how you will follow the script, if your will is strong enough."

"Will is the power to direct the mind, especially when there are contrary thoughts or tendencies within it. The mind governs the senses and the senses dominate the body through the nervous system. If the mind is untrained, as it is in most people, the will loses its authority and the body functions stupidly. You know that it is bad for your health to eat a thick juicy steak, and yet you do it. Your tongue overrides your willpower. You know that sleeping with a prostitute may give you a disease as a fringe benefit, but you go ahead and do it because your penis overrides your will. This is a type of mental impotence, an inability to control your actions, and it leads inevitably to unhappiness and frustration.

"All spiritual progress exists in the cultivation of a controlled mind. I am not talking about a closed mind, one which suppresses its desires. I am talking about a conditioned mind which maintains close watch over the senses by force of will. This is why I so love Anjaneya. He is immortal, he is a superman, and yet his mind is always focused on Rama, and his will is always subordinated to the will of Rama.

"Take a leaf from Anjaneya's book, and learn some humility," he said, focusing his gaze firmly on me. "Very few people know that Anjaneya actually introduced the story of the Ramayana to the world for the first time. He wrote his version with his fingernails on blocks of stone. After some time he realized that if his version became popular it would interfere with the fame of Valmiki's version, and he also understood that in Kali Yuga no one would be able to understand his Sanskrit properly, so he threw those blocks into the sea at Rameshwaram. They are still there somewhere, underwater. What did he care for name or fame? He cared only for Rama, so he could afford to be generous."

Mentally I bowed to the will of Rama.

"From one angle, episodes from the Ramayana take place every day in everyone's body. If people knew about this they would marvel at it. The Ramayana has seven divisions called Kandas which represent the Six Tastes in the body plus the one Parama Rasa, or Supreme Taste. Which Kanda you relive depends on which Taste you experience. If you are overwhelmed with lust, you relive the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana, and so on. But there is more.

"The story of the Ramayana is the story of the spiritual progress of an individual soul. All of us have the main characters of the drama present within us, and all of us who do sadhana live through the same sort of trials and tribulations that Rama and Sita had to endure. Rama, Sita and the rest had their own personalities, and therefore their own Kundalinis, but they

also represent actors in the epic which is performed by everyone who does Kundalini Yoga. If you want to try to grasp the hidden meanings that exist within the story, and understand how it might affect you, first try to understand the characters.

## The Players

“Rama, the Indwelling Spirit, is called *Raja* (King) Rama because He is king of the seventy-two thousand nadis. Krishna also rules the nadis, but His Lila is different; He has a love affair with them. Some people find it easier to relate to the Soul as King; others prefer to relate to It as Lover. You must find which way agrees best with your temperament, and relate in that way. As they say, ‘the Truth is One; the learned describe It in many ways.’

“Rama’s brother Lakshmana represents the power of concentration which helps the Soul to regain its Bride. His name, from the word *laksha*, suggests one-pointed concentration, and in fact Lakshmana did focus his concentration on a single goal: his brother Rama, the individual soul. Sita, Rama’s wife, is the Kundalini Shakti, the power of Ma on an individual level. Sita was not born from a womb, as Rama was; she was found when her father King Janaka was plowing the ground to build a sacrificial altar. She comes therefore from *Bhu Garbha*, the ‘womb of the earth.’ *Janaka* means ‘creator’; it is Janaka who by removing Sita from the Earth Element ‘creates’ her, or if you prefer, ‘awakens’ her.”

“‘Awakens’ seems more appropriate, since the Earth Element is at the Muladhara Chakra.”

“Exactly. Janaka, Sita’s father, the king of Videha, was a truly amazing man. He had so purified the Fire Element within him that he used to sit on the throne with one foot resting in a blazing fire—not near it, *in* it—and with one of his queens sitting on his left thigh. He would cup her left breast in his hand, and go about the business of kingship without the least disturbance whatever. This is the real significance of the word *videha*, which means ‘bodyless.’ Even though Janaka had a body he behaved as if he had none.

“When Rama came to Janaka’s court to attend the Swayamvara Ceremony at which Sita would decide who she would wed, He was given Lord Shiva’s bow to bend, which no one had ever been able to bend before. When Rama first bent and then broke the bow, Janaka realized that Rama

was meant to marry Sita. Esoterically—well, this is something which cannot be communicated in words, but I can tell you this: Shiva’s bow relates to the medulla oblongata.”

“The medulla oblongata?”

“Yes, the ancient Rishis were well aware of anatomy, as you have glimpsed somewhat from your study of Ayurveda. Now, Rama and Sita have to leave for the forest almost immediately after being married. Lakshmana refuses to be separated from them—how can the power of concentration be separated from the soul and the ego?—and accompanies them. When Kundalini unites with the soul the two withdraw from the senses, which wither and die from lack of shakti. And in fact King Dasharatha died very soon after Rama left Ayodhya. Dasharatha means ‘Ten Chariots’: the ten senses. The senses allow us to become aware of the soul; this is how Dasharatha is Rama’s father.

“All would have been well with Rama and Sita in the jungle had not Sita fallen prey to curiosity and disobeyed the orders of her brother-in-law Lakshmana. Which is precisely what I keep telling you: just because your Kundalini starts to get awakened does not mean that the job is over. In fact, your job is only beginning. Because she strayed from perfect concentration on the soul, Sita was abducted by Ravana.

“Ravana, the demon king who abducted Sita, represents the limited personality which constantly contemplates its greatness: ‘I am everything, I am lord of Lanka.’ ‘Lanka’ is Lam Bija, the Earth Element. Ravana was a very powerful being; he had become lord of the manifested universe. His ten heads also stand for the ten sense organs. He propitiates Shiva by chopping off these heads, which means that he forcibly restrained his senses from perceiving anything except Shiva. His offering is selfish, however; he is a demon.

“Once he had realized Shiva, Ravana wanted to carry Him down to Lanka to live with him there. But Shiva is above the manifested universe—within the brain—and so when Ravana lifted Mount Kailasa, Shiva’s home, in order to carry it and Shiva back with him to Lanka—the Muladhara Chakra—Shiva pressed Ravana down with His toe, and Ravana’s hands were trapped under the mountain. Ravana had to bellow hymns to Shiva for thousands of years before Shiva took pity on him and allowed him to escape.”

*Ravana* means ‘howling.’

“Rama lost Sita to a formidable foe: the limited, demonic human personality which wants to use her for its own gratification. Rama had to wander

far and wide before He could find any trace of Sita, just as you must search strenuously for Kundalini once She has self-identified with something other than the soul. Lakshmana, the one-pointed concentration which helped Rama regain His bride, was his brother's only companion for much of His search, until they met Anjaneya, who immediately enlisted in Rama's service. Anjaneya is prana, the son of the god of wind. Properly harnessed, prana clears Kundalini's path to return to her Lord, which is what Anjaneya did for Sita and Rama at every step."

## Anjaneya's Role

Vimalananda paused for a moment and looked up to an image of Anjaneya, better known as Hanuman. His lip quivered almost imperceptibly with emotion as he spoke again.

"Anjaneya flew to Lanka, located Sita, and assured her that Rama was coming to rescue her. Before returning to Rama with the news of Sita's whereabouts Anjaneya allowed himself to be captured and taken before Ravana to make Ravana aware of the gravity of what he had done. Then Anjaneya burned the city of Lanka to the ground, destroying Ravana's lovely fantasy world.

"Actually Sita was responsible for the burning of Lanka. Ravana's minions wrapped Anjaneya's tail in oil-soaked rags to torment him. But when they lit the rags Sita prayed to the god of fire to refrain from burning his flesh, and Anjaneya felt no burning. In fact, he felt a wonderfully cool sensation; he felt cool enough to go calmly about his work of destroying the city. This prayer of Sita's is actually a mantra; if you know it you can sit in the fire for years on end and not even one of your hairs will be singed. After all, Sita is *shita*, cool. Wah, Ma, wah!

"Anjaneya was able to burn Lanka with the help of his tail. Think of the esoteric meaning here: Lanka stands for the Muladhara Chakra and the Earth Element. So that the Earth Element can no longer exert any effect on him whatsoever Anjaneya burned it, using his tail, which is attached to his body near the Muladhara Chakra. A sadhaka likewise totally 'burns' all connection between Kundalini and the Earth Element with the help of prana moving in the Muladhara.

"After burning Lanka, Anjaneya returned to Rama—he is totally devoted to Rama—and with the help of the other monkeys built a bridge so that

Rama could cross over to Lanka. This process is called *Setu Bandha*. Internally, this bridge connects the Muladhara Chakra to the Manipura Chakra, bridging the Svadhishthana Chakra. This particular bridge can only be built by a perfect celibate, someone like Anjaneya who is not in the least tempted by any enjoyment which the Svadhishthana, the sex chakra, can offer him.

"Anjaneya is strictly chaste, which is unusual for a monkey; most monkeys spend their days mating or masturbating. But then, Anjaneya is a monkey in form only. He is an incarnation of Lord Shiva, and he is sufficiently aware of his true nature that he is not affected, or is affected very little, by his simian nature.

"By bridging the ocean—the Water Element—Anjaneya was freed from being affected by Water. This is a permanent bridge; when Anjaneya does something it is impossible to change it. Even the external bridge that was built became permanent. Once Arjuna tried to be clever and destroy the real bridge, and he got nowhere. How could he possibly compete with the bravery and strength of Anjaneya, who is *Mahavira Balavant* (the 'Great and Powerful Hero')?"

"You know the story of the Ramayana. Have you ever wondered why it was necessary to build a bridge over the sea from India to Lanka so that Rama and his armies could cross it?"

"No, I haven't."

"The bridge was necessary because the ocean refused to cooperate with Rama. When every other living thing in the world was cooperating with Rama because they loved him so much, why wouldn't the ocean cooperate?"

Good question; the story should be logical.

"Some people think it was because Anjaneya wanted to show off and become famous, but that is impossible; he is the epitome of devoted service, the single-minded servant of Rama. He has no other thought than for Rama. The answer lies in the Churning of the Ocean, at the time of the *Kurma Avatara*."

Of course! How elegant!

"The ocean was terribly tortured during the churning. How would you like to be churned? So although the ocean cooperated with Vishnu when Vishnu returned in the form of the *Rama Avatara*, it cooperated grudgingly, and partially. There was no alternative but to build a bridge."

"So after the ocean of the body is tortured by the churning of prana that is necessary to generate the Amrita, a new channel must be created—is this the idea?"

“You’re getting there,” he laughed. “Keep thinking about it. After the bridge was completed Rama, Lakshmana, Anjaneya and the monkeys invaded Lanka and the battles between the forces of Rama and Ravana began. At one point Lakshmana was seriously wounded. The chief physician reported that unless the *sanjivani* herb, which can restore the dead to life, was brought within a few hours, Lakshmana would die. That herb was available only on a certain mountain in the Himalayas. Rama was distraught at the possibility of losing Lakshmana, His right arm, so Anjaneya volunteered to bring back sanjivani. He flew to the mountain but could not find the herb, so in order to save time he uprooted the entire mountain and carried it back to Rama. Sanjivani was located, Lakshmana was saved, and Anjaneya returned the mountain to its proper place.

“You may have seen pictures of Anjaneya flying through the air with a mountain in his hand; they are illustrations of this story. Think about its meaning for a moment. I’m not going to spell it out for you; that would be too easy. But it involves Lakshmana, the one-pointed concentration of the mind; Anjaneya, who here is the body’s prana; and the mountain from the Himalayas, the vertebral column which contains the spinal cord with its physical nerves and subtle nadis.

He let me think on these things for a few moments, and then said, “Now let me make this story even more complicated for you.”

“Thanks,” I replied sardonically.

“As Anjaneya flew over Ayodhya with the mountain, Rama’s brother and regent Bharata saw him in the sky and, taking him for a demon, shot him down with an arrow. When he realized his mistake he was horrified, but Anjaneya reassured him and continued on his way. There was a sadhu I knew in Girnar who worshipped Anjaneya in the form of ‘Langde Lal’: Anjaneya who limps from the arrow in his thigh. In fact, the sadhu who blessed M. to be able to recite the Ramayana so well worshipped Langde Lal.”

“Were they the same sadhu?”

“I don’t know.” He did know, clearly, and quickly proceeded with his point: “Think for just a moment: Anjaneya is immortal, a superman. How could an arrow shot by a mortal, even one so powerful as Bharata, even scratch his skin?”

Another conundrum.

He continued: “This is easy enough to understand: Bharata did everything in Rama’s name. He even shot his arrow in Rama’s name. Anjaneya is utterly devoted to Rama, and only when an arrow with Rama’s name hits

him does he fall. And only when Bharata, Rama’s viceroy, gives him leave to go in the name of Rama can he depart.”

“This is becoming difficult to follow.”

“These things take time to digest. Keep trying! Anjaneya helped Rama conquer and kill Ravana. Now, Rama and Ravana both begin with ‘R.’ In India the first letter of a person’s first name reflects where the moon is in that person’s horoscope. Have you noticed how people whose names begin with the same letter, which means that they have the same moon sign, are often enemies? Astrologically it is not supposed to be this way; they should be friends. But often they are enemies: Krishna and Kamsa, Jesus and Judas, Gandhi and Godse.”

“True enough. But of course Jesus and Judas were not from India.”

“Ah, but remember the phonetic value of words. Names in India are given in this way to help balance out the mind; the moon controls the mind, especially the emotional side of the mind. Whatever your name, it is going to exert a strong effect on you, because everytime someone calls you by that name, and everytime you think of yourself by name, the phonetic value of that name will affect your consciousness, just like a mantra does.”

Wow. “That means that there are billions of people out there in the world who have the wrong names! Which means their very names are probably unbalancing them even further!”

“Definitely. But after all, this is Kali Yuga, you know; you have to expect this sort of thing.”

“What about my name?”

“As it turns out, your name should have started with ‘r’ anyway, so there is no problem.”

“Quite a coincidence, or something.”

“Or something. You share the same moon sign as both Rama and Ravana. ‘R’ represents Ram Bija, the Fire Element; anyone who worships Rama is actually worshipping fire. Ravana is Fire still polluted by the limited ahamkara; Rama is the Eternal Soul, pure Fire.”

I understood: so long as my own innate selfishness remains I remain equivalent to Ravana, no matter how great and powerful I may become; but there is a chance, should I purify my own Fire Element sufficiently, that I might yet achieve Rama.

“After Anjaneya frees himself of all traces of egotism by helping Rama he is then free of all limitations associated with the Fire Element. A tiny trace of individual effort remained when he burned Lanka; this is why his tail was



set alight. Even then Sita prevented him from being burned. Once he is free of every taint, though, Fire can no longer touch him at all.

“After Rama killed Ravana Sita was freed from the demon’s clutches, and returned to her rightful husband. In the body of the sadhaka this suggests that the Fire Element becomes totally purified; the Kundalini Shakti is freed from the clutches of Jathara Agni and is returned to the influence of Bhuta Agni. When Sita is retrieved she must submit to an ordeal by fire to prove that she has maintained her purity, that she has not been tainted by Jathara Agni. You must submit to a similar, but internal, test at this stage; if you pass, you become free of the need to eat.

“From the Manipura Chakra the Kundalini goes to the Anahata Chakra. Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and a few others flew from Lanka back to Rama’s capital Ayodhya in a sort of airplane, the Pushpaka Vimana. It is natural that they would fly, since the Anahata is the seat of the Air Element. Anjaneya is the son of the wind god. He is in his own element at the Anahata, and it is here that a sadhaka can meet him. The doors to his three lower chakras are irrevocably closed, so you will never chance upon him there; and when his consciousness is in the Vishuddha or higher, how will you be able to contact him? Beyond the Anahata he can see only Rama.

“Up to the Anahata you can still be aware of other individuals and have a desire to play about with them, though you see them all as forms of your Beloved. This is why fakirs (Muslim sadhus), once they reach ‘chautha asmaan,’ the Fourth Heaven, are always doing work for people and helping out the helpless. The Fourth Heaven is the Fourth Chakra, the Anahata. Once you reach the Vishuddha, though, there is ‘vishesha shuddhi’ (‘special purification’) and there is no wish of any kind. And beyond the Vishuddha are the Ajna, where all that remains is the consciousness of individuality, and the Sahasrara, where nothing remains. No, if you want to meet Anjaneya you must do so at the heart.

“When you are endangered, why does your hand go to your chest? Because Vishnu is the presiding deity of the Anahata Chakra, and you are instinctively requesting him to save you, to preserve your life. Anjaneya, the servant of Vishnu in the form of Rama, is also a Rudra, an aspect of Shiva, the Destroyer. So it is no wonder that the Anahata Chakra is the place of both life and death.

“Have you seen pictures of Anjaneya ripping open his chest with his fingernails to show that nothing remains in his heart but the purest form of Rama?”

I thought for a moment before replying, “Those that I have seen usually

show both Sita and Rama together in Anjaneya’s heart.”

“Yes, most do, but that is incorrect; Rama alone resides there. People sometimes speak of Anjaneya and Rama as different, but they are wrong. In fact, Anjaneya is Rama’s heart.”

“What?”

“Of course. Anjaneya is prana, the son of wind; he causes the heart to beat. How could Rama ever exist without His heart? Here is a story for you: Once Sita was complaining to Rama. ‘O *Aryaputra* (Son of the Just),’ she said, ‘sometimes I want to have a private conversation with you, but we are never alone. Anjaneya is always with us. Please send him out now and let us talk alone.’

“Rama replied, ‘O wife, what are you saying? What is there for you to tell me that Anjaneya cannot hear?’

“Sita answered, ‘I have some private womanly work, and since Anjaneya is not married he cannot listen.’

“Rama said, ‘All right, just to please you I will send Anjaneya away for a short time.’

“He turned and spoke to Anjaneya: ‘I will inform you when the discussion is over; then come back in. Meanwhile, please go out and eat some fruit from the trees in the garden.’

“So Anjaneya went out to the garden. He looked at the fruit trees but couldn’t bear to pluck any fruit from them; how could he hurt them? So he sat underneath a shady tree and began to sing a song in praise of His master Rama. Soon he was lost in samadhi.

“About this time Rama inexplicably began to yawn. But Anjaneya was so intent on his song—‘Ram Ram Sitaram, Ram Ram Sitaram’—that he had completely forgotten his earthly existence, and he continued to sit and sing.

“Rama was in a fix. He was yawning incessantly and no one could cure Him. They called His personal physician, who checked His pulse and said that there was no underlying pathology. They called the astrologer, who said that all the planets were in good positions and there were no inauspicious signs. Finally, after calling a few more people, they called Rama’s brother Lakshmana. He also did not know what to do, but he did remember to call Anjaneya.

“Anjaneya was out in the garden, deep in samadhi. By continuously chanting ‘Sitaram Sitaram’ into his ears for many minutes Lakshmana with difficulty brought Anjaneya back to earthly consciousness, and told him, ‘Something is wrong with Lord Rama.’

“In one jump Anjaneya was in the palace, and the moment Rama saw Him the yawning stopped.”

“The yawn was Rama’s way of telling Anjaneya to return to the palace?”

“You are a student of Ayurveda; what can you tell me about yawning?”

“It is caused by an abnormal upward movement of prana—oh. I see.”

“Correct. Anyway, Sita learned a good lesson: wherever Rama is Anjaneya must be there also, and vice versa. But it is also true that wherever Rama is Sita must be also. Once Sita asked Anjaneya, ‘Do you like Rama’s lotus feet better, or mine?’ A tough question; how could Anjaneya insult either His beloved Rama or Rama’s Shakti Sita? So He told her, ‘Your lotus feet are the softest and most enjoyable, while Rama’s are a little hard; but for liberation none can surpass Rama’s.’

“Now, I have always loved Anjaneya; he is my most beloved deity. But here he was wrong. Without Sita Rama was nothing; there are so many instances that he had to come begging to Anjaneya for help. Only the Divine Mother can grant liberation; nothing is higher than Ma. Only a few, like Anjaneya, can go beyond Maya, the transitory, to Rama, the permanent, and they all do so by Ma’s grace, nothing else.”

Hmm. “So Rama requires Anjaneya, Sita and Lakshmana to be complete.”

“Yes, which is why He is called Perfection Encompassed; He is the Perfect Man, but is subject to limits. This is why you always find all four images in a temple of Rama. They form a team; they cannot be separated from one another.

“After returning to Ayodhya Rama ruled as king, assisted by Lakshmana, Sita and Anjaneya. His rule, called *Rama Rajya*, was an ideal time in which to live; all was harmonious throughout His kingdom.”

“And esoterically, I suppose, Rama Rajya happens whenever someone attains Rama-consciousness in this way.”

“Of course. Regardless of when or where Rama lived and ruled on Earth, Rama Rajya happens whenever a sadhaka realizes the Rama within himself or herself and installs that Rama as the Inner Ruler.

“Rama ruled peacefully and happily for many years, but since all that is created must be destroyed, no matter how perfect it may be, one day Mahakala, Who is Time Personified, came to have a chat with Him. Mahakala stipulated that Rama must immediately disown anyone who might happen to disturb their conversation; He wanted no worldly influence whatsoever to interfere.

“As it happened Lakshmana did not know about this stipulation, and he inadvertently disturbed Rama and Mahakala. Rama, who always kept His word, had no alternative but to reject Lakshmana permanently. Lakshmana decided that life without Rama was not worth living, and so he jumped into the river which flows through Ayodhya, the Sarayu, and ended himself.

“Rama is the true, permanent, undying, indwelling Self. Lakshmana is *eka laksha*, concentration on a single point: the mind riveted on Rama. Even the last object or laksha in the consciousness must be dissolved before Nirvikalpa Samadhi becomes possible. In an individual sadhaka this final distinction jumps into the Sarayu in the forehead, a nadi which arises from Manasarovara, the ‘Lake of the Mind’ within the brain. When concentration itself drowns and merges with the infinite only Rama remains, because Sita has meanwhile returned to her source, the womb of Mother Earth. The soul has now relinquished everything, even its own Shakti, its own personal Maya.

“After Rama loses Lakshmana He loses all desire to continue to exist, and after bidding farewell to Anjaneya He enters the river Himself. When Rama merges, there is Nirvikalpa Samadhi, and the play of the Ramayana is ended.

“Everyone dies or disappears in the end except Anjaneya. Rama tells Anjaneya, ‘Although I am God incarnate I must also die. But you are the incarnation of Rudra, the God of Death Himself. You cannot die.’ And it is true. Anjaneya can never die. He is immortal like Mahakala, the original Rudra.”

“I know that Anjaneya is a matronymic, a name derived from his mother’s name, Anjani,” I said. “I also know how much you love Ma. But is there some specific reason you insist on calling Anjaneya Anjaneya, and almost never call him Hanuman or Maruti?”

“Well, being a worshipper of Ma I always like to remind myself of Her. And—Anjaneya may be a great hero, but even he has to listen to his mother.

“When Anjaneya went to meet his mother after Sita had been rescued he related the whole story of the Ramayana to her, and then told her, ‘Ma, I have been true to your milk. I have dedicated my life entirely to Sri Ramachandra, so much so that I have even become a celibate. I will never even look on any woman except you and Sita Ji.’

“Anjani told him, ‘How can you tell me that you have been true to my milk, when you could have taken Sita Ji back to Rama yourself directly without the need for any war? No, you have shamed my milk.’

“Anjaneya replied to her, ‘No, Ma, I could not do that. I can only do what

Lord Rama orders me to do. If I had been so ordered I would have done everything myself and Ramachandra Ji would not have had to lift even his little finger. But by doing as I was told other good things happened. For example, all the *Rakshasas* (demonic beings) who saw me changed their inherent natures and started to worship Rama, thanks to the beautiful form you gave me.’ And then his mother was mollified. Did you know that Anjaneya is described as ‘koti kandarpa lavanya?’

Let’s see: ‘the beauty of ten million kandarpas.’ “But doesn’t *kandarpa* mean ‘onion’ in Sanskrit?”

“Yes, it does, but is that its only meaning? Do you think anyone would refer to Anjaneya as having the beauty of ten million onions? Of course not!”

True enough. I stretched to think of other meanings of “kandarpa,” and then told him, “Kandarpa is one of the names of Kamadeva, the god of love.”

“Right. Now imagine how handsome the god of love must be, and then multiply by ten million. Then you will have an idea of Anjaneya’s beauty. But that is not all. ‘Kandarpa’ also refers to a particular type of prana which is connected with Apana; the *kanda* is the nadi-plexus where Apana can be made to move upward instead of downward.

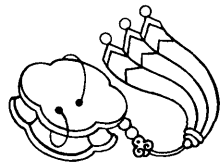
“Now here is another question for you: since Anjaneya always meditates on Rama, never forgetting Him for an instant, why hasn’t he become Rama, according to the Law of Caterpillar and Butterfly?”

He was enjoying this. “I don’t know.”

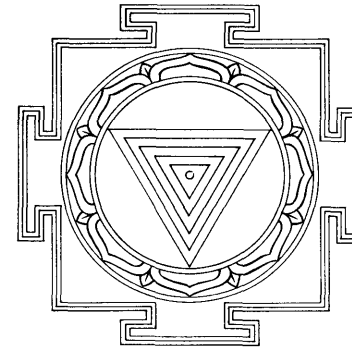
“The answer is simple: He does not become Rama because he deliberately does not want to. He is Shiva, Who knows only how to give, not to take, even if it is only a question of form. This is why Shiva is called the Great Giver.”

“Of course.”

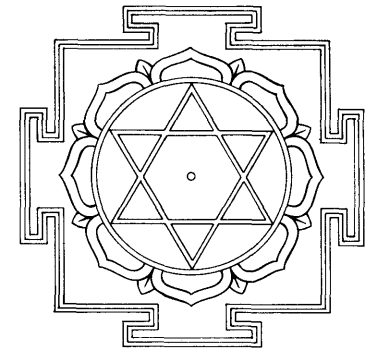
My concentration was evidently flagging. Vimalananda indulgently smiled at me like the Divine Mother Herself and ended our conversation by saying, “So now you know something of what I am thinking when I listen to the Ramayana.”



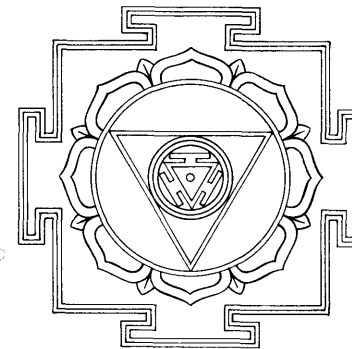
### Yantras of the Ten Mahavidya Goddesses



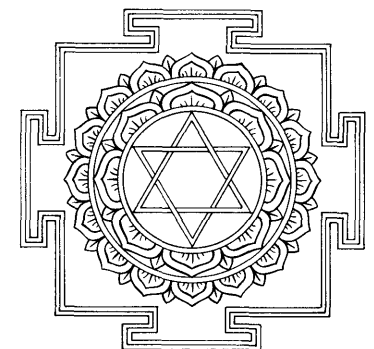
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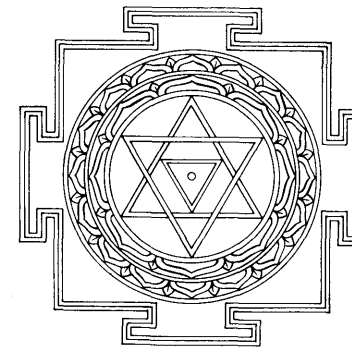
2. Tara



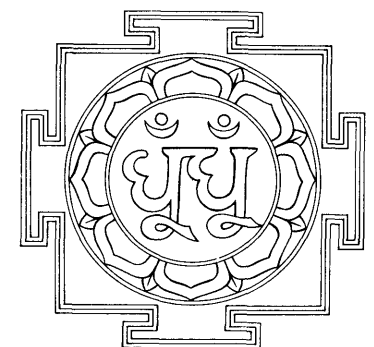
3. Chinnamasta



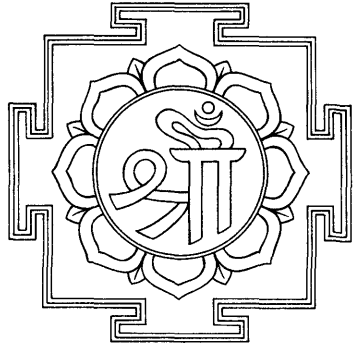
4. Bhuvaneshwari



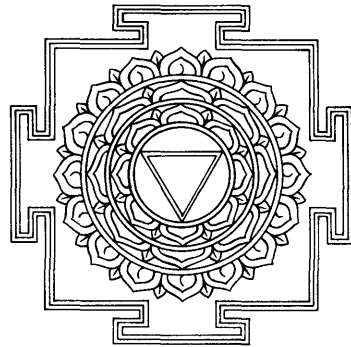
5. Bangala



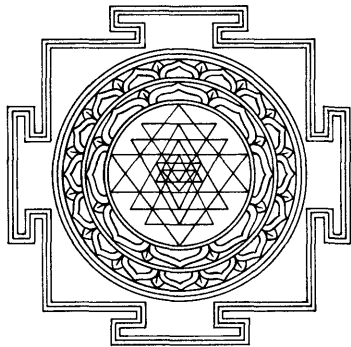
6. Dhumavati



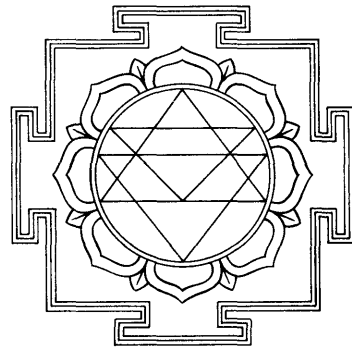
7. Kamala



8. Matangi



9. Sodasi



10. Bhairavi

The Ten Mahavidya Goddesses originate from the legend of Shiva and his first consort Sati. Incensed at the refusal of her father Daksa to invite her ascetic husband to the great sacrifice, Sati manifests the ten powerful forms of the Mahavidya Goddesses. Sati eventually destroys herself, and Shiva overcome with grief allows Vishnu to dissect her body and scatter it over the subcontinent of India. The places where the various parts of her body fell became the sacred sites (shaktipithas) of Devi worship, wherein the land itself embodies the sacred form of the dismembered goddess. From this legend derives the practice of Sati, where the faithful wife offers herself to her husband's funeral pyre. Some of the Mahavidyas, such as Kali and Tara, have several forms. Vimalananda self-identified with Tara, the second of the Mahavidyas, in her form as Smashan Tara. "Tara of the Cremation Grounds."

## GURUS AND DISCIPLES

A pleasing routine developed when Vimalananda visited Poona's Irani colony. I would come over early to help prepare lunch, and then would go off to college in the afternoon. In the evenings we would go to the stables to visit his "four-legged children," and on race days I would accompany him into the stands at the racecourse. After returning home we would sit together until late at night while he discoursed on spiritual subjects.

One night we were sitting with Chotu, one of Vimalananda's oldest friends, and with Sardar Denge, the scion of a noble family of Poona. Vimalananda decided to have some drinks, and though he usually permitted his friends to drink with him this time he told everyone, "Please, I am in a different mood tonight, and I want to drink alone. You can give me company the next time."

"Ha!" said Chotu. "What do you think? Have I not lived with you day and night for eight years? Have we not always eaten and drunk together? If you are going to drink tonight, I am going to accompany you."

"Listen," said Vimalananda, "Don't insist. If you do drink I will not be responsible for what might happen to you."

"Leave off," said Chotu airily. "You are just saying that because you know I

can drink you under the table without any difficulty. I am also going to drink," and he incited Sardar Dingle to drink as well.

"I warned you," was Vimalananda's reply, and I poured the Scotch. At his insistence I gave them only half a drink each. Although both these gentlemen measured their capacity in pints and quarts, after these particular drinks they were blind drunk. Chotu vomited all over himself and made a mess of the room before falling flat on his back in bed unconscious, leaving his grumbling wife to clean up behind him. I was assigned the task of dealing with Sardar Dingle. It took me half an hour to get him out the door, and another half-hour to steer him back to his home. Vimalananda enjoyed the whole spectacle immensely.

When Chotu came to he started to abuse Vimalananda roundly, and this caused Vimalananda to break into fresh peals of laughter. "Please abuse me some more," he told Chotu, "I expect it from you. I love to play with my 'children,'" he said, turning to me, "and they love to play with me; it is a mutual bondage of affection.

"I love to play with my children," he went on, "but they should do as they are told," looking pointedly at Chotu, who smiled broadly and foolishly. "Have you forgotten the story of the shakarpala?" We all leaned closer to listen to Vimalananda, while Chotu, who obviously knew the story, said nothing but continued to grin as if he had lost the ability to comprehend human speech.

"Once," Vimalananda began, "there was a wrestling club presided over by an old wrestler who was also a spiritual guru. His favorite among his many pupils was a shopkeeper, not because the shopkeeper was a good wrestler but because of a past karmic relationship. The shopkeeper, however, thought the guru loved him because he was the best pupil.

"The shopkeeper was always pestering his guru to let him fight a very eminent wrestler of the area. The guru knew his 'child' was no match for the bigger man, but he also wanted to fulfill his disciple's desires, so one day he called the boy to him and said, 'What makes you think you will be able to beat a professional wrestler?'

"The shopkeeper said, 'Well, I know that I am your best pupil, so that gives me confidence. I also know he will give me a lot of trouble, though, because he eats a whole goat every day.'

"The guru said, 'So what? Do one thing: Follow him out into the jungle in the morning and see how much he shits.'

"The shopkeeper started to object, but the guru told him forcibly, 'Now don't argue; if you want me to help you do as I say.'

"Unwillingly he did so, and came back the next day to report to his guru: 'About two pounds.'

"Then his guru said to him, 'You have nothing to worry about. He eats a whole goat, but he can't digest it. You have my permission to fight this big lug.'

"On the day of the match, just before the bout, the young shopkeeper did a full prostration to his guru, as is customary, and as the guru lifted him up from the floor he picked up a piece of *shakarpala* (a type of sweet), blew on it while repeating a mantra, and put it into the shopkeeper's mouth. The boy bounded out into the ring. The two wrestlers shook hands and began to fight.

"Within seconds the shopkeeper grabbed his opponent's leg, brought him down, and pinned him. He was so elated he began to dance, but his guru shouted at him, 'Hey, you rascal shopkeeper, sit down! Why are you dancing? It is the shakarpala which is really dancing.' Then the shopkeeper remembered himself and prostrated again to his guru, to thank him for the loan of shakti."

All of us listening realized that this story was aimed at Mr. Chotu and his prowess with the bottle, and we had another laugh at Chotu's expense. Vimalananda then decided to let Chotu off the hook, and changed the subject.

"Even my Junior Guru Maharaj, who is very strict, loves to play about. Back during the time I owned a dairy in Borivali he once came to visit Bombay, and my manager, Vasudev Pansekar, who we called Vasu, came to meet him. Vasu was a good singer of devotional songs, and after singing a few he invited Guru Maharaj out to visit the dairy. Chotu here, who lived with me out at Borivali then, is my witness. Do you remember, Chotu?"

Chotu, one of the most genial of men, smiled as he remembered Junior Guru Maharaj and nodded his assent.

"Guru Maharaj smiled at Vasu's invitation and told him, 'Of course I'll come, but you have to catch hold of me.'

"Vasu didn't think much of this, but late that night Guru Maharaj came to the dairy and strolled through. Vasu saw him and tried to catch him, but Guru Maharaj was moving too quickly, and disappeared. Or at least that is what Vasu told us the next day; I didn't believe him because Guru Maharaj had been sitting with us all during the time he was supposed to have been at the dairy. I told Vasu that without proof no one would believe him.

"Vasu said to Guru Maharaj, 'If you came to the stables and you were also here all the time, you must have come in your subtle body, and that is why

you couldn't be caught.'

"Guru Maharaj said, 'All right, just to prove to you that I was there I will come again; this time be prepared.' Vasu replied, 'But none of this subtle body business; you must come in your physical body.' Guru Maharaj agreed.

"This time Vasu prepared a reception for Guru Maharaj. He marshalled together all the cowherds, armed them with sticks and ropes, and surrounded the corrals with thorns and barbed wire, so that once anyone got in, there would be no way for them to get out again. Late the next night while everyone was on guard Guru Maharaj appeared, and though all the cowherds strove their mightiest he eluded all of them. They drove him toward the barbed wire and thorns, but he walked right through the barrier; the barbed wire broke when he touched it.

"This was too much for Vasu. He and several cowherds immediately came to where I was staying. There was Guru Maharaj, chatting quietly with my friends. He had not left my sight all day long; I wanted to make sure he didn't try any funny tricks.

"Vasu said, 'All right, so we didn't catch you again this time; how can we catch you when you come in your subtle body, which is ethereal and gives us nothing to hold onto?'

"Guru Maharaj called him over and showed him the skin on his arm; there were thorns in it, the same kind of thorns that the barrier had been made of. 'I kept my side of the bargain, and here is my proof,' he said. 'I can't help it if you couldn't catch me.' How Guru Maharaj could have two physical bodies in two different places at once is something I cannot understand, but it happened."

We all knew that he understood how it could be. I asked: "What were the sticks and ropes for?"

Chotu answered, "To tie Guru Maharaj up and give him a good beating as a welcome."

I said, thinking of Guru Maharaj's august personage, "How could Vasu, or anybody else, dare to lay a finger on Guru Maharaj?"

Chotu smiled again, this time at my foolishness, and Vimalananda said, "Well, Guru Maharaj had challenged him; what was he supposed to do? Just lie down and let Guru Maharaj walk over him? Besides, did anyone catch Guru Maharaj? The old man knows how to take care of himself."

"It's just the idea," I replied.

"A disciple has every right to test a guru," said Vimalananda vehemently.

"Look how Chotu just tried to test me, and he isn't even my disciple. But then the disciple, or the 'child,' had best be ready to be tested in return. That is how it has always been: first you test the guru, to see if he or she is right for you; then the guru will test you, to find out what you are fit to learn, and what you deserve to learn."

Indeed; even in the Ayurvedic texts, a student is advised to first test a prospective guru thoroughly, and only when he is satisfied with the guru's capabilities should he submit his name as a candidate for discipleship. Then the guru gets his turn to test.

"A guru has to test his disciples, and if he is a good guru he will test the disciple until the disciple's resistance is completely broken. Your guru is trying to teach you to efface your ego, to disengage your consciousness from the limitations Kundalini has imposed on Herself by becoming embodied. Only when your ego is humbled can you learn. The guru is like a gardener, and the disciples like flowers. The flowers may be beautiful, but they shouldn't get a swelled head over their own so-called importance. When your guru ignores or insults you he is only testing to see how far your ego has been effaced. Never, never get angry in return. Just keep quiet, and see how you are benefited.

"I love my mentors, but they play hard, much too hard for most people today. I remember a good saint who once ran afoul of my Senior Guru Maharaj. This saint was called Joowala Sai (the 'Lice-Covered Saint') because his body was covered with thousands and thousands of lice and other tiny insects. Every day he would very carefully remove the insects from all over his body, talk to them, play with them, and then carefully replace them. One day Bapu, my Senior Guru Maharaj, happened to meet Joowala Sai, and Joowala Sai smiled at him. An instant later the smile left Joowala Sai's face, and there were tears in his eyes. He begged for forgiveness, and even stood on a hot road for hours, burning his feet, but nothing doing. Bapu said to me later, 'How could he afford to show me his teeth?'"

I obviously didn't understand, so Vimalananda explained: "It is traditionally impolite to smile and show someone your teeth. When Joowala Sai smiled at Bapu it was a challenge to Bapu; it was tantamount to saying, 'See what a fine level of spirituality I have achieved!' Bapu had compassion for this fellow and so in a trice he stole all of his shakti. Joowala Sai immediately realized what had happened, and so he tried to placate Bapu, but to no avail."

"So then what happened?" I asked.

“What happened? Nothing happened. Joowala Sai had to start over again from the beginning. Eventually Bapu will have to do something nice for him—that’s the Law of Karma—but Bapu is in no hurry.”

“It hardly seems fair,” I protested.

“Fair!” It was growing late and Vimalananda was tiring of my refusal to see his point. “What would you know about what is fair when it comes to people like Bapu? If Joowala Sai had been really advanced he should have been able to recognize that Bapu was infinitely more powerful than he. Then he would not have tried to show off, and he would still be happily playing with his lice today.

“You talk about fair because you still have a bee in your bonnet; you still haven’t lost this filthy Western attitude that you deserve to be taught simply because you are fortunate enough to run across someone who can teach you. Unfortunately most Westerners have no patience. Your culture teaches that all desires should be immediately gratified. You see a girl you like and you go up to her and say, ‘Hey, how about a nice screw?’ No romance, no mystery, no excitement. ‘Sex is a natural function,’ say the scientists, and that is what you have made of it. In the West sex is now on the level of any other bodily function: whenever you feel the need to relieve yourselves you do. And you think the spiritual urge can be gratified in the same way. No wonder you people get only fake gurus.

“You cannot buy a real guru. If you try to purchase him or her you will get a nice kick on your behind; you’ll be thrown out. If a real guru sees that his ‘child’ is becoming impatient for knowledge that guru will deliberately delay, to teach the ‘child’ a lesson. If the ‘child’ loses his patience and storms off, well, why should the guru care? One less burden for him.

“Of course Westerners are not entirely to blame,” Vimalananda continued, calming somewhat. “Our friend from Germany who said that India is exporting ‘godmen’ is right, you know. We export them to the West where they steal money from people who come to them for knowledge. But the Westerners, and particularly the Americans, are partly to blame, because they think they can buy everything, including spirituality. When something cannot even be spoken how can it be bought? This is why Westerners are not being taught the true things. They only get false gurus; only a false guru will agree to teach someone in return for money.

“And they are not unique in this, of course. Rich people in every country, including India, think that because they feed, clothe, and house their guru that they are headed for heaven. It is not like that at all. A teacher can point the way, but he can’t do your work for you. But if the disciple refuses to lis-

ten—and why should he if he has purchased and now possesses the guru?—what can the guru do about it? All he can practically do is refuse to teach—but it takes guts to turn down all that easy money.

“The knowledge I am trying to give you I gained after a lot of difficulty. Even if I could sell this knowledge to you, which I can’t, the price would be so high that you would not be able to pay it. How can you put a price on the decades I have spent in smashans? Besides, a parent never expects money from a child, unless they are not true parents but merely procreators, like animals. I treat you as my son, Robby. After I have some drinks this feeling is magnified immensely, and I feel that there is so much I want to teach you. But you should be ready to learn it, and Ma should be ready to teach it. You know that the truth cannot be expressed in words; if it could be it wouldn’t be true. I can only use words to point out the truth and other methods to transmit the knowledge directly without your even being aware of it. This is the way a gift should be given. But I need your cooperation in order to give it.

“Americans need to stop trying to possess saints and sadhus, and look for spiritual masters who will possess them instead. Only when you surrender everything to your guru, including especially your acquisitive nature, can you ever hope to progress. The Americans are the ones who can do it. They are interested in reality. I hate to say it, but most of today’s Indians are cowards, the legacy of one thousand years of servitude to the Muslims and the Europeans. We Indians need to relearn this attitude of mind from the Americans, and they need to come to us, to some of us, for spirituality.”

I began to feel a little distressed, not because he was upbraiding Americans, but because he still considered me so much of an American.

He saw this, and said to the others in the room, referring to me, “I know he may not like what I have to say, but I’m very blunt; I can’t be sugar-coated quinine.” With that he dismissed me for the night. I kept quiet.

The next time the subject came up was in Bombay, when one of Vimalananda’s “boys” who had been studying astrology for a few months dropped by to ask some questions. The familiarity with which he asked made me remember the episode of Joowala Sai, and in fact Vimalananda told him, as he sat expecting to be patted on the back, “Please study for twelve years and then come back and discuss astrology with me. Astrology cannot be learned overnight. You know, I thought you were mature, since you are physically almost as old as I am. But I see now that you are still in your puppy stage. When a dog is small it bites its mother playfully; biting is an inborn trait in dogs. After it grows older it bites everyone else, but when

it is a puppy it only has strength enough to bite its mother. The mother doesn't mind a bit; she knows it is her own puppy, and she allows it to do as it pleases."

It is no more polite to call someone a dog in India than it is elsewhere, so clearly Vimalananda was aiming to shock. Then, as his last sentence had promised, he showed his compassion.

"If you were to go to a sadhu he would say, 'First become my disciple and then I will teach you.' I don't want any disciples; I want to remain a disciple to my dying day. And I don't mind your trying to impress me with your knowledge, though I am not in the least impressed. But if you try to show off in front of someone else you may be humiliated, so please be careful; that is my advice to you."

The budding astrologer was ashamed of himself, and asked for forgiveness, but Vimalananda replied, "Forgiveness for what? The essence of motherliness is forgiveness, no matter what the child does." After the man left, Vimalananda went on.

"Like most people nowadays who study a little tiny bit of a subject and become experts, this fellow thought he knew quite a bit. I knew he was trying to show off his knowledge by the questions he asked and the way in which he asked them. If I were a sadhu I would have treated him roughly, shouting at him and upbraiding him for being cheeky, so that he would never do this sort of thing again. Because I treat him as my child I can't do that—but I can't let him get away with it either. So I had to be blunt. It hurt him, I know, but better he should be hurt a little bit now and learn his lesson than to have someone else burst his bloated balloon later, which might have hurt him a lot.

"Suppose a surgeon sees that he needs to operate in order to cure a certain disease. If the patient says to him, 'Oh, no, don't operate, it will hurt me a lot,' will the surgeon start to feel sorry for the patient and think, 'No, I mustn't operate; how can I cause him any pain?' Never! Not if he is a real surgeon. A real surgeon will cut, if he knows that is what the patient needs, because he knows that the end result for the patient, which is freedom from the pain of the disease, is worth the little bit of pain that it takes to achieve it."

I remembered his recent bluntness in Poona.

"I have never been and will never be a teacher. When you try to teach you usually end up cheating yourself. For one thing, most people are motivated by idle curiosity rather than a sincere thirst for knowledge. I have no time to waste my breath on people who want to know whether or not God exists.

For those who believe in God no explanation is necessary; for those who don't believe in God no explanation is possible.

"I will never claim to be God, or a prophet of God, or even a guru, as so many claim to be today. To be a guru you have to say, 'I know and I can teach you.' But if I say that, well, I'm finished. I can never learn anything else. I have shut myself off from anything new. If I remain a student all my life, though, I will always be ready to learn new things. I am nothing; the sort of nothing which has everything contained within it. That is the kind of nothing to become: the nothing which occurs when Kundalini leaves her dalliance with samsara and opens you to the universe of all possibilities.

"There are plenty of people around who think they are gurus and that they should try to enlighten the world. One of them is a famous swami from Bombay who has centers all over the place, in so many countries. I invited him to my house some years ago, just to see what he was about. When he arrived I offered him refreshment, as one does to any guest who comes, but he refused, saying, 'I never take any nourishment outside my ashram.' All right, I thought to myself, if you are being strict I will be strict in return.

"Then he asked me, 'Are you following some Yoga?'

"I pretended innocence and said, 'No, Maharaj, I am only an ordinary man. Yoga is too far away for me.'

"He said, 'You know, I am having my discourses on the Bhagavad Gita at the Oval. You should come and listen to them; you will be enlightened.'

"This was too much. I said to him, 'Maharaj, the Bhagavad Gita was spoken by Krishna, who was God incarnate, to Arjuna, who was a great yogi. Both of them were aspects of Rishis, in fact. You are not Krishna, and your listeners are not Arjuna. How can you expect that the kind of jnana which is in the Gita can be passed from you to them by discourse?

"Not only that, you go day after day to the same place and speak the same things over and over again. The Gita was a spontaneous outpouring of joy from Krishna's heart. Arjuna was His beloved spiritual 'child,' and He had such a desire to make Arjuna understand that He couldn't control Himself. The Gita came from Krishna's lips spontaneously; even He was not aware of what was happening. That is why it is so great.

"And when it was all over Arjuna said to Krishna, 'Lord, I have forgotten what you taught me. Can you tell me again?' Krishna replied, 'No, that time is passed, and it cannot be recovered.' Which means that the Gita could be only transmitted between its original author and hearer, who were both Rishis, at a certain time, because afterward that spontaneous outburst was gone. Now, Maharaj, how can you think that you are doing any good to any-



one by babbling on about the Gita?

“Well, he got wild, of course, and told me, ‘You are an atheist, I won’t stay here any longer,’ and stormed out. As he was leaving I said, ‘Maharaj, the scriptures say you must control your anger.’ That only made him wilder. Such are the sadhus we have nowadays. Only rarely will they recognize their mistakes.

“I don’t mind meeting anyone who has a sincere desire to learn. I’m ready to teach anyone who is ready to learn, and as long as someone comes to me with humility I will do anything for them. But how many have real interest in spirituality, and how many have the patience necessary to wait for those spontaneous outbursts to happen when transmission can really take place? And besides, how many could endure learning with me? When I teach I am ruthless. No compassion; you must succeed or you’ll die.

“If I were a sadhu, Robby, well, I love you but I would rip you to shreds before I taught you anything. That is the best way; then there is no fear of backsliding. As it is I am a householder, so you are receiving knowledge with much less effort on your part. I will never have disciples, only ‘children,’ because that is the way a real guru should treat a disciple: as a spiritual son or daughter. I can’t afford to be as strict as a sadhu because I treat you as my son, and no parent ever wants to see his or her children suffer. I am willing to suffer on your behalf. In return I expect you to act in a certain way, and you do. I appreciate that.

“So,” he concluded, “I’m afraid you have fallen in with a madman. Madmen can be dangerous; look out! Think twice before continuing to stay with me.”

He laughed, and I grinned in reply, happy to be exposed to his sort of danger. I told him, “Hopefully my ego will come sufficiently under control so that I don’t end up like Joowala Sai.”

Vimalananda shook his head and said, “Poor fellow! He didn’t realize who he was tangling with. Bapu is terribly strict about things like respect. One day he and I were sitting around here in Bombay when someone told us of a fakir who was very ill. My mentor immediately said, ‘Take me to see him and I will cure him.’ He is very loving that way. Now, I knew this fakir, and knew he was a good man, but I also knew that he was not yet ready for my Senior Guru Maharaj.

“I told my old man, ‘Don’t bother, he will not see you.’

“He became wild—as his disciple, I had no business contradicting him, after all—and said, ‘I am ready to bet that he will see me.’

“I am a gambler, and I liked my odds, so I said, ‘Be careful, Bapu! This is

Bombay; you don’t know how people are here.’ But he insisted, and we settled on a bet: one betel leaf.

“He went to the fakir’s residence and asked to see the sick man. The people there refused to let him in. He told them, ‘Look, I am a fakir myself, I want to cure him,’ and all sorts of other things, but they steadfastly refused.

“Finally he lost his temper and said, ‘Is he God, that he will refuse to see me? All right; he has a plaster on his chest right now, doesn’t he? That plaster will remain on his chest until his dying day, just to remind him of the fakir he did not meet.’ And it actually happened that way. You know it, Robby; you and Freddy have seen his photo with the plaster on his chest.” Yes, we had.

“Of course then Bapu had to come back home and pay me my betel leaf, and he doesn’t like losing any more than I do. I told him, ‘Why do you become obstinate about such things? These are human beings; they can’t pass the kinds of tests you dish out.’

“It always pays to give respect to spiritual people. Back in the time when the British ruled India there lived an Aghori in a small hut in a small forest on the outskirts of a small village. For some reason the government decided to build a road right through the sadhu’s little hut. When the Englishman in charge of the road gang came to evict the old man he acted so highhandedly that the Aghori decided to teach him a lesson. He lengthened his penis, wrapped it around a nearby boulder which must have weighed tons, and towed it in front of the machinery in use on the roadway. Then he stood back and told the Englishman, ‘Now please remove it.’

“The Englishman, of course, thought it was some kind of trick—wrapping your penis around a rock and dragging it along?—so he ordered his men to remove it. All of his men got behind it and tried to push it out of the way, but they couldn’t budge it, not even an inch.

“Then the Englishman realized that something funny was going on, and he went to the sadhu and told him politely, ‘Look, I have to build this road. It is my job; if I don’t do it I’ll be fired. Please help me out.’

“The sadhu looked at him closely and said, ‘That’s better; now you are talking properly.’ Then he again lengthened his penis, wrapped it around the boulder, and tugged it to one side, and the roadbuilding went on undisturbed.”

By this time both of us were guffawing over the vision of the hapless Englishman and the Aghori who had lassoed the boulder with his penis. After the mirth died down Vimalananda continued:

“I accidentally got involved in one of these situations myself. It was in the

South, and it involved a Western couple who were touring India. One day while they were sightseeing a wild-looking man with unkempt hair started to stare at them. This made them uneasy and they asked him to stop. He ignored them, and continued to stare, wide-eyed. This went on for some minutes until the male tourist lost his temper and spat on the man.

“The man, who was a sadhu, picked up the wad of spittle with his fingers, looked at it carefully, looked at the couple carefully, and then walked away. The couple thought they were rid of him. How wrong they were!

“Next morning they began their day with bloody diarrhea. They tried all sorts of remedies, but nothing worked. Someone they knew knew me, and I was called onto the case. In the course of our talk about their health it came out that they had spat on that sadhu.

“‘Oh,’ I said, ‘now I get the idea. You should never have insulted him like that. No wonder he has decided to teach you a lesson. Don’t worry about a thing.’ And I went to the smashan. The next day they were fine again, and I warned them strictly never ever to do anything like that again. India is a very strange and dangerous country.

“Two days later who do I see coming to visit me but the sadhu, who asked to be cured of his bloody diarrhea. I told him, ‘Look, you are an old man and you are supposed to be matured and mellow. Why did you allow your mind to be disturbed by a couple of foreigners, who after all are so ignorant of our ways that they are no better than children?’

“He retorted, ‘They come to India to stare at us, so I wanted to see how they liked it when someone stared at them.’

“I said, ‘Yes, but you can’t just use your power on everyone who irritates you, especially when those people don’t know how to fight back. Besides, they are our guests while they are here, and we have to treat them as such. Anyway, they have learned a lesson, all right, and I hope you have too.’ He agreed that he had learned a good lesson, and we parted as friends.”

The unstated but clear message was of course directed at me: watch your step here in India, lest you land in quicksand!

“I have always tested my gurus, you know; only if they meet my criteria am I willing to learn from them. I have met and tested many sadhus, but most of them have been found wanting. One day one of my friends came raving about a certain saint: ‘What heights this man has reached! He even talks to Lord Krishna!’ I said to myself, ‘Ah-hah, he talks to Lord Krishna!’ I’ve always been willing to meet anyone who was willing to meet me.

“You were supposed to take a coconut and present it at his lotus feet, and then he would tell you what you wanted to know. I didn’t take any coconut,

and when my turn came he asked me where it was. I told him I had only come for his darshan and not to ask any questions. Then he started to say, ‘Lord Krishna says this,’ and, ‘Lord Krishna says that,’ and I got wild. Lord Krishna indeed!

“I told him, ‘Whatever Lord Krishna may say, you had better watch out for yourself, Maharaj, because I think that within one month you will be trampled under the foot of an elephant.’

“Everyone there became very angry with me, of course, but I didn’t care; I was so insolent then. And besides, I was just telling the truth. My friend tried to intervene: ‘What are you saying? Ask Maharaj his forgiveness.’ That only made me wilder, and I had to leave the room.

“Well, it happened as I had predicted. About a month later this sadhu was being taken out in a big procession on elephant back. Suddenly the elephant went berserk, picked the sadhu up with his trunk, threw him to the ground and trampled him. A horrible death.

“Like that I’ve met so many babas and holy men. I remember a fakir who used to sit on a big cushion of rich green velvet. When I met him I saw that he had a small spirit with him. The spirit was very unhappy because the fakir was taking a lot of work from him. I asked the spirit if he would like to be set free, and he said, ‘Yes, I would like to repay this fakir for all the work he has taken from me.’

“As soon as the spirit was released he immediately grabbed that fakir’s testicles and began to squeeze. My God, what a howl that guy put up! None of the disciples could see the spirit, of course, so they didn’t know what was going on and didn’t know what to do about it. As if there were anything they could do about it. His balls were squeezed mercilessly until the next morning, when he died and became a spirit himself.”

My face must have hinted at disapproval, because Vimalananda continued by saying, “What should I have done? Left him as he was, to create more karma for himself and make the spirit more miserable so that when his end finally came his condition would be even worse?” Since I had no answer to this, the conversation ended there.



One day Vimalananda sat me down and outlined for me his criteria for testing saints:

“Some people follow what is called the Path of the Ant in their search for God: they scurry about hither and thither, moving backward as well as forward, taking many births to reach their goal. Those who are more determined follow the Path of the Fish, swimming strongly against the current. The Path of the Monkey, which involves leaping from limb to limb on the Tree of Knowledge, is more difficult still; but the most difficult is the Path of the Bird, the Path we Aghoris follow: you leap out into space, and your wings carry you to Him.

“Of course, if your wings fail, and you drop to the ground, you are finished, totally; you are dead. A monkey at least has branches to break its fall; a fish can rest behind a rock whenever it needs to. The Path of the Ant takes the longest time but it is the most secure, because an ant has nowhere to fall. The more difficult a sadhana is, the more necessary it is to have a guru. In Kundalini Yoga it is absolutely essential to have an expert guru. The guru is a spiritual aspirant’s friend, philosopher, and guide; he guards the disciple against all dangers, and ignites the internal flames which eventually consume all the limitations of the disciple’s personality. You can make spiritual progress without having a guru, it is true, but if you want to reach the highest states a guru is absolutely essential.

“No effort is ever lost. Even if you cannot succeed in this lifetime your effort is right there in your bank balance in an account that travels with you from birth to birth. It is such a wonderful account that you can never lose your passbook. The vibrations of your efforts exist indefinitely in a subtle form, so there is nothing to worry about. No matter where you end up you’ll be dragged back into your spiritual practices. All the records of your past lives are available to anyone who knows how to locate them and who can perceive their subtle sound, so your guru never has any difficulty keeping track of where you are and what you are doing, no matter how far you may stray from him.

“But for you to have this sort of guarantee you have to have a real guru! Out of a thousand sadhus today perhaps one is genuine, because it is Kali Yuga. You will meet many sadhus, Robby, and you will need to know how to evaluate them. You should learn to smell saints out; yes, ‘smell’ them out. They say, ‘Attar can be created only when flowers are crushed,’ and it is the same way with a sadhu. Only after his ego has been thoroughly crushed so that his Kundalini can identify with God will he be able to give a sweet smell

to all who come near him. So long as he retains traces of selfishness a stench will follow him wherever he goes.

“So long as your own mind and body are blocked up you’ll never even be able to know what a saint is, or to sniff his scent; as you purify yourself, and your perception improves, you will learn more and more. This is like opening a bottle of attar in a room. After a moment or two everyone except someone whose nose is blocked up can tell that attar is present. The least-experienced person can say only, ‘Attar is present.’ Someone with more experience can identify it more accurately: ‘It is rose.’ Only an expert will recognize the fine nuances: ‘It is Kabuli rose mixed with a little jasmine.’ It is the same way with saints.

“If you want to find out whether or not a sadhu is genuine, first go to see him, but don’t ask any questions. Sit quietly and don’t say much; listen, and try to keep your mind blank. If when you sit near him you find yourself forgetting the things of the world and becoming more peaceful, then he is a good saint; his halo is quieting your mind. If not, run away!”

“Naturally if you yourself are purified it will be easier to know whether and how much your mind is being quieted,” I observed.

“Naturally. Once your mind becomes purified there’s no limit to what you can learn. You can know so many things about a person by simple observation. For example, check the saint’s feces, like the shopkeeper who wanted to wrestle did. A real yogi excretes only an ounce, or at most a few ounces, a day; anything more indicates that he is bogus. If Jathara Agni has yielded most of its energy to Bhuta Agni, there will be very little physical digestive fire left. Yogis are disciplined by nature, and a good yogi will only eat as much as he is hungry for. If he eats more than he can digest he will have to excrete the excess, and you will be able to detect it. Or, if his bodily fire is generally weak, his assimilation will be poor and he will excrete more than he absorbs, which suggests that his mind will be as dull as his body.

“This principle makes Jain munis easy to test, because of their toilet habits. They never go outside the house to defecate; usually they do it on an outer balcony or somewhere like that. And they never use water to clean themselves afterwards, since water is life-giving and they regard it as sacred. So they clean themselves with a pebble or a stone and just leave the dung there for the rain to wash away. When someone told me one day that an excellent Jain muni had just arrived in town, I first went to see his droppings, and after I saw them I knew he would be no match for me. I went in confidently and defeated him easily at religious debate. He was actually rather dull. You can use this test for anyone.

“Whether or not you are able to observe a sadhu’s droppings, look at his face. A good saint’s face will begin to take on the form of the face of the deity he worships. You know how married couples start to look like one another after forty or fifty years? This is the same principle. There was a sadhu in Bombay named Kamu Baba who meditated on Sai Baba of Shirdi for so long that when you looked at him it was just like looking at Shirdi Sai Baba. At the end of his life my father looked almost identical to his own guru, on whom he had meditated for decades. This effect is magnified millions of times if your Kundalini has been awakened. Kundalini’s power is self-identification, and she quickly takes on the form of whatever she identifies with.

“True saints rarely approve of having their photos taken. They don’t like to be known by multitudes of people; they prefer to live alone and die alone so they can be nearer to God. Also, a photo gives a great boost to anyone who wants to self-identify with that person. Anyone who has a saint’s picture can call that saint astrally and play about with him, which is all well and good. But suppose someone for some reason should hate that saint? Everytime they see his photo they will remember their hate, and send reinforced negative vibrations his way, which will have unpleasant implications for the health and well-being of the poor innocent saint. Only false sadhus who are anxious for publicity go out of their way to be photographed.

“While you are busy observing the sadhu don’t forget to listen carefully to what he says. Do you remember that young woman who was born in India of Western parents? When she came of age she decided she wanted to marry a fellow-disciple of the same female guru. But when she went to ask her guru’s permission the old woman said, ‘No, how can it be? You are a foreigner and he is an Indian; such a marriage must never take place.’ This shows the depth of that old woman’s deficiency. If she really believed herself to be the Divine Mother incarnate, as she claimed, how could she discriminate between two of her children? Mustn’t she treat them all equally? Her prejudice proves that she was not all that spiritually advanced. She could rightly have objected for other reasons, but not simply because of skin color.

“If the supposed saint you meet talks about collecting money to build ashrams and centers and so on, depart immediately. His disciples may talk about such things, I admit; disciples are always somewhat deluded. But a real sadhu says, ‘Why should I bother about trying to establish something? If God wants me to have it I will have it.’ This is the right attitude; it shows that the sadhu has full faith in his deity. Only if he has no faith will he try to collect money, or disciples, or whatever. We have a saying in Hindi: ‘What is the use of a flower which has no fragrance? What is the use of a beautiful

face which has no one to desire it? What is the use of a fakir or sadhu who is not a giver?’ Fakirs and sadhus are always givers, because they have realized that everything belongs to God; how can they refuse to give to God in the form of a human being that which belongs to God?

“It is absolutely scandalous how many people are making money and fame for themselves off the Bhagavad Gita. I knew one Dada Maharaj, who had gathered a lot of disciples for himself by his discourses on the Jnaneshwari. You can be sure that a great Siddha like Jnaneshwar did not write the Jnaneshwari so that he could become famous; he did it so that common people who did not know Sanskrit could hear Krishna’s story in Marathi, their own language, and keep it in their hearts, and bring themselves closer to Krishna in that way. When Jnaneshwar himself never commercialized his writing, why should anyone else do so?

“This Dada Maharaj was a barber who had promoted himself to religious lecturer. There is nothing inherently wrong in this, except that the Jnaneshwari is actually a wonderful treatise on spiritual subjects including Kundalini, and unless you have had personal experience in that department you have no right to open your mouth. You certainly have no right to develop a swelled head, as this man had done. He developed such a bloated ego that one day I decided to teach him a lesson. I went to see him, and I took a dog along.

“When I went in to him I performed a full prostration, as I always do in front of any saint, to gauge his or her qualities. This fellow, I could tell, had achieved absolutely nothing. He started to explain something when suddely the dog burst in, as I had planned, and ran up to him. He shouted, ‘Get that dog away from me!’

“Then I said to him, ‘Maharaj, you claim that you are a great man, though by pedigree you are only a barber. Be that as it may, the book on which you give lectures states clearly that a sage looks with an equal eye on a realized soul, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an eater of dogs. Are you better than Krishna, that you are offended by a dog?’”

“Then what did he say?”

“What will he say? He had no choice but to keep quiet. There’s no use in jabbering on about all these things; you need to do the sadhana and have the experience. Then you will know, and there will be no need to talk. You don’t realize the truth just by thinking about it; you have to go through the grind.”



None of the saints, fakirs and babas that I met impressed me nearly so much as did Vimalananda, perhaps because none of them had gone through the grind as thoroughly as he had. Because he always preferred to have questions put to him mentally, so that he could answer them at the moment he felt most appropriate, I began to mentally inquire about becoming his disciple. One day he told me frankly that he was not a guru, but that I would meet my guru one day, if I had a strong enough desire to do so:

“People are always coming to me saying that they want to locate a guru, and I always tell them that if you have real bhakti, real spiritual love and devotion, then your guru will automatically come to you; you won’t have to go out looking for him.

“You don’t need to search, but you may well have to wait; remember Chang Dev.” Chang Dev Maharaj, a sadhu who rode on a tiger and used a cobra for a lasso, had to wait fourteen hundred years for his guru. Every hundred years death would come for him, and he would go into samadhi to elude it. After fourteen hundred years he met his guru, Jnaneshwar Maharaj’s fourteen-year-old sister Mukta Bai, and was released.

“Unfortunately,” Vimalananda went on, “if you are not a superb yogi like Chang Dev you may not be able to know when you will meet your guru, or even recognize your guru when he or she comes to you.”

“Meanwhile what am I supposed to do?” I retorted peevishly.

“Meanwhile do as I tell you to do, and you will continue to make progress. I didn’t say I was not going to help you; I just said I am not fated to be your guru,” he replied, warning me with a glance to behave. “Besides, first you need to be ready for your guru. Can you honestly tell me you are ready?” No, I couldn’t.

“One of my friends asked my Junior Guru Maharaj in 1959 to make him his disciple. Guru Maharaj told him, ‘I don’t dare to do that, because once you become my disciple you will have to do everything I tell you. If you make any mistakes you will be guilty of *guru droha* (offense or treachery against the guru), and that could ruin you. You just be my devotee for twelve years, and at the end of that time if I feel you are ready I will accept you as my disciple.’ But so far that has not happened, even though many more than twelve years have gone by.” I got the hint. So did that friend, who has yet to become Guru Maharaj’s disciple.

Just before Vimalananda’s death he introduced a well-known Ayurvedic doctor from Bombay to Junior Guru Maharaj, who told him, “Get yourself a *shalagrama* (sacred river rock) of the variety known as Lakshmi Janardana and worship it.”

The doctor replied, “Maharaj, you know much time it takes to worship a *shalagrama* properly,” implying that he was a very busy man. “Give me a mantra to repeat instead, because otherwise I will have to carry that *shalagrama* around with me everywhere I go.” As Vimalananda told me later, he forgot that you do not dictate terms to a sadhu, and especially not to someone like Guru Maharaj. There must have been some good reason Guru Maharaj wanted him to worship a *shalagrama*, but he was thinking only of his own convenience. Besides, on the one hand he asks Guru Maharaj for a way to advance spiritually, and on the other he says he has no time to do it properly. What does this tell us about his sincerity?

Guru Maharaj kept quiet, and the next day asked this doctor to prepare a medicine for a child with epileptic-type fits, a medicine whose recipe happened to call for equal parts of honey and ghee. The doctor objected again: “But Maharaj, Ayurveda forbids the mixing of equal parts of honey and ghee.”

Guru Maharaj displayed great patience and replied, “This recipe also comes from the Rishis; please do as they have prescribed. Besides, there are other herbs in the medicine which will remove the poisonous effects of this combination and make it into nectar. What is poison and what is nectar anyway? Just do as you are told.”

After this encounter was over Vimalananda took me aside and said, “You see how it is? Sometimes even when a guru wants to give some knowledge to a ‘child’ the ‘child’ refuses to learn it. You never get anywhere by arguing with a guru, and especially not with a guru who is a live wire like Guru Maharaj. What is a teacher to do with students like these? It is a great blessing to get a good guru, no doubt, but it is an even greater blessing to get a good disciple. Have I ever told you the story of Nagarjuna?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“When Nagarjuna wanted to learn alchemy he located a guru and became his disciple. The guru assigned Nagarjuna to a room adjoining his, and for many days Nagarjuna worked on various preliminary sadhanas.

“One night just as he was going to bed Nagarjuna heard a strange noise from his guru’s room. Wondering what it was he stared quizzically at the wall, and suddenly noticed a small hole in it. His native curiosity quickly overpowered any guilt about spying on Guruji, and he put his eye to the orifice.

Inside he saw his guru busily applying some sort of paste to his feet. After he had finished, he took hold of his staff—and flew out the window.

“Nagarjuna was momentarily stunned, but then his mind began to work again, wondering how he could learn that trick. He knew that asking his guru outright would prove fruitless, so he had to think of a workable plan if he was to gain the knowledge. Suddenly, it came to him.

“He waited up for several hours until his guru returned, and then, after waiting a respectful moment or two to let the old man catch his breath he rushed from his cell and knocked softly at the guru’s door. When the door opened Nagarjuna explained, ‘Guruji, I have been overcome with the desire to serve you. Please let me wash the dust from your feet.’

“The guru eyed Nagarjuna carefully, and then solemnly consented. He had expected this, of course; otherwise why would he have left a hole in the wall for Nagarjuna to peep through? He wanted to see how much initiative the boy had, and he was pleased with what he saw. But he didn’t want to let Nagarjuna know how he felt, so he suppressed his praise.

“After washing his guru’s feet Nagarjuna bowed low and returned to his room, where he exerted himself to the utmost to figure out the composition of the flying unguent. He tasted the wash water over and over again, and finally decided he could identify one of the ingredients. The next night he waited impatiently at the knothole, and finally, there went Guruji! Again he washed the old man’s feet; again he tasted and tasted. Eventually, after many a night of this, he felt confident that he knew the recipe.

“And so one night Nagarjuna himself mixed up a paste, and smeared it on his soles. Then he walked to the window, and—off he flew! Unfortunately he did not have the formula down pat, so he didn’t get very far. He fell out of the sky, and on his crash landing broke one of his legs. He spent the rest of the night outside, wondering what his guru would say when word of this excursion reached him.

“He need not have worried. He was found early the next morning, and his guru personally came to him to say, ‘Of all my students you are the only one who has ever tried to discover the secret of that paste. You deserve to be taught.’ And he was taught.

“A good guru always sets challenges for his disciples, to test them. Sometimes a guru will give a disciple a Shiva Linga made of crystal, or, if he is a really mighty guru, one made of solidified mercury, and make the disciple insert it into the mouth just above the hard palate. This is a type of penance; it limits you in many ways. For example, as long as it is in your mouth you dare not speak a lie; if you do, it will split into two pieces. If you can observe

all the limitations you can achieve quickly, but if you fail, you fall. Never set out to attempt such things until you are absolutely certain that you can achieve them.

“The guru’s order must be obeyed to the dot; then only can the disciple get results. Tukaram Maharaj once gave a rock to a man who was going on pilgrimage. This was no ordinary rock, of course; it was a philosopher’s stone which could convert base metals into gold. The man had a fine pilgrimage, creating gold here and there whenever he needed more money to go on.

“At the end of the trip the man realized that he could not give the stone back to Tukaram Maharaj; he was too attached to it. What to do? He thought of a plan and hid the stone in his house. He then went to meet Tukaram Maharaj, who first asked for details of what he had seen and done, and then asked casually, ‘Oh, yes, let me see that stone I lent you.’

“The man told him, ‘Maharaj, while I was bathing in the Ganga the stone slipped into the water, and although I tried to catch it, it was lost. Obviously Mother Ganga has taken back Her own.’

“‘So be it,’ said Tukaram Maharaj evenly.

“As soon as the man got back to his own home he looked in his hiding place for the stone, but there was no stone to be found. He raced back to Tukaram Maharaj and shouted, ‘Maharaj! The stone is gone!’

“Tukaram Maharaj told him, ‘Stupid, of course it is gone. You just told me yourself that Mother Ganga had taken it back.’ And that was that.

“So be patient, and prepare yourself,” Vimalananda continued soberly. “So often a guru gives a disciple something like that philosopher’s stone, and the disciple becomes so excited by it that he or she forgets altogether the guru who gave it to them in the first place. You can always lose objects, but you can’t afford to lose your guru. If you hold tightly to the guru he can provide you with all the objects you’ll ever need or want.

“One day a king decided to give away everything in his palace. Kings are like that; you can never know what they will do next. He told everyone in the kingdom that in between sunrise and sunset on a certain day they were all free to come and ask him for whatever they wanted from his palace, and it would be theirs.

“By late afternoon the palace was empty. There was absolutely nothing left in it, not even the throne. At five minutes to sunset a young girl entered the palace. The king told her, ‘Oh, no, why didn’t you come earlier? Now there is nothing left.’

"She said, 'You are wrong, Maharaj. Of course there is something left; you are left. I am taking you.' And they were married. After she became queen the girl told her husband, 'Now that I have you, I can use the money in the treasury to build and decorate fifty palaces if I like. I got the best bargain of all.'

Indeed she did, and Vimalananda paused briefly to let this sink in and to light another cigarette before proceeding.

"But why go so far away? Let us take an example that is close to home. I have taught you and several of my other 'children' to do homa. One of them, whom you know well, now spends all his free time wandering around the countryside performing homa. There is nothing wrong with this; it is a good thing. But he could learn even more if he spent more time with me, since I was the one who taught him to do homa in the first place. He has let his little bit of knowledge go to his head.

"Why should he spend more time with me?" I loved to spend all my time with Vimalananda, and needed no reason to do so, but I knew this question had a purpose. "Well, he is trying to convert himself from a caterpillar into a butterfly, from an ordinary human being into a worshipper of fire. He is still weak in visualizing his new role, still like a puppy; his Kundalini is not yet sufficiently awakened and freed from his normal, everyday personality. He is not yet able to disengage himself from his ego attachments. I could help him by visualizing for him, but he has to spend some time near me so that I can do it.

"The best example of this sort of practice that I can think of is that of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Whenever he saw his householder disciple Dr. Nag Mahashay, Ramakrishna would worship the Divine Mother Bhavatarini in him. He would visualize the Divine Mother in Dr. Nag's astral body, and eventually, by the force of Ramakrishna's will, the Divine Mother's form was actually created in Dr. Nag.

"When Ramakrishna saw Vivekananda he would visualize Shiva, and Vivekananda actually became the embodiment of Shiva as a result. When Gopaler Ma came to Ramakrishna she was already an advanced sadhaka; when she meditated on Gopala, Krishna in the form of a young boy, she could actually project a form of Krishna from her astral body. When she met Ramakrishna, that form of Krishna merged with Ramakrishna, and then she knew that he was indeed Krishna embodied. Ramakrishna began to work on her too, and eventually created the Divine Mother in her as well. This is the way a real guru works on his disciples.

"Do you think Swami Vivekananda, who was Ramakrishna's favorite dis-

ciple, could have done anything on his own? Never. When he went to Chicago and stood before the crowd at the Parliament of Religions, before he began to speak he mentally repeated this verse: 'I salute Lord Krishna, the embodiment of Supreme Bliss, by whose grace the mute speak and the lame cross mountains.' Then the Divine Mother Kali entered Vivekananda's body, and when he began, 'Brothers and sisters of America, I would like to talk to you today on "The Master as I Knew Him,"' all America went wild. That is the power of Ma, and of *guru bhakti* (devotion to the guru).

"Vivekananda had real guru bhakti. When Ramakrishna lay dying Vivekananda felt so much attachment to him that he actually ate the phlegm and pus that Ramakrishna coughed up. This was in fact a subtle test, and Vivekananda passed with flying colors."

"That was a test?" I asked.

"Yes, that was a subtle test. The same sort of thing happened with Samartha Ram Das, one of Maharashtra's greatest saints, who was actually an incarnation of Anjaneya. His favorite disciple was a boy named Kalyan, and of course all the other disciples were jealous of him. Samartha Ram Das decided that the jealous disciples needed to learn a good lesson, so one day he developed a big boil on his back. All the disciples showed plenty of sympathy, but didn't do much of anything of a practical nature to alleviate his misery.

"When Kalyan heard that his guruji was in pain, though, he was overcome with love. He ran to Samartha Ram Das, put his mouth over the boil and began to suck out the pus. But when he tasted it he found that it was not pus; it was nectar! His guru just smiled. This was a form of Shaktipat Diksha for Kalyan. The other disciples were ashamed of their jealousy when they saw that Kalyan did what they did not even dream of doing, and they never even suspected that he was getting anything in return for his devotion. Kalyan became the successor of Samartha Ram Das.

"Kabir says, 'You talk about lovers, but what do you know of them? Only the man who is ready to cut off his head at a moment's notice for his guru is a real lover.' Bhakti like Vivekananda's or Kalyan's is very rare, but I have seen an example of such bhakti. There was a nobleman named Jaisingh Rao Ghatge, whose guru was a Muslim fakir named Mungshahji Maharaj. When anyone came to meet Mungshahji Maharaj he would throw feces at them, or if he knew they were vegetarian he would pick up a chicken bone and throw it at them, just to see how much they could take before they became angry.

"Mungshahji Maharaj lived with Jaisingh Rao, and when the mood struck him he would throw his feces at the wall, set fire to the curtains, and break



things. He would do anything he felt like doing, and Jaisingh Rao never said a word. Jaisingh Rao was so devoted to his guru that he used to perform full puja to Mungshahji Maharaj's feces.

"One day Jaisingh Rao was in danger of losing all his land because his monetary position was very bad. He never spoke a word, but that day while he was paying his respects to his guru his mind strayed to his mundane difficulties and a single tear fell from his eye. When Mungshahji Maharaj saw it he said, 'Child, when you take such good care of me, never asking even the simplest favor, do you think I can bear to see a tear in your eye? What's the problem?'"

"When he heard the problem, Mungshahji Maharaj said, 'Go! You not only will not lose your land, I am going to make you a billionaire.' Jaisingh Rao kept his land, and when he sold it piece by piece he made in fact one billion rupees.

"At one point the entire population of a certain town petitioned the court that Mungshahji Maharaj be forced to stay with them. Jaisingh Rao filed a countersuit, asking to retain custody of his guru. The learned judge was quite perplexed, and finally decided that since a fakir is free of all encumbrances he has the right to decide where he will stay. Mungshahji Maharaj then said, 'I will never desert Jaisingh Rao, because he doesn't ask me for anything.'"

I interrupted: "Mungshahji Maharaj was called 'Maharaj' even though he was a Muslim?"

"Yes, because he had so many Hindu disciples. Jaisingh Rao was a Hindu, after all."

"He must have been quite a saint."

"He was good. I met him because he had been trying to dig up a buried treasure. He had got partway and a cobra had appeared to block the path. Also, spirits could be heard howling around the area. He had heard that I knew how to get around such obstacles—I have dug up hundreds of things from the ground—so I came and grabbed the cobra and said, 'Dig!' Just before they were about to strike pay dirt I told them, 'You must donate this much to charity, this much to a particular trust fund, and then you can keep the rest for yourself.'

"Poor Jaisingh Rao said nothing, but Mungshahji Maharaj's ego was hurt, and he said, 'No, it will be divided as I decide.'

"I let go of the cobra and said, 'Do it yourself then.' They couldn't, and the treasure remained buried. It is so difficult to keep the ego under complete control, even for great saints like Mungshahji Maharaj. But in spite of

his guru's imperfections Jaisingh Rao did well, because of devotion. It was the bhakti that did most of the work. Have I ever told you the story of Pyaredas?" He had, but I wanted to hear it again, so I kept quiet.

"Pyaredas was a drunkard debauchee who was very fond of women. One day this wastrel met a sadhu who told him, 'Pyare, you are completely devoted to flesh, skin and bone; if you were to love God as much as you love the physical body, what do you think you might become?' These words had such an effect on Pyaredas that he left everything and took that sadhu as his guru. He loved his guru very, very dearly, and was so terrifically devoted to him that he never left him for a moment.

"When it came time for the guru to leave his body he became worried that the shock of the separation might be too much for Pyaredas, so he told him, 'Pyare, you go to such-and-such a city, and I will follow you later.' After Pyaredas departed, his guru left his body.

"Pyaredas waited several days in that city, and when his guru did not come he returned to the guru's town and asked news of him. When he learned that his guru had left his body, and that a memorial stone had already been erected for him, Pyaredas went directly to the memorial stone and began to cry. He cried and cried and cried, so much so that he went blind.

"Finally he decided to end himself, and started to bang his head against the stone. After his head had become quite bloody and his skull was about to crack, his guru appeared to him in an ethereal form. He made Pyaredas to see again, healed the wounds on his head, and then entered his body. Then the two were always together, and they lived together in that body for a hundred years. Bhakti like this is very rare."

We were interrupted at this point, and some days later he continued this lesson.

"You can be dead sure that your guru will come to you when the time is ripe. The question is, will you be ready for him? Will you be ready to love him without any limits or preconceptions or conditions? The mother is high, but the guru is even higher. It is because of your mother that you have any physical existence at all, which is why you must worship your mother until the end of your life; but it is because of the guru that you are born again. A real guru will first destroy you and then recreate you, give you a new birth. When Jesus said, 'You must be born again,' this is what He meant.

"If you want to love God, or your guru, or whoever, you must have a waxen heart. That was Shakespeare's phrase, but I'm not sure he under-



stood the full implications of what he wrote. You must have a heart which is ready to melt when the emotion becomes too great. And that is only the beginning. Once your heart melts, you must melt your bones so that there is no resistance left at all. You must surrender totally to your guru, making his will yours, so that your guru can have his way and perfect you. Unfortunately, only one in a million can surrender totally; everyone else must first learn how to surrender.

“The relationship which exists between guru and disciple is the deepest possible human relationship. They relate like parent and child, like chums. Nowhere in the universe will a ‘child’ ever find a pal like his guru. And they are like lovers. The guru will tempt the child in all sorts of ways, like Matsyendra Nath tested Gorakh Nath (see *Aghora*, pp. 156–7), but a good disciple will never be tempted. A good disciple loves only the guru, and wants only the guru.

“You well know that Guru Purnima is the day on which the guru is to be worshipped. Have you asked yourself yet, ‘Why a full moon, and not some other lunar day?’”

“No.”

“Well, it has to do with emotion. If two lovers find themselves alone on a full moon night they are likely to be overcome with the desire to unite sexually. They cannot endure the separation from each other; they must embrace. Full moon nights cause an overflow of emotion in the human psyche. On Guru Purnima the guru and disciple, whose relationship is much more intimate than that of mere lovers, experience a natural outpouring of emotion for each other. The guru, because of his tremendous love for his disciple, takes the disciple’s karmic debts onto himself. The disciple responds with *guru dakshina*, an offering to the guru.

“Someone with subtle understanding will now ask, ‘Why is the disciple supposed to give an offering to the Guru, if the guru has already taken all the karmic debts from the disciple? Then the disciple has nothing of his own left to give.’ And that is very right. The disciple has nothing he can give the guru except love, and so he can do nothing in return except worship the guru as God incarnate; not to pamper the guru’s ego, but to become more and more selfless so that the guru can work on him without interference.

“They say in Hindi, ‘Light comes from the moon, not the stars; love comes from one, not many.’ That one is the guru, and only when you have learned how to love your guru will you ever learn how to love God. The relationship between guru and disciple can begin only when the disciple forgets everyone else except that one; once that happens then everything follows.

“A guru always wants to make his disciple into his own guru. The Self, the Absolute Reality, is the true guru, because the gu-ru is that which is *gunatita* and *rupatita* (beyond attribution and form). A true guru makes the disciple go beyond attribute and form. First he makes the ‘child’ go beyond *manubandhana*, the bondage of karmic debt. Then he makes the disciple realize the nature of the Self, and the two become guru-brothers (or guru-sisters). Then the guru worships the disciple’s Self as the Supreme Guru, the First Deity, and the disciple is made.

“If this is what it takes to make a disciple,” Vimalananda continued rhetorically, “how many real disciples can a guru have? One or two; a handful at the most. Jesus had only twelve, and not all of them had the same capacity or achieved the same things. Four of them, like John, had *Sattva* predominating in their natures; they were the ones who best followed Jesus’ teachings. Four of them who became pillars of the church, like Peter, were dominated by *Rajas*; because the pillars were *Rajasic*, the Catholics and their church exist mainly in *Rajas*. And four disciples, like Judas, were full of *Tamas*. Poor Jesus did the best He could with the material He had available.

“A few gurus teach a handful of disciples each; some teach no one. A guru may have many devotees, but there is no use in creating hundreds of disciples who are all half-baked. Every guru should have one special disciple to whom to transfer his most precious knowledge. Make one, but make that one so thoroughly that the whole world will gape at his or her greatness. *That* is the real value in being a guru.

“The pride of seeing your ‘child’ succeed cannot be measured in words. But a guru can’t just select a disciple arbitrarily; he must know the innate capabilities and aptitudes of each of his ‘children’ so that he can select one to whom to transmit the bulk of his knowledge. This is why a guru always loves to play with his ‘children,’ to test them.

“After he has been satisfied, and he wants to give *Shaktipat Diksha* to a disciple, he usually transfers that *shakti* through a vehicle, which might be a drink of water, the smell of incense, an intense gaze, or a tap to the spine or head. Perhaps he will transfer the *shakti* in the form of a mantra. When the disciple with closed eyes sees the mantra written in tongues of flame, in Devanagari script, a voice will tell the ‘child’ how to repeat the mantra and what restrictions to observe. It is better to do it this way, because mantras are never meant to be spoken.

“This is what happened to Tukaram Maharaj. He met his guru once only, in a dream. The guru showed him the mantra, repeated it to him, and told him to repeat it. That was it; no lengthy discourses, physical initiations or

complicated rituals. He got his mantra and began to recite it. And it was not some sort of complicated mantra, either; it was the simple, beautiful mantra 'Rama Krishna Hari.' Because he had supreme faith in his guru, Tukaram Maharaj achieved wonders even without any personal guidance from a living guru. He was so advanced that he did not die in the usual way; like Elijah, a chariot from heaven came down and collected him. Not everyone who claims to have been initiated in a dream ends up like Tukaram Maharaj!

"And what about Kabir? He was initiated when he lay in front of Ramananda Swami early in the morning as Ramananda Swami was returning from bathing in the Ganga in Benaras. Ramananda Swami inadvertently kicked Kabir, whom he could not see in the darkness, and said, 'Ram, Ram,' which Kabir took as his mantra. He could achieve in this way, with a mantra which had been given to him offhandedly, because he was Kabir, and because he had full faith in Rama and in his guru.

"Kabir was a great saint who had a great son: Kamal. Kamal, which means 'amazing,' really was amazing, which meant of course that all of Kabir's other disciples were insanely jealous of him.

"Kabir loved horses, and one day he sent Kamal out to cut grass for the horses. Kamal found the grass, but when he went to cut it he started to think about how much that would hurt the grass. To make a test, he took the sickle and cut his own finger. When he felt the pain he decided that he definitely couldn't go through with cutting the grass.

"Horses have to eat frequently, and when these weren't fed they became uneasy. When some of the other disciples discovered that Kamal had not brought any grass they rushed out to cut some, and then ran to tell Kabir, hoping to see Kamal get a good scolding from the master.

"When Kabir heard the story he called for Kamal and asked him why he had not cut the grass. Kamal explained to Kabir that the grass was living just as much as he was and that he couldn't cut it; in fact, he would rather cut himself than cut the grass. Then Kabir understood, and composed a verse on the spot: 'Kabir told Kamal, 'You are really *kamal* (amazing). I have only been half-baked, but you are completely done.' This is the beautiful play of guru and disciple."



Perhaps because he knew he would be dying soon, Vimalananda sat me down one day late in 1983 for what would be a final admonition.

"Sooner or later, Robby, I am going to die."

"Yes, but you are not going to die any time soon."

"Can you guarantee that? Can you guarantee that you or I will be alive even one minute from now?"

"I can't guarantee anything about me, but I can guarantee that if you decide you want to stay alive you can do it."

He continued without comment. "Everyone is going to die. Maybe now, maybe later; but someday I will be gone, and you will be left here. You have learned quite a lot, and you have a lot left to learn. Never pass up an opportunity to learn.

"Because it is Kali Yuga there are no longer any Rishi ashrams here on the physical plane. But the Rishis are immortal, and they can travel anywhere they like in the universe. This means that a Rishi might be moving amongst us, in Bombay or anywhere else. Of course no one would be able to recognize him; he would be in disguise. You would only be able to recognize him if you knew the special signs on his body which distinguish him from ordinary human beings. Very few humans know these signs.

"If you do know these characteristics and are able to spot a Mahapurusha, even a Siddha, he will give you a wonderful blessing. Because this is Kali Yuga everyone's sadhana is imperfect, so you are not likely to be able to attract a Mahapurusha to you by force. But if you sincerely do the sadhana that you have been taught, and if you have an aching desire, one day a Mahapurusha will come to you, in disguise, and will let you try to catch him. See how they love to play about? Even though sadhana is very serious business, you must always keep an attitude of playfulness about you, like a small child. Everyone, and this especially includes celestial beings, loves children; but no one likes an adult who thinks he or she is too clever. The quickest way to be shot down in the spiritual field is to become too big for your breeches.

"This is the reason you must always see Narayana in the heart of each and every creature you meet. You can never know when, or in what form, your deity or a Mahapurusha will come to test you. If you pass you are made; your sadhanas have been crowned with success. If you fail—well, you will have to start all over again from the beginning, and no one knows how many lifetimes that might take. So don't make any mistakes.

"And remember, this is not the sort of test you can mug up for. You will never know it is taking place until it is over. Actually, of course, there is no

such thing as a test. You think it is a test because 'you' are there—the false personality. Once the e-y-e 'eye' has been converted into capital 'I' there is no question of a test; who will you test? Yourself? But so long as duality is present—so long as Kundalini is not completely free of Her bonds—there is always the danger that you may not make the right choice, because of the play of karma and manubandhana.

“Whatever you are destined to have you will get, beyond the shadow of a doubt. How and when you get it depend on how well you can cultivate your mind. The function of Tantra and Aghora is to put the government of mind, senses, and body into the proper order to avoid misery. Life minus misery for a prolonged period produces satisfaction, which yields happiness; and when happiness is increased beyond all conceivable limits and is sustained it becomes bliss, what the Vedas call *ananda*. Sadhana is a means to this end. When Kundalini awakens, if body, mind and spirit are in good working order bliss is certain.

“Bliss is not something you have to create, or accumulate; it arises spontaneously. Just let God decide what is best for you, and God will provide it accordingly. So even at those times when your will power is weak and your mental control is poor, there is still nothing to worry about. Always, always remember that the supreme method of mind control, the supreme intoxication, is the perpetual repetition of the sweet name of God. Never forget God, and God will never forget you. And one day you will succeed.”



## APPENDIX

by Robert Beer

### Yantras: A General Description

Yantra, meaning “device” or “instrument,” is usually a geometric representation designed to identify the mind of a worshipper with his or her chosen deity. The *Yogini Tantra* says that the goddess may either be worshipped as image, mandala or yantra. A yantra is the outward form of a deity, while a mantra is the deities’ subtle form. In essence the mantra is the deity, and when a yantra is inscribed with its bija mantras and empowered by consecration the deity is installed within the yantra. Empowerment is the entry of the deities’ prana into the yantra, and without this the yantra is but an empty construction. When a yantra is consecrated by auspicious rites it brings prosperity and peace and removes all malevolent influences from the worshippers family. Yantras can be used for magical purposes and when employed in destructive rituals the yantra becomes more a prison than a palace for the deity.

A yantra is usually constructed with a circular point or bindu at the center embodying the seed or bija of the deity. Encompassing the bindu are usually

triangles which may form a hexagram or geometric design, the upward pointing fire triangles represent the god, and the downward pointing wind triangles represent the goddess (yoni). Intersecting squares may house the center which usually rest on the circular bed of a lotus. Outside this in concentric circles are the petals of the lotus which normally number eight or sixteen. The whole diagram is contained within a square bhupura or ground plan with four gateways in the cardinal directions.

Yantras are inscribed on various materials according to their use and the function they perform. For peaceful and magnetizing rites: rock crystal and birch bark are often used; for enriching: gold, silver or copper plate; for destructive rituals: iron, skin or bone is employed. The metal plate is often smeared with a paste such as sandalwood, saffron or aloe, and inscribed with a stylus of gold, wood, iron, or thorn taken from shrubs such as acacia, bael or datura, depending again on the ritual for which it is used. Three dimensional yantras are sometimes commissioned for their enduring influences of peace and prosperity, skilfully carved from such precious materials as rock crystal, coral or lapis lazuli.

## The Nine Nath Siddhas

The tradition of the Nine Nath Siddhas stems from the flowering of Shai-vite Tantra around the tenth century. The word Nath is derived from the name of Shiva and its literal meaning is "Lord." The Naths brought to light various systems of tantric practices aimed at the transubstantiation of the human body into a divine immortal body. Central to their methods were the practices of Hatha, Kundalini and Alchemical yogas. The North Indian tradition lists nine Naths and eighty-four Siddhas in its lineage, the most prominent of which were Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath. Many of these eighty-four Siddhas appear in the Buddhist tantric tradition, where it is sometimes said that they practiced Hindu tantra by day and Buddhist tantra at night. The various lists of the Nine Naths include: Matsyendranath, Gorakhnath, Jalandhara, Kanipa, Gopichand, Caurangi, Charpati, Dharamnath and Gaininath.

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## NATH SIDDHA ILLUSTRATIONS

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The Nath Siddhas and Siddhas are illustrated in their Tibetan styles.  
Page numbers refer to references or examples in the text.

### The Nath Siddha Matsyendranath

Matsyendranath—the “Fish Lord,” is the first Guru of the nine Naths. Along with Gorakhnath he is regarded as the founder of the Nath, Kaula and Kanphata traditions, and with instigating the practices of Hatha, Laya and Raja yogas. According to legend he was a fisherman from Kamarupa in Assam who hooked a giant fish and was swallowed alive by it, like Jonah. The fish came to rest on the ocean floor near a hidden palace in which Shiva had chosen to transmit his most secret teaching to his consort Uma. From within the belly of the fish Matsyendranath overheard these secret teachings and received his mantra directly from Shiva, who had no option but to make Matsyendranath his disciple. Matsyendranath spent twelve years perfecting his sadhana in the belly of the fish until he was eventually disgorged onto dry land. He had many disciples, the most prominent of which was Gorakhnath.

In Nepal, Matsyendranath is identified with the Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokitesvara, who is himself identified with Shiva as Lokanath—“Lord of the World.” Matsyendranath is the patron deity of Nepal, and is believed to have brought the first grains of rice to this Himalayan Kingdom.

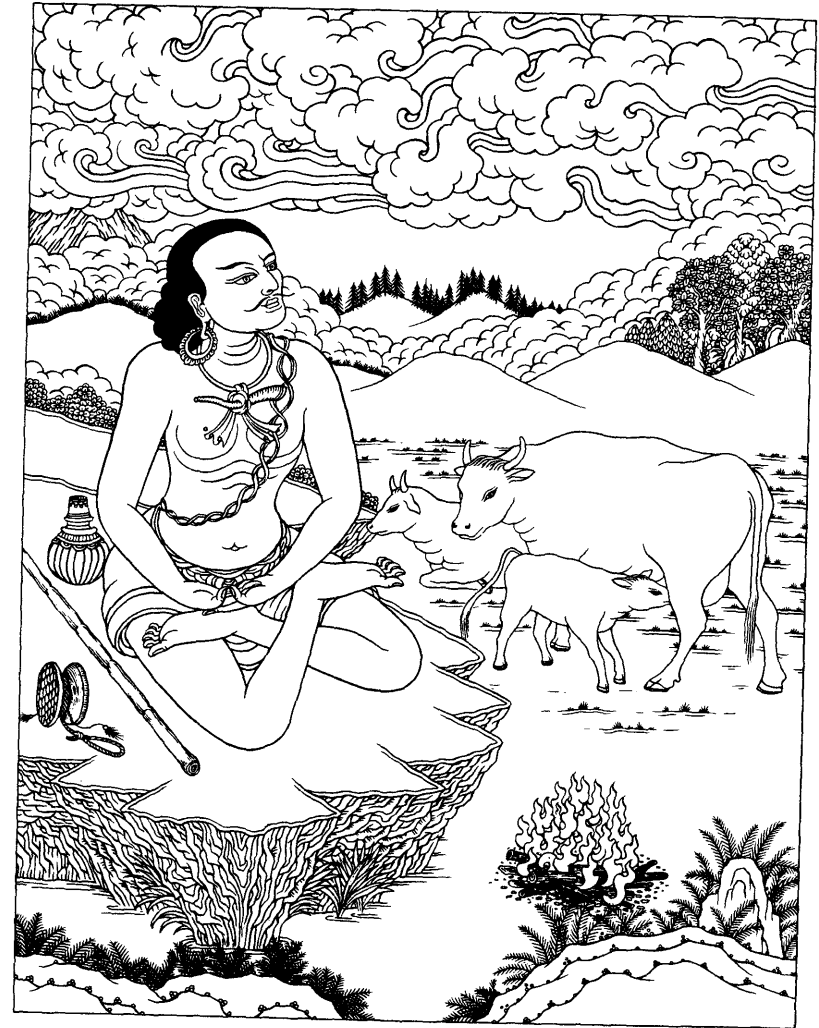


The Nath Siddha Matsyendranath  
(page 278)

### The Nath Siddha Gorakhnath

The Indian subcontinent is rich with stories and miraculous anecdotes about the life of Gorakhnath. He was probably born in the Punjab around the tenth century, although legend often dates him to a far more remote past. He travelled extensively across India, from Sindh to Bengal and from Nepal to Sri Lanka. In Nepal he is said to have caused a twelve year drought by the power of his meditation, which was only ended by the intercession of Matsyendranath. The city of Goraka in Nepal is named after Gorakhnath and its descendants now form the tribe of the Gurkas. He is believed by his followers to be immortal and living to this day in the Himalayas; but at the vast temple complex in Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh is a tomb said to contain his body absorbed in Samadhi. His Hindu name Goraksha probably derived from “Protector of the Cows (Go),” or from a legend in which a barren woman, wishing to bear a son, received some ashes from Shiva’s fire. Instead of swallowing the ashes she threw them on a pile of dung (ghor), and twelve years later Matsyendranath recovered a boy from this dung pile whom Shiva named after Gorakhnath—“The Lord of Dung.”

Gorakhnath is said to have inspired such great luminaries as Kabir, Gopichand, Guga, Puran Bhagat and Guru Nanak—the founder of the Sikh religion; in one record he is even reputed to have been the foster father and teacher of the Prophet Muhammed. His followers, known as Gorakhnaths, Naths and Kanphatas form the largest Indian tantric tradition. The Kanphatas are named after the practice of splitting the center of the ear to accomodate large ear-rings, usually made from rhinoceros horn, ivory, conch, copper or gold. Great importance is attached to these ear-rings; if they are pulled out or the ear mutilated the Kanphata yogin becomes an outcaste. In certain parts of India such an occurrence would result in the yogin being buried alive with no tomb erected over his body.



The Nath Siddha Gorakhnath  
(pages 38 & 211)

### The Nath Siddha Caurangi

Cauranginath was a disciple and contemporary of Gorakhnath. Legend relates that he was the son of King Devapala of Bengal. Devapala's first wife died while Caurangi was still a child, and his father took a new wife who resorted to deception in order to place her own son on the throne. Caurangi was taken to a forest clearing where his arms and legs were cut off. Here he was found by Matsyendranath who instructed Gorakhnath to care for the limbless youth. Gorakhnath taught him the yoga of pot-like breath retention (kumbhaka), and after twelve years of this practice his limbs were miraculously restored by the power of his own realization.

His name Caurangi probably derives from "Four Limbs (anga)," and the shape of his torso as a bulb (kanda) possibly refers to his practice of Kanda Manda yoga. Caurangi is said to have founded the great Kali temple of Kalighat in Calcutta. The main north-south thoroughfare across the city of Calcutta is now known as Chowringhi.



The Nath Siddha Caurangi  
(page 114)

### The Nath Siddha Jalandhara

Jalandhara, whose name means “Bearer of the Net,” is also known in Bengal as Hadipa—“born from a bone (hada) of Shiva.” He is named after one of the four most sacred sites (pithas) of tantric practice, Jalandhara, located in the Kangra valley of northwest India and close to the modern city of Jullunder.

In the Nath legends, Hadipa was a sweeper of Bengal who became guru to the young king Gopichand. Gopichand doubted his guru’s integrity and caused Hadipa to be buried alive in a pit. After twelve years, Hadipa’s disciple Kanipa was informed of this occurrence by Gorakhnath, and Kanipa travelled to Bengal to release his teacher. When Hadipa emerged alive from his ordeal, Gopichand repented of his actions and abdicated his throne to follow the Nath path of his teacher Hadipa.

Jalandhara was a great exponent of Hatha and Kundalini yogas. Gorakhnath comments that the term Hatha meaning “forceful” is made up of the two syllables ha and tha representing the solar and lunar channels which are forced into union (yoga) in the central channel of Sushumna.



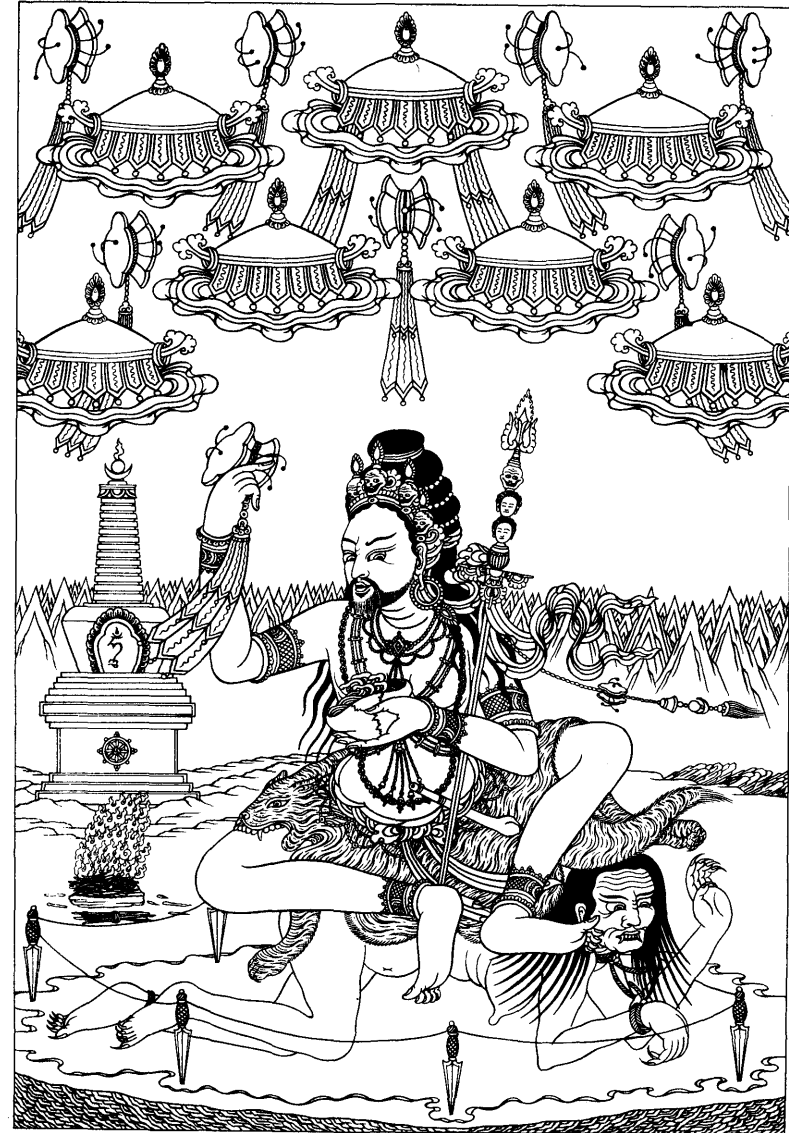
The Nath Siddha Jalandhara



### The Nath Siddha Kanipa

Kanipa was said to have been born as a Brahmin in the Kingdom of Gaura near Bengal. His father is reputed to have been the fisherman who caught the fish from which Matsyendranath appeared. Kanipa's guru was Jalandhara and his legends are rich in anecdotes of the Bamarg or Left Hand Path. He was instrumental in the rise of the Kapalika and Carya traditions, composing a famous cycle of Bengali Carya songs known as the Caryagiti. He is also held to be one of the founders of the Aghori sect, and many snake charmers claim Kanipa as their root guru. In one anecdote a tantric feast was hosted by Matsyendranath and Goraknath and each participant was free to choose his own food. Kanipa's chosen dish was cooked snakes and scorpions, and he was promptly banished from the feast. In the Buddhist legend of Kanipa his untimely death was due to being cursed by a dakini. On his deathbed he taught the headless Vajra Varahi sadhana—a deity assimilated with the headless Mahavidya goddess Chinnamastra.

He is represented in a smashan wearing bone ornaments, holding a skull cup, double-sided drum and tantric staff. Above his head float seven drums and canopies, which often spontaneously manifested as signs of his accomplishment. He is seated upon the resurrected corpse of a vetala (vampire or ghoul).



The Nath Siddha Kanipa  
(page 125)

### The Nath Siddha Charpati

Charpati was one of the first great teachers of Hatha yoga, and composed several texts on this subject. He was one of the early disciples of the Kapalika lineage and his guru was Jalandhara. One of his legends relates the practice of Khecari Mudra, whereby the tongue is turned upwards into the soft upper palate of the throat. He lived around the tenth century and amongst his pupils was King Sahila Varma of Chamba state in Himachal Pradesh.



The Nath Siddha Charpati  
(page 71)

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SIDDHA ILLUSTRATIONS

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**The Siddha Nalinapa**  
(page 213)



The Siddha Chang Dev Maharaj  
(page 270)



The Siddha Bhadrapa  
(Chapter 7)



The Siddha Dengipa – The Rice Thresher  
(page 218)

## GLOSSARY

Abhisheka - Ritual bath of a deity or individual; if the latter it is initiatory.  
Adesha - Instruction, command (by the guru).  
Adhibhautika - The mundane or terrestrial sphere of action. The lower three Chakras, Muladhara, Svadhishtana, Manipura, are for adhibhautika accomplishments.  
Adhidaivika - The celestial or astral sphere, the world of gods and goddesses beyond both the physical and the spiritual. The three Chakras in the head called Golata, Lalata, and Lalana are for the adhidaivika.  
Adhyatmika - The spiritual world, the realm of the Self. The upper three Chakras, Anahata, Vishuddha, and Ajna, are for the adhyatmika.  
Advaita - "Non-dual"; the designation of a system of philosophy characterized by the notion of the ultimate non-distinction between the individual self and the absolute Brahman or God.

Adya - Lit. "first, original." Used as a synonym for the Adishakti, the first or original Shakti which manifests from the absolute and is the Mother of all the worlds.  
Aghora - Lit. "non-terrifying." Aghora is the most extreme of all Indian sects, concentrating on forcible conversion of a limited human personality into a divine personality.  
Aghori - A practitioner of Aghora.  
Agni - "Fire"; the God Fire.  
Agnihoti - One who performs the Vedic fire sacrifice called Agnihotra, the offering of milk or rice into a sacred fire in the morning and evening.  
Ahamkara - "I-maker"; the ego.  
Ajagara - "Python."  
Ajagara Sadhana - A meditation in which one becomes like a python.  
Ajna - "Command"; name of the Chakra located at the center of the forehead, between the eyes.

Akartum - "Not to perform"; that which is impossible for ordinary beings, referring to the adhyatmika, the spiritual world.

Akula-Shiva - the Absolute Unmanifested; opposite of both Kula and Shakti.

Alaksha - "Unmarked; without characteristic."

Amrita - "Immortal", nectar.

Amsha - "Part, fraction."

Anahata - "Unstruck"; the name of the heart chakra.

Anahata Nada - "The sound which does not arise by striking"; the sound of the Anahata Chakra.

Ananda - "Bliss."

Anjaneya - "Descendant of Anjani"; a name of Hanuman, the monkey king, because his mother was named Anjani.

Anubhavi - "Experienter."

Anusthana - An extended series of ritual or meditational sessions.

Anusvara - The nasal sound "m" that comes at the end of many Sanskrit words; its shape is a horizontal upward-pointing half moon (see bindu).

Anyathakartum - "To alter, act otherwise"; that which is beyond both the spiritual and the mundane and is inconceivable to humans, referring to the adhidivika or astral world.

Apsaras - A class of semi-divine females who can change their shape at will; they move between water (ap) and clouds (saras).

Aryaputra - "Son of a nobleman."

Asana - "Seat, yogic posture."

Ashta - "Eight."

Ashta Pasha - The Eight Snares which bind us to the world: lust, anger, greed, delusion, envy, shame, fear and disgust.

Asura - "Demon, anti-god."

Atharvan - Name of an ancient Vedic sage.

Atma/Atman - The soul, the indwelling spirit which animates a living being.

The Jivatma is the individual spirit which imagines itself trapped in a physical form, subject to the limitations of embodied existence. The Paramatma is the Universal Soul, the totality of spirit in the cosmos. All Jivas or Jivatmas belong to the Paramatma.

Avatara - "Descent, incarnation," usually denoting one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu: Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar), Narasimha (the man-lion), Vamana (the dwarf), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki (the future incarnation).

Baccha - "Child" (Hindi, masculine).

Balavant - "Strong, powerful."

Bandha - "Binding; a bond or fetter"; a sealing of a part of the subtle nervous system through yogic manipulation.

Bandha Koshtha - Constipation.

Bhairava - "The Terrifier"; a ferocious form of Shiva who often serves as a guardian deity. [also cf. Aghora glossary]

Bhairavi - A ferocious form of the Goddess; A woman who gains an attributeless state in sadhana comes back as a celestial Bhairavi or Yogini.

Bhajan - Religious song or singing.

Bhakti - Religious or spiritual devotion.

Bhava - Any emotional or spiritual state.

Bhedana - "Dividing, breaking."

Bhogi - "Enjoyer"; usually characterized as the opposite of "yogi."

Bhojana - A meal.

Bhu - "Existence", name of the Earth Goddess.

Bhu Garbha - "Womb of the earth."

Bhuta - "A being"; usually, however, it refers to a disembodied spirit.

Bhuta Agni - "The fire of life."

Bhuta Shuddhi - Ritual purification (shuddhi) of unwelcome spirits from the body.

Bija - "Seed."

Bija Mantra - Any monosyllabic mantra, which is a "seed" representation of a God or Goddess.

Bindu - The dot appearing over the anusvara in superscript position in Indian scripts. The half moon and dot above the line are the anusvara and bindu. More esoterically bindu refers to a point or position without dimension; thus, the source of all sound.

Brahmana - A member of the priestly class of society.

Brahmarshi - A high level sage or rishi.

Buddhi - "Intellect."

Chaitanya - "Consciousness."

Chillum - A pipe used to smoke marijuana or hashish mixed with tobacco. It is three or four inches long and is straight, tapering from a wide bowl to a thin mouth.

Chakra - "Wheel"; a sensitive subtle nervous plexus. The six Chakras usually described are the Muladhara, in the perineum; the Svadhishtana, in the pubic region; the Manipura, at the navel; the Anahata, near the heart; the Vishuddha, in the throat; and the Ajna, in the center of the forehead. From the Ajna one moves into the Sahasrara, which is not actually a Chakra. However, Aghora adds three more Chakras, all located in the head: Golata, Lalata, and Lalana.

Chakra Puja - A ritual in which one or more male tantric practitioners surrounds himself or themselves with female tantrics (8, 16, or 64 are recommended numbers). Sexual relations are the culmination of the long ritual which includes many offerings during which both males and females self-identify with deities.

Chit - "Consciousness, subjectivity."

Chit Shakti - The power of consciousness or subjectivity which identifies with the Unmanifested Absolute.

Dakshina - Payment or offering of gratitude after the completion by a guru or priest of a teaching or ritual.

Dama - Physical self-control.

Damaru - Shiva's small drum.

Dasharatha - Name of a great king, father of Rama.

Dattatreya - Name of a sage, son of Atri and Anasuya who was worshipped as a deity in the form of the triad Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

Daya - "Compassion."

Deepaka - Name of a Raga or musical melody: the Kindling or Igniting Melody.

Deva - "Deity, celestial being."

Dhabawala - One who carries a vessel (dhaba); refers to men who bring hot home-cooked lunches to hundreds of thousands of workers in Bombay every day.

Dhara - The power to hold or fix, the syllables of the word Radha reversed.

Dharana - "Concentration."

Dhuni - The fire tended by a sadhu. A sadhu is said to sit "on" his dhuni, meaning close to it, concentrating on it.

Dhyana - "Meditation."

Digambara - "One whose raiment is the sky;" a naked mendicant, usually of the Jain religion.

Diksha - An initiation.

Droha - "Treachery."

Dvapara Yuga - "Eon of one-half"; name of the third Yuga in the series of four, in which one-half of the dharma or righteousness of Satya Yuga remains. In Dvapara Yuga the primary sadhana and means of achieving desires is austerities (tapas).

Five Great Elements - The elemental constituents of the physical universe: earth, water, fire, air, space.

Gana - "Attendents."

Gandharva - A celestial musician.

Ganesha - The elephant-headed god, son of Shiva and Uma (gana + isha, lord of attendents).

Ganesh(a) Paran - A raga for Ganesha during which Ganesha must come if sung correctly.

Garbha - "Womb."

Gati - "Gait, mode;" there are 108 gatis of sound (nada, q.v.). Numerologically 108 adds up to 9, the number of chakras in the body, according to

- Aghora. Which gati of nada you hear depends on your past karmas, present tendencies, ancestry, etc.
- Ghata - "Pot."
- Ghata Sthapana - "Establishing of a pot;" name of a rite performed at the commencement of the Nava Ratri festival during which a clay pot is decorated and consecrated or established, then worshipped as the Goddess.
- Ghee - Clarified butter.
- Go - "Cow" (secondarily "sense organ" and "sacred word"); name of the supreme ideal world (loka) of Krishna.
- Gopi - "Female cowherd;" the gopis were devotees of Krishna.
- Gotra - 1) System of Vedic lineage ancestry, deriving from "protection of cows"; 2) "Protection for the senses."
- Granthi - "Knot."
- Granthi Bhedana - The piercing of the knots which obstruct the free movement of Kundalini in the nadis (q.v.).
- Guna - Lit. "qualities" or "attributes." The Three Gunas are the three fundamental attributes of conditional or limited existence: Satva (equilibrium), Rajas (activity), and Tamas (inertia). In its purest state the mind is pure Sattva, and the two chief mental disturbances are Rajas (overactivity) and Tamas (inactivity).
- Gunatita - "Beyond the gunas."
- Guru Bhakti - Devotion to the guru.
- Guru Droha - An offense or act of treachery against the guru.
- Guru Purnima - The full moon of the Indian month of Ashadh (usually in mid-July), during which the guru is worshipped.
- Halahala - The world-threatening poison drunk by Shiva that turned his throat blue.
- Hanuman - The monkey king of the Ramayana who is the archetypical devotee.
- Hara - "The snatcher;" name of Shiva as the Lord of Death.
- Hiranyakashipu - A great demon king, father of Prahlada (q.v.), was eviscerated by Narasimha, the man-lion avatara of Vishnu.
- Hiranyaksha - A demon king, elder brother of Hiranyakashipu (q.v.), was killed by Varaha, the boar avatara of Vishnu.
- Homa - General term for any ritual in which offering into a consecrated fire is the primary action.
- Indriya - "Sense"; five senses are enumerated: touch, smell, taste, sight, hearing.
- Isha - "Lord."
- Jahnvi - A name of the Ganges River, also a word for the sacred thread worn by Brahmanas and others.
- Janaka - A king of great spiritual prowess; father of Rama's wife Sita.
- Jathara - "Belly."
- Jathara Agni - "Fire of the belly"; the digestive fire.
- Japa - Systematic repetition of a mantra or sacred name.
- Japamala - A rosary on which japa is performed.
- Jata - "Matted locks", worn by many sadhus (q.v.).
- Jeevan Samadhi - "Living trance;" the act of deliberately entering into a state of permanent samadhi, tantamount to death. This act is only possible for the greatest saints, such as Jnaneshwar, and often will happen in a cave, after which the saint's disciples will seal off the entrance.
- Jiva - The individual personality which undergoes rebirth, because the karmas stored in the causal body need a physical body to permit their expression. (see Atma)
- Jnana - Transcendent wisdom. Knowledge (Vidya) is an outward projection or objectivization of this innate, living wisdom.
- Jnani - One who has attained ordinary spiritual knowledge.
- Kala - "Time."
- Kala Ratri - The Black Night, the night just before Dipavali, the new moon of the month of Ashvin.
- Kali - The lowest throw of the dice.
- Kali Yuga - The fourth of the four ages through which the cosmos passes in cycles of 4,320,000 years. Kali Yuga is supposed to last 432,000 years, and is characterized by lack of interest in spirituality among the populace, which leads to materialism, atheism, and the perpetuation of various cruelties by stronger beings onto weaker ones.
- Kalpa - A time period or epoch consisting of the four eons or yugas (q.v.)
- Kanda - "Division, chapter;" also "bulb," or something bulbous, such as the nadi plexus where the breath or prana called Apana can be made to move upward instead of downward.
- Kandarpa - "Onion; beauty;" name of Kamadeva, the god of love.
- Kanya - "Maiden."
- Kartana - "Cutting."
- Kartum - "To do;" that which is difficult to do, but is doable. This refers to the adhibhautika, the mundane world.
- Kaula - Followers of Tantra who perform the practice of Rasa Vidya in order to turn Kundalini into Kula Kundalini (q.v.).
- Kavi - "Inspired poet."
- Kevala - "Isolated, exclusive, alone."
- Kevala Kumbhaka - Cessation of breathing for a lengthy period. Only when there is kevala kumbhaka can one's mind become completely firm, after which worship will become steady.
- Kedara - Name of a Raga (q.v.), the "Field Melody", sung to attract Krishna.
- Khanda - "Broken; a part or limb."
- Khanda Manda Yoga - A sadhana during which the practitioner cuts off his own arms and legs with a sharp cleaver, and throws them into a roaring fire. After twelve hours these limbs reemerge from the fire and rejoin his body.
- Khandana - "Breaking, dividing, destroying."
- Khara - "Donkey."
- Kilana - "Nailing"; particularly ritually nailing an ethereal being or deity to a specific location with mantra.
- Kirtan - "Devotional song", often accompanied by discourse.
- Kirtankar - "One who leads devotional singing and discourse."
- Krida - "Play"; particularly unconscious play, such as rati krida ("love play"). Krida is controlled by someone or something other than the being who is playing. In love play, the glands and the genitals do the controlling, not the two people who romance each other.
- Krura - "Cruel."
- Krura Ratri - "Cruel Night"; the night before the spring festival called Holi, on the full moon of the month of Phalgun (in March).
- Kshatriya - "Warrior"; a member of the warrior castes.
- Kula - "Family"; "Supreme Consciousness of the Universe"; "form"; see Kula Kundalini.
- Kula Kundalini - "Freed Kundalini." After the Kundalini is uncoiled and straightened out along the Six Chakras, She takes the form of the Goddess who is meant to be worshipped by the family (kula) into which you have been born.
- Kumbha - "Pot."
- Kumbhaka - Holding of the breath, rendering the abdomen and chest like a pot.
- Kundalini - Cosmic energy that manifests along the spine and within the chakras (q.v.); the source and force of all experience.
- Kurma - "Tortoise"; name of an avatara of Vishnu.
- Laya - "Rhythm, dissolution;" see Pralaya.
- Lila - "Cosmic play"; distinct from Krida (q.v.). The divine play of Rishis and deities, especially Krishna and Rama, is called Lila, cosmic pastimes in which They are always in control.
- Linga - The phallic shaped symbol of Shiva.

Ma - Vimalananda's generic term for the Mother Goddess, the cosmic potentiality for creation. All females were to him embodiments of this universal principle of motherhood and motherliness.

Madhu - "Honey." Only honey can offer sweetness to the body without being digested first.

Madhura - This word has the suffix 'ra' following "madhu". The 'ra' refers to the Fire Element. Anything that is madhura must first be digested before its sweetness can be released into the system. Of the four levels of speech only Para is truly madhu. All other levels are madhura to various degrees because they must first be digested by the listener before their effect can be felt.

Madhyama - "Middle, in between"; the second level of speech, midway between the mundane and the spiritual; mental speech or intention.

Madira - "Wine", one of the Five M's. Esoterically, Fire, of the five elements.

Maha - "Great, immense, cosmic."

Maha Atharvan - Designation of a Maha Kaula whose Kundalini is completely awakened; As such he has gone beyond the limitations of the Atharva Veda, which is the source of Tantra.

Maha Bhava Samadhi - Emotional highlights, a state of madness with uncontrollable love and joy.

Maha Maya - "Great or cosmic illusion"; the covering on the individual self.

Mahakala - The God of Death.

Maha Kaula - Designation of a Kaula after a ritual initiatory bath (abhisheka) has been performed on him.

Mahanubhavi - "Great Experiencer", said of Rishis (q.v.).

Mahapurusha - "Great Soul"; refers to any being who has become immortal as a result of sadhana (q.v.). Rishis (q.v.), Munis (q.v.), Naths and Siddhas are all Mahapurushas.

Maharaj - "Great King"; also a common designation of a saint, who has

achieved dominion over the spiritual world.

Maha Rasa - Transcendental flavor.

Maha Ratri - "Great Night", otherwise called Maha Shiva Ratri, occurring on the night before the new moon during the lunar month of Magha (February or early March).

Mahavira Balavant - "Great and Powerful Hero", description of Hanuman.

Maithuna - "Sexual intercourse," one of the Five M's. Esoterically, Ether, of the five elements.

Mamsa - "Meat," one of the Five M's. Esoterically, Air, of the five elements.

Manda - "Embellishment; creation."

Mandana - "Decorating, adorning; creating."

Mantra Siddhi - "Perfection of mantra"; the result of successful sadhana such as purushcharana (q.v.); the manifestation of the deity inherent in the mantra.

Mantra Chaitanya - A stage of sadhana (q.v.), beyond tadrupata (q.v.), when there is total union of consciousness and mantra.

Manu - A being who is the progenitor of the races who live on the earth during a Manvantara (q.v.).

Manvantara - A period of time comprising seventy cycles of the Four Yugas (q.v.).

Marga - "Path."

Marjana - Part of a purushcharana during which one's mantra is recited while water is sprinkled about the body (marjana).

Maryada - "Bounded, encompassed."

Maryada Purushottama - Perfection Encompassed; said of Rama.

Matsya - "Fish;" the name of the fish incarnation of Vishnu. One of the Five M's; esoterically, Water, of the five elements.

Maya - "Illusion"; usually indicates cosmic illusion.

Maya Shakti - The power of unconsciousness or objectivity which identifies with the world, the manifestation

of the Absolute.

Megha - "Cloud"; name of a raga (q.v.). If you want rain you play Megha in a certain way and rain will come.

Mleccha - "Barbarian"; one of the common Sanskrit words for any foreigner.

Moha - "Delusion."

Moha Ratri - "Night of Delusion", which is Krishna's birth night, occurring in the month of Shravana (August or early September).

Mudra - "Parched grain", one of the Five M's. Esoterically, Earth, of the five elements.

Muladhara - The first chakra, located at the perineum.

Munda - "Skull."

Munda Sadhana - A spiritual practice that employs skulls.

Muni - An advanced being (yet lower than a Rishi [q.v.]), who communicates telepathically or through the eyes.

Nada - "Sound."

Nada Brahman - The music of the spheres, the Absolute expressed as the sound Om.

Nada Yoga - Sadhanas which employ music. In Nada Yoga the Nada Brahman is worshipped.

Nadi - Ethereal nerves; the body has 72,000, which are conduits of prana (q.v.).

Naga - "Serpent, naked"; a naked Sadhu who gives up everything except his fire.

Naga Kanya - "Serpent princess."

Nara - "Man."

Narasimha - "Man-lion", the name of this avatara of Vishnu.

Narayana - A name of God, esp. of Vishnu.

Nath - "Lord"; a highly advanced being, an Aghori.

Niranjana - "Stainless."

Nirvikalpa - "Without option."

Nirvikalpa Samadhi - A state of consciousness in which all dualities are finally transcended and only aware-

ness of the Paramatma (Ultimate Reality) remains. No consciousness of body or individuality is left.

Nishkalanka - "Stainless"; name of Kalki, the final Avatara of Vishnu.

Nivrtti - Inward movement of consciousness toward its source.

Niyama - The second limb of yoga, internal discipline.

Nyasa - Ritual placement of a deity in a part of the body.

Ojas - That essence of physical energy which produces the aura as well as immunity (Ayurveda).

Paan - A common digestive consisting of the highly astringent areca nut and other ingredients wrapped in the pungent betel leaf.

Pakhawaj - A large two-headed drum.

Para - "Beyond"; the fourth and highest level of speech, purely telepathic. Only Rishis can access Para.

Parashurama - "Rama with the axe"; the sixth avatara of Vishnu.

Pasha - "Noose."

Pashu - "Animal"; Vimalananda's etymology: "he who is snared (like an animal for sacrifice) by a pasha", referring to any of the Eight Snares (Ashta Pasha.)

Pashyanti - "Seeing"; the third level of speech, seeing with the divine eye, clairvoyant perception. Certain immortals, including Naths and Munis use pashyanti.

Pitri - "Father; deceased ancestor."

Pitri Tarpana - A ritual performed for a deceased human, usually a father or mother or other progenitor, to satisfy any lingering cravings that individual might have had. Properly performed, this assures the individual an auspicious rebirth and enables him or her to maintain their spiritual progression.

Prahlada - Son of the demon king Hiranyakashipu (q.v.); a devotee of Vishnu.

Pralaya - The periodic dissolution of the universe in which everything is returned to to the first (pra-thama) rhythm (laya): the Absolute. This occurs at the end of each Kali Yuga,



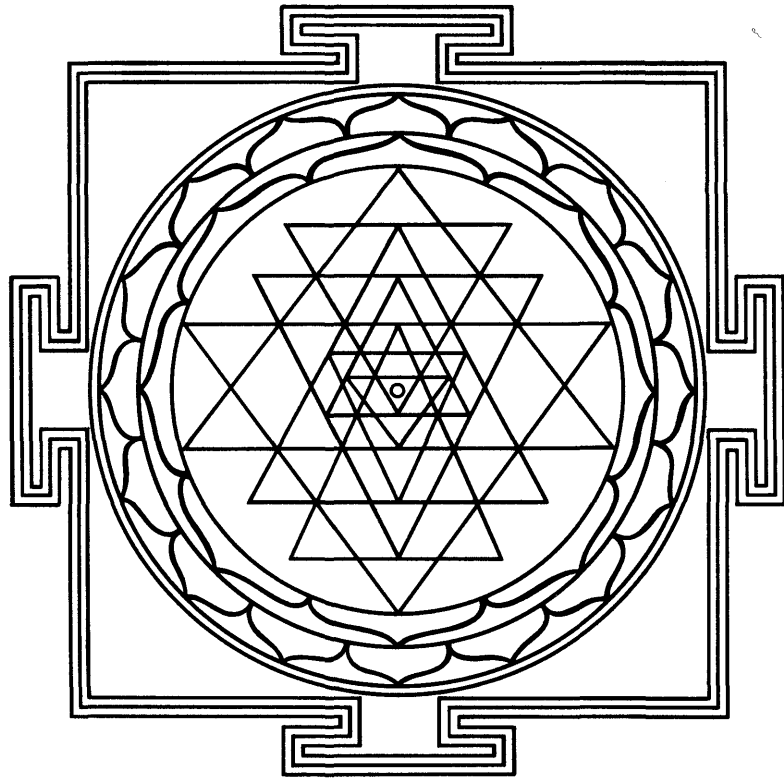
usually caused by natural calamities.  
 Prana - "Breath, life force." The five major breaths are prana (the forward-moving breath that regulates the process of breathing), apana (the downward-moving breath that regulates evacuation), samana (the evenly-distributing breath that regulates digestion), vyana (the all-pervasive breath that provides movements of the limbs and joints), and udana (the upward-moving breath that pervades the head).  
 Prana Pratishtha - "Establishing prana"; a rite in which prana is infused into an image of a deity.  
 Pranayama - "Control of the Breath"; any practice of breath-control.  
 Prasad - Any substance, usually food, which has been offered to a deity or saint, or to the image of a deity or saint, and which is then partaken of by a disciple or devotee. Prasad is supposed to contain a tiny amount of the deity's or saint's Shakti, which can exert a spiritualizing effect on the partaker.  
 Prasadika vani - "Words gifted from God."  
 Pratyahara - "Withdrawal" of the senses; the fourth limb of classical yoga.  
 Pravrtti - External movement of consciousness toward manifestation.  
 Prayoga - "Procedure"; any ritual or meditational procedure  
 Prema - "Love, esp. romantic love."  
 Puja - "Ritual adoration", especially of a deity or guru, with objects symbolic of purity, divinity, or grace such as flowers, incense, sweet fruit, coconut, etc. However, puja can also be performed mentally, and Aghoris can perform external puja with impure objects such as menstrual blood and feces.  
 Purnatmaka - "One whose nature is fullness."  
 Purnatmaka Purushottama - Perfection Personified, said of Krishna.  
 Purnima - "Full-moon."  
 Purushcharana - A lengthy and highly

controlled sadhana designed to achieve Mantra Siddhi.  
 Mantra Siddhi - For that you need to follow a specific process called purushcharana. First determine how many repetitions of japa you can do in a year. You must then do the same number every day. After completing that, ten percent of the total number must be offered as oblations into a homa fire. Then ten percent of that number must be offered into water (tarpana). Ten percent of that number must be then recited as you sprinkle water about your body (marjana). Finally, ten percent of that number is offered as bhोजना, gifts of food, usually to children.  
 Purushottama - "Supreme person, highest being."  
 Pushiti - "Grace, prosperity."  
 Pushiti Marga - A path (marga) of Krishna devotion founded by Vallabhacharya (1479-1531).  
 Raga - "Melody"; any Indian musical scale.  
 Rajya - "Kingdom."  
 Rakshasa - "Demon."  
 Rama Rajya - "Rama's kingdom", symbolic of the ideal state wherein peace, harmony and dharma prevail.  
 Rasatmaka - "Full of blissful emotion", said of Krishna.  
 Rasa - "Flavor, emotion."  
 Rasa Vidya - "Knowledge of flavor"; Tantric alchemy.  
 Ratri - "Night."  
 Ravana - Name of the demon king who abducted Rama's wife Sita, later killed by Rama.  
 Ravi - "Sun."  
 Rishi - Lit. "Seer." Anything a Rishi sees or perceives becomes reality, because a Rishi is an ethereal being of the highest class, one who is almost totally unlimited, who can travel anywhere in the cosmos and do anything at all. The Rishis "saw" the hymns of the Vedas, from which all the knowledge of ancient India was derived.

Rnanubandhana - The bondage of karmic debt.  
 Roti - Generic name for Indian bread, usually indicating a chappati.  
 Rudra - Lit. "the Crier," or "He Who makes others cry." Rudra is the ancient name for Shiva, the god of death, and is so called because He makes everyone cry who comes into contact with Him, because He separates them from their limited existence, to which they are tightly attached.  
 Rupatita - "Beyond form."  
 Sadashiva - "Eternal Shiva", the state in which Shiva and Shakti are united. Sadashiva's left side is female and right side male, united through the operation of Kundalini.  
 Sadhaka - One who practices a sadhana.  
 Sadhana - Any spiritual practice. Aghora Sadhana is designed to replace the Aghori's personality with his deity's personality by creation of the deity's form in the Aghori's subtle body.  
 Sadhu - "A good person"; a wandering religious mendicant.  
 Saguna - "With attribute, with form"; The Absolute can be expressed as Saguna or manifested, such as the form of a deity, or Nirguna, formless and unmanifest.  
 Samadhi - A state of profound or one-pointed consciousness, trance.  
 Samagri - "Collection, assemblage, especially of materials used for worship."  
 Samaya - "Time, occasion"; especially for regular functions such as worship or eating.  
 Sampradaha - "Complete incineration."  
 Sampradaya - "Sect, tradition."  
 Samsara - The cycle of birth and death, ensnarement in the web of worldly existence.  
 Samskara - Personality characteristic.  
 Samyama - "Complete control."  
 Sangama - "Confluence", as of rivers meeting.  
 Sanjivani - An herb that can restore the dead to life, brought from the Himala-

yas by Hanuman to save Lakshmana, the brother of Rama.  
 Sankalpa - "Intention; certainty."  
 Sankhya - "Number", e.g. the number of repetitions of japa that must be performed.  
 Sarangi - A mid-sized string instrument played with a bow.  
 Sarvavidya - The totality of manifested knowledge. This is a Siddhi which involves control of all Shakti in the cosmos.  
 Satya Yuga - "The eon of truth"; the first and longest of the four yugas. In Satya Yuga, in which dharma or righteousness operates at maximum capacity, there is no disease or discord, and people obtain everything they need by power of will.  
 Setu - "Bridge."  
 Setu Bandha - The building of the bridge by Hanuman's army of monkeys from India to Lanka in order for Rama's army to cross the waters and rescue Sita. Esoterically, the internal Setu Bandha connects the Muladhara Chakra to the Manipura Chakra, bridging the Svadhishthana Chakra.  
 Shaivism - Sectarian worship of Shiva or his aspects.  
 Shakarpala - A type of sweet.  
 Shakti - Energy; the ability to perform some action. Shakti is always female in Indian philosophy.  
 Shaktipat - "Descent of Shakti."  
 Shaktipat Diksha - "Initiation by transference of Shakti."  
 Shalagrama - Fossil ammonite representative of Vishnu.  
 Shat - "Six."  
 Shat Prayoga - "Six Rituals or Procedures"; rituals of black magic which cause death, delusion, discord, hatred, obstruction, and enchantment.  
 Shava - A corpse.  
 Shavasana - A yoga pose (asana) in which the practitioner lies down like a corpse (shava) in order to release and relax completely.

- Shita - "Cool."
- Shruti - "That which is heard", indicating the Veda because it has been transmitted orally.
- Shuddha - "Pure, purified."
- Shuddha Advaita - "Pure non-dualism"; name of the philosophy of the Pushti Marga founded by Vallabhacharya.
- Shuddhi - "Purification."
- Shudra - "Laborer"; member of the hereditary castes of laborers.
- Shunya - "Emptiness, nothingness"; in the Shunya state all names and forms become extinct, and one is only aware of one's own individuality. The entire universe is contained in the Shunya state, in unmanifested form.
- Siddha - An "accomplished one." Anyone who has obtained a Siddhi, or supernatural accomplishment, is a Siddha. Vimalananda restricted his use of the word Siddha to indicate those beings who have achieved immortality.
- Siddhi - "Perfection, accomplishment"; especially success at sadhana.
- Simha - "Lion."
- Six Tastes - An Ayurvedic category: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent or spicy, and astringent.
- Smarahara - Name of Shiva. After the God of Love (Smara) disturbed his meditation, Shiva destroyed (hara) him with a single glance.
- Smashan - A charnel ground; an area in which dead bodies are burned or buried. This word is derived from "ash-mashana," or "place where rocks lie," which suggests that burial was once more common in India than it now is.
- Smrti - "Memory, that which is remembered"; recorded tradition, distinct from Shruti, the Veda, revealed tradition.
- Sthana - "Location."
- Sthapana - "Establishing."
- Sudarshana - "Well-seeing."
- Sudarshana Chakra - Vishnu's discus.
- Sura - A god (identical to deva).
- Surya - "Sun."
- Sushumna - The central nadi through which the Kundalini Shakti travels.
- Swapneshvari - "Goddess of Dreams."
- Svatantra - "Independent, self-functioning", a primary goal of Tantra.
- Tadrupata - "A state of being similarly formed"; a stage of sadhana, beyond tanmayata (q.v.), in which the practitioner becomes identical with the deity.
- Tanmayata - "Togetherness"; a stage of success at sadhana in which the practitioner is with the chosen deity at all times.
- Tapas - "Heat, austerities, penance"; karmas are burned away by tapas.
- Tara - The Goddess Tara, She Who Causes One to Cross Over; from the Sanskrit, "to cross, swim."
- Tarpana - Offerings into water.
- Tattva - Lit. "thatness." A category of existence. For example, the Three Gunas are Tattvas because they are attributes, and the category of attribution is a Tattva. The Atma is also a Tattva.
- Tirthankara - "Ford-Maker"; name for any of the 24 founders of the Jain religion. Esoterically, a Tirthankara is one whose Kundalini has successfully passed through all Six Chakras.
- Trataka - A form of meditation in which one stares fixedly at an object such as a candle flame. If done properly it can open the third eye. In Treta Yuga people used trataka to obtain prana from the sun.
- Treta Yuga - "The eon of three-quarters"; in which one-fourth of the dharma or righteousness of Satya Yuga is lost and three-quarters remains. In Treta Yuga, sacrifice (yajna) is the main sadhana.
- Triveni Sangama - The confluence, at Allahabad or Prayaga, of the three rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the unseen Sarasvati. Esoterically, it is located at the Ajna Chakra in the forehead, where the Surya and Chandra Nadis, the energy channels of the right and left sides, respectively, which generate heat and coolness, meet the Sushumna (q.v.).
- Tulsi - Holy basil.
- Turiya - "The fourth"; the state of consciousness beyond the three ordinary states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, in which one realizes identity with the Absolute Brahman.
- Upanayana - The Vedic ceremony of investiture of the sacred thread (Jahnavi [q.v.], Yajnopavita), the Gayatri mantra, and eligibility to study the Veda.
- Vaikhari - The first and lowest level of speech; vocal or physical speech, it can only be used for mundane communication with external objects.
- Vaishya - "Merchant"; a member of the merchant class.
- Vajroli - A yogic practice in which fluid is sucked into the penis or vagina by muscular force. During the sex act Vajroli can be used to suck up the partner's secretions for both physical and spiritual benefit.
- Valmika - "Anthill or termite mound."
- Vamana - The dwarf incarnation of Vishnu, he rescued the world from the designs of the demon king Bali.
- Vanara - "Monkey"; Vimalananda's etymology: after evolution (va) a monkey has the potential to become a human (nara).
- Vani - "Speech"
- Varaha - The boar Avatara of Vishnu.
- Vasana - A tendency of the individual personality which produces habitual modes of action. often inherited from one's ancestors. Vasanas make people do what they do in spite of themselves because of the power of the inherent tendency.
- Videha - "Bodiless"; name of the kingdom of Janaka (q.v.).
- Vidya - "Knowledge."
- Vidyut - "Lightning."
- Vidyut Lata - "Lightning creeper"; said of Kundalini.
- Vijnana - Practical spiritual knowledge, higher than jnana. In vijnana one becomes a Siddha (q.v.), an immortal, because the ego has become absolutely purified.
- Vijnani - One who possesses Vijnana.
- Vikalpa - "Option; uncertainty."
- Vimala - "Stainless."
- Vimalananda - "Stainless bliss"; a proper name.
- Virodha Bhakti - "Perverse devotion"; said, for example, of Hiranyakashipu, whose hatred of Vishnu was so powerful that he remembered Him constantly.
- Visha - "Poison."
- Vishesha - "Special, extraordinary."
- Vishuddha - The Fourth Chakra, taken from the words vishesha shuddhi ("special purification")
- Wah - An exclamation of amazement, surprise or revelation.
- Yajna - Vedic fire ritual. In yajna, deities in ethereal worlds are invoked, then fed with the fragrance of smoke from the various burnt offerings.
- Yajnopavita - The sacred thread worn by Brahmans and others (also jahnavi)
- Yakshini - A Hindu angel; an ethereal being who was once human and because of his ability in sadhana attained to this status after death.
- Yama - Also called Dharmaraja, or King of Righteousness. He is the judge of the dead, evaluating their activities while on Earth and determining which paradise or hell they go to while awaiting rebirth. Also, the first limb of yoga, external discipline.
- Yantra - A diagram which acts as a receptacle for the power of a mantra. Yantra is the ritual by which the Yantra is empowered by the mantra. Any substance can be used for a Yantra, but Vimalananda averred that the best of all possible Yantras is the human body.
- Yogini - See Bhairavi.
- Yuga - The Four Yugas or eras are Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dvapara Yuga and our era, Kali Yuga.



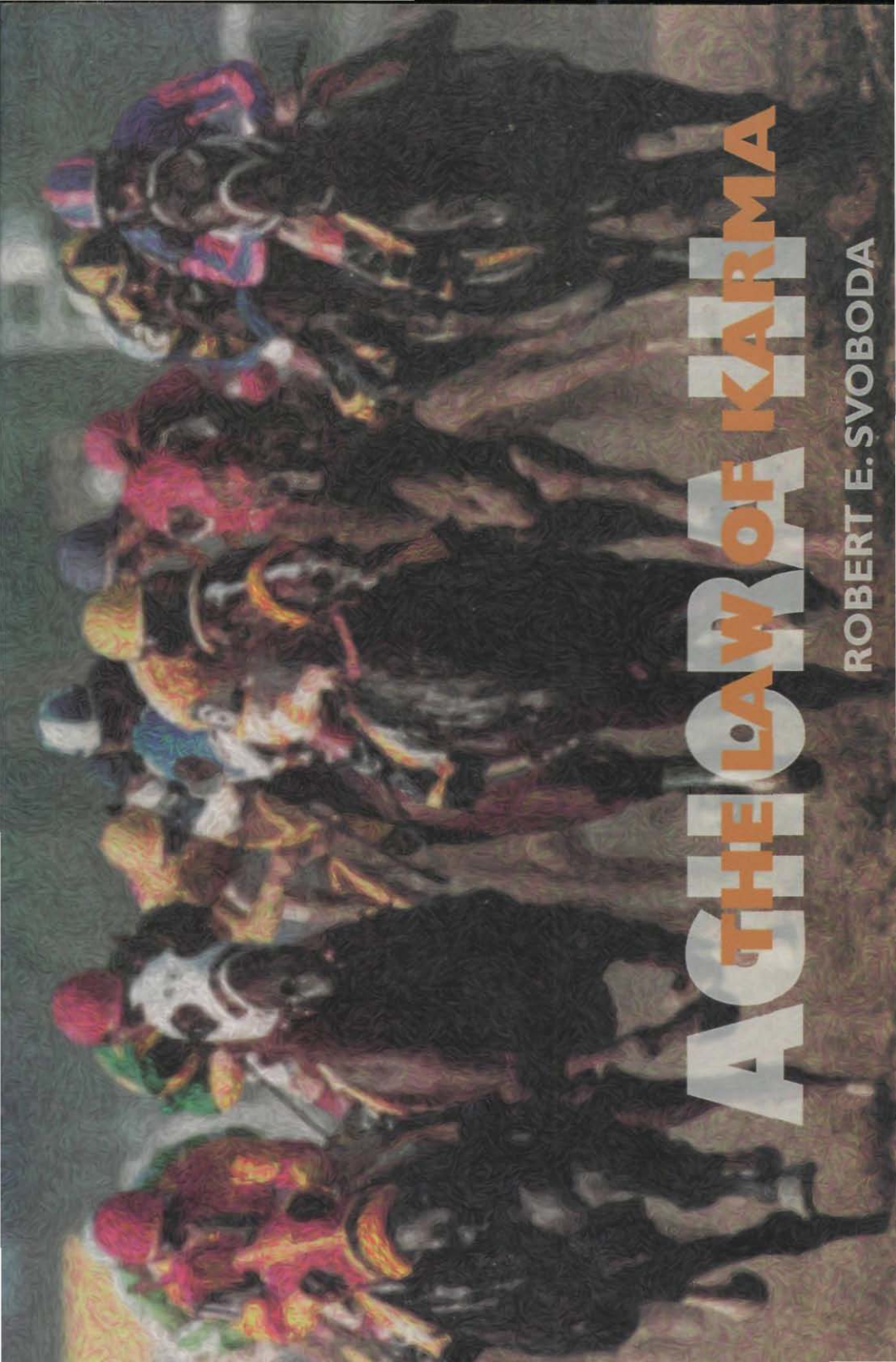
**Shri Yantra**

(continued from page 12)

The Mahavidya goddess Tripurasundari is also known as Sodasi—'the divine sixteen year old goddess.' She is of a beautiful red complexion with four arms holding a bow, noose, arrow and trident hook. She sits astride the prone body of her white Shiva in sexual union, supported by a throne whose four pedestals are the gods Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Indra. This form of the Shri Yantra was worshipped for many decades by Telang Swami in the Anapurna temple of Benares.

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# A THE LAW OF KARMA

ROBERT E. SVOBODA

# **AGHORA III**

## **THE LAW OF KARMA**

**ROBERT E. SVOBODA**

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	7
1. STONEY .....	43
2. ELAN .....	73
3. TEASERS AND STALLIONS .....	95
4. TIMIR .....	127
5. SCARLET RUBY .....	153
6. THE CITY OF DELUSION .....	183
7. REPAY .....	209
8. REDSTONE .....	237
9. PRAKRITI SIDDHI .....	283
EPILOGUE .....	313
GLOSSARY .....	317

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## INTRODUCTION

*It is always better to live with reality, because otherwise, without fail, reality will come to live with you.* —The Aghori Vimalananda

IF TO BE RELIGIOUS, in the truest sense of that much misunderstood word, is to thirst for water from reality's fountain, then to walk the spiritual path is to turn your compass toward its ever-flowing well. The organized religions, which have set up camps downstream from that spring, all provide sketchy maps that trace a single trail to the source. The one map illuminating all the tracks leading spiritwards through the diverse terrains of existence is accessible only through the world's sole dogma-free spiritual trekking agency: *Aghora*. Aghora, which literally means "unagitated," teaches *aghoris* (its practitioners) to focus and intensify their craving for reality until they learn how to transcend all that galls (the *ghora*) in life. Then no internal or external stimulus, however ordinarily 'agitating,' will be able to interrupt or interfere with their one-pointed guzzling of the nectar of being.

I obtained my orientation toward reality from my mentor, the Aghori Vimalananda, who showed little regard for organized systems of belief:

"I have never believed in religion. Religions are all limited because they concentrate only on one aspect of truth. That is why they are always fighting amongst one another, because they all think they are in sole possession of the truth. But I say there is no end to knowledge, so there is no use in trying to confine it to one scripture or one holy book or one experience. This is why I say, when people ask what religion I follow, 'I don't believe in Sampradaya (sect), I believe in Sampradaha (incineration): Burn down everything which is getting in the way of your perception of truth."

(Robert E. Svoboda, *Aghora, At the Left Hand of God, Brotherhood of Life*, Albuquerque, 1986, p.167)

Aghoris, who do their damndest to stand up to reality without having to lean on any reassuring doctrine or creed, strive always to do exactly what must be done at the moment when it becomes necessary. They learn what they need to know in the *smashan*, the cremation ground, worshipping death that they may die to their restrictions and be reborn into purity of perception. They accept with love everything that comes their way, knowing that whatever reality serves up is after all the meal that their karmas have created for them.

The Law of Karma, which is one of the most profound and fiendishly perplexing of reality's axioms, is the Law of Cause and Effect, the law of "as you sow, so shall you reap." The oldest of the Upanishads expresses it this way: "Truly, one becomes good by good action and bad by bad action." (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* III.2.13). This law is better known to most of us as Newton's Third Law of Motion: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. The mandate of this succinctly complex law regulates the potentially limitless implications of every small act performed by every actor within the manifested universe, meteor and microorganism alike. Everyone lives within the precincts of the ubiquitous Law of Karma, whether or not they accept its reality. Ignorance of this Law is no defense in the Court of Cause and Effect. As Lord Krishna declared in the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, "Karma is the guru; nay, it is the Supreme Lord."

Every physical or mental action you perform and with which you identify yourself as the doer becomes a karma for you and produces a reaction which you will eventually have to experience. Like everyone else, aghori or atheist, you consume at each moment of your life that portion of your karmic grain that has finally matured. Likewise, each of your self-identified actions or reactions today shapes your future by seeding yet further reactions. Every individual being is a karmic slate of coming attractions and repulsions. Though we all physically share the same Earth-space and Earth-time, our individual causative schemata create for us individual universes of experience. There are as many universes as there are beings, each locating the environment—war or peace, wealth or penury, misery or ecstasy—that each assortment of karmas requires. Since limitations of time and space prevent everything from happening in our world all at once, the Law of Karma schedules its events to occur just in time, every time, in each cosmos large and small. Every interaction between two different universes of experience creates its own karma which duly propagates its own reaction. The more strongly you identify with your karmas, the more closely your experience will conform to the reaction they promise.

Though very few people ever graduate from quotidian religion to authentic Aghora, everyone is free to make use of the truths that the world's aghoris have sucked from reality's teat. Arguably the most fundamental of these real-

izations is this: the essence of living with reality is to continually surrender to what is. You have already created your own personal universe with your karmas and now you must live in it. Everyone who has sown the wind will eventually reap the whirlwind. However, most people try to ride out their karmic storms by barricading themselves inside psychological houses no building however weatherproof can withstand every tornado, earthquake, flood and conflagration. Almost everyone accordingly finds himself or herself existentially homeless one day or another. Religions make good ideational roadhouses: you are free to shelter yourself under these roofs for as long as you like—or at least until a tempest blows in and causes that shelter to collapse.

A good aghori recognizes the innate flimsiness of all doctrinal thatch and knows there is no security of any kind to be had in life except the surety that each of us is going to die. Many aghoris forestall future personal derangement by emigrating to the *smashan* where they can live their lives with nothing more substantial above their heads than God's never-failing umbrella. Vimalananda, who could be one of the most sophisticated of philosophers when the mood struck him, never mistook philosophy for reality. Time and again during the more than eight years that I was with him, the faith he displayed in Nature's ultimate beneficence brought home to me the value of capitulating to what is. Time and again I was wowed when I saw how his submission to reality solved his problems. It was that awe that inspired me to write this book.

The Law of Karma, the unimaginable complexity of which has cowed the greatest of scholars, loses some of its ability to dismay when viewed through the prism of surrender. If having decided to surrender you are willing to keep surrendering, and then you surrender some more, you will simplify your personal choreography to the more manageable—if still convoluted—process of resolving how, when, and what to yield. But though this simplification, properly applied, makes karma easier to work through it in no way neutralizes the Law of Karma's power to mystify and consternate. Nor does it render karma's logic any more linear, as the Mughal Emperor Akbar discovered in the following, possibly apocryphal tale:

## WHATEVER GOD DOES IS FOR THE BEST

The Emperor Akbar once developed a chronic non-healing sore on his left pinky finger. It became so severe that his physicians eventually decided the



whole finger would have to be amputated. The idea of losing a part of his body so upset the emperor that he sought a second opinion from his dear friend, confidant and advisor Raja Birbal. Birbal told his liege, "If the doctors say it has to come off, then it has to come off."

Akbar told Birbal, "Here I am a very religious man, who makes all the proper donations at the proper times, and still God is taking away part of my body? What have I done wrong?"

Birbal replied, "Your majesty, whatever God does is for the best."

This remark irritated Akbar to no end. He grudgingly agreed to the operation, but decided simultaneously to teach Birbal a lesson. His opportunity came some weeks later when the two of them, out hunting with a few retainers, came across a dry well. Akbar promptly commanded his men to deposit the astonished Birbal into it. When the emperor rode over on his charger and bent over the well's rim Birbal shouted up at him, "Why are you doing this?" Akbar shouted down to his friend, "Birbal, whatever God does is for the best!" Then, to let Birbal stew for a bit, he rode off alone to a different part of the forest, thinking, "Now we will see what good God can do for him there!" Birbal meanwhile sat in the well, cursing his fate and wondering what was going to happen to him next.

All at once Akbar was surrounded by a band of ruffians. This particular pack of thieves selected only rich people as their victims, first robbing them and then offering them as human sacrifices. The highwaymen accordingly stripped Akbar of all his clothes and jewelry, and the bandit chief told him, "Prepare yourself for death!"

Seeing his end approaching, Akbar began to feel Birbal's absence severely. For, Birbal had always been able to extract the emperor from otherwise hopeless situations. The gangleader meanwhile busily inspected Akbar, as he did all his prospective victims, to make sure that they carried no untoward sign. When he got down to Akbar's missing pinky he shouted in dismay, "Egad! You are not whole! You are not fit to be offered to my Goddess!" Disappointed, the thug ordered Akbar to don his clothes and ornaments quickly, and to depart thence.

Being told that he was unfit to be offered hurt Akbar's feelings and infuriated his ruler's ego. He maintained his presence of mind, though, and as he dressed he thought to himself, "Birbal was right: had I not lost my little finger I would have been dead today." He mounted his horse and rode directly back to the dry well and immediately ordered his waiting men to raise Birbal who now was wondering why the emperor had changed his mind. Akbar began by apologizing to Birbal, and then told him, "I was so upset with you I was actually considering leaving you here to die, but did I ever learn my lesson! In

truth, everything God does is for best!" The emperor then narrated the whole adventure to his amazed audience.

Suddenly Akbar furrowed his brow and asked his friend, "But now tell me, Birbal, if 'whatever God does is for the best,' what good came of your being in the well?"

Birbal told him, "Isn't it obvious, Refuge of the World? If I had not been in the well I would have been captured with you, and after the bandit had rejected you I would have been next in line for sacrifice. And since I am not missing any parts of my body he would have sacrificed me!"

"The Lord is truly marvellous!" repeated Akbar distractedly, stroking his beard in wonder as they rode to the palace.

## LESSONS IN SIMPLICITY

Vimalananda made "whatever God does is for the best" the refrain for many of his adventures. For, early in life reality had shown him, as it had shown to Akbar and Birbal, how wise it is to cooperate with the universal flow. Vimalananda rarely tried to force his will on the world; when he did he usually lived to regret it. He openly declared his failings as warnings to others, and openly identified in others similar foibles when he felt that such pinpointing could teach valuable lessons. For, the teaching of lessons was one of his great interests in life. So concerned was he that his listeners not misinterpret his message that he often pared his expressions down to their least common denominators. He often observed that "unnecessary detail enmeshes people in *maya*. The mind loves to learn; in fact, the Sanskrit word for mind is *manas*, that which measures or compares. And the power by which *manas* measures is *maya*." In his opinion, when you try too hard to pin down a thing's detail all you end up pinning down is its shadow, the illusion that is its *maya*.

Vimalananda's penchant for reduction to fundamentals has led some people to complain that he willingly distilled karma's daunting intricacy into a relatively unsophisticated theory of brute retribution. Though there is of course more to the Law of Karma than the simple formulation, "If you killed Michael last time, Michael will kill you next time," this criticism seems to me to be unjustified. Though Vimalananda did not waste his time debating karma's theoretical minutiae, he was well acquainted with them and he would speak in karmic technicalities whenever he had an audience who could appreciate them. However, he did expect that most people would mis-

understand karma's precepts. I have seen little to suggest he was wrong to do so. The sad truth is that today the poor Law of Karma, which has long been centerstage in India's theater of thought, has reached its conceptual nadir in the world of post-industrial civilization. We of the late twentieth century have mutated it into a mammoth fad, a causative catchword, a universal excuse. Modern people speak glibly of those with whom they "have karma," and of it being "their karma" to get this promotion or buy that new trinket. Our philosophical carpetbaggers have even pressed it into the service of Californian used-car dealer propaganda!

Unfortunately, many Indian thinkers and systems of thought are just as guilty of willfully perverting karma's basic nature without the excuse of ignorance that our hedonistic Western lotus-eaters might plead. Reality crouches perpetually before you in India, gazing steadfastly into your face, cuffing you purposefully about the head whenever you dare to turn away from it. Indian reality's very inexorability has given innumerable seers and thinkers no alternative to devoting their lives to the contemplation of its chief cause, the Law of Karma. Indian thinkers began in early antiquity to develop and test sophisticated hypotheses of karma, inspired by the revelations that India's *rishis* (seers) gathered with their inner sight as they performed intense *sadhanas* (spiritual practices). While certain of these ancient philosophies are still vigorous, others have lost their vitality and have been mummified into systems or fossilized into dogmas by heavy-thinking hair-splitters. Some Indian texts even apply shameless, self-congratulatory sophistry to "prove" the validity of their competing versions of the Law of Karma with "one-size-fits-all" explanations.

## KARMIC THEORY

The pervasive temptation to oversimplify the Law of Karma rises from the collision of the irresistible force of humanity's innate need to comprehend cause and effect with the immovable object of karma's extreme reluctance to divulge itself to humans. *Gahana karmano gatih* ("karma runs indescribably deep"): The simple Law of Cause and Effect sets into motion such a near-infinity of past, present, and future ramifications for each purposely performed act that it effectively precludes a complete description of the entire karmic slate of even one living being. When it comes to comprehending the sum of the karmas of every living being we can go nowhere at all without the systematizing help of a theoretical model.

There is no lack of competing explanations of causation, for any cogent explanation of cause and effect, including those of physics, chemistry and biology, can function as a theory of karma. We could even elucidate into a theory of karma some psychological conjecture which details how specific events in the past influence an individual's present and may shape his or her future. But scientific causation notions are crimped by their materialism, which limits cause and effect observations to the physical reactions which arise from physical actions. Psychological theories are similarly defective to the extent that they restrict themselves to the limited domain of the psyche. A truly efficacious model of karma represents a system of causation relevant to all conceivable states of existence, to anything that can be named.

Karma being so intricate, decent theories of karma are as difficult to objectively "prove" or "disprove" as is the theory of quantum mechanics. One practical difficulty with testing either theory is that cause and effect is only rarely linear. One cause sometimes produce one effect, but far more commonly a number of cooperating, concomitant causes are needed to produce a single effect. And a distinct cause quickly spirals into a cascade of interconnected effects. Also, while neither sort of theory is inherently unprovable, neither can be observed by an external observer in the manner approved by scientific materialism. Both karma theory and quantum mechanics refuse to accept that observers can exist independent of the systems they observe. Spiritual science goes so far as to take the observer's own internal universe and its states as its experimental field. For it is within that field that karma is produced and stored.

Fortunately, it is not my task to attempt to prove or disprove anything other than that my mentor, the Aghori Vimalananda, possessed his own unique vision of the Law of Karma which he tried at all times to remain aware of and act in accordance with. Though many of his favorite spiritual processes are preached by certain 'recognized' lineages of Aghoris, Vimalananda refused to denominate himself. Instead he shopped the metaphysical mall, donning and doffing assumptions until he found one that resonated with his experience, which he would then wear so long as it continued to fit. Over time he tailored for himself the philosophical garment which he wore while I knew him, apparel which was basically Tantric in design. This makes the *darshana* (philosophical vision) that underlies Tantra is a good vantage from which to survey Vimalananda's world view.

## TANTRA

Among the beliefs that Vimalananda shared with orthodox Tantrics are:

- ◆ that the One Reality creates, underlies, and weaves together (the word tantra derives from a root meaning “to weave”) the multiplicity of matter;
- ◆ that the Oneness of Reality is clearly perceived only when all the many varieties of personal obstructions have been removed;
- ◆ that these obstructions can be removed by manipulating the matter of which they are formed;
- ◆ that there is no substitute for a personal guru who shows you your path by gifting you a spark of living knowledge. (There is no Tantra without a guru.)

The “matter” from which we and our obstructions are created includes both the dense physical material from which our bodies are built and the thoughts, attitudes and emotions that make up our minds. Tantric practice is karmic engineering within this field of name and form, orchestration of substance and action into result. First you direct new causes against previous effects to nullify adverse influences on your awareness, then you unleash yet further actions to negate the influence of the nullifying actions.

While all Tantras—Buddhist, Jain, or Veda-inspired (like most “Hindus” Vimalananda hated the word “Hindu”)—play current karmas against pre-existing karmas, the various Tantric systems disagree over the question of how cause and effect mutually relate. While the Buddhists, and certain Vedics like the *Mimamsakas*, assert that cause and effect are separate from one another, other “Hindu” traditions aver that cause and effect are implicit in one another, even though they do not simultaneously exist in our world. According to this latter evolutionary interpretation, effect is nothing but cause seen in a different state. A seed causes the effect of tree which produces seed that produces more trees; the totality of “tree” is a sum of all its states, all of which are equally real. Vimalananda espoused this second category of karmic theory, which is known in Sanskrit as *Satkaryavada*; he expressed the essence of *Satkaryavada* as, “Cause is effect concealed, and effect is cause revealed.”

*Satkaryavada* has two variants: the *Sankhya* school sees occurrences in the world as actual transformations (*parinama*), while the school of Shankaracharya and his version of *Advaita Vedanta* (there are five major forms of *Advaita Vedanta*) sees worldly activity as nothing more than the appearance of

transformation (*vivarta*). *Sankhya* is the philosophical foundation of much of *Ayurveda* (Indian medicine) and *Jyotish* (Indian astrology), and of most *Puranas* (compendia of spiritual traditions) and Tantras. Vimalananda followed *Sankhya* in asserting that the world of duality in which karma exists is as real as the condition of absolute nonduality which is the Ultimate Reality of the universe, and that each is implicit in the other: All-in-One, One-in-All.

## SANKHYA

*Sankhya* sees the universe as a continuous evolution from a “Big Bang” event during which a sense of separateness develops within a portion of the Singularity that is the One Reality in unmanifested form. That portion of the One which sees itself as separate is known as *Prakriti* (“Nature”), and the remainder, which remembers that All is One, is referred to as *Purusha*. The Law of Karma comes into effect at the instant *Prakriti* separates from *Purusha*, the first act from which all other acts develop; it is an act motivated, it is said, by a spontaneously-arising desire within *Purusha* to produce individuals who might perceive and know It. Each atom of the cosmos contains within it a fragment of that Singular Consciousness Who desired to experience. Consciousness continually evolves by projecting itself into physical vehicles. Though it is minimal in “inert” matter and maximal in humans, a smidgen of consciousness and its resulting *souçon* of self-awareness appears in even the densest matter. Human activity is valuable in the *Sankhya* system only to the extent that it makes us more aware of that undifferentiated Consciousness.

*Prakriti* forms, limits, and finitizes. After projecting from Oneness She evolves into undifferentiated transcendent intelligence (*mahat*), which partitions itself into individual parcels of *ahamkara*, the force which produces “I-ness” in an organism. *Ahamkara* (literally, the “I-creator”), which gives living beings that sense of individual existence without which no further differentiation could occur, possesses three *gunas*, or attributes: *sattva* (equilibrium), *rajas* (activity) and *tamas* (inertia).

*Sattva* is the internalizing “I,” the subjective consciousness which resides within a being, revealing its environment. From *sattva*, the innate nature of the thinking mind, develop the ten senses: the five senses of perception—hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell—through which we take in from the world, and the five senses of action, through which we put out into the world:

speech (which represents all forms of communication), hands (creative action), feet (locomotion), genitals (reproduction) and anus (elimination).

Sattva is the most conscious of ahamkara's three qualities. Rajas is the externalizing "I," the active "I" always on the move, searching for something with which to self-identify. Tamas is the objectifying "I," the expression of unconscious individuality which veils consciousness as it evolves into the five objects of the senses: sound, touch, form, taste and odor. These in turn produce the Five Great Elements (*pancha mahabhutas*)—Space, Air, Fire, Water and Earth—which are the building blocks for everything that exists in the manifested universe, including the physical bodies of living beings.

The Sankhya philosophy maintains that embodied life is the functioning together as one unit in one place at one time of the Five Great Elements, the ten senses, the thinking mind, *ahamkara*, and the intellect, all enlivened by the individual soul, which is a reflection within the field of matter of the cosmic Purusha. Of these only the Purusha Itself is wholly and forever outside the field of the Law of Karma. Everything else that exists within the entirety of the aggregate of all possible universes is a form of matter, which makes it subject to action and reaction. Purusha is pure, passive, present consciousness which no more interacts with the events it perceives than a movie screen interacts with the pictures projected upon it. All forms of action, including all mental functions, are orchestrations of matter within the closed cause-and-effect system that is the Prakriti-field. All secondary distinctions (male/female, body/mind, rationality/intuition) are significant only within Prakriti and have not the least effect on Purusha-Consciousness Itself.

Sankhya is in a sense a species of materialist philosophy in that it teaches that even the most inconsiderable thought is as material as the doornail, and that all thinking, however hasty and offhand, is action which must create reaction. Even awareness itself is a karma-producing activity when your ahamkara, the force which self-identifies, identifies with it. Inaccurate perceptions encourage tighter bondage; proper perception promotes freedom.

As *ahamkara* solidifies your individual identity it also solidifies your attachments to your previous karmas and your current actions. All the actions you have performed and with which your ego self-identified act as seeds for karmic reactions, each of which will take its own time to mature and bear fruit. *Ahamkara* plants its seeds in the ethereal nursery known as the *karana sharira* (causal body). The karmic seeds which have collected in the causal body lie quiescent until it is time for them to sprout. Once they sprout their course becomes predestined. As they mature they produce fruit which filters down into your *sukshma sharira* (astral body). Each karma induces your astral body (which is composed of your conscious, subconscious, and uncon-

scious minds) to induce your *sthula sharira* (physical body) to put yourself into the proper place and time to enjoy the pleasant or unpleasant results of your past actions. In general, then, your physical body reflects the effects of your past actions while your astral body mirrors your present-day existence. Your causal body is your future; it determines how and where you will continue your evolution.

## FOUR KARMIC CATEGORIES

Although the cause-and-effect relationship is essentially an indivisible whole we can for easier comprehension partition it into four categories: *Sanchita*, *Prarabdha*, *Kriyamana*, and *Agama*. *Sanchita* ("heaped together") *Karma* is the sum of all past actions, known and unknown, that appear in your causal body nursery; it is Sanchita Karma that prompts some Indians to claim that the ways of karma are unfathomable. "Unknown" actions include those performed in past lives. *Prarabdha* ("set in motion") *Karma* is that portion of Sanchita Karma which is ready to be experienced by an individual during this lifetime, the fruits which have ripened and are ready to be consumed.

*Sanchita* and *Prarabdha* Karmas are in a sense "destined," or "fated" as the product of past actions that have matured. However, they are truly inevitable only to the extent that they are not modified by *Kriyamana* ("being made") *Karma* or *Agami* ("coming, arriving") *Karma*. *Agami* Karma is our capacity to envision future actions, while *Kriyamana* Karma is what we do at any moment with our capacity to will and to create. You cannot destroy your past, but neither need you permit your past to manipulate you like a puppet, since you can alter your future by acting in your present. *Kriyamana* Karma can also include *Agami* Karma, and *Kriyamana* Karma and *Agami* Karma can together be termed *Vartamana* ("current, living") *Karma*. Each of these types can be *arabdha* ("begun, undertaken") or *anarabdha* ("not commenced, dormant"). A famous agricultural analogy to this system of karmic classification equates karma with rice. This makes Sanchita Karma the already grown rice that has been harvested and stored in the granary. *Prarabdha* Karma is the small portion of that stored rice that has been removed from storage, husked, and readied for cooking and eating. *Kriyamana* Karma is the rice that is now being planted in the field to produce a future crop.

## THREE KARMIC INTENSITIES

Though some texts use the Sanskrit words *karma* and *daiva* (fate) interchangeably, fate and karma are not synonymous. The human condition always arises from the dynamic coalition of fate and free will, not by either on its own. No one is ruled only by fate, as some Indians insist, and no one's life is wholly malleable by free will, as some New Agers claim. How much Agama and Kriya-mana effort you will need to modify your fate will depend on how intense is the Prarabdha Karma in that area of your life and (to a reduced extent) in the lives of all those other beings with whom you share collective karma: your family, extended family, friends, neighbors, fellow countrypersons, nation and planet.

Tradition distinguishes three degrees of intensity in Prarabdha Karma. These may apply to one, many, or all areas of your life: *dridha*, *dridha-adridha*, and *adridha*. *Dridha* ("fixed") *Karmas* are so intense they are non-changeable. They create those seemingly "fated" events, pleasurable and painful, that either occur despite all our efforts to avoid them or fail to take place despite all our efforts to create them. The good or bad results produced by *Dridha-Adridha* ("fixed-unfixed") *Karmas* can be changed by anyone who is willing to apply the concentrated creative will needed to change them; in the absence of any sustained effort their predicted results will appear. *Adridha* ("unfixed") *Karmas* are so easily altered that you may do more or less what you please (within reason) in these areas of your life.

This current life of yours is fundamentally a swim across the river of your Prarabdha Karma. If your Prarabdha current is *dridha*, it is likely to overpower you and sweep you away, even if you are a strong swimmer. If you and your current are of roughly equal strength, you will face a *dridha-adridha* situation, and will probably make it across your river if you swim like the devil. When the current is weak your *karmas* are *adridha*, and you are unlikely to be imperiled even if you swim poorly. Free will operates here as elsewhere with each of your decisions: where and when to enter the river, how fast to set your pace, what stroke to use. Each act of free will adds to your eventual fate. If you use up your free will early on—if you exhaust yourself just before you reach the rapids—you may find that you have nothing remaining at that crucial moment when you need your reserves to try to "cheat" your fate.

In the world of finance, non-callable investments pay back their principal and fixed-term debt instruments require repayment at term only, not before. Until you invest, your money is as fluid and free as your will, but at the moment you invest you lock yourself into a result that has become "fated." Banks may fail, technologies may innovate, interest rates may skyrocket, markets

may crash, but your eventual payoff or payment is locked in. The result is now effectively "destined" unless you can use your free will to do something with these investments or loans during their terms. You will alter your fiscal destiny if you can sell your investments or create derivatives from them, or if you can pay off your higher-interest loan with one bearing a lower rate of interest. Whether or not you will be able to make such alterations will depend on the inherent value of the investment or debt, prevailing market and general economic conditions, and related factors. How possible or impossible it is for you to make such changes, i.e. how fixed or unfixed your monetary destiny is, is an expression of the degree of karmic intensity in your life in the pecuniary sphere.

Similar degrees of karmic intensity apply to every realm of your existence. *Adridha* health *karmas*, for instance, produce diseases which run their course and disappear on their own (unless you use your free will to do things to reinforce them). *Dridha-adridha* health *karmas* may produce chronic illnesses which can usually be controlled with the help of intensive therapies, but will continue to worsen if neglected. *Dridha* *karmas* in the health realm tend to produce conditions which refuse to respond even to the most heroic treatments.

Probably the most important of the karmic intensity factors is self-awareness, the force that allows you to self-identify with your actions. The more you are self-aware, the more effectively individual you can be. Humans, who appear to possess more self-awareness than do most other lifeforms, are better able to self-identify with their actions, consciously, intently, and passionately. This allows us to sow and reap more than other sentient beings can.

## REINCARNATION

The *karmas* that you perform in dizzying number—think of all the things you accomplish in the space of an hour—grow and mature at different rates, making one lifetime insufficient for you to experience all their effects (unless you happen to be immortal). Karmic theory therefore proposes that beings die and are again reborn—reincarnated—to continue working out pending reactions. What transmigrates, of course, is *Prakriti* and the principles which devolve from Her. *Purusha*, Who is eternally free, is never bound to or released from a body. *Purusha*'s sole pastime is to silently observe as the mass of *karmas* that have accumulated in your causal body steers you from life to life, permitting you to re-interact with those who helped you to create the karmic

bed in which you lie. Each time you are ready to be reborn your Prarabdha Karmas forge for you a mind and body and a milieu in which they will live. Your progress in each life is fertilized and watered by the karmic reactions that support you and is interfered with by karmas that act against your interests. Finally your terminating karmas catch up with you and kill you. The thought you think at the moment of death—a thought which will reflect either the force of the strongest karmas you performed during that lifetime, or your state of mind as you lie dying, or the force of your habits, or whatever reaction has just matured to join your karmic queue—sets you up for your next birth.

Reincarnation is so handy a concept that it has been an integral part of almost all Indian philosophies since ancient times. Implied in the Vedas themselves, its earliest clear formulations appear in the *Brihadaranyaka*, *Chandogya* and *Svetasvatara Upanishads*. By the time of the *Bhagavad Gita* reincarnation has become one of Indian thought's central concepts. The stories in the *Jataka Tales*, for example, are Gautama Buddha's experiences in previous existences which he used to teach his disciples.

Reincarnation was used in Ayurveda to explain incurable diseases, congenital deficiencies, and other inborn physical, economic and social handicaps. Ayurveda generally tried to put a positive spin on the experience by advising sufferers (advice is a karma) to be of good cheer and use their free will to try to improve their health now in expectation of an improved physique next time around. Ancient India's hegemonistic priests used this same doctrine of karma as a negative model to try to keep the majority of the common people in subordinate social positions. The priests advised the peasants that their future living conditions would improve if they would avoid rocking the karmic boat in the present, and promised the lower castes a happier future for themselves if they would pay priests to perform purifying rituals on their behalf.

Venal priests and their willingness to sell karmic indulgences were one reason that Vimalananda hated organized religions. Another reason was their tendency to confuse karma with sin. While sin is a violation of the rules of your society, religion or affinity group, karma is an innate property of the universe. If your religion enjoins you to, say, slaughter an infidel, then failing to do so will be a karma (to refuse to act is also an action) that may be a sin. By doing so you are likely to escape sin and will gain some good karma for living up to your cultural responsibilities, but you will also incur the probably bad karma involved in taking a life. The Vedas and Tantras, which teach that black magic is dangerous, unwise and productive of evil karma, also indicate that you may resort to it when you find yourself in that condition of extremity when it alone may save you or those who depend on you. Your dis-

gress will not exempt you from the karma involved, but it will at least ensure that you performed it for a worthy cause.

## DHARMA

Evil karma is evil for you because it sets you up today for a fall tomorrow. As one Tamil woman put it, karma means that “we are punished not *for* our actions, but *by* our actions.” (quoted in O’Flaherty, p. 37) A predator in one birth needs to return as prey, to earn both the points of view needed to round out the whole experience. But evil karma did not become sin until the lawgivers made it into sin. Until then it was *adharma* (“against dharma”), a state which encompasses all acts that impede or pervert the current of your existence. *Dharma*, which some people mistranslate as “duty,” others as “religion,” and yet others as “vocation,” is really “doing what you are born to do.” “Conforming to your dharma” means following that path through life and performing those actions that best agree with you as an individual in the context of the environment in which you exist. Dharma is the universal law which makes a thing what it is. The dharma of the moon to shine, of volcanoes to erupt, of boats to float, and of hyenas to laugh. Horses run, whinny, and toss their manes because it is their dharma to do so, not because they feel any moral obligation in that direction. Adharma is neither “sin” nor “evil”; it is simply a “non-conformity” with the nature of things, a crime against harmony.

Plants, animals, minerals, and the things constructed for them possess unambiguous dharmas to the extent that they exist independent of human society. Human dharma is more equivocal. It involves aligning the dharma of an individual's personal Prarabdha Karmas with the consensus dharma constructed by the society into which he or she was hatched. To effectively follow your dharma as a individual human you need to know how much you must conform to the demands of your community. Between the two poles of human adharma—an all-consuming sociopathic disregard for human association and a fanatical subsuming of self into group—lies a catwalk of dharma above a swamp of adharmic dissonance. One false step in either direction from this “straight and narrow path” and you plop into adharmic muck, either by violating the tenets of your personal consonance or by transgressing the “rules” of rapport that someone else has set.

Everyone's road to reality is personalized, for one person's dharma is another person's adharma. Dharma precedes karma. For, actions which con-

## KARMA'S MECHANISM

form to your dharma are as likely to give you good reactions as actions which disagree with your dharma are likely to yield disagreeable results. Humans are social animals: most people find their paths to dharma within the context of a society. However, there are a few whose dharma it is to live apart. The dharma of such “renunciates” is to be dead to the world. Any “renunciate” who gets involved in politics (some do in India) thus commits a crime against dharma. While it is against almost everyone’s dharma to live in the smashan, Aghoris find it agreeable to do so because it is their dharma to live there. A good aghori is always fanatically intent on trying to act in harmony with his personal dharma.

The concept of “natural” dharma prevailed in India until the day the lawgivers decided to equate dharma with religion. Dharma now shifted from an innate nature—knowable by the introspective—to an external, moralistic, socialized construct maintained by lawgivers. The early lawgivers were probably looking to simplify life for their outer-directed flock by creating rules of dharma to follow. For, it is impractical for most individuals to know cause and effect in detail. But these rules deteriorated into dogma, and sin came to be defined as violations of these rules.

The *Manu Smriti*, a famous *Dharmasastra* (treatise on dharma in its incarnation as Hindu religious law), speaks of karma but focuses on sin when it assumes rebirth to be necessary to complete the results of many actions. The text, which sees reincarnation as an action’s first and most important karmic consequence, also advises the prompt performance of penance in hope of modifying the results of these sins. It details several sorts of rebirths, expected for specific crimes or states of being, according to five different karmic pay-back systems and a number of miscellaneous rules. Thieves are for example reborn as a variety of animals, and those who fail in their specific caste duties descend into the wombs of the hungry ghosts (*pretas*). Theft from a Brahmana (member of the priestly caste) is punishable by many years in terrible hells, after which the opportunity to take a degraded incarnation will finally arise. The ungrateful wife returns as a jackal (there is no mention of any punishment for a husband’s lack of gratitude).

Though many people today are cheerily convinced that once you become human you will always return to earth as a human, most authorities in ancient India concluded with Manu that you may well descend the evolutionary path before you again ascend it. The Buddha Himself offered this discouraging analogy: A blind turtle who lives at the bottom of a vast ocean surfaces only once each century. On the surface of that ocean sits a storm-tossed ring of wood. You are as likely to be reborn as a human as the turtle is likely to stick his head precisely through that ring of wood when he rises next.

The Dharmasastras are so ardent to present their retaliatory systems that they pay little attention to another pressing question, viz. the technique by which karma is stored and rebirth occurs. Patanjali’s Yoga system teaches that each intentional act creates a karmic residue (*karmashaya*) which will conform either to dharma or adharma. Each residue has various *samskaras* (“dispositional traces”) which produce numerous results, including two types of *vasanas* (“residual impressions”). While one sort of vasana stores the memory of the act, the other produces *kleshas* (“afflictions”). These usually-erroneous conceptions cause people to remain in bondage to their karmas by spurring them to create yet further karmic residues. Even the memory of a partial incarnation can fasten you more firmly to error if you cannot digest the experiences you had therein—which is why Nature ordinarily will not permit you to remember your past lives until you are in no danger of being overwhelmed by them.

When a person dies her *jiva* (the sum of her unactivated karmic residues and their attached *samskaras* and *vasanas*, gathered together within her awareness field) prepares for rebirth. The residues determine *jati* (the kind of body, e.g. tiger or human), *ayus* (lifespan), and the varieties of *bhoga* (pleasure or pain) that that new body will enjoy during its life as each residue matures (*vipaka*) to give its fruit. The nature of our karmic fruit depends substantially on how we use *ahamkara* to identify with our actions, which depends in turn on the relative balance of the Three Gunas in our personalities.

Until a human can completely self-identify with the Absolute Purusha, his or her human’s awareness is itself a substance, a form of matter that possesses gunas. This matter interacts with other forms of matter either to bind pure consciousness more firmly to inaccurate perception or to release it somewhat, that it may shine freely forth by prying apart those bindings. When *sattva* predominates a person performs karmas without becoming attached to their results. People who act from passion, blinded by desires, evince a predominance of *rajas*, while *tamas* predominates in those who act without thinking. Only those whose minds are fixed solely on the Absolute remain untouched by the Three Gunas. In the words of that greatest of Puranas, the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, “The *shastra* (text) that one studies, the water one uses, the people one consorts with, the place where one is habitually found, the time of day that one favors, the karma one performs, the sacrament that one receives, the object of one’s contemplation, the mantra that one is initiated into, the kind of purification that one practices—these influence one’s gunas.”



The images among which we exist are formed when guna pattern gets multiplied by vasana-produced memories and their associated conceptions, erroneous or otherwise. Images can be weak or strong, spiritual or mundane, altruistic or selfish, creative or destructive, intellectual or emotional, sensual or chaste. Each of us continually spawns thought forms as we attract the thought forms of others. Images of similar nature resonate with and reinforce one another according to the universal law of attraction. Like continues increasing like until the force of an image becomes so strong that its pressure on the mind can no longer be withstood. When it projects, the image's owner acts out the image in the "real" world. People can be possessed by their own images, by those of their families (fortified by shared genetics), by those that assemble in the psychic atmosphere of an individual's familial, local, and national environments, or by combinations of all the above. Images can become so strong that they propagate themselves from generation to generation; indeed, we see this daily in locales like the Balkans and the Middle East.

Once an image is created it cannot be destroyed; its physical representations will disintegrate, its energy can dissipate or bleed away, but its name and form will not pass away until the universe passes away. Though most modern people think of material things as real, even though they can be destroyed in a matter of moments, it is imagination, memory, and the other creations of the mind that are really real. Everything that has ever been thought, imagined, or done has left its mark on the cosmos, and can be recalled to awareness by anyone who knows how to recall it. Previous incarnations are also subject to recall, although there is no guarantee that what you may recall is what "really" happened to you. Your "remembered" incarnations might equally well be images from your imagination, images from someone else's imagination, images from the "lives" of archetypal beings, or experiences of an ancestor's incarnations.

A superb example of the mysterious relationship between self-identification and incarnation appears in the compendium known as the *Yoga Vasistha*. A certain spiritual aspirant had by dint of meditation so purified his mind that he gained the power to materialize his thoughts. One day when he was tired of meditating he imagined himself to be an illiterate fellow—which he instantly became. This "dream-being," who felt he had the name of Jivata, wandered about in his dream world until one day he got drunk and slept. While sleeping Jivata dreamt he was a Brahmana, who dreamt he was a king, who dreamt he was an emperor, who dreamt of being an *apsaras* (celestial dancing damsel), who dreamt of being a deer, who dreamt of being a creeper, who envisioned itself as a bee, who began to drink the nectar from the

creeper's own flowers. The bee saw an elephant on which it contemplated, becoming thereby an elephant, which was captured by a king. When the elephant saw a hive of bees it remembered its past birth and became a bee, which became a creeper, which became a swan. While the seeker was meditating on the swan, death collected him, and his consciousness entered the swan's body. When that swan beheld *Rudra* (the god of death and transformation) it thought, "I am Rudra," and became Rudra, who went to the abode of Rudra, and recognized what had occurred.

Rudra proceeded to where the aspirant's body lay and revived him, at which point the seeker saw that he was in fact Rudra and remembered all that had happened. When the pair revived Jivata they all three realized that they were in reality one only. When they awakened the Brahmana and the king and the swan, and all the others, they all grasped the truth that they were all the same, and were all Rudra. Then the Rudra, who knew fully that He was Rudra, sent the rest of them all back to the world to play out their parts in the grand drama of maya until they returned to Him at the end of their apparently individual existence.

## RNANUBANDHANA

One persistent question about reincarnation's grand design is, "How exactly does that jiva get into the body of the plant, animal or human through whose womb it will be reborn?" Probably the most ancient explicit explanation of transmigration from the Vedic period appears as the "five-fire doctrine" (*panchagnividya*). According to this scheme, the properly propitiated souls of the dead proceed to the sphere of the moon where they eventually become *soma* (lunar nectar). They then fall to earth as rain, which produces food, which when eaten by humans produces semen, which finally becomes another human being. This scenario is rather hazy, however, on how one's bad and good actions influence the process and its results and how the jiva locates the right raindrop that will land on the proper plant that will enter the appropriate parent for it. Presumably it has something to do with the universal law of attraction.

Vimalananda, who was not concerned about which raindrop you may have boarded on your journey here, did believe that jivas find their parents via the law of attraction. Karmas are not performed in a vacuum; performed action always has an object, however obscure. Energy (*shakti*) of all kinds



flows only when it has some destination to flow to, just as electrical energy flows only when a circuit is created. Your action creates a relationship with its object, be it of dense or subtle matter. Even something so seemingly insubstantial as a thought can act as an action's object. Vimalananda called the relationship thus created *rnanubandhana* ("binding karmic debt"). The energy flux that your action initiates creates a debt (*rna*) that is payable to you if you sent energy to your object, and that you must pay if you extracted something from that object. Every action creates another "tie that binds," another band that will draw you back toward that object so that you can square up your karmic account when that residue matures.

Blessings and curses bind you to whatever you have blessed or cursed; if they are strong enough they will take on lives of their own, and pursue you. Thought *rnanubandhanas*, which create obsessions when they draw their creators to them, are equally adhesive. Throughout your life you will be drawn to the people, places and things with whom you have *rnanubandhanas*, and when you are ready to be reborn you will be drawn "automatically," as it were, to those parents with whom you have some karmic affinity, with whom sufficient *rna*-bonds have accumulated.

If karmas were numerical quantities that could be added and subtracted, life would become easy and predictable. All you would need to square up a karmic account would be to total the outstanding karmic credits and debits and then pay them off or be paid off accordingly all at once. But this it is not feasible since each significant residue among the astronomical numbers of karmas that we set in motion and then quickly forget about must be settled separately. The fate that is built into your *rnanubandhanas* will continue to draw you into those situations in which your karmic residues can work themselves out, and you will still be able to use your free will to try to alter or negate the *vasanas* that they create. These transactions will continue indefinitely, birth after birth, until you exhaust your casual body's stock of karmic residues.

## KARMIC TRANSFERS

While there seems to be no theoretical limit to an individual's capacity to self-identify with new substances, actions, and situations, the question of transferring the karmic residues of already self-identified action from one being to another is a little muddier. Some texts refuse to accept that one per-

son might experience the results of another person's actions, while other texts insist that this must be so. Vimalananda's position was that both situations can occur. Since no one can become so subsumed into communal reality that all individuality is irrevocably lost, no one in our world becomes wholly independent until he or she is freed of all need to consume all nourishment from the environment. What makes it impossible to completely dissect an individual's karma from that of his or her community is the fact that each person exists in a fluid continuum between two opposing poles:

community benefit — individual benefit  
 transactional life — philosophical life  
 this world — other world  
 householder — renouncer  
 creation — dissolution  
*pravritti* — *nivritti*  
*dharma* — *moksha*

The Vedas placed great weight on genetics and community; they assumed outright that the members of a family or clan share with one another both their individually-performed karmas and those performed in concert. Some later texts, however, taught that an individual's karma is separate and unsharable; they therefore prohibit karmic transfer: "A man reaps that at that age, whether infancy, youth or old age, at which he had sowed it in his previous birth... A man gets in life what he is fated to get, and even a god cannot make it otherwise." (*Garuda Purana*, p. 68).

Early Buddhism took an individualist approach: "Each being must be an island unto himself, working out his own salvation... Meritorious action well laid up is a treasure 'not shared with others.'" (McDermott, p. 190). Mahayana Buddhism, though, returns to a community-based view of karma with its *Bodhisattva ideal*. A *Bodhisattva* resolves to take on the burden of all suffering and to offer his store of merit to others. Those who have the ability naturally produce and donate good karma; those who need it receive and enjoy it. Later Hindu traditions, particularly those of the *bhakti* (devotion) sects, also swung back from rugged karmic individualism towards shared karmic experience.

Renouncers and householders both have their place in the world. Renouncers cannot exist without householders to feed, clothe and shelter them. However, a culture becomes totally and unattractively materialistic if it is composed wholly of householders. Back and forth, to and fro, Indian philosophers have argued the advantages and disadvantages of sharing your karma with others. Living in a community requires attention to its *dharma* as well as your own; it requires interactions with other community members in which you will be exposed to the karmic residues of others, and vice versa.

Food and sex are two salient ways through which karma can be shared. The *Manu Smriti* (6.58) mentions that even a *jivanmukta* (someone who has been liberated while still alive from the need for rebirth) can become “bound with the fetters of the *samsara* (the universe of manifested existence)” by accepting food from the wrong hand. A wife’s sexual loyalty is said to be integral to her husband’s karma. But while a chaste wife can compensate for her husband’s sins, a man can also be destroyed by his wife’s concupiscence.

Consanguineous ties are of immense significance. One rule of thumb in Jyotish states that from birth until age seven a child mainly experiences the results of her mother’s karmas, and from age seven to fourteen, her father’s karmas. Only after age fourteen (and puberty) does she come into her own, karmically. Transfer of merit within families appears in many Vedic rituals, including the *pinda* offering, which is made to appease potentially angry or harmful ancestors. Karmas can also be ressigned in the opposite direction; the *Kausitaki Upanishad* (II.15) describes how a son inherits his dying father’s karma.

## PRAVRITTI AND NIVRITTI

All these swaps promote *pravritti* (further development of worldly entanglements and future reincarnation) if the exchangers identify themselves with their exchanges. Minimizing swaps and/or failing to identify with them promotes *nivritti* (withdrawal from the world of action). Vimalananda preferred *nivritti*, but not at the expense of neglecting to pay off any residual *rnanubandhanas*. Though there is a general perception that Indians as a people are otherworldly (this slant is noisily preached now in certain Indian spiritual circles), it was not always thus. The disdain for the world of matter, regularly preached by followers of Shankaracharya’s impersonal Vedanta, is even today less predominant a world view among Indians than is belief in the efficacy of worshipping a loving, personal god who can help us both in the here and now and in the hereafter.

Pravritti and nivritti both date from the Vedas, which advise the performance of all manner of sacrifices for the achievement of all manner of specific ends both in this world and the next. For many centuries, however, most of those who sought to follow the path toward *nivritti* which culminates in *moksha* (cessation of the necessity for rebirth) have tried to isolate themselves from mundane community and the karmic transactions community inevita-

bly arouses. By renouncing the world such people become *sannyasins*. *Sannyas* literally means “coma,” so a *sannyasin* is (or should be) literally “comatose” to the world. Sannyasins try to minimize the actions of their many bodily and mental functions as they retreat from their worldly obligations. Until they become enlightened, however, the “spiritually comatose” retain their individual causal bodies and karmic slates. Moreover, they continue to share karmas with their fellow sect members, to the extent that they imbibe ascetic power and spiritual energy (*tapas* and *tejas*) from their gurus and enjoy the aid and comfort of their fellow disciples.

Clear-thinking people may be disheartened and disgusted by the implications of the karmas we perform for self-preservation, including our dogged rape of Nature. These karmas stretch from the destruction of the wilderness to the swindling of our domesticated plants and animals to work for us for slave wages under savage conditions. We breed and propagate these species only to gobble them down with very little benefit to them or to the Nature Who is their Mother. These karmas teach us humans in turn to gull one another: “Fraud was at the basis of our present-day agricultural and stock-farming industries. Among humans exchange took the form of mutual deceit—the start of which was buying and selling. Therefore, the basis of trade is fraud, trickery and deceit. . . . There is no profit without a type of fraud. A totally fair exchange leaves you with a profit of zero.” (Engler and Hayashi, p. 124-5)

Running away from a duplicitous human society is however rarely an effective strategy. The demoralized usually act dispiritedly, and usually collect dispirited results. The renunciation that is of value happens automatically, whenever the karmas that detain you in your world have become depleted. As Vimalananda iterated and reiterated, “If you have to think about renouncing the world you are not ready to do so. When your interest in worldly activities drops away by itself you will automatically move onto the path of *nivritti*, and only then will you be successful in following that path. Until then there will be no end to karma in this lifetime.”

## HUMAN SACRIFICE

Diligent research into the nature of cause and effect permitted the seers of the Vedas, who well understood the necessity of action in life, to evolve methods through which they could achieve specific ends through the willful performance of specific karmas. These methods, called *yaga* or *yajna* in Sanskrit

and referred to in English as “sacrifices,” feed and satisfy deities and other ethereal beings with *prana* (life force) transported to them via the fragrance of the smoke from the burnt offerings of consecrated plants or animals. Sacrifice is a prominent feature in many ancient religions, including Judaism, and continue to be performed in India today (all but a few of these are however highly simplified versions overseen by priests who no longer understand what they are doing). Sincere sacrificers avoid fraud by ensuring that the beings they sacrifice receive some benefits as well. When a Vedic ritual is properly performed, the evil karma that Vedic sacrificer incurs by killing his victims is negated by the good karma for all that the ritual engenders.

While goats, horses, bulls, alcoholic beverages, and the juice of the *soma* plant have all been used in Vedic sacrificial ritual, the archetypal victim is a human. At the beginning of its explanation of the Agnichayana sacrifice, for example, the Vedic text known as the *Shatapatha Brahmana* states clearly that a human is the best sacrifice of all. Another text provides a mantra to be used when you accept a severed human head. No one knows how often humans were offered in Vedic sacrificial rituals—or whether they ever were—but there is little doubt that human sacrifice did occur in ancient India. We find evidence in works like the *Mahabharata*, which relates the story of King Somaka, who was so worried that his only son might die that he had the boy sacrificed in order that all one hundred of his wives might conceive. The Jataka Tale called “The Folly of Garrulity” describes a human sacrifice performed to protect a city gate. In the *Simhasana Dvatrimshati* (“Thirty-Two Tales of the Lion Throne”) the semi-mythical King Vikramaditya barely escapes becoming a victim himself. In historical times the Thugs made human sacrifice their religion and isolated cases continue to come to light in India even now.

## SELF-SACRIFICE

Though Vedic sacrificers have not used human victims for many centuries, sacrificial symbolism continues to pervade much of Hindu ritual. The coconut, for example, is a particularly auspicious fruit because it so well represents the human head, with its three eyes in a hard skull-like shell which contains a brain-like flesh and a quantity of liquid that represents the blood, hormones, cerebro-spinal fluid and other “juices” contained in a human head. Today’s people offer coconuts in lieu of severed heads on occasions

such as the full moon during August, when the citizens of Bombay go down to the sea with their coconuts to attempt to appease the rain gods and calm the monsoon’s frenzy.

The head has long been regarded in India as the most important part of the body. In it concentrates the power that is the excellence of existence, the essence of the universe. The head is the seat of the personality and therefore karma; before the body can act to perform the karma the head must direct it to act. It is by the head that we know the body. The essence of a sacrifice is in its “head,” the means by which the karma of recreating harmony in both the internal and external universes is performed. The more symbolic our sacrifice becomes, the less karma we need to perform; we can take the head, the chief, essential, important element, and leave the rest. To emphasize the literal in sacrifice is to maximize its karma, which limits its potential benefits. Some modern people are beginning to suggest that it is generally appropriate to worship God or the Goddess with sex, alcohol, and meat, and that blood sacrifices should be performed because they are effective means of achieving our desires. Though such rituals can indeed be effective they are rarely skillful means since for they are karmically expensive and commonly lead to intoxication and addiction instead of worship. The astral aura they generate is also likely to strengthen the will of people like the pedophiles and pushers who are already greedily consuming the flesh of the throwaway children whom they “sacrifice.”

It is true that Aghoris worship with sex, alcohol, meat, and sometimes human sacrifice, but solely for the purpose of working off their leftover rnanubandhanas, not for creating new ones. They do so with full awareness of what can happen to them if they fall into self-identifications with these actions. While the Law of Karma may be temporarily transcended it can no more be nullified than the law of gravity can be negated. An airplane continues to fly in violation of gravity for only so long as its engines continue to whirl. Aghoris who complete their flights successfully can get from place to place very quickly and get much of their rnanubandhana work done, but if their engines should stop in mid-air down they will drop. If they do crash they know they have themselves alone to blame.

Aghoris prefer to offer their own blood in sacrifice; they ask themselves, “If my Beloved requires *prana*, why should it not be mine?” In this they follow the lead of the Veda’s themselves. One of the world’s handful of remaining Vedacharyas is Agnihotram Ramanujan Tatacharya whose mastery of Vedic ritual and text is truly dazzling. When last we met he reported to me that there is a passage in the Taittiriya Samhita of the Yajur Veda which states that originally all sacrifice was of the sacrificer’s own flesh. These first sacrificers

did not expect other animals or humans to contribute on their behalf; only after they lost their own grit did they begin to settle for substitutes. A good Aghori even today accepts no substitutes.

Blood's chief task is the transport of prana, and the offering of blood to a deity is fundamentally the offering of that being's prana. Vimalananda, who always valued refinement over crudity, generally preferred to use sacrificial techniques that were subtler, and less messy, than the literal spilling of gore. This is the sort of penance the Tantras intend when they speak of *antaryaga* ("internal sacrificial rites"). The *Kaushitaki Upanishad* provides an example of antaryaga in its description of "inner *agnihotra*." Agnihotra usually refers to worship of an external sacred fire, but the inner *agnihotra* involves the offering of breath (another transporter of prana) as an oblation in speech when you speak, and the offering of speech as an oblation in breath when you fall silent. In this way you can offer oblations continually as long as you continue to breathe, using your body as your sacrificial altar and your life itself as your sacrifice.

A good aghori masters the art of self-sacrifice. Good aghoris fiercely love to consummate that action within themselves and refuse to forgo it even for a moment. Instead they take the smashan with them wherever they go, even to the racecourse, that their oblations need never be interrupted. What is our world, after all, but one big smashan in which each of us is already burning? For a sincere Aghori life in the "internal smashan" is no metaphor; sincere Aghoris make the smashan real for them. This is a subjective, internal reality, a reality that is more real to them than is the maya outside themselves. Aghoris know that all that is not pure, unalloyed Consciousness is filth. Because they do not discriminate between one variety of filth and another, they literally come to see no reason to discriminate between feces and fruit! Instead they ignore everything except their own pertinacity to bring themselves again and again to the melting point, willingly consuming their own filth when need be, the dung becoming ambrosial when it is transmuted in the furnaces of their longing.

Emotional muck, which is usually worse than the physical variety, deserves thorough immolation. The nineteenth verse of the *Karpuradi Stotra*, a hymn to Kali, states that the Goddess delights in receiving in sacrifice the flesh of goat, buffalo, cat, sheep, camel and man. Though the greedy for meat use this and similar textual references to sanction animal slaughter, what an aspirant really needs to sacrifice is his lust (the goat), anger (buffalo), greed (cat), stupefaction due to delusion (sheep), envy (camel), and pride and infatuation with worldly things (man). These thick cords that yoked us to the world must be severed if we are to become truly independent (*sva-tantra*). Until these

limitations are sacrificed the seeker is himself no better than an animal—which is why the Tantras call such people *pashus* (animals).

## OFF WITH YOUR HEAD!

You can butcher all your emotional attachments in one fell swoop if you are willing to part with your head, which will be for you more of a cesspit of toxins than a reservoir of excellent essence so long as it is polluted with your personal limitations. Severing your head can help you cast off your attachment to your individual, finite self, for at the moment you perform the karma of this surrender you sacrifice a bit of your imagined control over your life and offer some of your prana to the divine. This allows divinity access into you; "sacrifice," after all, literally means "to make sacred." The Maharashtrian poet-saint Tukaram said it right:

If we want to enjoy God, we should lop off our head from our body and hold it in our hands.

When the body has been sacrificed to god, says Tuka, all worship has been accomplished.

(*Tukaaraama Gaathaa* 3414, 3171)

Tukaram speaks here of dissevering one's awareness (the head) from all distortions provoked by any kind of physical, mental, or other material limitations (the body). Though the ideal head offering would extinguish all limitations at once, for most of us a single donation will not suffice. Most of us are so attached to our self-definitions that we need to chop off and offer our heads daily, internally. The force of self-identification is called *ahamkara* so long as it self-identifies with the actions of the body and mind into which it was born, a self-identification which monopolizes a great deal of energy. When *ahamkara* begins to release its self-identification with the limited, temporary personality that portion of energy which is freed is called *Kundalini*. The only difference between *ahamkara* and *Kundalini* is the object with which they self-identify. Until *Kundalini* is completely awakened *ahamkara* will continue to act in large part as if it were the self, and whatever you do will continue to be motivated by your own self-importance and attachment to your sense of difference from the rest of the world. As you chop your awareness and prana free of *ahamkara*'s grasp, you free them to identify with something new.

When you act you make use of your free will; to react is to conform to your "fated" karmas. If you really want to transform yourself you will have to take

charge of your reactions and learn how, when, and where to act. Free will is the ability to choose to remember that we sent our trains of karma in motion and that we can by dint of repeated action eventually change the direction of that train. Your current karmas can be negated at any moment, but only if your present force of intention is equal to the force you used to create those karmas. The key to creating and solidifying new samskaras that will negate your old ones is to repeat your new actions so often and so intently that nothing can stand in their way.

If anything that you do in total selflessness tends to move you in the direction of *nivritti*, every karma you perform with a desire for a result is likely to lead you further into *pravritti*. There is no real advantage in renouncing participation in the world to which you belong until you are ready to give up self-identifying with your actions. Until *ahamkara* has been transformed into *Kundalini* you will just continue creating new *rnanubandhanas* wherever you go. Even the desire to make karmic amends may be fraught with peril, for fighting against your residues tends to create yet more residues, and a conscious effort to repay all your *rnas* may make you run amok. If you find the thought of rebirth distasteful you will do well to learn how to act appropriately, according to your *dharma*, in a state of *karmasamya* (“active balance”) and refuse to self-identify with the performance of your duties. By reflecting on the transitory nature of existence, you can live in your family and society unfettered, like a chance guest, and forsake your attraction to the sense objects that make up your world. All bondage disappears as soon as you relinquish the idea of “me” and “mine” in all things: “Realize, then, that smell and taste have to be given up! They are nothing but a steady flow of craving and desires! How, thus liberated, could you ever think of the fishmonger’s shop as stinking?” (Kohn, p. 241)

## TYAGA

All Vedic rituals contain three basic elements: *dravya*, the material that is offered; *devata*, the deity to whom it is offered; and *tyaga*, the renunciation of the fruits of the ritual in favor of the deity. *Tyaga* is the essence of sacrifice—in Vimalananda’s formula, “the *marma* (core or nucleus) of *dharma* is *tyaga*.” In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna describes *tyaga*, which He defines as the renouncing of the fruits of all one’s activity, as life’s ultimate goal. He advises Arjuna to waive his attachment to all potential results of every karma and to

focus on Him and Him only: “Abandon all other duties, and come to me alone for refuge. Be not sorrowful, for I shall give you liberation from all sins.” (*Bhagavad Gita* XVIII.66) Though there is no escape from karma in this world, you can free yourself from all other karmas by assigning the fruits of all your actions to Him. When you dedicate your actions to the Lord they produce well-being in all fields of activity, just as watering the roots of a tree nourishes each of its branches. Your offering creates the *rna* that gives Him the power to help you, to grant you His grace in return. In Vimalananda’s words, “A fair exchange is no robbery.”

Daily sacrifice of your self-importance provides daily sustenance to your deity, who after “laundering” it of your *vasanas* returns it to you with interest. Your sole ritual becomes a quest to see and worship Him in all beings in all places (including the race track, if your karmas take you there), with every exertion of body, mind and speech. Jesus would have you follow the same path. He made Himself the Passover lamb, the sacrificial “first fruits” of the harvest, that whoever opened themselves to Him might escape the burden of their karmas. When you contract to surrender your all to Jesus, or Krishna, or another deity, or your guru, you are in danger only if you fail to perfect your gift. A single unsundered karma in the causal flowerbed is sufficient to seed a new forest of karmas and another string of rebirths. This hazard is easily surmounted if you are willing to extend to your devotion that commitment that Zen Buddhist abbot Harada Sekkei Roshi advocates when he advises his student to “crave *dharma* like a fish that is out of water, and work as you would if your hair were on fire.” (Roshi, p. 77)

This was the sort of commitment that the *gopis* (milkmaids) of Vrindavana showed to Lord Krishna. Krishna said of them, “They want Me with all the force of their minds; they look on Me as the life of their life; for My sake they have abjured all the ties of the flesh. And I cherish and sustain those who sacrifice for Me all the joys of this world and the next, and the *Dharma* of which they are the fruit.” (*Shrimad Bhagavata* X:46:3) In time, when the intensity and repetition of the *gopis*’ whole-hearted devotion to Krishna had completely destroyed their *vasanas*, they attained Krishna, and freedom.

Krishna similarly saved King Parikshit. The *Shrimad Bhagavata* is the story of how Parikshit extricates himself from the constraints of his *vasanas* and *samskaras*. His intensity is stimulated by the curse that he would die within seven days; the repetition is provided by the story. The first half of the book uses genealogies and lineages to awaken and release Parikshit’s *Kundalini* from its ancestral, archetypal, and transmigrational memories; the second half provides new objects for his *Kundalini* to attach herself to, in the form of Vishnu’s *avatars* (divine incarnations). By Book Ten, which tells the tales of

Lord Krishna's transcendent pastimes, Parikshit is ready to listen, and to surrender.

Whoever constantly contemplates Krishna merges completely with Him. But though He is Perfection Personified (*Purnatmaka Purushottama*), Krishna is but one of the countless deity-images to whom one can surrender. Vimalananda liked to speak of submission to Krishna when he spoke of surrender because of his love for Krishna and for the *Shrimad Bhagavata*. Tantric sadhanas can also lead to union with one's deity, but Tantric texts rarely emphasize bhakti (Vimalananda claimed that this is because by and large they were written by ambitious, unperfected disciples). While the texts of Tantra tend to concern themselves with karmic transactions and the achievement of results, texts on Krishna, in particular the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, pursue the goal of unbounded bhakti. Those who can bring their karmas to equilibrium (*karmasamyā*) on their own should do so; those who cannot should permit Krishna, or Shiva, or Ma, or another Beloved to do it for them.

Vimalananda, who was always rebelling against something or other, loved both the Tantras and the bhakti movement for their refusal to kowtow to petrified social conventions. While the Tantras use heterodoxy as a means to their end of extracting themselves from society's conditioning, devotees of Krishna simply have no time to think of orthodoxy: "To dedicate an action to Me is to purify it. What is right may in certain circumstances be wrong; what is wrong may... become right. The rules that declare what is right and what is wrong thus show only that the distinction is based on no intrinsic difference... . Whatever a man gives up, that he is freed from. The observance of this law puts an end to sorrow, fear, and delusion and delivers men from bondage." (*Shrimad Bhagavata* XI:21:14-18)

## VIMALANANDA

To Vimalananda, who yearned above all else to be free from every form of bondage, the worst sort of thralldom was entanglement in the ossified ideological pabulum of calculated spirituality. Brahmanical Hinduism has throughout its history sought to control potential troublemakers by defining them into harmlessness. All too often this drive has led Indian culture to appropriate its saints. After a saint is safely dead and seemingly gone his well-meaning devotees usurp his reputation and readjust his image and message to fit their understanding of what he was trying to teach. Most of Ramakrishna

Paramahansa's disciples followed this game plan when they confiscated his memory and tailored it to suit Victorian Bengali culture, emphasizing the Vedantic aspects of his teachings while downplaying its Tantrism.

Vimalananda, who loved his freedom, worked hard not to be appropriated either by neo-puritans or neo-epicureans. While he sometimes actively sought to outrage, his normal daily life was usually outrage enough. I am sure that this book will give the people in the West who have already accused him of practicing black magic (Beware the Dark Side!) new ammunition with which to attack his memory (Horse races! Gambling! We are shocked, *shocked!*).

But what else should we expect from those prigs and bluenoses who are after all simply reacting, conforming to their karmas? What can someone who is bedeviled by concern for external purity and piety understand of someone to whom the external is merely a detail? "He who lies down on the ground cannot fall," says the *Shrimad Bhagavata* (XI:21:17), and there is no ground further down than that of the smashan. Every act that Vimalananda performed was a calculated excuse, a ploy to maneuver himself into a position from which he could square up some rnanubandhana or other. Inspired perhaps by the example of Lord Krishna, Who certain bhakti texts describe as a "sweet thug" because He would dupe people into doing what their karmic debts required them to do. Vimalananda never failed to stoop to crookery when he required it to take care of a rna. He thus fit right in at the racecourse, where everyone is crafty. You cannot speak your mind candidly to all and sundry at the racecourse and hope to win any races. This makes you crooked—but it need not make you a cheat.

Life at the races is an apt allegory for life in general. On the track or in the home or office, the best way to deal with the karmic reactions that have come due is by *kala* (stratagem, finesse), not *bala* (brute force). Never to try to force the issue, but negotiate patiently as you slip and slide your way toward extrication. Vimalananda, who characteristically preferred tact to coercion as he navigated the ship of his life through the sea of his world, illustrated this point on one occasion with the following story:

There was once a man who owned an old pair of sandals which had been patched so many times that they had no spot left unpatched. The man then decided that it was time to get rid of these sandals, so the next time he went to the temple for worship he removed them and left them outside. When he came out he deliberately neglected to pick them up, thinking that some poor person would come along and take them. But some busybody ran after him, handed them to him, and said, "You've forgotten your sandals! Don't you have any better sense?"

The man walked back home, where he concluded that the best way to get rid of the sandals was simply to throw them away and let anyone pick them up. So he went directly to his window and threw them out, but they happened to land on a small child who was passing at that moment beneath his window. The child and its mother screamed so loudly that a crowd gathered. When they heard what had happened the crowd abused the man for injuring such a dear, helpless child, and the child's mother beat the man soundly with his own sandals.

Once the commotion had died down the man sat to think the situation over. He reflected to himself, "All I wanted to do was to get rid of these old sandals, and as a result I get both insults and a good beating. What can I do now?"

Suddenly the sandals started to talk. They said, "Why are you causing such a fuss? All right, I know that I have been resoled so many times that nothing but patches remain. But all you have to do is remove all the patches and attach some good leather, and then attach a new sole, and I'll be just as good as new." And that is what the man did.

## A WORLD OF STORIES

Vimalananda, who patched and resoled his personality whenever he wished to become "good as new," made his whole life into a teaching tale. Rarely would he hesitate to hyperbolize to drive a point home; he did, after all, sometimes describe himself as *Bandal-e-afaab* ("the sun among exaggerators"). His overstated displeasure with figures like Adi Shankaracharya and Mahatma Gandhi does not imply a lack of appreciation for their real achievements. It suggests instead an acute awareness of their imperfections, enhanced that I might not mistake the lessons they carried. He sometimes exceeded his own limits for similar purposes, and as you read his excuses for such questionable behavior remember the many ways in which we each use self-justification to our advantage. The human brain has been compared to an attorney who will argue whatever side of a case it has been hired to argue regardless of its merits. Once Vimalananda had divined a course of action it was child's play for him to construct a rationale for it.

Though he never succeeded in winning me over to certain of his more out-

landish positions, I was always at least willing to consider being convinced by Vimalananda's arguments. Doing so facilitated free communication in the same way that rambunctiousness on my part would have obstructed it, and most of the time Vimalananda's conclusions were themselves self-evident to me. But perhaps the main reason that I would sometimes accept the possibility of truth in an assertion so wild that coming from anyone else I would have instantly discounted it was his transparent sincerity. In Aghora, lack of heart is very dangerous, and Vimalananda was a child at heart until his dying day. His love for everyone around him was so genuine and childlike that many people took mean advantage of him, which eventually made him wary enough of humans that a certain external trickiness came to seem to him prudent.

What seems to me prudent is to accept his stories for what they are and allow the heart to extract from them their vital essence. A good tale is such a useful tool because even if it suggests nothing to you when you first hear it, it can mature within your consciousness into a form that in due time may begin to communicate with you. Like many other teachers of traditional Indian wisdom, Vimalananda preferred to teach in stories, some of which speak to the deepest levels of human awareness. There were times when Vimalananda would be trying to explain to me something exceptionally esoteric—like the relationship between the causal body, the chromosome pattern and the *Jnanendriya-Karmendriya Nyaya* ("the Law of the Sense Organs of Cognition and Those of Action"), and how the *Jnanendriya-Karmendriya Nyaya* controls fertilization and impregnation—that everything would begin to go far over my head. Then he would suddenly shift his discourse into a story instead. Though at the time he delivered it the story often seemed to have little connection with the topic at hand, the truth of their connectedness would indeed gradually begin to arise within me as it all sank in.

Even with time, of course, some myth-packed narratives never reveal themselves fully, even when they seem most nailed-down. When you read in Chapter One the story of Prithviraj Chauhan, for instance, please remember that there was a time when it was common practice in India at the start of a construction project to drive a nail or stake into the head of *Shesha Naga*, the gargantuan serpent who supports the world. The structure's cornerstone would be laid above the snake's head, thus placing it at the exact center of the world. Mircea Eliade has traced this tradition to the "primordial gesture" of Indra when he "struck the Snake in his lair" (*Rig Veda* IV:17:9), when his lightning bolt "cut off its head" (*Rig Veda* I:52:10). To transfix or behead the snake is to pass from the virtual and amorphous to the formed and organized, to concretize a potential karma's causation stream in time and space. Properly fastened karmas churn out well-tempered, benefic effects.



*Shesha* means in Sanskrit “that which remains,” not in the sense of someone’s leavings but rather a background or setting, a matrix which so complements an item that without it that item would be incomplete. When you dig a well on your property, you may value the well for its water, but the condition of the ground that forms the remainder of your property will govern how valuable that well will be to you. Your well draws its water from your property’s *shesha*; change those surroundings and you change the well. Like a wisely-dug well, a story whose stake stretches down into Shesha Naga’s head taps into its own *shesha*, the inexhaustible waters of living myth which will continue to stream into it so long as that stake remains in place.

Vimalananda rarely met a story he didn’t like, and he freely adapted many of them for his purposes. In this he was but following tradition, for recycling legend is an ancient and respected practice in India. In Vimalananda’s world no story was a good one unless it possessed at least seven layers of meaning, and he would tinker with his stories until they did. You can if you like compare Vimalananda’s version of the story of Sudama with that of the *Shrimad Bhagavata* (Book X, Chapters 80 & 81), and find in the Sanskrit text known as the *Panchatantra* versions of at least two tales that Vimalananda ascribed to Akbar-Birbal (that of the unlucky one-eyed washerman and that of the man who claims to be able to go to heaven by getting his “old” body burned). Vimalananda, who had done an M.A. in Mughal history, was particularly fond of tales of Akbar and Birbal, many of which continue to be told for fun and profit all over North India. He added some of the better-known of these to his repertoire, and possessed others that seemed to be known only to him. These may have been gleaned from some obscure oral tradition, or he may have deliberately created them as teaching tools; if so, he would not have been the first to do so.

This book, which I crafted with the same sort of heedfulness that we used to craft our winners at the track, is an episode in the personal saga of the Aghori Vimalananda. This introduction represents a slice of the book’s *shesha*. As you turn now to the narrative, please release any need you might have to perfectly understand the literal meanings of its words and sometimes eccentric reasoning. Open yourself, rather, to the words. Let them course through you in their own way and they will surely deliver to you their message.

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## NOTE

Aside from known historical figures like Akbar, General Sleeman and Seth Sagal Shah and known mythological figures like Smashan Tara and Gorakh Nath, the following actual people appear within under their own names: Robby (the author), Roshni, Ranu, Faram, Chotu, Vaidya B. P. Nanal, Dr. Vasant Lad, Dr. Shantilal Mehta, Dr. Gomes, Dr. Durandar, R. D. Shah, Dinkar, Damle, Chabhu Ranbuke, Begum Akhtar, Chandramohan, Taat Maharaj, Sevasasji & Chunilal, Balam Bhat, Madhavbaba Patil, Shankargiriji Maharaj, Hambir Baba, Baba Chandal Das, K. Narayana Baba, Dada Maharaj, Das Bapa, Chaitanyananda, George McGrath, Sir Lester Piggott, Mr. Williams, Sir Cusrow N. Wadia, Admiral Eric Shipton, the Chief of Jat, and the Maharajas of Bikaner, Gwalior and Mudhol. “Lizoo” was really the dog’s nickname (her registered name was Lady Elizabeth), and “Prof. Joker the Guru” really was that tipster’s nickname. Black Dog really is a blend of premium Scotch, and Kersasp Kolah really does produce a savory Spicy Carrot



Pickle. The horses Potoooooo, Waxy, Eclipse, Kincsem and Mount Everest actually raced under those monikers. Everyone else, horse and human alike, has had his or her name changed, to protect the innocent, the guilty, and those who aren't sure. Stoney's photo on Vimalananda's wall showed her winning a race other than the Mother Lode Cup. Although Colonel Pratap Singh of Jodhpur was a real person, the Big Race that Redstone won was named for another nobleman.

Every event in which I am involved that I recount in this book actually occurred—insofar as things actually 'occur' here in the physical universe.

## chapter one **STONEY**

"WHY DO YOU THINK I own horses and come to the race track?"

Vimalananda and I sat, in March 1977, on his usual bench in the First Enclosure of the Bombay Racecourse. We had reached there well in advance of the first race, and while we awaited the arrival of his colleagues, the friendly gamblers with whom he would wrangle, wager and roar, the man who was my mentor sprang this question on me.

"I know you wonder about this all the time," he went on, "because your orthodox friends in Poona have taught you that good Hindus don't gamble. Do you have any idea at all why I come here?"

"No," I responded truthfully, "none at all."

He was right: gambling was anathema to my acquaintances among the orthodox of Poona, the city 100 miles southeast of Bombay where I was a student in a college of *Ayurveda*, India's traditional medical system.

"Sometimes I come here to gamble," he went on, "and at other times I come just to watch the races. But whatever my other reasons I always come to study the karmas of the people who are here with me."

"Their karmas."

"Yes. Do you know Newton's Third Law of Motion?"

"Er, yes: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

"Yes. Newton's Third Law of Motion is the Law of Karma. We can also call it the Law of Cause and Effect, the law of 'as you sow, so shall you reap.' Any time you self-identify with an action—any time you act and think of yourself as the doer of that action—that action becomes a *karma* for you. All your self-identified actions, good and bad, act as causes which eventually produce effects, good and bad, which you will have to experience. The race track happens to be a great place to gain practice in knowing other people's karmic accounts."

"You mean, to know who karmically owes what to whom?"

“Right. We call that *rnanubandhana*, the bondage of karmic debt. Let me give you a little illustration of my point so that you will know exactly what I mean. Suppose you want to predict the results of a horse race, like the race Stoney is running this afternoon.” Stoney was his nickname for Stone Ice, who was his favorite mare. Today was to be the last race of her career.

“To know who will win a horse race you need to know about the luck—which means the sum of the karmas and *rnanubandhanas*—of many different beings. First, and foremost, the horse: Is he or she destined to win? Next, the horse’s *syce* (groom) and the *jemadar* (head groom): Are they destined to collect bonuses from the owner, which he awards them when his horse wins? Then, the trainer: Is he destined to obtain his share of the stakes for saddling a winning horse? As for the jockey: Is he destined for both a share of stake money and a big tip from the owner for winning? And what about the owner: Do the horse and the club owe him the stake money for the horse’s victory? Is his horse meant to enhance his fame by a victory, or weaken his prestige by flopping miserably?

“Next to last comes the bookie: Is he karmically meant to pay you, or to collect from you? Only now do we finally come to you, the gambler: Are you meant to win or lose money on that horse?”

“I can see that it is not so simple.”

“My God! I should think not! If it were simple someone would have figured out a foolproof system to predict winners by now, and would be getting rich. Actually, it *is* fairly simple for the public. Most of the people who come to the track are debtors; they owe money either to the bookies or to the Club. They are the cannon fodder that provides the cash that pays those few people who are the horses’ creditors, who are the only people destined to make money on the horses. These karmic debts get settled up on race days, when the public comes to play its favorites. The horses do the work, the creditors win, and the debtors lose. The horses themselves are mainly debtors: they work hard so that the others can make money. At best, if they win, they get some extra carrots and some sweet words; at worst, if they lose race after race—well, the worst can be pretty gruesome.

“I go to the race track to finish up a large number of *rnanubandhanas* all at once. I always race my animals to win. Knowing what I do about the Law of Karma, how can I do otherwise? I want to die with a clean karmic balance sheet. Every time my horse wins I pay off hundreds or thousands of bettors. The horse owes them the money, no doubt, but because I own the horse and am supporting him it is really me that is paying them off. Neat, isn’t it?”

“It is for you,” I responded, “but what about everyone else? Are all the other people who own horses automatically paying off their *rnanubandhanas* too?”

“They are if they are not creating some substantial new karmas in the process of paying off their previous ones.”

“Oh.”

“Clear?”

“For now.”

“Look at it from this angle: when an owner races a horse to win and doesn’t interfere in any way with how that horse runs the main effect of the race is to pay off existing *rnanubandhanas*. So far, so good. But things don’t always work this way. Sometimes an owner, in cahoots with a trainer or a jockey, will try to do something to make sure that his horse wins or loses. That effort is a karma, which will either create a new *rnanubandhana* or perpetuate one that already exists.

“These consequences are not limited to the actions of owners, of course. Sometimes the trainer will be in cahoots with the jockey, and they keep the owner in the dark about it. Sometimes the bookies and the jockeys are in cahoots and leave everyone else in the dark. This sort of thing is unfortunate, but it happens all the time; the lure of easy money is too much for many people, and they become greedy.

“Many bookies get involved in conspiring with the jockeys to make extra money by fixing up races. When he can arrange for a favorite horse to lose a bookie can swallow all the money the public had bet on the favorite.” As in Great Britain, licensed bookies operate legally at Indian racetracks.

“They can swallow the money, but will they be able to digest it?” I contributed sardonically.

“That is precisely my point,” he responded with some vehemence. “Here is the creation of a new karma: the mare does her job for her creditors by trying to win, but the jockey and the bookie pocket the money when they stop her from winning. The members of the public who were the horse’s creditors have still not been paid, so they now become creditors of the bookies and jockeys; the debts are transferred. The bookies and jockeys, who think they are getting something for nothing, are merely borrowing money which they will have to pay back later, with interest. Moreover, the jockeys will also have to be reborn so that the horses that they whip into exhaustion now will have an opportunity to work them to death in return. If these people ever realized how many millions of lives it will take to pay off all these debts they would never play dirty.

“But they don’t realize it, and they do play dirty. In fact, we’re about to have a practical demonstration of this kind of treachery right now.”

The horses were now leaving the Paddock to tramp toward the starting gate. “Did you hear what that no-account excuse for a rider Jhendu Kumar said to me yesterday at the stables?”

"No." Jhendu Kumar was Stoney's jockey that day. After a moment of puzzlement I suddenly realized that Vimalananda fully expected Stoney to lose. Sickened by that thought I turned to watch her and the other horses walk and canter away from us, roused into friskiness by the impending race.

"When I told this fellow that this would be Stoney's last race and that I was confident she would win it he told me, 'Don't count your chickens before they hatch.'

"Which means that he is not too confident."

"Yes, but why shouldn't he be? I have watched Stoney work, and I can tell you that she is absolutely at the top of her form. Jhendu Kumar himself has been working her over the past few weeks, and he has also won atop her before. So he has to know that in her present form she is unbeatable today—she is a class above the other horses in this race. Isn't it natural that I become suspicious?"

"You're suspicious of him?"

"I am very suspicious of his intentions. I *could* take what he said as an omen, but it just doesn't add up to one when I consider Stoney's condition, her track record, and the weakness of the rest of the field. Also, I have to consider *how* he said what he said—he seemed to boast when he spoke those words, as if he alone knew what was going to happen. When I add this boasting to his own previous track record—he has been in trouble for hooking horses before—and his own current precarious financial condition, it makes me think that he may hook her today."

"By 'hooking her' you mean prevent her from winning?"

"Exactly."

"But won't anyone notice that he has hooked her?"

"Anyone who has eyes in his head instead of samosas probably will notice, but so what?" I suppressed a snicker as the vision of a Jhendu Kumar with those savory Indian snacks for eyes trotted into my head. "There are so many ways to hook horses that look so much like ordinary misfortunes that the Stewards of the Club, even if they suspect foul play, can often do nothing about it."

"But what about the patrol camera, and the instant replay?"

"Horses are not machines, you know; you can't ever tell what might put them off. Sometimes the tempo of the race won't agree with the horse. Sometimes the *way* the race is run will set the horse off; some horses like to be shut in, and others prefer to see daylight in front of them. Sometimes when a horse visits some other racing venue he may become homesick, or decide that he doesn't like the taste of the food or water there." I remembered Kincsem, the famous Hungarian mare who would never travel anywhere without her cat.

"But those are all legitimate excuses. Hooking is different. One way a jockey can hook a horse is to hesitate for a split second so that he fails to leave the starting gate with the other runners. Then, if he settles in at the rear of the pack he can let himself get hemmed in on the rail at the turn and cross the winning post well behind the leaders. Or, the jockey can craftily send the horse wide and then suddenly veer out into the flat by shortening one rein with a sharp turn of his wrist and swiftly kicking the horse in the ribs with his opposite foot. Or, a jockey who knows that his mount needs to be whipped to win can 'accidentally' drop his whip. A jockey who is desperate to lose may even fall off in mid-race—but that takes guts, as it is a very dangerous stunt.

"The trainer has more ways to make a horse lose. He can 'stuff' the horse, by substituting normal racing feed (mainly hay and bran) with a full meal of grain on the night before and the morning of the race. Have you ever tried to run a race on a full stomach? Or you can give the horse extra salt to eat and then plenty of water to drink, to make it temporarily gain lots of water weight. It is also easy to overtrain the horse, to gallop it too frequently so that it passes its peak before race day. There was one trainer named Udgith who used to tie up the horse in its stall so that it couldn't get any rest, or even move, the night before the race. That would certainly mar the horse's performance for the next day, but how cruel it was to the horse! Udgith was a cruel man.

"Given these words from my jockey and the peculiar omen that I happened to see on our way to the track today, I didn't bet very much on Stoney, despite being so convinced that she is the best horse in this field."

"Which omen?" No reply. I tried again: "If you think she is going to lose why bet anything at all?"

"It's an owner's bet, an expression of confidence in my mare; it's like saying, 'I still love you, and even if that bastard hooks you I'm going to put money on you because I know that you would run an honest race if only you were permitted to do so. Besides, she might win; who can say? Fixed races also unfix themselves sometimes."

"How?"

"What if a gang of owners decides that my horse is going to win, but the jockeys conspire together to make your mare succeed? I've seen it happen before. The jockeys who are in on the plot will select a rank outsider, a horse who will be available at long odds because no one expects him to win. He has to be a horse being ridden by an apprentice jockey, or maybe by a broken-down old rider who is not a member of their clique. The plotters have their accomplices bet heavily on that horse just before the race begins, at the very last moment. That way no one else has an opportunity to get in on the deal. After the start of

the race the conspirators guide the apprentice along without his knowing it, bunching him in and moving him up. At just the right moment they give him an opening. Out in front he goes, with the others swinging their whips furiously behind him pretending they are trying their damndest to catch up. *Voila!* The kid thinks he's a champion for booting home a horse who had no chance to win, and the pirates who arranged for him to win enjoy a handsome payday. If it is done properly no one will suspect a thing."

He was convincing. "If you are so sure about Jhendu Kumar, why didn't you just replace him? Wasn't there still time yesterday?"

"There was, but what would I have gained by doing that? I have no proof that he is going to hook her. If I make unsubstantiated allegations against him it will only look bad for me. It might even make all the other jockeys hook all my runners from now on, to teach me a lesson. Jockeys are jockeys, after all; they show solidarity with others of their breed. Besides, why should I be worried? If Stoney still owes me money she'll have to give it to me later somehow, maybe via one of her foals, even if Jhendu Kumar hinders her from giving it to me now. So I can afford to relax and watch the show unfold. It's just that it would be so nice for her to go out on a winning note. She's a horse with so much heart! She deserves to win so that she can enjoy the crowd's adulation again this one last time."

"The horses have reached the starting gate," came the announcer's voice over the public address system. We lifted our binoculars to watch the race. It was a clean start, and I quickly located Vimalananda's racing colors—pink with red chevrons—amidst the pack. Stoney looked good coming out of the gate and looked good coming round the bend. But in the stretch she didn't rise to the challenge of the horse who came on strong from the outside; she finished the race a close second to him. Even though I was just a tyro of a race watcher in those days it didn't seem to me that Jhendu Kumar had done much to encourage Stoney to win. He had standing orders not to whip her, but nothing precluded him from riding her out with his feet and hands, or from showing her the whalebone (whips were once made of that material). But he had done neither of these things. Instead, he had made a histrionic exhibition of effort by ineffectually slapping the reins up and down around her neck. I suppose that he brazenly thought that this would somehow impress us, but as I dropped my binoculars for a sidelong glance at Vimalananda I could see that he too was convinced of Jhendu's guilt.

Vimalananda said nothing more about the matter until that evening, when we were back at home and he had a glass of Scotch at his right hand. He spoke with calm firmness: "Since my mother died two years back life no longer interests me much. I've done a lot in my life, much more than most people. I

have endured the heights of pleasure and the depths of misery. I've gained a lot, and lost a lot, and thanks to my beloved Smashan Tara I have achieved almost everything that I set out to achieve." *Smashan Tara* ("The Saviouress of the Cemetery," "She Who Transports You to the Other Side of Existence") is the second of the group of Tantric goddesses known as the Ten Mahavidyas. She is the deity that introduced Vimalananda to his spiritual path.

"There is very little in the world that can keep my attention now. I am still interested, though, in my spiritual 'children,' in my little dog, Lizoo," who lifted her head from his lap expectantly when she heard her name, "and in horseflesh.

"For me horse racing is splendid sport because I find something wonderful in the whole process of preparing a horse to race. This is why I keep my horses with lesser-known trainers. The famous trainers like Ardeshir Rustomjee who probably do a better training job than the smaller fry won't let you interfere with their plans for the horse. If you make too many suggestions they just tell you, 'Get out!' because they know they can get more horses at any time. But a small trainer who never knows where he'll be able to find another owner has no alternative; he has to put up with interfering owners like me who interest themselves in the nuts and bolts of training.

"You begin by sifting through the pedigrees of the foals that come into the auction until you find one that you can afford that you think can win, and you bid on it. If you are able to purchase it you then direct its training program until it is ready to see the track. Meanwhile you pore over the racing calendar to find appropriate races in which it might run. As the months pass you check regularly on the progress of your colt or filly by watching her do her morning work and by visiting her at the stables in the evening. You worry over her when she is sick. You pamper her more than you would your own child, feeding her supplements to improve her health and to give her that extra vigor that she will need to best the field.

"Eventually you enter her in a race. When the list of entries is published you study each runner, closely comparing their current handicaps with their previous race records. Finally, on those occasions when everything seems to come together you start to get a feeling that yes, in this particular race, your filly can do it! She can trounce the opposition! Then you go to the track and put your money where your mouth is, and she comes and runs her heart out and wins! When you walk out onto the grass near the finish line to lead her in, amidst cheers of adulation from the crowd—well, it's a unique feeling, I tell you, unique!

"Now, what if, after all this expenditure of time and energy you've invested in your mare, she had every chance to win the last race of her life and then at

the last moment a scoundrel appeared on the scene, a human scum who spoiled everything. How would you feel? I doubt that it would make you very happy." He sipped his Scotch sternly. "Don't get me wrong; I'm glad she's going to retire. She'll have a chance to relax and be well fed in a peaceful paddock. She'll enjoy some nice sex with a well-hung stallion and learn what it means to be a mother. No, I don't feel bad about her leaving racing at all; I just feel bad about the way she left."

"According to you," I ventured, "because Stoney was destined to win both her syce and the jemadar were destined to receive winning bonuses from your hand, and her trainer Mr. Lafange was destined for his share of the stake money, and you were destined for both stake money and prestige enhancement. Jhendu Kumar, who was destined only to get stake money and a tip, elected instead to conspire with a bookie who was karmically meant to pay you. The bookie collected from you and Stoney's other creditors the bets that you all were supposed to have won money on and gave some of that money to Jhendu Kumar. This makes the two of them the new debtors for all the rest of you."

"Absolutely correct."

"What about the debtors who owed money to the club and the bookies?"

"They were going to lose anyway, and they lost; those debts are cleared."

"Mustn't it also have been your karma, or Stoney's karma, that involved Jhendu Kumar in the first place?"

"Indeed it was, but however much it has been my karma or Stoney's to be involved with such a cheat it is even more a result of Mamrabahen's karma." (Mamrabahen was a woman to whom Vimalananda had long been a father figure.) "Mamrabahen dragged me back into racing, after a gap of nearly thirty years. I had no need for it, but she thought she did. She wanted to be able to parade around at the racecourse in fancy saris, and show off her connection to my horses. I cooperated because I wanted to try to satisfy these desires of hers so that she could get beyond them and drop them. And what was the result? Her new-found 'affluence' went to her head. She acts as if she herself is the owner, which makes everyone think that she is my mistress. Meanwhile she has been running around with all the jockeys, flirting with them and doing God knows what else in order to get hot tips on which horses are going to win."

"By permitting myself to get involved with Mamrabahen and her schemes I opened myself to being influenced by her karmas, almost all of which are bad—if they had been good something good would have happened to her by now."

"If her karmas are so evil why would you want to expose yourself to their influence?"

"Well, it is a complicated situation. For one thing, I have been part of her life ever since she was small. How can a mother ever give up on her child? For another, she is part of my karmic family—part of the group of people that I have an obligation to relate to during this lifetime whether I like it or not."

"Since you are so karmically connected to her why can't your influence, which I have seen help so many others, help her overcome the bad influences in her life so that she can make some progress too?"

"It is not an easy thing to explain, Robby, but it has to do with her *causal body*. Do you remember the difference between the causal body and the *astral body*?"

"The causal body is the storehouse of all the memories of all your *rnanubandhanas*. Karmas when ripe and ready to be experienced project from the causal body into the subtle or astral body, which is the mind, where they cause us to act in conformity with the karmas we have to experience."

"Correct. The problem is that in Mamrabahen's causal body there are so many negative karmas that it will be almost impossible for her to get rid of them all in the space of one short lifetime."

"You mean that if Mamrabahen's causal body were a shirt it would be so coated with the greasy dirt of her nasty karmas that no matter how many times you wash it and bleach it it will still be absolutely filthy?"

"Yes," replied Vimalananda with cold sobriety as he continued to sip, "that's the idea. Her karmas are so bad that she has steadfastly continued down the road to ruin no matter how many times I have tried to change her course. I have had to save her dozens of times from all sorts of unpleasant circumstances. Once she had even been sold into slavery and was about to be sent to the Persian Gulf! We only caught up with her the day before she was to depart and extricated her with great difficulty."

"I forced this girl to do her M.A.; I have found jobs for her; I have tried to find her a husband. I have spent thousands and thousands of rupees on her, but has she appreciated anything that I have done for her? Not a thing; she even says to my face, 'What have you ever done for me?' She's wretchedly spiteful and thankless, yet I still continue to try to save her. Why? Because it's my karma to do so. You see, I once ordered her to be killed."

"You ordered her to be killed?" I asked, incredulous.

"Yes, in a previous lifetime, as the result of a pre-existing curse. Most of what we call karma is made up of the effects of curses and blessings. As a matter of fact I would say that 75%, or maybe even 90%, of all karma is either *ab-hishapa* (curse) or *ashirwada* (blessing)."

"When you say 'curse' you don't mean vulgarity—what we call 'cuss words' in Texas—do you? You must mean some kind of hex like the gypsies use,

which makes it sound like almost all karma results from people throwing whammies on one another?”

“Not exactly. There are still a few people who know how to consciously deliver real curses and blessings, but very few. Most curses and blessings are not deliberate. If you do something really nice for someone, if you help him out when he really needs help his heart will melt, if he is any kind of human at all, and a wave of gratitude will flow from him towards you. This is a blessing. A curse is the same sort of thing: if you afflict someone terribly then at some point, often at the moment of death, he in his misery will cry out from his heart. That cry will act on you like a curse; its vibrations will follow you around and interfere with your life. A *sadhu* (Hindu religious mendicant) can only bless or curse when he is overwhelmed with emotion; only then does the real *shakti* (power, energy) flow. When he is overcome with anger out comes a curse; when it is joy that overflows it comes out in a blessing.

“I’ll explain to you just exactly how this works—eventually. All you need to know right now that the curse that binds Mamrabahen and me together is a true curse, delivered on purpose by someone who was very powerful—which is why we are still being affected by it. The force of a real curse lasts for seven births. In our case those seven are still not complete. I have already killed her more than once, and she has been taunting me for years that she will force me to kill her in this incarnation also. This is not her speaking, really; it is the curse speaking through her. If she succeeds at inciting me and I kill her that progression will continue and I will kill her in a total of seven births. After that she will gain the right to kill me in seven incarnations.”

“Huh???”

“It’s nothing but the Law of Karma, Robby, Newton’s Third Law of Motion, the Law of Action and Reaction: If I kill her she gets to kill me in return.”

“That’s all there is to it?”

“Basically, that’s all there is to it. But does that sound like nothing to you? The Law of Karma may sound simple, but understanding all its ramifications is truly a hell of a job. There was once a disciple who claimed that his guru never taught him anything. Disciples are always like this; it is part of God’s *lila*, His Cosmic Play. We humans perform *krida*, which is unconscious play, play which we do not know how to control. Only the play of the gods, and of our ancient *Rishis* (Seers), is *lila*: cosmic pastimes which are always under their control.

“Anyway, this disciple pestered his guru for knowledge for so long that the guru finally decided to force the boy to learn something. The next day when they were out walking together they saw a cobra being gobbled up by thousands of ants. No matter how the cobra twisted and turned he couldn’t escape

a horrible death. The disciple asked, ‘Guruji, what has the cobra done to suffer like this?’ The guru replied, ‘Keep quiet! Come on!’

“Further along the road they came to a fishing village. One fisherman had just returned to shore after hauling in a big catch. He was resting, obviously enjoying himself, smoking a good pipe.

“‘Do you understand?’ asked the guru.

“‘No,’ replied the boy.

“‘That cobra we saw will become a fisherman, and those ants will become fish. This man was once a cobra who was eaten by ants, and that is why he has a right to torture and destroy these fish who were once ants.’”

“Oh,” I said, in a tone of hush. “I see. If you slay Mamrabahen again she will eventually get to slay you, one way or another.”

“Yes, and if I break this cycle right now I will never have to kill her again and she will never get the right to kill me. That will end this peculiar karmic dance, which is what I want. There are times that the force of that curse on her mind makes her provoke me so much that the force of the curse on my mind makes me decide to wring her neck—but then I calm down and remember my plan.”

“And this will continue until the entire energy of the curse is expended?”

“Exactly, for that long and not one moment longer. But who knows how much power remains behind the curse? There is no limit of time. It’s difficult to know such things, but I have seen no change in her behavior thus far. This makes me think that I still have a long way to go to pay off this particular *rna* (karmic debt). Once the *rna* is paid the *rnanubandhana* ends. In the meanwhile I help to moderate the curse’s force by sharing in her karmas. Because she is destined to suffer I have to suffer, and I have really suffered due to Mamrabahen, on so many accounts. After involving myself with her some of her evil karmas have affected me directly—my recent heart attack was partly due to her making me furious, partly to my taking on some other karmas that I don’t want to talk about right now. Some of her evil karmas have also affected me through others. Currently one portion of her karmas is affecting me through the person of Jhendu Kumar. She has latched onto him thinking that together they will collaborate with the bookies, hook lots of horses, and make quick money. Quick money, that is all she can think of; ‘long-range planning’ is not in her vocabulary.

“Now, just because Jhendu Kumar had the ability and the opportunity to hook Stoney doesn’t mean that he was forced to do so. He had the free will to say ‘no,’ and to go ahead and win. If he had won he would have obtained a little less money this time, but he would have maintained good relations with me. That would have helped him out in the long run. But he followed a policy of short-term gains, for which he will have to pay.”

“Eventually.”

“Eventually, and also very soon, since I will never give him a mount again. I will also tell of my experience to my owner friends, who are unlikely to give him any mounts either. And then where will he be? He could have seen this coming, but his own evil karmas, coupled with all the booze that he drinks, have clouded his mind. To refrain from taking easy money when it is offered to you on a platter takes backbone, and you can’t really expect many jockeys to show much of that. A few do have character, I know, but most jockeys are taught to be crooks from an early age. They are tutored in crime by the trainers and the bookies.

“Today’s debacle was partly my own fault. One of my previous trainers, old Maneckjee, always warned me about giving a jockey a winning mount more than twice. ‘Let him win twice, you moron-molester,’ he would say, ‘and then give the mount to someone else. A jockey will try hard to win the first two times, but after two victories he will start to think that you can’t do without him, that he can do as he pleases and you won’t dare to do anything about it. Remember what I say, you sister-screw!’ Maneckjee was a true Parsi—he couldn’t speak a single sentence without at least one vulgarity in it. One of the reasons that I love Parsis is their colorful way of speaking.”

The ancestors of today’s Parsis emigrated to India from Persia more than 1300 years ago. The Parsis, who worship fire, follow the religion of Zarathustra (Zoroaster) who 2500 years ago or more preached a dualistic faith in which good and evil continuously battle for control of the universe. About half of the world’s one hundred thousand Zoroastrians live in Bombay.

“When I call Jhendu Kumar a bastard, by the way, I’m not just talking out of my wits. He *is* a bastard; no one knows his pedigree. He grew up in an orphanage. You know how important pedigree is to racehorses; do you think it is any less important to humans? Oh no—it is tremendously important. And even more important than your physical heredity is your mental heredity, the lineage of karmas and *samskaras* (personality characteristics) that you carry with you from birth to birth. How can I expect Jhendu Kumar to be honest when he doesn’t seem either to have inherited any good *samskaras* from his parents or brought over into this lifetime any good karmas from his previous incarnations? Some people leave the orphanage and go on to live decent lives, but not this fellow. In fact, he was tossed out of the orphanage for misconduct. Now he is misbehaving with me. It is his fate to be a cheat, and there is nothing I can do about it, unless I want to get myself filthy cleaning out the cesspool of his karmas. But why bother? My job is to complete my *rnanu-bandhana* with him. Then I can go my own way, and he can go on experiencing the results of his own karmas, which is his fate.

“What is fate, after all, but the sum of all your past karmas? And what are karmas except debts to be paid? You act, and your action sows the seeds of a reaction that you will have to endure, like it or not. I can’t try to prevent everyone from enduring their fate. People go on and on arguing about fate *versus* free will, but they’re all fools. Everyone has free will. You are free to decide either to live your life cooperating with Nature or to try to go off on your own. But even if you go off on your own you will still end up having to walk the path that Nature (which means the Law of Karma) has set for you. If you cooperate with Nature from the beginning you will waste less time and energy, and suffer less misery. Isn’t it more sensible and rational to choose the path of least resistance that entails the least pain? It is always better to live with reality, Robby, because otherwise, you can be sure of it, reality will come to live with you.”

“So we can be absolutely sure that reality will eventually come to live with Jhendu Kumar?”

“As sure as you and I are sitting here. Nature’s wheels grind slowly, but they grind very, very thoroughly, and nothing escapes them. Do you know who Vidhata is?”

“I do not.”

“*Vidhata* is Fate personified, an ethereal being who manages the conversion of past karmas into present results. Vidhata exerts his influence on us through his representatives, the ethereal beings who create the circumstances in which he can work. In *Jyotish* (Indian astrology) we recognize nine such representatives, which we call the Nine Planets. Each planet influences different aspects of an individual’s life. The Sun, for instance, represents the soul. The Moon represents the mind, especially its intuitive and emotional aspects. The position of the Moon in the horoscope thus shows a good astrologer exactly how an individual’s emotions are innately arranged, and how those emotions will change as the planets transit the skies.

“The most important of the Nine Planets is Saturn, the planet in charge of experience (*anubhava*). We call Saturn the ‘son of the Sun’ in *Jyotish* because all experience occurs due to the presence of the soul, who is the true ‘experienter’ in a living being. It is Saturn who is responsible for your fate, who forces you to experience your karmas whether you want to or not.”

“Good karmas and bad.”

“Good karmas and bad. Saturn causes dramatic changes, both good and bad, in everyone’s life. Saturn can cause you to reach the heights of fame or riches or whatever, or can make you sink into the depths of misery, all according to the credit or debit balance in your karmic account. Some people are naturally lucky; you see it everywhere, and there is no accounting for it except



by invoking the Law of Karma. In one and the same family one man may have to slog all day long just to keep bread on his family's table, while his brother may unexpectedly receive some windfall that allows him to live a luxurious, carefree life. 'Bad luck' is the state in which your karmic account consists mainly of bad karmas, which causes Saturn to dish out mostly miseries for you to endure. 'Good luck' means that you have plenty of good karmas to enjoy. To have a positive karmic credit balance means that you are the creditor of a large number of rnanubandhanas, that you will have many things to collect from other beings. A person with a negative credit balance owes lots of things to other beings; he is the debtor of a large number of rnanubandhanas.

"Saturn causes you to experience pleasure or pain by affecting your innate 'nature' (*svabhava, prakriti*), which is the thing that determines how you relate to your surroundings. Some people have an angry, irritable nature; others are naturally calm and complacent; still others are by nature fearful and timid. This nature is inborn in each of us; it is present in our genes and chromosomes, and controls how we experience the world. The 'nature' of Ma, the Great Goddess, is Nature itself, the force which causes the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universes."

"Doesn't environment count for anything?" Roughly speaking *prakriti* represents the root and *svabhava* the fruit of human awareness.

"It counts for a tremendous amount. If you are given proper samskaras when you are young enough you can go a long way off. But beneath all your samskaras is still your nature.

"In the limited human sense your *prakriti* is your 'first action' (*pra + kriti*), the choice of action which you naturally, instinctively make when you are confronted by some situation. Except in a few rare cases this choice is purely instinctive in animals, whose conscious minds are very limited. And even if you teach an animal to restrain itself you can rely on it only so far. After a certain point the temptation to return to its original temperament will prove too great for its training. After all, the nature of Nature is automatic and instinctual behavior. The consciousness of human beings is supposed to be more advanced than that of animals, but how much more advanced is it? Your human consciousness has plenty of limitations which can cause you in critical situations to forget all the good things you have learned. These influences include your food, your air, and the company you keep, but without a doubt the most important of the limitations on your consciousness is the hereditary characteristics that you have inherited from your family and your past births.

"Until you have conquered this innate nature, either through long, hard penances or by creating overwhelming affection and love for your deity, Sat-

urn can still affect you. Directed by Fate, Saturn searches out the weaknesses in your personality and exposes them to full view. This forces you to experience the many limitations of your nature. In life you ultimately have to depend on your own inner knowledge, which is all you'd be able to save in a shipwreck. How well you can tap into your inner knowledge depends on how strong an influence Saturn exerts on your mind. This in turn is determined by *ahamkara* (ego). *Ahamkara* is called *Kundalini Shakti* when it begins to awaken from its 'sleep' of self-delusion. Until that time *ahamkara* creates and reinforces your limited human personality by self-identifying with your physical and mental attributes. So long as your awareness remains trapped in your body you will be at Saturn's mercy, for you will be unable to control your own nature. Only when you have completely overcome 'what comes naturally' to you can Saturn no longer have any effect on you.

"This is why we say in Sanskrit, *Svabhavo vijayati iti shauryam*—'the true heroism is to conquer your own nature.' But it's not so easy to permanently conquer your own nature! Not at least until you become immortal. Fate can affect an immortal being only if he or she again willfully accepts subjection to time, space and causation. I emphasize all this just so you will know that to make any kind of fundamental change in your nature—which means to alter your fate—you must be able to change the chemical patterns in your brain, patterns which are controlled by your genes and chromosomes."

"So there is no hope for Jhendu Kumar?"

"There is hope for everyone; everyone will eventually realize God. But eventually is a long way off for Jhendu Kumar. Given the karmas he came in with and the ones he has been creating there is very little likelihood that he is going to make any sort of desirable progress during this birth. Translate this Sanskrit phrase for me: *Purva datteshu vidya, purva datteshu bharya, purva datteshu dhanam, purva datteshu maranam*."

"Well . . . 'previously given knowledge, previously given wife, previously given money, previously given demise.' Is that close?"

"It is. What it means is that whatever knowledge or skills, spouse, wealth and property, and death you enjoyed in previous lives you will also enjoy in this one. Good karmas and bad, curses and blessings, all your rnanubandhanas continue with you from life to life for at least seven births in a row. Saturn is the planet who by swaying your mind forces you into the situations which will fulfill the conditions set out in the karmic debts that you have contracted. Suppose because of your rnanubandhanas you are destined to marry a certain girl. When you meet her you will probably fall into some *love-aria* which will cause you to jump into matrimony. The stage is then set for the two of you to square up your karmic accounts."



“Love-aria??”

“Love-aria is just like malaria except that it is caused by romance instead of by a physical parasite. Most of the time a sufferer from love-aria remains normal, sane, and rational, but during an attack of the fever of love he falls into delirium. Like malaria love-aria usually won't kill you, and like malaria it is very difficult to cure.”

“Huh.” I paused for thought before I asked, “If you get your exact same spouse back in a new form will you get your exact same knowledge back?”

“The form of all these things may change but the essence will remain the same. A butcher may be reborn as a surgeon, perhaps, but both live by cleaving flesh. In fact, whenever you see an expert surgeon, like my son, you should know that he must have been a butcher in a previous birth. Otherwise he would not have such a love for his job. Sometimes my son will tell me, ‘Papa, whenever I go in to operate I feel such a thrill!’ That love for cutting is characteristic of a flesh-cleaver. When I hear these words come out of my son's mouth I say to myself: ‘Purva datteshu vidya!’

“A person who can play a part well can do so because of the traits of previous lives which he retains within him. If I can convincingly play a king I was very likely a ruler in a previous life. If I can perfectly self-identify with merchants, villains or prostitutes then I must have been a merchant or a villain or a prostitute in the past. And so on.”

“Does this mean that Akbar likes to come to you because you play the king well, which you do because you were a ruler in some previous life?” Vimalananda was fond of opening himself to possession by the spirits of deities and saints, a process known in Sanskrit as *avishkara*, and he would frequently host the shade of the Mughal Emperor Mohammed Jalal-ud-Din Akbar.

“Yes, I was a ruler, more than once, and if I have achieved something in this life it is because I have some pedigree, both from my past lives and from my parents. Jhendu Kumar might hope to make something of himself in this lifetime if he had some foundation to build on, some ‘previous knowledge.’ But he has nothing to build on. And what can he do well? Nothing! He is no great shakes as a jockey, and he is useless as a crook. He is a nobody.”

“He can cook.”

“He can cook—adequately. Are you prepared to call him a chef?”

“By no means.”

“And even in the food he cooks he continues to create future limitations for himself.”

“How?”

“By cooking meat. Unless you are a Tantric adept or an *Aghori* (a practitioner of *Aghora*, the ‘super-Tantra’ in which all sense of limitation is removed),

meat-eating creates a powerful negative influence on your mind by causing your ego to self-identify with the animals that you eat. You'll notice that most Indians who eat meat eat goats, chicken, and fish—and have you noticed all the chicken and goat and fish mentality in people nowadays? And this effect is not even limited to the animals that we kill for food. With the big rat eradication program that's going on now in our country rat qualities will appear more and more. You will see it. Do you know the character of a rat? You get along fine with the fellow until one day he gives you a good bite!” He laughed.

“Like Jhendu Kumar bit you.”

He laughed again. “Precisely. Every animal, even an insect, which is willfully killed by a human gains thereby the right to be eventually reborn as a human. Whenever I see a line of animals being led to the slaughterhouse I want to say to them, ‘Quick! Quick! Quick work! Just a little pain, and then you are in the queue to come back and be reborn as a human.’ That is its right, and why shouldn't it be? It's the Law of Karma. Even insects have this privilege. Fortunately for us, though, insects and other non-mammals are not adapted to live as mammals. They can't thrive as mammals, and they don't enjoy it either. They each get their chance, but they die very young. This is why we don't see more cockroach, ant, fly, or mosquito humans. Can you imagine how terrible a bedbug human or a tsetsefly human would be?”

“Oh my God!”

“We are fortunate that insects and other animals which are killed accidentally don't have this privilege. They don't have it because you didn't intend for them to die. You don't kill them intentionally; they die thanks to their own karmas. But vermin that are deliberately killed get a chance to be human, if even temporarily. This is bad enough for those who kill vermin for a living, because it establishes a *rnanubandhana* with the vermin they kill. But that's not the end of it. Most of those vermin will be human only temporarily; this is why the number of abortions increases with the number of vermin exterminated. Even so, some vermin—most likely those that have already been mammals in some birth or other—will probably develop into humans, if even briefly. Suppose those vermin-humans then perform some evil karmas during their human rebirth. It is likely that they will; mayhem comes natural to vermin. If they do, won't the exterminator be at least partially responsible for that mayhem, since he enabled them, violently, to become human in the first place? He must be!”

“But if we don't kill off cockroaches, rats and other vermin how can we keep them under control?”

“Well, there are better ways. In Rajasthan there is a famous temple of Karni Mata. Thousands of white mice live in it. If you sit inside the temple long

enough they will begin to climb all over you, which is an eerie feeling. The Maharaja of Bikaner allots to the temple a certain amount of grain, which is distributed to these mice. And in the surrounding area, for miles around, very little if any of the grain in the fields is ever eaten by rodents. Nature likes it when we try to work with Her, and She loses Her temper when we don't.

"But at least when you kill vermin they can't remain human for too long. Most of the higher mammals that we murder, though, can adapt fairly well to the human body. Most Westerners are fond of beef and pork, and when I have visited the West I have not been surprised to find large numbers of pig-humans and cow-humans there; pigs and cows who have been temporarily reborn as humans. They gravitate to the flesh of the animal they used to be because it feels so familiar to them. But even those people who were recently other animals show a perverse sort of fondness for beef or pork. Why perverse? Well, for one thing neither of those meats is fit for human consumption. From the point of view of your health a regular diet of either beef or pork will make you more prone to degenerative diseases like arthritis, rheumatism and gout.

"But the worst effects of beef and pork are on the mind. One of the words for cow in Sanskrit is *go*, which also means sense organ. This suggests that anyone who eats the flesh of the cow becomes more animalistic, more physical, more attached to the world of the senses and their objects. Those who eat beef will find it very difficult to control their senses and soar into the astral regions, which is what you must do if you want to make real spiritual progress. And pork! If you want to know what pork can do to you just look at the sow. She will have sex with any boar she likes whenever she likes, even if she is pregnant. And if she is hungry after delivery she will eat her own piglets."

I knew this to be true.

"If you think carefully about this whole meat business you will realize that the more violence you use to obtain your food the more violence you will use and experience in your everyday life. Violent food will cause you to tend to attract violence to yourself, and will make you more interested in inflicting violence on others. For example, it is because meat eaters are so intent upon cutting flesh that both they and the doctors that treat them usually prefer surgical medicine."

"The Law of Karma; curses and blessings."

"Exactly. You know, once all the goats who had been slaughtered by humans, in ritual sacrifices and for food, held a congress. After they compared notes with one another regarding the various miseries they had suffered at the hands of priests and butchers they decided that they should perform some rituals themselves. So the goats organized a *Maha Vidweshan Prayoga*

(a great ritual for causing hatred and discord), and dedicated the fruits of this ritual to the human race so that men would slaughter one another just as they slaughter goats."

"The goats seem to have done a pretty good job of spreading strife with their *prayoga* (ritual)."

"Yes they have. And I'll tell you this too: until people stop eating meat the population of the world will not go down no matter what the governments try to do. Animals love to procreate, you know, and when they become humans they retain many of the impressions of their animal lives, including especially the desire for sex. No matter how much the authorities push birth control it won't help. And abortion is not the answer either! Sometimes abortion may be necessary, of course, and when it is necessary it is not so bad if it is done before the fourth month. Before the fourth month the *jiva* (individual soul) is not so firmly connected to the fetus that the baby has started to move. The karma for an abortion which is done later, though, after the heart begins to beat, is the same as for murder."

"Hitler was a vegetarian."

"Yes, I know that. Meat-eating is just one of the factors which causes war—but it is a significant one."

"Some people insist that the earliest humans were hunter-gatherers whose diet consisted almost entirely of meat."

"There is considerable doubt among modern scientists that ancient men were strict carnivores. I personally believe that primitive man in India never ate meat. Instead he ate only tubers, roots and fruits, and when he realized what he was doing he began to live only on air. Some of those early men and women who were super-dupers went beyond air also. However, it would not astound me if in most other countries people became more and more primitive instead of more and more refined as time passed, and started to kill and eat animals.

"And don't think that this belief of mine makes me some sort of namby-pamby pacifist. I have killed men when I was in the army. I also used to enjoy hunting, until the day I went out with Mr. Williams of Stanvac, the company that later became Esso. He was an American, and I wasn't much impressed with him; he would get tired after a few miles and then go back to the tent and drink beer.

"Anyway, on this trip I happened to shoot a *gaur* (Indian bison). I dropped him with a clean shot. As I stepped up to finish him off, if need be, I looked into his eyes. The look he gave me made me stop dead in my tracks. It said, 'The only reason you killed me is that I am so much better than you. You couldn't appreciate me for being stronger and more handsome than you are; in your weakness your only way to gain power over me was to kill me.' He was

right. I pulled my earlobes and I have never hunted since that day.”

Like many people in India Vimalananda would pull his earlobes when admitting to being at fault. Though convinced of his sincerity on this subject one thing still bothered me: “You yourself still eat meat occasionally,” I noted.

“Yes I do, but only when I am convinced that doing so is the best to settle a specific rnanubandhana. Besides, I know how to eat that meat so that it will not pollute my mind. Nor I have not forgotten the Law of Karma, for after I eat meat I always repay my debt to the animal by making sure that it will be promptly reborn in a higher womb. Do we think that Jhendu Kumar knows anything at all about such things, or that he would bother to think about them even if he did? Any meat eater who can’t take care of the animal he eats is asking for big trouble.”

“Which is a big reason that you have told me never to eat meat.” I had actually become vegetarian a year and a half before being introduced to Vimalananda.

“Correct. If I told you to eat meat either I would have to take responsibility for that animal’s welfare, even if it was your gullet that its body went down, or I would have to teach you how to repay your debt to the animal, which I am not yet ready to do. There may be some times, though, that I will advise you to eat a specific piece of meat in order to settle a specific rnanubandhana. In those cases I will take personal responsibility for the animal and will do something for it. And for you, too, if your mental digestion is not yet strong enough to handle its meat.”

During our years together Vimalananda enjoined me to eat meat on three separate occasions.

“It is because killing the animal is far worse than just enjoying its meat that the Buddhists have the Three-Hand Law. They say that three hands participate in preparing of meat for the table: the hands of the slaughterer, the butcher, and the cook. Each of these people takes up part of the meat’s karma, leaving the eater of the meat with much less karma to take on than if he had killed, dressed and prepared the flesh himself. This is why I tell those of my ‘children’ who eat meat that they should never select a living animal and instruct a butcher to kill it for them. That action of identifying yourself with the karma—that intention that ‘this animal should die for me’—magnifies its effects tremendously. I always advise people to go to the cold storage shop and see what is available. If nothing is there, well, your rnanubandhanas are with other animals than those whose bodies lie there, and you will have to wait until later to eat meat. As it is everyone who goes to a butcher can only obtain meat from those animals with which they have some rnanubandhana. Furthermore, they can only buy those body parts which that animal owes to them. If no animal that day has any rnanubandhana with them, then even if

they want to buy the meat they will not be able to do so: they will run out of money, or will suddely have to leave, or will change their minds at the last minute, or whatever.”

“The butcher is also ruled by rnanubandhana. He has a right to slaughter animals because he himself was slaughtered in so many births. He can kill as many as killed him in times past; only that number and no more. When he runs out of animals to kill he will automatically retire, or change his business, or develop arthritis in his hands so he can no longer hold his knife, or something like that. Nature really knows Her job best.

“Remember this: Any time you have an opportunity to deliberately slay an animal it is nothing but payback for a time in the past when the animal slew you. This is the only reason that you get the chance to kill it now. If you decide to go ahead and settle your score your new action will guarantee that animal the opportunity to hunt you down later and kill you yet again—unless you know how to avoid it. Butchers could also, if they liked, refuse to exercise their right to slaughter. If they did their personal karmic cycles of killing and being killed would then cease—but the weight of their accumulated karmas is so heavy that only a handful of butchers have ever even considered such a thing.

“One who did was a poor fellow who eked out a meager living for himself and his family by slaughtering and butchering one goat each day. It so happened that one night a guest arrived at his place after the family had already eaten. The law of hospitality clearly states that a guest must be fed, but there was no food left in the house. The butcher could slaughter the next day’s goat, but the meat that was not eaten that night would spoil by the next day, for there was nothing like refrigeration then. Such a loss would ruin him.

“The butcher went out into the pen and looked morosely at the goat, which was a mature billy-goat. Suddenly he had an idea: If he only castrated the goat instead of killing it he would be able to get just enough meat from the testicles to feed the guest. The goat would continue to live, albeit in agony, until the next morning, when he could be dispatched.

“Pleased with this plan the butcher had begun to sharpen his knife when he heard a strange noise coming from the goat. When he removed the knife from the grindstone and listened more attentively he found that the goat was simultaneously crying and laughing. A more intellectual man would have been astonished that he could understand goat language, but the butcher simply went over and asked the goat what he was doing. Calming somewhat the goat replied, ‘I am crying because I am thinking of the torture I will suffer tonight after you cut me, but I am laughing because that torture will last only until morning. Then I will die, which will free me from my misery, and after I am reborn I will be able to seek you out and take my revenge!’

“The butcher dropped his knife and stood stock still for a moment. Then he left the goat, left his family, left the guest in the house, and went straight to the jungle without saying anything to anyone. Eventually he became a saint.”

“He was lucky.”

“He *was* lucky—which means that he was destined for it. His good karmas had matured to the point that he was able to hear the goat, and to understand what the goat told him. Most beings, though, never realize what they are doing, and remain bound tightly to the wheel of karma. A dead mink, who was still weeping bitterly from the pain of having been flayed alive, was once ushered into the presence of God. God’s heart was so touched that He told the mink, ‘Ask whatever you want and I will give it to you.’

“Sobbing between its words, the little mink said, ‘O Lord, now I have no skin to keep me warm. What I want is a human skin coat, so the humans who tormented me will know what it means to have your skin torn from your living body.’

“God replied softly but firmly, ‘If you understood the Law of Karma you would know why you had to be flayed alive and such words would never emerge from your mouth.’”

“But according to the Law of Karma the mink will eventually get a chance to flay its flayer alive, right?”

“Yes indeed—but how will that help? It will just keep the whole process in motion. Forget about revenge; that is God’s job. The Old Testament says, ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.’ Jesus went even further; He said, ‘Turn the other cheek.’ An ordinary person has no patience. He wants immediate revenge when he is wronged; he always strikes back when injured. But that is not the way to do things. That way ties you even more firmly to the wheel of action and reaction. So often when someone plays dirty with me I want to retaliate. But then I remember, *kshamam virasya bhushanam* (‘forbearance is the ornament of a hero’). If you can be patient Nature will arrange your life for you in such a way that you will eventually gain what you desire; about this there is no doubt. Doubt exists only in how long it will take for your desired result to come to pass.”

“Is this what you are talking about when you talk about cooperating with Nature?”

“Yes. When you get to the point where you can manipulate your karmas on your own, or you find someone who is willing to manipulate them for you, then you may be able to fine-tune your destiny to some extent. Otherwise, your fate in the form of your karmas is going to determine your path for you. Then your job will be to walk that path in the most graceful way possible. There is nothing graceful about revenge because it is so very difficult to know

precisely how much retribution your previous karmas entitle you to. Do you remember Shylock from the *Merchant of Venice*? He was entitled to a pound of flesh but to none of the blood therein. Any compensation beyond the amount to which you are entitled creates a *rnanubandhana*, a new karmic account that you will eventually have to square up.

“Moreover, the world of *rnanubandhana* is such that if I owe you cash I will have to pay you back in cash even if I want to pay you back in kind. And I will pay you as much as I owe you even if I don’t want to. Everything depends on the size of the debt. If I reach into my pocket to give a ten-paise coin to a beggar and I pull out a fifty-paise coin, I owed him more than I thought I did. And what if I offer a beggar a ten-paise coin and he gets wild and refuses to accept it, saying, ‘Why are you trying to give me this when I want a rupee?’ The reason I cannot pay him is because I don’t owe him anything. If you know about debt you can know how to repay.”

All I could say at this point was, “This is all very complex.”

“Let us take a practical example,” responded Vimalananda with increasing enthusiasm, “so that you will understand exactly what I mean. Mohammed Jalal-ud-din Akbar, the greatest of the Great Mughals, was every inch a ruler. Although he grew up among the cruelest of the cruel, and although he himself was very hard about certain things, Akbar was never overcome by bloodlust. At thirteen he won his father’s empire back from the Hindu usurper Hemu. When Akbar’s adviser and boyhood mentor Bairam Khan dragged the defeated Hemu in front of Akbar he told the boy, ‘Cut his throat personally, my lord, and become *ghazi* (the title applied to a Muslim who has killed an infidel).’ But Akbar told Bairam Khan, ‘I am not a butcher to kill an unarmed captive. Let my butchers do it.’ The 99.9% of rulers who lack true nobility destroy themselves; only the rare ones, like Akbar, have any idea of what is really going on. Akbar was a true king, and the life he lived is the type of life one calls *shahi* (regal, majestic). Even though at that tender age Akbar probably knew nothing of the Law of Karma, he seemed to have a natural understanding of right actions and wrong actions.

“True kingliness has always been rare among rulers, all throughout history, and we do not see it at all among today’s rulers. So ask yourself now how we could see it in Akbar? On one side of his family he was descended from Genghis Khan and on the other side from Tamerlane, both extremely cruel, bloodthirsty conquerors. Why did he not show their traits of barbarism in his own life when he showed that he had inherited their expertise in strategy and in battle? The answer is not too difficult. In his previous life Akbar had been Prithviraj Chauhan, the Hindu emperor of Northwest India. Prithviraj was a *Rajput*, a warrior from Western India, who exhibited all the

noble traits that he had inherited from the Rajput rulers who came before him. Akbar inherited these traits from his previous incarnation, and they were strong enough to overshadow the viciousness that he inherited from his immediate forebears.

“Prithviraj’s story is very educational. Like Akbar Prithviraj was a great king with great associates, and yet he was defeated in battle, blinded, and forced to commit mutual suicide with his best friend. Prithviraj was a fearless and able warrior whose kingdom was well defended. Even his servants had achieved success with their worship of Ma. The goddess Chamunda, one of Ma’s terrifying destructive aspects, appeared to Prithviraj’s general Chamunda Rai every day to invigorate and advise him. A different aspect of Ma appeared each day to Chand Barot, Prithviraj’s bard, and provided even more shakti to strengthen Prithviraj’s authority. With such powerful shaktis at Prithviraj’s beck and call what could have gone wrong? How could he have ever been conquered? I’ll tell you how: Prithviraj lost his throne, his sight, and his life because of the theft of a woman. He stole his wife Sanyukta from her father’s house. This was no doubt a custom of the time, but it was still a karma. Back in the time of the *Mahabharata* the great hero Arjuna stole Lord Krishna’s sister Subhadra. It is true that Arjuna did so at Krishna’s instigation, but karma is karma. What was the result? Arjuna’s enemies conspired to isolate Abhimanyu, Arjuna’s son by Subhadra, on the battlefield, and killed him there. To obtain shakti is not so difficult; to retain it is no joke.”

The *Mahabharata* is one of India’s two great epic poems. “How exactly did all this happen?”

“Sanyukta’s father hated Prithviraj. When he arranged a swayamvara for his daughter he made it a point not to invite Prithviraj.” In a *swayamvara* (“personal choice” ceremony) a girl chose her own husband from among a number of eligible suitors. “To insult Prithviraj yet further Sanyukta’s father ordered a statue of Prithviraj to be made. He installed this statue outside his door and told all his visitors, ‘Look, Prithviraj is my doorkeeper; how will he marry my daughter?’

“This was because the law books stated that a lowly doorkeeper was not fit to marry a princess?”

“That’s right. But Prithviraj was not to be denied. He came to the swayamvara anyway, in disguise, with Chand Barot and some supporters. Sanyukta, who had been secretly informed of the plot, made a big show of circulating among the assembled princes, trying to choose, when suddenly she garlanded the statue! That sparked off a major fracas which expanded into a brawl when Prithviraj and his men sprang up and ran off with Sanyukta.

They escaped to Prithviraj’s kingdom, where they married.”

“Hold on—if Sanyukta voluntarily went off with Prithviraj, how can you call it a theft? Was Sanyukta her father’s property, like Hebrew girls were their father’s property in Biblical days, that he could do with her as he willed?”

“Not at all. If that were the case, where would the question of *swayamvara* have arisen? But Sanyukta’s father *saw* it as a theft, and acted accordingly.”

“Wait, wait, wait! If one day I pick something up off the road that is free for the asking, do you mean that you could accuse me of theft just because you happen to *think* you own it?”

“Why not? Remember, almost all of karma is curses and blessings. There is no law that says a curse or a blessing has to be based in clear perception. If people had really clear perception they would never curse each other! Even a misguided blessing or curse can produce some effect if it is strong enough. I could give you plenty of incidents from Indian tradition, but let us take one that you are probably already familiar with. Have you forgotten your own Bible? Don’t you remember how Jacob covered himself with fur to trick his father Isaac into giving him the blessing that was really meant for Jacob’s brother Esau? Even though it was not what Isaac had intended it happened anyway, and when Esau arrived late Isaac had to tell him, ‘I’m sorry, but your brother has taken by guile that which was yours.’ Jacob had to pay for his deception—he lost his favorite son Joseph for so many years—but the blessing accrued to him nonetheless. And this is just one instance of misdirected blessings and curses in the Bible. Read it again and you’ll find many more!”

I knew there was more to Jacob’s story than this, but I also knew that Vimalananda was intent on making a point.

“Don’t forget that the size of the blessing or the curse will determine the size of its effects. Isaac’s words had extra power because he was a patriarch, and a dedicated worshipper of God. His blessing became extraordinarily powerful because it was a deathbed blessing. In moments of extreme emotion even ordinary people can put powerful shakti behind their words. Right or wrong, if I have some good shakti you are going to feel the effects of my curse when if I curse you, even if it is for taking something that I only think belongs to me. It is true that I will eventually have to suffer for cursing you, but first you will have to suffer. That is the Law of Karma.”

“Do I understand this correctly? Even though Prithviraj’s elopement was in no way a theft Prithviraj had to suffer just because Sanyukta’s father acted as if it were a theft?”

“Yes, the curse had an effect because Sanyukta’s father hated Prithviraj passionately for carrying off his daughter. That effect was multiplied because Sanyukta’s father was a king, a man of power in the mundane world. You

have to be cautious with the mighty. We have a saying in Hindi:

*Raja jogi agni jal, kabhi na kijiye prit,  
Are prit kiye to nibayie Parashuramji, kyonki un ke uli rit.*

“Lord Dattatreya, who is teaching his disciple Parashurama, says, ‘O Parashurama, you should never befriend a king, a yogi, the fire, or water, but if you do befriend them then tend to that friendship very carefully, because their nature is very contrary.’ The king can award you lands and wealth in one breath and sentence you to death in the next. The fire can cook your food, or burn you. Water can wash you or drown you. And a sadhu? If he is pleased with you he’ll do anything for you; the sky’s the limit. But if you get him angry you’ll be finished, totally ruined.

“Sanyukta’s father cursed Prithviraj by sending a message to the tyrannical Mohammed Ghori of Afghanistan to invite him to invade India and conquer Prithviraj. He also provided Ghori with many of the defense secrets of the kingdom. This was bad enough. Still, Prithviraj had all the advantages that I just told you about, and he could easily have survived Ghori’s attacks had he not made one fatal blunder.”

“What was that?”

“Not too long after the wedding Prithviraj’s guru, who happened to be an Aghori, came to call. The guru told the king, ‘I will take a nail and put it into the head of *Shesha Naga* (the great thousand-headed serpent who supports the earth). Then the Hindu Empire will be firmly established and will remain unassailable for centuries.’ Everyone watched solemnly while the guru ceremoniously placed an iron nail into the ground. Then Prithviraj’s wife Sanyukta said to her husband, ‘What is this naked fellow trying to tell you? ‘Put the nail in the head of Shesha Naga?’ What nonsense! Tell him to prove that the nail has reached Shesha Naga.’ It was always foolish to taunt an Aghori and dare him to prove himself, but we can’t blame Sanyukta too much because something else was speaking through her mouth.”

“Something like the curse of her own father?”

“At least in part. Some other karmas were probably influencing her mind too. Whatever the factors may have been Prithviraj now fell wholly under their influence because of his own karmas. The Aghori told him, ‘Great King, do not listen to her!’ But Prithviraj insisted that the Aghori do as the queen had bidden him. The guru stared sadly for a moment at his wayward ‘child.’ Then he sighed, ‘Led astray by a woman’s words,’ and pulled up the nail—which was dripping with blood. Everyone was horrified. Prithviraj begged his guru to return the nail to Shesha Naga’s head, but the guru told him, ‘It is too late now; the auspicious moment has passed. You were blinded then by love for your wife, but now you will literally be blinded; you cannot escape it.’

“And what happened next? Ten times Mohammed Ghori invaded India, and ten times he was defeated and captured by Prithviraj. Each time that he was brought into Prithviraj’s presence Ghori would say, ‘I am your cow. A *Kshatriya* (member of the warrior caste) must protect all cows. I put myself at your mercy.’ Each time this happened, Prithviraj would release him—*kshamam virasya bhushanam*.

“Prithviraj resisted revenge ten times. The eleventh time his luck—his good karmas—finally ran out, and he was captured by Mohammed Ghori. Ghori then exhibited his own variety of compassion and gratitude by immediately blinding Prithviraj, thus fulfilling the Aghori’s prophecy. How low can a man go! Only a bigoted barbarian would dare to touch the person of the man who had forgiven and protected him not once but ten times before. And that’s what Ghori was: a filthy, vulgar barbarian, human dregs. He took Prithviraj back with him to Afghanistan as sport for his populace. After parading him around for a while Ghori installed Prithviraj in his palace, along with Chand Barot. Prithviraj now had plenty of time to reflect over his guru’s words, and he realized all his follies. He became filled with a terrible resolve and determined that such a brute as Ghori should not continue to live. He and Chand concocted a plan.

“The next day Prithviraj boasted to Ghori: ‘You consider yourself a great conqueror, but you are just a vandal. I, on the other hand, am a true warrior. Why, even without eyes I can still hit a target’s bull’s-eye with an arrow, solely with the help of Chand Barot’s guidance. You could not do such a thing even in your dreams.’

“This stung Ghori, so he decided to force Prithviraj to make good his boast. He even invited all the residents of his city to watch Prithviraj make a fool of himself. As Prithviraj stood facing the target, Chand gave him directions not for the target but for the conqueror, who sat nearby on a throne observing the proceedings. Chand being a bard, his directions came out in a couplet:

*Char bhanj, chaubis gaz, angula ashta praman,  
Vahan pe baitho sultan he, mat chuke Chauhan.*

“Four bhanj, twenty-four gaz, eight angulas away,  
There is sitting the Sultan, Chauhan, don’t dare miss him now.”<sup>1</sup>

“These instructions were so accurate that Prithviraj’s arrow sped straight to Ghori’s chest, pierced his heart, and killed him. Then, to forestall recapture and torture, Prithviraj and Chand swiftly stabbed each other to death.”

“Wow.”

1. An *angula* is approximately 3/4 of an inch, and a *gaz* is about 25 inches. The length of a *bhanj* is uncertain.

“Ghori was a beast, and Prithviraj was a hero. Prithviraj, who had been unable to succeed as emperor, was rewarded for his sufferings by being reborn as Akbar, and as Akbar he reigned as the most glorious of emperors. Chand was reborn as Birbal, Akbar’s closest confidant and the originator of much of his policy. See how karma works! Prithviraj was a Kshatriya and Chand was a low-caste bard. Akbar, though Emperor of India, was not a Hindu, and Birbal was born a *Brahmana* (a member of India’s priestly caste)!

“Many of Akbar’s personality traits were holdovers from his life as Prithviraj. Even when he had the chance to personally kill Hemu he refused to sink to Ghori’s level of predation.”

“Yes, but he still had him executed.”

“True, but in those days if you let a rival live there was every chance that one fine morning you would find a dagger between your shoulder blades. At least Akbar had Hemu executed quickly without torture. That in no way saved Akbar from the karma of Hemu’s death, but it was still a form of compassion. It was in fact the form of compassion that was appropriate in this situation. Torture was omnipresent in those days; why, Akbar’s own son used to enjoy watching condemned prisoners being flayed alive. For Akbar to have been able to live in the environment of intrigue and assassination into which he was born and still not become a bloodthirsty tyrant showed remarkable nobility.

“Akbar could not have learned this sort of nobility in his one lifetime as Prithviraj, of course. It had to be cultivated within him over many, many lives. But Akbar did ‘inherit’ many of his principal character traits from Prithviraj. Because Prithviraj had been a Hindu Akbar’s chief advisers were Hindus and Jodha Bai, his favorite wife, was a Hindu. He loved her dearly, but because Prithviraj had been blinded when he was led astray by Sanyukta, Akbar never allowed himself be ruled by his wife’s advice alone. And because a Muslim had betrayed and blinded him he was always wary of his fellow Muslims. Most of the Rajput chiefs realized this, and cooperated with Akbar to build the empire. Man Singh of Jaipur, who was Akbar’s commander-in-chief, was a Kshatriya, and Man Singh’s sister Jodha Bai, who became Akbar’s empress, was the mother of his son Salim, who succeeded Akbar as the Emperor Jehangir.”

I have recently learned that Jodha Bai, daughter of Udai Singh of Marwar, was actually Jehangir’s wife, mother of the Emperor Shahjahan. Jehangir’s mother, daughter of Bhar Mal of Amber and sister of Man Singh, was named Harkha.

“Although Akbar was a Muslim he wore a Vedic sacred thread, worshipped the sun, and put an end to cow slaughter throughout his empire. The secular

government of India has not been able to end cow slaughter, but the Muslim Emperor Akbar could! What do you have to say to that?”

“I’d say that it showed substantial compassion for the cows.”

“Indeed it did. But what is even more remarkable is that Akbar even started his own religion, which called *Din-e-ilahi* (‘the religion of God’). His own religion—can you beat that? Has any other Muslim ever dared to try this? Most Muslims think that Islam is the only true religion, and those Muslims who have strayed even slightly from the path, like Mansur and Shams-i Tabrizi, have been butchered. And here was a Muslim who said, ‘No, what we need is a religion of God!’”

“Didn’t Akbar have a profound mystical experience during his youth? Perhaps that had something to do with his interest in religion.”

“I’m sure that it did. Akbar wanted *Din-e-ilahi* to be a synthesis of all the religions, just as his Empire was a federation of all the Indian states. He wanted to make people realize that everyone worships the same God and that everyone works toward reaching God at his own rate of speed. This is what I also say: everyone should carve out his own niche. Akbar wanted to stop all the animal sacrifices and other meaningless rituals. He wanted to show people that the way to God leads inwards, not outwards into repetitious rites. This attitude caused many of the clergy from all the religions to hate him, but he was their Emperor, so there was nothing they could do about it. They dared not even wag their tongues lest those tongues be torn out by their roots by Akbar’s executioner, Mian Kamruddin. Akbar was very strict about decorum and discipline.

“Akbar was meant by Nature to be Emperor. He was able to bring all of India under his control because it was his destiny to do it. If the English and the Germans believe in ‘divide and conquer,’ well, I think Akbar was greater. He believed in ‘unify and rule,’ and he practiced what he preached. Nowadays in India Rana Pratap Singh of Udaipur is regarded as a great hero because he was the sole major Rajput king to resist Akbar. The Hindu fanatics say that this showed his willingness to resist tyranny. But what was the ultimate result of his actions? Thousands of Rajput women committed mass suicide by self-immolation after their husbands had died on the battlefield, and that’s about it. When Akbar requested Rana Pratap to enter the federation peacefully he said, ‘No, never!’ with great bravado. Is that the way to behave with someone who is infinitely stronger than you? A true Kshatriya would think of his subjects and their wives and have compassion for them before starting a futile war.

“You know, I did my M.A. in Mughal history, and I think I know what I am saying when I say that Akbar was one of the greatest rulers ever. His was a truly secular state. Even though he was an illiterate Afghani he patronized the



arts and sciences, and gathered all the top men of music, poetry and administration into his court. He built Fatehpur Sikri entirely from scratch as his capital city; even today you can see how architecturally unequaled and amazing it is. Akbar's rule was really the culmination of the entire age. There were other kingdoms in the world at that time, but none could rival the splendor, the power and the glory that was his. He was and until today still is unique, one of a kind. None of his successors could match him, and after him the decline of independent India began in earnest.

"And even though India is again independent we are in such deep decline that the wisdom of the world has become *kshamam virasya dushanam*—not *bhushanam* (ornament) but *dushanam* (error)."

"'Forbearance is a hero's stain?'"

"Yes, today children are taught, 'Do unto others before they do unto you'; they are told that only stupid people fail to speedily retaliate. After Stoney lost I had a good mind to take the whalebone to Jhendu Kumar's hide myself—but why? I could have Jhendu Kumar maimed or killed in a trice by paying a few rupees to a thug, or by showing some fake tears to one of my ethereal friends. But that would make me beholden to them, which would cost me dearly later on. No thanks! I'd rather bide my time and let Nature deal with Jhendu Kumar so that I need not soil my hands. I try to live my life cooperating with Nature from the beginning, which is the true path of least resistance. When I take this sort of long-term look at the situation I remember where I am headed, and I think of how retaliation would make me detour from my course. It would be such a pity for a boat to cross a storm-filled ocean and then sink within sight of the shore."

"So all you have to do is to be patient."

"Do you think that's some kind of joke? The hardest thing in the world is to bide your time."

## chapter two ELAN

I MET VIMALANANDA first in September 1975 on the day that Elan, one of his most reliable mares, won her first race for him. I first accompanied him to the races on the day of Stoney's last outing. Horse racing began in Bombay in the early decades of the nineteenth century when a race ground emerged in what is now the predominantly Christian district of Byculla. When the time came to search for greener pastures, the Royal Western India Turf Club Limited (R.W.I.T.C. for short) selected a low-lying site near Bombay's famous temple of Mahalakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Most members of the Indian racing public mistakenly assume that the Mahalakshmi racecourse, which is among the world's most beautiful wagering venues, was a British production. In truth it was an Indian, Sir Cusrow N. Wadia, the Parsi who was then head of the textile giant Bombay Dyeing, who oversaw the entire project from concept through planning to construction. He gave the club an interest-free loan of Rs. 4 million (\$10 million or more in today's dollars) and went himself to Melbourne, Australia to obtain a blueprint. Thanks to his farsightedness there is only one turn for all races up to and including 1600 meters (one mile).

After racing ceases in Bombay in April, when the heat makes the course too hard for horses to safely run upon it, those horses which do not proceed to Hyderabad, Bangalore or some other venue for monsoon racing are moved to the R.W.I.T.C.'s facility in Poona. There they relax during the summer and the first part of the rainy season while torrents inundate the Bombay stables. The course in Poona sits atop land which is rented from the Southern Command of the Indian Army. It is a little jewel box that occupies the southeast corner of the hundreds of acres of military installations that is collectively known as the Poona Cantonment. At the end of the Poona season, which usually lasts less than three months, the horses are again loaded aboard their



vans or aboard a special train and return to Bombay, where racing commences in late November or early December after the mud in the stables has thoroughly dried.

Racegoers have a choice of three enclosures inside that eminently tangible allegory for life that is the Bombay racecourse. Inside the Members' Enclosure sit the nobility of the racing world: horse trainers, horse owners, Stewards, and Members of the Club and their guests. Club Membership is an exceptionally exclusive privilege which postulants achieve only after dangling for a decade or more on the waiting list. Many Club Members are also owners. Most of those who weren't were, at least at that time, nouveau riche industrialists, old-moneyed erstwhile maharajas, nawabs, and other upper-crust cavaliers and their wives. These grandees graced races mainly to see and be seen as they reclined in comfortable chairs sipping and nibbling, hazarding trivial sums on their whims or on favorites whose names were bruited about by those in the know. Each year one or more of these dignified personages would be fatally bitten by the gambling bug and embark upon the road to ruin. Sometimes I would turn my field glasses on the latest reputedly doomed victim and watch him saunter on the grass below the winning post as he sank deeper into economic quicksand with each step of his gallant promenade.

The Second Enclosure is reserved for commoners, those petty tradespeople, underpaid clerks and unemployed slackers who bet only a few rupees but study the racing form with the concentration and scream with the delight or anguish of those who bet thousands. These people, who lack all access to the insider information that is crucial for placing sensible wagers, mostly come to the races to lose money agitatedly. They count among their number a smattering of expert (though rarely formally trained) statisticians, pedigree investigators, hunchmeisters and the like, men and women who occasionally flabbergast both themselves and onlookers with their serendipity.

In between the Member's and the Second is the First Enclosure, on whose wooden benches Vimalananda and I would sit when we came to watch the races. True to its central location it is the home of mostly middle-class bettors who may have some peripheral connections to people at the track and so are often able to stake their money on "good things." If only "good things" could be guaranteed to win! Though he was an owner Vimalananda hated the incestuously cloying atmosphere of the Member's and preferred to breathe the free air of the First Enclosure. His friends there, who were mostly Parsis, included Cama, an upper-echelon civil servant, and Firoz Godrej, the bluff, broad-shouldered transport manager of a local soft-drink bottling firm who was usually squired to the track by his milder son Noshir.

A week after the Stone Ice debacle I again accompanied Vimalananda to the Bombay races in his 1967 Austin Cambridge station wagon, which we protected by promising a few rupees to one of the young boys who loitered in the parking lot posing as attendants. At the entrance we were accosted by the usual gang of avid sellers of race cards (Cole is the most popular brand), desperate tipsters (the most enduring of whom is a devalued coin who styles himself "Prof. Joker, the Guru"), and despairing gamblers seeking inside information. Just past the entrance stands the Ring, the oval enclosure composed of the stalls of the bookmakers licensed by the Club. Around the Ring stand the hardened gamblers, the men and women with eyes of coagulated greed, who ignore everything except the odds that the bookies chalk onto their narrow blackboards. When the odds become unexpectedly favorable at one stall these maniacs elbow and shove their way there en masse to scream out their wagers. Vimalananda, the ex-wrestler, could easily hold his own with the most raptorial of these gamblers when he entered the Ring, but my height gave me a signal advantage when it came to thrusting money into a bookie's hands. Since I could also by then run up and down stairs more fleetly than he, I was often given the task of betting his favorites for him.

Bettors who lack the money or the nerve to wager with the bookies in the Ring utilize the Tote, or Totalizator, which is run by the Club. The minimum Tote risk is five rupees (then about 70 cents). Between the Ring and the Tote swirl the flotsam and jetsam of racecourse society, propelled on waves of avarice toward their rendezvous with an equine-mediated destiny. On that afternoon it was a world still unknown enough to me to be fascinating. Here huddled a group of astrology buffs debating the latest predictive theory; there leaned a man bent on seducing his pretty companion with the promise of a winner at long odds. Before me the clerks in the office sat calculating stipends and logging payments; behind me the racing populace conferred enigmatically in hurried tones. I navigated this corridor with all the care that one would accord a piranha-filled river.

Vimalananda's friends in the stands were invariably happy to see him trudge up the stairs to his usual seat, for he always tried to give them at least one good horse to bet on during a long afternoon of racing. From where we sat we could see to our right, in the east, the chimneys of a few of the more than one hundred textile mills that are strewn about Bombay. To our north we viewed the planetarium, and to our left sat the naked horizon that betokened the sea beneath it. Cama was already in his place that afternoon, and Firoz and Noshir soon joined us, but Vimalananda's mind seemed too preoccupied to participate in their enthusiasms. When he announced that he had come only to watch these runners and not to bet on them, the others quickly

retreated to the business of their calculations. Vimalananda then looked at me with the eyebrow equivalent of a wink, and as I looked into his race book I watched him mark with his thumbnail one horse in each of the races. This was the first time I saw a procedure which I and others would see now and again thereafter, with the same results: each horse that he marked thus would always win, and never would he bet on those races.

Eventually it became old hat, but on this first occasion I was frankly astonished that he could pick eight winners in a row and neither bet himself nor let his friends in on his secret. I was also shocked that though Elan was running she was not a “good thing.” “You told me,” I protested, “that you always race your animals to win.”

“And I do,” he replied, “provided that they are in fact on the job. When they *are* on the job everyone knows that they are on the job, so that they can all bet and enjoy along with me. It is always best to share your profits with good people; when you spread the karma around by making others your ‘partners in karma’ your own burden gets significantly reduced. But only the greatest horses can win every race they run in, and while I love Elan she is not unbeatable. I could have just galloped her to make her fit, but this run will act as a gallop. Besides, I will be paid for it; I get a subsidy from the Club each time one of my horses runs. Also, by running and losing she will go down in handicap, which will make it easier for her to win next time. When she *is* on the job everyone will know it, have no fear.”

We continued to chat about racing until, after the fourth or fifth race, he began to comment conspiratorially from an astrological standpoint on the day’s large number of unlucky-looking attendees. Jyotish regards such characteristics as oddly-shaped bodies and uneven teeth as indications of affliction by malefic planets, which impede the free flow of *prana* (the life force). When such unusual individuals appear at critical moments in one’s life they often foretold negative events, and at first I thought that he had refrained from betting that afternoon from fear of some temporary obstruction to his own luck.

But he picked up on my thought and contradicted it: “Luck is nothing but a matter of karmas, and there is nothing wrong with my luck—not today, at least. Today I am in a different mood. Only a handful of people have ever entered the racecourse and left it again in one piece with their money, character and balance of mind intact. I was an inveterate gambler, uncontrollable, until my Junior Guru Maharaj brought me under control. My gurus cured me of the gambling disease. I gamble now, but I control it; it doesn’t control me. Still, gambling is a serious karma; it permanently devastates your mind. In fact, they say that it is one of the three things that cannot ordinarily be atoned for in this lifetime.”

“What are the other two?”

“Rape and guru-murder.”

“Gambling is that serious?”

“It is very serious, but I have learned how to karmically atone for my gambling, so I’m not worried about that karma. What I *am* worried about is misusing my other talents. I am always happy to bet on my own fancies, on the horses that I have selected as winners on the basis of their pedigrees, records, handicaps and recent track work. But suppose that someone, some ethereal being, comes to me and says, ‘Why do all that work? Here are the winners for today’s races; go out and enjoy yourself!’ I could take his advice and make lots of money that way—but what about the karma? What about the gambling karma, and the karma of taking money that I didn’t deserve, and most of all the karma of going under the obligation of that ethereal being? Somewhere along the line he will want me to do something for him, something I may not want to do. How will I be able to refuse him if I am in his debt?”

“I used to make money on racing with the help of information from the ethereal world, just to test it—and then I would promptly dispose of my winnings. Sometimes I would pay off my debts or other people’s debts with that money. For the longest time I would go down to Crawford Market whenever I had a good day at the races and buy up all the pigeons and doves and other birds waiting there to be slaughtered. Then I would free them, just to watch them fly away and enjoy their freedom. Eventually, though, my mentors made me see what I was getting myself into. Now I just like to sit, and watch, and appreciate the cleverness of my ethereal friends. Besides, if I take everything that I am due from these horses too soon that will be all I’ll be able to get from them. Then there will be no fun in coming to the races; if I had no promissory notes to cash in I wouldn’t be able to do anything but lose!”

“When I owned my dairy in Borivali in North Bombay all the other owners used to complain that while their buffaloes would go dry within nine months after calving mine were still producing even after fourteen or fifteen months. I told them, ‘It’s simple. You add water to your milk to increase your profit, but I never add water. Each buffalo and calf has an individual *rnanubandhana* with me, a debt of a specific size that will repay me a specific sum of money. I am content to receive repayment at the rate which Nature feels is appropriate for me. You want your money faster, but because you cannot get more from your buffaloes than they owe you your buffaloes have to go dry sooner. They go dry, in fact, as soon as they pay you back what they owe you, according to their *rnanubandhanas* with you.”

“So the only buffaloes that would enter your stable would be those that owe you money?”

“How else would they be able to come to me?”

He interrupted his train of thought so that we could watch the next winner flash past our stands. Then some railbirds haled us into their dispute over likely Derby winners. It was only after the races had ended for the day that he again took up the threads of his argument, as we began our drive home. The sun was just then setting tumesciently behind the tomb of Haji Ali like a well-cooked samosa dunked by the Creator into a deep dish of cerulean chutney. Haji Ali was a pious Muslim who gained his title (“Haji”) after performing *Haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca that all pious Muslims are expected to perform once in their lives. After his return to India he came to be regarded as something of a saint, and his sepulcher as something of a shrine after his death. Accessible only at low tide, his mausoleum is frequented mainly by Muslims seeking the Haji’s ethereal assistance in mundane matters, including the divination of likely winners. As we veered past Haji Ali’s last resting place, which juts out into the Arabian Sea on a small spit of land very near the track’s main gate, my mind skidded toward food. I was thankful after a hard day at the races to find Vimalananda driving us to our favorite *pani puri* stand near the temple at Babulnath. We arrived there just in time to watch the last golden rays of the vanished sun settle to the ground between the faded pastels of the apartment buildings that loomed above us.

*Pani puri* (known in North India as *gol guppa*) consists of silver-dollar-size medallions of wheat dough deep fried to make them swell into hollow balls (*puri*). The stallholder breaks open the ball with his thumb, scoops a few cooked beansprouts or chickpeas into the cavity thus formed, adds a chutney or two, and then fills the ball with at least two types of thin sauces (*pani*): one spicy with chilies and the other sweet and sour, preferably from tamarind and dates. The customer now alertly stuffs the ball into his mouth and when he bites it all the flavors rush together and riot on his tongue. Win or lose we usually stopped for *pani puri* at the end of a race day.

As we munched Vimalananda waxed oratorical: “How many are the ways to make money, and how few of them are free of karma! And the karmas are often very hard to recognize. I have had to work, and I have had to make money. I had a rock quarry for a while, I was in the textile business, I owned a dairy. I have had practical experience of the many unsuspected repercussions of the karmas you incur when you earn money. I have always believed in treating *Lakshmi* (the goddess of wealth) as a mistress, not a wife; I tell Her, ‘Come to me if You want to, but I am married to *Saraswati* (the goddess of learning), and I don’t want a charge of bigamy to be laid against me.’ That way I do not tie myself down to Her.

“But even with this attitude it is very hard to earn a living without creating

a big bunch of karmas in the process. To begin with, certain things like knowledge, food, and women were traditionally forbidden for commercialization. These three were never supposed to become objects of commerce because they embody the Mother, and how can you even conceive of selling your mother? But people today don’t seem to be concerned about this. They do a roaring business in all three, and reap horrendous karmas as a result.”

We paid and saluted the vendor. As Vimalananda sped onto Marine Drive heading for home I asked him, “Weren’t you selling food when you sold the milk from your dairy?”

“Indeed I was, and that is my point: I know of what I speak, because I have been through the grind. I have had practical experience of the truth of this principle. But this is only one of many things for you to consider. Even among the things which are permitted for sale there are variations in the karma involved. For example, to make money from the sale of live animals is better than to earn money from the sale of the corpses of dead animals, but it is still not a good thing. Suppose you own a pet store and you sell an animal to an owner who mistreats his pet. Who will be to blame for that abuse? You will! And that pet will curse you for it, day after day. Dealing in grains and vegetables is better than dealing in meat. Plants will still curse you when you kill them, but a plant’s curse is less severe than an animal’s curse because plants have less awareness than do animals. Selling live plants is better than selling pieces of dead plants, but what if you sell a tree to someone who mistreats it, or who hangs himself from it? Even when you plant a tree some of the karma will come to you if that tree is somehow mistreated.”

“Or if someone chops it down and builds a gallows from it.”

“Exactly. Selling fruit is better than selling live plants, and dealing in milk is better even than selling fruit, assuming that the calf drinks its fill first, because there is no killing at all. But you can get yourself into trouble selling milk also, especially if you or your hired hands ill-treat your animals, or if you sell your old dried-up animals to the slaughterhouse, or if you breed the animals and then separate the calf or the kid from its mother. And that also goes for breeding pets for sale and separating pet mothers from their children. Do you think that animal mothers have no feelings? They do, and they and their children can curse you!

“But as bad as they are, these karmas pale before the karmas incurred by the people who sacrifice the millions of animals that are used every year to test and improve medicines and cosmetics. Our ancient Rishis used to test their medicines on themselves; they never asked animals to do their work for them. And their medical system, Ayurveda, has been used safely for thousands of years on millions of patients without requiring any kind of animal

experimentation. But in the modern world millions of animals are butchered annually without any thanks for laying down their lives in the service of science. Alexander Fleming was knighted for discovering penicillin and many other scientists have received Nobel Prizes, but has a laboratory monkey, or dog, or cat, rabbit or rat ever received a medal, or had a statue erected in its memory? No! Never.

“Millions of animals are sacrificed each year so that humans can enjoy safe drugs, but what happens to all the violence that is used to perfect the medicines? The Law of Karma tells us that it will not just evaporate; it has to appear somewhere. One day I got the idea that each of these preparations must contain a fraction of the torture that was inflicted on those animals. Some of that hate and pain must be there, and it comes out in the form of the terrible side-effects that many of these drugs produce. I don’t think anyone else has ever thought this way, do you?”

“I doubt it.”

“And what about modern agriculture? Today we try to prevent the insects, birds and other ‘pests’ from eating their fair share of the crops. Why should we give them a share? Because then they would also have a share in the karma of digging into Mother Earth’s body with plows to produce the food. Jains are forbidden from farming, or even selling milk, for this very reason. This prohibition has made many Jains into moneylenders—which is even worse. Instead of sucking life from the earth a moneylender sucks the prana out of those who borrow from him. Besides, think for a moment about what it means to lend money at interest. Money is the embodiment of Lakshmi Shakti. If you regard all shaktis as mother, could you ever dream of taking your mother to someone else’s house and making her work there? And on top of that, demanding her earnings from her at the end of the day? I hope not!

“Jesus said, ‘The love of money is the root of all evil,’ and He was right; but He should also have gone on to say that money itself is a very filthy thing. It is Lakshmi, but Lakshmi in Her whore form, the form in which She is passed from person to person and used over and over again. Think of all the karmas that pile up on just one piece of money! Do you know what happened to Croesus, the king who invented money? He died by having molten gold poured down his throat. That should give you an idea of the magnitude of the curse he has unleashed upon us. The Rishis never used money, and I personally never keep any on my person unless I simply cannot avoid it. I hate to handle it, which is why I always prefer to give it to you or to Roshni to handle.”

“Oh, great.”

Roshni was Vimalananda’s foster daughter. She and I respected each other sufficiently that we were willing to work together for Vimalananda’s benefit

despite what was at that time an ongoing foster-sibling rivalry.

“What are you worried about? It is my job to see that this curse doesn’t affect you. If I ask you to dig in the slush for me then I have to arrange for you to bathe as well. But not everyone has this advantage; those who don’t are affected by these curses.”

He swung the car onto our street and parked it. Upstairs Roshni served us drinks. “Do you know the story of gold? Gold itself once told me this story: ‘I was resting peacefully in the womb of my mother, Earth, when men came and dug into Her and dragged me from my home. Then they tortured me by burning and melting me and forming me into new shapes. But I have altered their minds so that they do not keep me outside working for them; instead they keep me hidden in dark, cool vaults, very much like my mother’s womb. I have cursed them for tormenting me, and now they torment each other over possessing me.’

“Every substance which is stolen from the earth has its own tale to tell. Iron, which is also mined, becomes weapons when men hold it. Just as the earth’s skin is punctured in strip mines for iron ore, iron and steel are used to puncture men’s skins, in the form of bayonets and shrapnel, razors and knives, needles and scalpels. Likewise coal has its tale to tell, and oil. Oil is the earth’s blood; by pumping oil from the earth we are sucking Her blood. Doesn’t She have a right to suck our blood in return? And She does, via modern medical science; every syringe that draws blood from a human is helping to pay back this debt.”

“Particularly if they are plastic syringes; plastic is made from oil.”

“How can human beings be so blind as to fail to offer the greatest respect and love for Ma, for our Mother Earth? We spill urine, feces, and toxic wastes onto Her, we walk on Her and spit on Her, but She never objects. We tear Her skin and extract treasures like gold, silver, and precious stones from Her, and She gives them freely. Even though we pump Her own life’s blood up from the depths of Her body She still supports us. And when we die She welcomes us into Her lap. Only Ma has such magnanimity. But even She cannot save us from the Law of Karma, because She looks on all Her children—every mineral, plant and animal—with an equal eye. What we do to Her children we have to pay for.

“Gorakh Nath says, ‘When you don’t ask you get milk; when you ask you get water; when you take you get blood. This is Gorakh’s Rule.’ He means that if you don’t demand things from Nature She will give them to you of Her own free will, just as mothers give milk to their babies out of the exuberance of their joy. If you ask, Nature will give you just what you ask for. Because you cannot know what is best for you it is best not to ask, but if you ask for some-

thing you will receive it. Even though water is not so tasty and nutritive as milk it will keep you alive, at least for a while.

“If you grab you get blood. Theft is always a karma, just as theft of an animal’s life in order to enjoy its flesh is a karma. According to the Law of Karma the repayment for blood is blood. Blood is also hard to digest and may cause you to get sick if you are not used to drinking it. Milk is a beautiful, sweet drink; pure water is pleasant, but blood tastes good only to vampires. So never take anything; always remain in the lap of the Mother, and let Her feed you from the abundance of Her milk.”

“OK, so producing things is out of the question, karmically. What about the professions?”

“What *about* the professions? Are they any better? I would never want to make money from law. That money is tainted with whatever evil karmas your client has performed to get him into the sorry plight that has brought him to you. Then those karmas are multiplied by all the lies you will have to tell if you want to win your case. I have a law degree, but I’ve never practiced law. My father was trained as a lawyer as well, and he too refused to make money from law. On his first day at work he advised his clients to settle with each other and avoid litigation. His British boss took him aside and said, ‘Young man, if this is your attitude you’ll never thrive in this profession.’ My father told him, ‘I’m sorry, I can’t do what you are asking me to do,’ and he quit.

“As for medicine, well, it is better than law, because you don’t need to lie all the time. But Ramakrishna Paramahansa himself said that a doctor’s money is ‘all blood and pus.’ When you take money for treating someone you still share in that patient’s karma, and maybe even create some new karmas. You might as well just take on all the patient’s karmas and be done with it; that way he would get well immediately. And whatever you do you are only helping Nature out. What is so heroic in that? If anyone deserves to be paid when a sick person gets well it is God, because it is God that does everything. Of course, for that matter, what beneficial activity is there in the universe that God does *not* do?”

“It is true, though, that a doctor who treats people without demanding a fee helps to clean his karmic slate. I have also trained as an *Ayurvedic* physician, but I have never charged any fee for my services and never will.”

“What about me? Here I am attending this *Ayurvedic* medical college.”

“*Why* do you keep worrying about yourself? If I told you to go there that makes it my karma, my responsibility. If I tell you to practice medicine, and you do, then there too am I responsible, provided that you practice to the best of your ability. I am doing this for you because of my love for you and my *rnanubandhana* with you. As for all the other doctors in the world, well, they

have their own karmas and *rnanubandhanas*, and if they are lucky they have someone to take responsibility for them. If they don’t that’s their problem.”

“Their fate, you mean.”

“Their fate. Now, if they are clever they can try to alter their fate. They can practice for free, or for donations alone. Or, if their economic circumstances force them to charge a fee, they can sincerely offer some of what they earn to God, and God will appropriate some of their karmas.”

“And so will the priest, if the doctor hires a priest to do the worship that offers some of what they earn to God.”

“And so will the priest, to some extent.”

“But you don’t like priests.”

“The priests that are good men are the ones I like. The ones I don’t like unfortunately form the vast majority of priests. They practice their profession not because they really love God but only because they want to make money. All of the religions of the world have been ruined by those greedy priests who loot the gullible—but I am certain that even most of those priests would never loot the people the way they do if they really understood the Law of Karma. It is a terrible karma to sell spiritual teachings. Even though you may hope to escape from most other karmas you cannot escape the ill effects of collecting money from people as a condition for providing them spiritual advice. I wonder how many of our phony “*bhagavans*” and “*swamis*” are aware of this.

“Of all the looting that priests do, that surrounding death is undoubtedly the worst. When a person dies the priests do their rituals and pray their prayers. After collecting plenty of money from the family of the deceased they announce that the soul has reached heaven. But how do they know that? Is it so easy to reach heaven? To get to heaven you pretty much have to die planning to go there, because it is what you are thinking about when you die which determines where you will go after your death: *ante mati sa gatih*. After death people tend to try to insulate themselves from their new reality. They try to remain wherever it is that they find themselves, and tell themselves just as we humans do that they are very happy right there. People must *want* to change before change can occur.

“But no priest today even has an inkling of what happens after death, so of what use are their assurances? The only reason they reassure the family is because they want to be well paid and want to be well fed. Unfortunately for them, the food and the money they receive from these rituals is contaminated by the carnal desires of the dead person. Today’s priests are not taught how to digest this food and the money, which means that those desires will pollute them by making them more worldly. This in turn will cause them to

enjoy themselves lavishly, in so many ways. Is this not a sort of heaven? By the time they die they will have used up all their good karmas, which gives them no alternative but to go to hell and endure the effects of their bad karmas. Is that not terrible?

“Stealing from God creates similar results. The former trustee of one of our famous Bombay temples was very fond of the horses. He would oversee the counting of the temple’s daily collection, and when he needed money for betting he would loudly abuse whoever was doing the counting: ‘Hey, you idiot, count properly!’ When he heard this agreed-upon signal the counter would let some coins roll under the furniture. Then, when the sweeper came to sweep up he would also be roundly abused by the trustee, and would sweep up and deliver the money; the sweeper also knew the signal.

“To rob God is bad enough, but to gamble with God’s money is even worse. Especially when God is your cook; this trustee lived exclusively on food that the temple was providing him. Given these facts you will not be surprised at how this fellow died. He was in such a state that he couldn’t eat, or even drink water. Horrible—but that is the Law of Karma.

“Why, the Law of Karma has not even spared God Himself! Look at that temple I regularly visit in the South. Last year gold, silver and jewels worth hundreds of thousands of rupees, including one of the enormous emeralds presented to the temple by Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagaram Empire, disappeared into the hands of thieves. Everyone was asking, and rightly so, why such an ancient temple where so much worship has been performed for so many centuries should have to suffer like this. The Brahmanas, of course, are partly to blame; they always are. But here we should look deeper. Where did Krishnadevaraya get that emerald? He was a king, so most likely he stole it from somewhere. Isn’t that unrighteous?

“And where did the temple get so much money? Much of it came from the sorts of people who have pots and pots of money nowadays. Those are the people who have stolen, cheated, lied and killed to get rich. When these people realize what they have done they try to purchase deliverance by giving some small fraction of their wealth to some temple. When God tries to eat all this karmically indigestible tainted money shouldn’t he also be given a good purge? Shouldn’t he also be taught a lesson? And shouldn’t the people who come there and try to be clever also be taught a lesson? Like Bhai Kaka from Bombay, who dropped dead of a heart attack in the toilet of the ashram he had built for his guru near that very temple, on the very day of Guru Purnima when gurus are to be worshipped. What a message *that* sent to all concerned!”

“So poor God has to suffer for His devotees’ karmas.”

“Yes, but He’s happy to do so; that’s how much He loves them. And how

much work is it for Him anyway? But for a human to try to do what God does—well, Namdev (a famous Maharashtrian saint) tried it once. He took over from his beloved deity Lord *Vitthala* (‘Vishnu Who Stands on the Brick’) for a day, just so he could see what it was like to be worshipped—and what a day he had! He had to stand up straight without even a quiver, so that no one would discover he was there; he had to put up with all the complaints that all the worshippers brought to throw at his feet; and he couldn’t eat any of the beautiful food they brought him! Deities eat with their eyes instead of their mouths, but this was beyond Namdev, who had to stay hungry. By the end of the day he was exhausted and fed up. When Lord *Vitthala* returned to His temple that night Namdev fell at *Vitthala*’s feet and cried, ‘Enough, Lord, enough! Forgive me! Take your job back, I can’t handle it.’

“It’s so easy to bollix things in this business of money that it’s hard to believe anyone ever survives the effects of their errors.”

“Well, I am very lucky that way, because even when I have made mistakes someone has been there to correct them for me. Once I was in desperate need of money. I was so desperate that I just didn’t know what to do, but I was thinking of doing something drastic. Thinking, thinking, thinking I fell into a deep sleep, and had a dream.

“In the dream someone showed me a man with a big fat belly, the kind of belly so many successful businessmen have. I was told his name and his wealth: ‘He is worth fifty million rupees.’ Then I saw a second man, who was thin absolutely; four times thinner than any man you have ever seen. I was also told his name and, ‘This man is worth one hundred million rupees.’ Finally I was shown a man who was absolutely rotten, literally eaten up by disease, full of leprosy and eczema. I heard his name and, ‘He is worth five hundred million rupees.’

“Then I was asked, ‘Now do you want to become wealthy?’ I said, ‘No, please forget it. All I want is for Nature to take care of me, and whatever She provides for me I will accept with great thanks.’ Since that day I have forgotten to try to become rich. I don’t need to be rich; Someone is taking care of me.”



The next day I proceeded to Poona to resume my Ayurvedic classes. A couple of weeks passed before I could escape again on a train bound for Bombay and descend through what is some of the loveliest scenery in India, the range of hills known as the Western Ghats. The Deccan Queen arrived at Victoria Terminus that morning precisely at its scheduled time of 10:35 A.M., and

once I reached the egress it took me my usual seven minutes to walk to Vimalananda's digs. He was awaiting me excitedly.

"It truly amazes me," he began, "that so many people who should know better willfully ignore the terrible karmas that are connected with tainted money, and merrily continue to scuttle themselves just for the sake of a few rupees. You can call unimaginable calamities down on your head when you start to play about with life and death. Only a few days after you last left a sadhu came to meet me. He told me, 'Get me half a pound of meat from a black goat and half a pound from an owl and I will work miracles.' I could see that he was willing to do this just to put me under his obligation so that I would have to do some other work for him. No thanks.

"I told him, 'I know what an owl can do; you needn't think you are telling me anything new. But I am not interested; please get out of my house.'"

"Was he upset?"

"Who cares? I don't even want his thoughts in my neighborhood. Do you remember that I told you that the Goddess Lakshmi rides on an owl?"

"Yes."

"I explained to you then that when you become rich your discrimination becomes clouded and works well only at night or when you are otherwise in the dark, literally or figuratively. But that is just one interpretation of this 'myth.' Now I think you should know some more things about owls, things that very few people know.

"Suppose you were to apply to your eyes the collyrium that has been prepared from an owl according to the appropriate ritual. You could then meet the richest man in the world and request a billion-dollar loan and he would give it to you without even batting an eyelid. What is more he would follow you around like a puppy dog and become so fond of you that he'd never be able to leave you. Or you can use it on some movie star. You can marry her and never have to fear that she'll go with another man; how can she leave when she is crazy about you? You can also prepare from an owl a thing which can make you invisible—and there is no need for me to tell you how advantageous it can be to be able to become invisible whenever you please. The owl can be an extremely useful bird, if you know how to use it.

"We can call the process by which you use an owl the *Uluka Sadhana*; *uluka* means owl, and *sadhana*, as you know, means any kind of spiritual procedure that is designed to achieve some specific result. You begin the *Uluka Sadhana* by taking an owl to the *smashan* (cremation ground) and performing a ritual to call a certain class of spirit to sit in the owl's body. The spirit will start to talk to you through the owl's mouth, and will tell you all about each part of the owl's body and how it can be used.

"Now comes the dangerous part. You must watch the owl closely, and listen to it very vigilantly. As soon as it seems he is about to stop talking you must hit him very hard, with a stick or with your fire tongs. If he gets to the end of what he has to say he will conclude his remarks by saying, 'Now you are ruined!' Coming from an owl this is such a tremendous curse that you will be a destitute, disease-ridden beggar to the end of your days. But even death will not save you; after you die you will become one of the most miserable of spirits for uncountable ages.

"So you have to be alert, and ruthless. You repeat the same procedure of calling the spirit into the owl's body several days in a row until you are satisfied that you have collected all the information that you can safely extract. Then, if you want to save yourself, just as the owl is about to stop speaking on that last day you take a sword or a large knife and cut off its head with a single blow. A moment's hesitation for any reason—and the spirit will do his best to pervert your mind just long enough for him to get his curse in edgewise—and you are doomed. No one on Earth can save you, and even God will not come to your rescue.

"Even if you do succeed in murdering the owl your problems have only begun. First you must see that it is reborn into a higher womb, unless you want it to slaughter you in some succeeding birth, according to the Law of Karma. Also, how do you think the Goddess Lakshmi, who rides on an owl, will feel about you if you kill Her vehicle? I'm sure you can imagine what will happen to your wealth and prosperity, if not immediately then in the future, if She gets angry with you. Never approach these things lightly.

"And anyway, is it right to torture an owl just for the sake of mundane gains? Never! I did this *sadhana* once, simply because an ethereal being had told me about it and I was determined to see whether or not it worked. Well, it works, but I have never done it again; I really don't think that anyone should ever do it."

"I killed an owl when I was out hunting when I was young; do you think Lakshmi is still angry with me?"

"Well, even though you did it deliberately you didn't know any better, so I suspect that Nature will eventually let you off the hook on this account. At least it was an owl and not a frog. Killing a frog is such a terrible karma that they say it is equal to killing a human, but I would go further. I would go so far as to say that although you may be able to pay off the karma of killing a human during that same lifetime you will not be able to pay off in the same lifetime the karma of deliberately killing a frog. When you kill a frog you will have to be born again to endure being slaughtered by that frog."



Instantly my blood froze, for though I had never killed a frog even in a laboratory I had a few years earlier been involved in a Tantric ritual in which a frog was used. Fortunately it was released alive. I told him about it.

"Thank God it didn't die! That's all I can say. Besides, the whole project wasn't your idea; the fellow conducting the ritual will have to pay for its karma. Does he realize what he has got himself into?"

"But what about the people who kill frogs in laboratories in the name of science, and the people who eat them?"

"Even though 'ignorance of the law is no defence,' the degree of the karma depends a lot on intention. In the context of science the karma is minimal if you are a student and your instructor directs you to kill a frog. But if you design some sort of research project that involves killing frogs then you are responsible for those deaths. Eating them makes you responsible too, of course. You know, when I owned my rock quarry over on Sheva Island I more than once saw my workers break open a rock in which there was a frog. Out it would jump, alive—don't ask me how—and then as the poor thing was trying to hop away they would grab hold of it and eat it on the spot!"

"Didn't they even *wonder* how the frog had stayed alive in there?"

"Not at all. They were being driven by their karmas. Being illiterate and ignorant, all they could do was conform to the nature of their rnanubandhanas. But what of all the educated people who look at a frog and immediately think, 'Frog legs!' How many people ever wonder about the life of frogs? How many people ever look at a little frog and appreciate it for how *beautiful* it is just enjoying its life! The frog is the farmer's friend; when it begins to croak in the summer the farmer knows the rains are about to start. Frogs eat thousands of insects during their lives, so they are a natural form of pest control. And, whenever you see a frog you know there is a snake about, because frogs are the natural food of snakes; life lives off life.

"But instead of being respected frogs are cruelly tortured. Their legs are chopped off while they are still living and conscious, and the torso is tossed aside to die. And those who exterminate them by the hundreds every day, how many hundreds of times must they have been sliced apart to give them the right to slice in turn? And how many times in how many thousands of future lives will they be killed by the frogs they are killing now? It is so difficult to know the Law of Karma."

Hmm. "I did hear that a frog is used to sweep the ground in the area where a Vedic *yajna* (sacrificial ritual) is to be performed, and that there is a Vedic hymn that is used to obtain rain that compares frogs to Brahmanas. Even the scientists say that so far frogs are the only animals they can clone—so all told I suppose frogs must have some unusual shakti."

"They certainly do. For example, you can use frogs to 'enchant' a piece of money. I won't go into the details, but it involves taking a pair of frogs and burying one of them alive. Once the money is enchanted you mark it, so you will be able to recognize it, and then you go spend it on something. Within a few hours it will return to your bag; don't ask me how. You can keep using it, and getting it back, indefinitely. But what about the cost to you? The price is far too high to pay."

"Do you still have to pay the price when you sacrifice an animal to a deity?"

"You will unless you know how to escape it. A certain ruler who was a great devotee of Ma used to offer a number of animal sacrifices to Her daily. After he died he found himself surrounded by thousands of angry animals, and asked Ma what was going on.

"She told him, 'You have taken their lives; shouldn't they get an opportunity to take your life now? This is the Law of Karma.'

"This came as a great shock to the ruler, who begged, 'But Ma, I sacrificed them only from the love of You.'

"Ma smiled and said, 'No, there was some self-interest behind your love and affection for Me. The real reason you sacrificed them was to get Me to benefit you and your family. And besides, did I ever ask you for these sacrifices? No, I never did. If you were really so interested in sacrificing to Me why couldn't you have cut your own flesh and offered Me your own blood? They at least belong to you. If you really loved Me why didn't you give Me the thing you are most fond of: your own life?'

"At last the king realized what he had gotten himself into.

"'But wait,' Ma went on, 'My grace is there for you. I am here to look after you. Instead of having to be born and then slaughtered thousands of times you will only have to do it ten times. But those ten times you will have to experience what these sacrificial beasts have experienced.'"

"Sacrifice is very big in Judaism; is that one of the reasons that the Jews have been suffering for so long, that they have all those dead animals angry with them?"

"That is a part of the problem, obviously. Another part is that when they invaded Canaan they massacred everyone they could find."

I knew from Sunday school that in a number of places in the Old Testament (e.g. Joshua 9:24) Jehovah exhorts the Israelites to ensure that no Canaanite be left alive. The ensuing carnage amounted to genocide of the Canaanites—was the twentieth-century Holocaust a part of the karmic reaction to that long-ago extermination? I thought at first to ask his opinion but then kept this thought to myself and asked instead, "So Islam, which is big into sacrifice, will not be spared either?"



“The Muslims are already starting to slaughter each other; look at Iran and Iraq.”

“Does *everyone* who performs animal sacrifice end up this way?”

“Almost everyone. You should slaughter an animal only if you know your rnanubandhana makes it necessary for you to do it; you must have that sort of karmic debt with the animal. Then, you must properly select the animal you want to slay. The only fit victims are those animals which carry certain signs on their bodies which show they are meant to be sacrificed. If you perform a sacrifice without a fit victim your karma will be much worse.

“But even if you have a fit victim you must also have the power to make the dead body live again. When our Rishis used to sacrifice animals they always brought the animal back to life afterwards by means of a special mantra. That way there is no stain of karma at all, as there is when you murder an animal without being able to revive it. For instance, you can sacrifice a chicken, cook it and offer it to Ma. Then you distribute its flesh as Her *prasada* (blessing), but you must retain at least one small bone. From that bone you reconstruct the chicken and bring it back to life. It will live again, but it must never again be sacrificed. Instead you must either set it free or keep it and feed it well. If you cannot or choose not to do this then you must still bring the animal back to life, but in a different way. You do this by ensuring that the animal gets an immediate, higher rebirth. This is what I do whenever I eat a piece of meat. If you sacrifice an animal without this power you are the biggest fool. Ordinary people kill only for the tongue, which is what causes the karma. They kill and eat now and afterwards they are killed and eaten, birth after birth. The wise slaughter only to redeem.

“And this is only for ordinary sacrifices. The karma for human sacrifice is far, far worse. Human sacrifice—*Nara Bali*—is the most difficult of all sacrifices. To kill a human being is a terrible karma, but to offer a human soul to Ma offers unbelievable benefits, both for the offerer and for the soul. It is a good thing to do *Nara Bali*, but you can do it safely only if you know exactly what you are doing. For one thing, even though almost everyone today is a *pashu*, an animal, you can’t just go out and slaughter whomever you please like the Thugs did.”

The *Thugs* (“Deceivers”) were a secret society of Indians which offered unsuspecting victims as sacrifices to the goddess *Bhavani*. During their heyday they waylaid and murdered an estimated two million travellers. Their depredations ended when they were suppressed by General Sleeman and the British Army during the last century.

“In the wrong hands these rituals bring nothing but trouble. The reason there are almost no Aghoris left in Girnar today is all because a group of Ag-

horis once kidnapped a little boy, sacrificed him, and ate him. When his distraught mother came to them to ask about her son they lied to her and said they had not seen him. Then she complained to Guru Dattatreya, the first of all Aghoris in the world, who used his yogic power to discover what had happened. He became wild and personally expelled all but the best Aghoris from Girnar.”

“So what they say about Aghoris and human sacrifice is true.” Earlier in his life Vimalananda had lived as a naked sadhu at Mount Girnar, a renowned pilgrimage spot in Western India, where he met his Senior Guru Maharaj.

“Aghoris have always been fond of *Nara Bali*, but no true Aghori kills without being able to resurrect. There is one very hard group of Aghoris which uses *Nara Bali* if they enter a village and the villagers fail to welcome them properly. These Aghoris perform *homa* (fire worship) and invoke a goddess like *Chandi* (goddess of cholera) or *Shitala* (goddess of smallpox and chickenpox) to ravage the village. While it might seem that this could not help anyone these deaths in fact act as *Nara Balis*, which makes Ma pleased with the Aghoris. The victims are benefitted because Ma has taken them and they are bound to be saved. And the remaining villagers, who come to their senses after a few deaths, learn proper manners. Everyone gets some benefit, but the process does produce some karma.”

“Doesn’t it produce a lot of karma? It certainly seems like a lot of ego is involved here, like there was with the Aghoris that Dattatreya threw out of Girnar. I mean, all right, the villagers fail to welcome you properly, but is that a good reason to kill them? Shouldn’t you be a little more compassionate if you are a sadhu?”

“Suppose though that you are an Aghori whose worship of *Chandi* or *Shitala* has matured and your goddess is with you twenty-four hours a day. Then the villagers are not offending you as much as they are offending your goddess. It is She who loses Her temper, She who performs the *homa* through you, and She who consumes the sacrifices.

“And besides, if a tiger were to waltz in here right now you would behave toward it with respect, wouldn’t you? I should hope so! Similarly, you would be very wise to behave respectfully toward a powerful goddess, in whatever form She might choose to appear to you. It is true that the villagers probably did not ask for the yogis to come to their village, but once they arrived the locals ought to have realized the potential consequences for disregarding them. This is India, after all. There is no lack of precedent for this kind of thing. Remember, don’t ever make friends with a king, a yogi, the fire, or the water unless you plan to live up to your friendship!”

He started to laugh.

“My Senior Guru Maharaj, my Bapu, is both a ruler and a yogi, so you have to be extra careful with him. One day he took me to a place where an immense underground treasure lay buried. We passed through stacks and stacks of gold bricks, heaps of jewels and what-have-you, but neither of us stopped for them. We were both interested in an amulet, one small amulet. In order to obtain it, though, a small child would have to be sacrificed. Bapu ordered me to do it, but I refused. Why stain my hands?”

“‘All right,’ he said, ‘I’ll make you a deal. I will come to you, in any form. Watch out for me and catch me, and if you can catch me I will see that you get the amulet.’ Great!”

“Back in Bombay a few days later I was just sending my son Ranu up to bed when suddenly an enormous black cobra appeared. I was on one part of the divided staircase and my friend Dinkar was on the other, with Ranu. The cobra wound itself around Ranu’s leg; my Senior Guru Maharaj always did love that boy! Ranu didn’t do anything, as if he understood. Then the cobra headed toward me.

“Unfortunately by this time Dinkar, the stupid idiot, had started shouting, ‘Snake! Snake!’ He grabbed a walking stick and began to beat the cobra before I could stop him. The snake disappeared forthwith and I became furious: ‘I told you not to hit that snake!’”

“He cut me off: ‘Now, Pratap, you don’t *know*, those snakes are deadly poisonous. Ranu was here; he might have been bitten.’ But, numbskull, if the snake was going to bite Ranu he would have done so while he was curled around the boy’s leg. What can you do with such people?”

“A few days later I met my Senior Guru Maharaj again. He was wild with rage: ‘Look at what you’ve done! Most of my bones have been battered,’ showing me the place on his back where he had been clubbed.

“What could I do, Maharaj?” I asked him. ‘I couldn’t stop him in time.’ And until today neither of us has obtained that amulet.”

We both smiled and moved on to other things. The next morning Vimalananda returned to the subject of sacrifice in what seemed an incongruous venue: the R.W.I.T.C. cafe at the racecourse, where we sat over buttered toast and milky tea after witnessing the early morning trackwork. Vimalananda’s then trainer Mr. Lafange sat with us for a while, trying to convince us that the mediocre work we had witnessed was something more than mediocre. After he left Vimalananda grimaced briefly as the euphony of the chirruping birds was contaminated by the stridor of two of the stuffer Club members. They were hypothesizing over foreign jockeys: who George McGrath would be riding for this year, and whether Sir Lester Piggott, then the Queen of England’s retained rider, would be out for the Derby again.

Vimalananda spoke: “I have always believed in avoiding karma whenever possible. The more you do to try to accomplish your ends the more karma you create for yourself. Whether in human sacrifice or in horse racing, avoiding karma is the sensible way to go. One way to avoid karma in human sacrifice is to follow the example of the Rishis and use a mantra to bring the man back to life after sacrificing him. But even without such a mantra you can still offer as many human sacrifices as you like without ever becoming stained by karma, if your intelligence is subtle enough. Can you guess how?”

“It must have something to do with the victim’s prana.”

“Right. Ma has no use at all for the bodies of sacrificial victims. She is ethereal, She has use only for the spirit which is separated from the body at death, and the prana which that spirit carries. Knowing this, a clever person can offer a human sacrifice without any danger by taking a spirit and offering it to Ma. You can take any spirit, even one killed on a battlefield; wars kill so many every year. You can give thousands of Nara Balis this way if you so desire; all you have to know is how to do it.

“First you locate a country in which a war is going on. Then you tell Ma, ‘Ma, I am going to provide You with a certain number of Nara Balis within two days, if You give me permission to do so.’ If She gives you permission you proceed; otherwise not! You collect all the spirits of everyone who has died in the war thus far, soldiers and civilians, innocent victims and guilty warmongers alike. Since they have all died violent deaths they don’t know where to go and cannot find their way into a new rebirth.

“After collecting the spirits you bring them to the spot where you will invoke Ma to devour them. Then you perform *stambhana* (‘immobilizing’) and *kilana* (‘nailing’) to lock them inside a circle from which they will be unable to escape. This is the ethereal equivalent of tethering a sacrificial animal to the sacrificial post by tying a noose around its neck.

“Then you invoke Ma. When Ma arrives She is ready to eat, but because She is ethereal She does not eat with Her mouth. She inhales the spirits—they are ethereal anyway, just like puffs of wind—taking their prana from them and enjoying Her own cosmic intoxication. Have you ever seen a puppy playing with a ball? You throw the ball, he runs after it, catches it, and runs back to you with the ball in his mouth so that you can throw it again. It is the same thing here: Ma has caused all these beings to take birth, to be thrown into the *samsara* (the universe of manifested existence). You are just restoring them to Her so She can throw them out again.

“She doesn’t toss them into some ditch, of course. Because of Her grace, Her aspect of motherhood, they all receive immediate high rebirths. Ma is the mother of all, and what mother refuses to save her children even when

they are naughty? So the spirits are bound to be satisfied by this process. Ma is also satisfied, and She rewards the sacrificer. Everyone is happy, and the real beauty of the whole thing is that the karma is very minimal.”

“Great! Why aren’t more people doing this sort of thing?”

“Because it is very difficult to do, unfortunately. This is why we have yet other ways of offering Nara Bali. One way requires that you find an animal or a human with whom you have the right rnanubandhana. Then you invoke into that person or animal a goddess, or a spirit of a certain class who also has the right rnanubandhana with the prospective victim. The goddess or the spirit then sits inside that victim and drinks up all his blood. The victim gradually loses weight, and wastes away to a skeleton, because his prana is being lost. There is no cure; death comes as soon as Ma wishes, or as soon as the spirit has taken all the blood it is entitled to in that case.

“For instance, you might select *Chinnamasta*, the Great Goddess Who holds Her severed head in Her hand and drinks an unceasing stream of Her own blood. She is the goddess of wasting diseases like leukemia in which the red blood cells decrease and the white blood cells increase. Sometimes ordinary leukemia patients survive, because Ma chooses only to take a part of their prana when She calls on them. But no victim of a Nara Bali can survive unless you botch the ritual.

“Whatever goddess you may select will be happy, because She will get the spirit of the being She wanted without having to bother about all the flesh and other disagreeable offal produced in a physical sacrifice. The victims are made to remember God by their pain, which is nothing but the effects of all the karmas of their millions of previous births. When they die Ma saves them. You get the benefit of giving the souls to Ma while you sit on the sidelines as a spectator, and none of the karma in actually killing the person comes to you.

“In these ways one hundred thousand Nara Balis can be given. The result? Tremendous! You could never do so many physical sacrifices, which is why I always say that physical worship is limited. But if you try to fool about in this way without knowing your rnanubandhana with your victims you are heading for big, big trouble.”

“So how to know rnanubandhana?”

“All in due time, my boy,” laughed Vimalananda, “all in due time.”

## TEASERS *and* chapter three STALLIONS

BOMBAY’S SUMMER USUALLY begins near the end of March. With the summer of 1977 summer came the problem of where to send Stoney to brood. Pedigrees of all sorts fascinated Vimalananda; when we watched Wimbledon together he would sigh and say, “If only Jimmy Connors and Chrissy Evert would get together, their child would really be something!” Now he had the opportunity to select the genes that would mingle with those of his beloved Stoney. He invested more and more of his spare time in pedigree comparisons, to ensure that the ensuing foal would bring glory to its mare’s name.

I too would have willingly focused my full attention on these family trees, but my college continued to monopolize the majority of my time. Two separate lives developed for me as my regular daily slog of anatomical structures, symptom complexes, and medicinal substances began to intersect, at seemingly opportune moments, with participation in Vimalananda’s unusual world. When we were together I stuck close to him to sponge up whatever knowledge he chose to spill before our parting left me again on my own, mired in an existence that seemed indecently tedious in his absence.

Shortly after Stoney’s last race Vimalananda’s momentum gathered me up from my Poona purgatory and swept me along with him to inspect a nearby stud farm. At least half a dozen such breeding establishments dot Poona’s environs, most snuggled up against fields fecund with sugar cane, chickpeas, sorghum, corn and kohlrabi. As our vehicle passed the largest and most renowned of these studs, the one owned by the two Anklesaria brothers, Vimalananda’s eyes narrowed into seriousness: “The Anklesarias do an excellent job of breeding horses, and they know their horseflesh. Darius is something of a blowhard, but Nariman is a real gentleman. I would love to purchase one of their two-year-olds, but they are simply priced too high for my budget.

“One of the things I don’t like about their operation, though, is their factory for manufacturing serum from horses and mules. Because their products are used to treat diseases there is some good karma to be had from this business; but what about the bad karma that is their by-product? Slaughtering animals outright is bad enough, but here you are slowly bleeding them to death—leeching their prana from them little by little, but never enough for them to die outright. You keep them just alive enough that you can continue to suck their blood.”

“Like a moneylender gives a farmer just enough money to keep him functional so that the farmer can continue to pay the interest on the loan.”

“Exactly. And the interest rate is so high that the farmer can never pay back the principal. Some farmers begin by borrowing as little as Rs. 500 (then about \$65) and end up paying the moneylender thousands of rupees over decades—and then the farmer’s children have to take over the debt. That kind of extortion is bloodsucking, without a doubt. But even that doesn’t quite compare to literally having your blood continuously drained from your body.”

“So that your tissues always feel starved because they always lack blood—ooh, that’s nasty. Never for a moment any feeling of wellbeing. What sort of karma must that be that causes beings to be born as blood-factory animals?”

“A very horrible karma indeed. Some of them may even have been moneylenders in their past lives!”

We laughed over that thought as we turned into the drive to our destination. There sat the owner, an eccentric old Parsi lady, anticipating our arrival on the veranda of her bungalow which by the looks of its architecture had been built for a Britisher some decades previously. “Sahibrao,” she called to her servant in desultory Marathi as we walked up to her, “bring these gentlemen some refreshments.”

After our snacks we were led down to a paddock where a mare in heat was standing, preparing to be covered. As this was my first visit to a stud farm I had to whisper a question to Vimalananda: “Surely that little pony who is rubbing up against the mare is not the stallion?”

“No, certainly not,” replied Vimalananda in a similar whisper which those around us would take for sage deliberation. “He’s the teaser; his job is to play with the mare until she is fully in heat, to titillate her until she can’t stand it any longer. Then, when she is at her peak they bring out the stallion and send away the teaser. Watch!”

As if on cue the stallion now appeared, tossing his mane like a horse possessed, an enormous erection poised ramrod-straight along his belly. The two handlers brought him into position, helped him to mount, and stood

watchfully as he thrust. Within 30 seconds or so it was all over and he and the mare were led, jubilant, back to their respective stalls.

That pageant turned out to be the high water mark of our visit, and as soon as we were again on the road the comments that I had been suppressing swarmed out: “What a difference in karmas between the stallion and the teaser! Both are male horses who are valued for their hard penises. But one gets pampered with the best of food, shelter and care and does nothing but screw all day, while the other gets by on leftovers and never even gets a chance to have an orgasm. Always a groomsman and never a groom; brought to the peak of arousal day after day and never allowed to enjoy release. What a life! What a case of blue balls! Couldn’t they at least have one little mare for him to cover, one little pony?”

“Why should they? Then he would feel satiated, which means he would lose the intense sexual craving that he must transmit to the mare he’s teasing. Besides, he might get the pony he covered in foal, and who would want that child? Who would feed it?”

“They could use it for another teaser, if it were male.”

“Teasers are a dime a dozen. And what if they took your advice, and then sent that foal to the serum factory—how would you like that responsibility?”

“Forget it!”

“*Gahanah karmano gatih*: ‘The current of karma is very deep. Why does one stone go to form an idol which is worshipped and another, perhaps from the same quarry, goes to form a urinal which is insulted? It’s all a matter of previous karma. Karma is so peculiar in India because some of the strangest karmas in the world have been performed here. India is a land where you never know what is going to happen next. If you do not know what is going on you had better be very prudent, because you can get into deep trouble here. Take the practice called *Visha Kanya* (‘poison damsel’), which was very common in ancient times and may even survive somewhere today. Beginning when she is only a few months old a girl who is to become a *Visha Kanya* is given gradually increasing doses of many types of poisons. She never gets enough to kill her, just enough make her body immune to them. By the time she reaches her teens she has imbibed a huge amount of poison which has lodged in her tissues forever. Then she is ready to be tested.”

“Tested?”

“If she has been well prepared a fly who alights on her skin should immediately die.”

“Ooof.”

“After she passes her test she is ready to be used; no need to administer anything more. When the king of the country finds someone he wants to get rid of he invites that fellow to a nice feast and then presents this girl to him to

enjoy for the night. The moment the man has a nice enjoyment with her he takes in enough of her venom to kill him after a very short time. No one but the king understands what has happened. What do you think happened to Alexander the Great? Part of the tribute he was given after he defeated King Porus was a Visha Kanya. That was sufficient.”

“A horrible way to die.”

“Yes, but think of the plight of the girl! How could she ever get married? The first time her husband embraced her she would become a widow. The poison of a Visha Kanya is so strong that even if you just kiss her, once only, your fate is sealed. Nothing can save you, though it may take some time for you to die. What kind of karmas must such a girl have performed in her past to be tortured like this? It is very hard to know karma, but we can guess. And what of the fate of someone who dooms a Visha Kanya to an existence of total sexual and emotional frustration? Perhaps such a person ends up a teaser at a stud farm!”

“That does seem appropriate.”

“And for that matter, what do you think will happen to the stud farm owner who uses such a teaser? It’s not likely to be pleasant. There is really no end to action and reaction in this world of duality in which we live, particularly in this business of sex. It is a terrible karma to disturb two beings who are in a sexual embrace; even the Rishis have not escaped.”

“So say the texts,” I offered. Indian legend is filled with examples of such karmas. Durvasas Rishi was separated from his wife because he separated *Indra*, the king of the celestial gods known as *devas*, and the *Apsaras* (celestial dancing damsel) Rambha when they were copulating. It was because the planet Jupiter hindered the lovesport of *Kamadeva* (the god of erotic love) with the *Apsaras* Ghritachi that the Moon abducted Jupiter’s wife and fathered a son on her. Gautama Muni interrupted the Moon and Rohini; as a result he was cuckolded, and lost his wife for millennia because of his own curse. And when King Harischandra (whose name was a byword for truthfulness) punished a ploughman who had had an illicit liason by expelling him to wander in a lonely forest, he lost his wife, his son, and his kingdom, and was tormented by the Rishi Vishvamitra.

“Interrupting someone’s sexual enjoyment is bad enough,” Vimalananda continued, “but the karmic repercussions of sex go far further than that. Let’s talk about the billions and trillions of insects in the world, most of whom live for only a few moments and die. Their large numbers are chiefly due to the wastage of semen by human beings. Every sperm is alive; don’t the millions who are killed after each ejaculation have the right to be born again to take revenge on the humans who killed them for no reason except momentary

pleasure? They have every right to do so. Because this is Kali Yuga, more men waste their semen and more insects are created when *asuric* (demonic) tendencies predominate.

“In English we might call this ‘poetic justice.’” *Kali Yuga* is the fourth of the Four Ages through which the world passes again and again. In Kali Yuga, the so-called “Iron Age” which the texts say lasts for 432,000 years, only one-fourth of the normal amount of righteousness remains in society, which makes it very easy for people to be overcome by delusion.

“Here in India we call it ‘divine justice,’ and it can be really severe. There is no favoritism in the Law of Karma. Even the prophets and *avatars* (incarnations of God) have had to suffer. Think of the doleful life of *Ramachandra*, who was God incarnate. He had to relinquish His kingdom on the day He was anointed king. He roamed about in the forest for fourteen years, and was separated from His beloved wife Sita for most of His life. And His is only one instance. Why did Mahavira die by a nail in the ear? Why did Buddha die after eating the little suckling pig? Why was Zarathustra stabbed? Why was Mohammed poisoned? Why was Jesus crucified? Why did Krishna die with an arrow in His heel? When you set out to play with God you had best be ready for whatever He is going to dish out, no matter who you think you are.

“Never ask for divine justice. If you think about it with a clear head you will realize that you have so many pending karmas that if you ever did get justice you would really have to pay through the nose. You would never be able to take it. Once a sadhu sat in penance for twelve years on the same rock, never leaving it. Eventually God became pleased with his penance. When God appeared to the sadhu and told him to ask for a boon the sadhu replied, ‘I want justice.’

“God said to him, ‘Look, you fool, you have no idea of what justice is all about. I have come here to help you. You please listen to me and ask for some useful boon.’

“But the sadhu replied, ‘No, I insist; I must have justice!’

“God gave the sadhu one last chance, but when he insisted on justice God got tired of arguing with such a dunderhead and said, ‘All right, you want justice? Fine. You have sat on this rock for twelve years? Now it is the turn of the rock to sit on your head, for twelve years. That is justice, isn’t it? Now enjoy your justice!’”

“Ouch.”

“Some of our scriptures discuss the nature of divine justice, and mention penalties for indulging in certain actions. They are not talking about guilt and retribution; they are talking about karmic reaction. Because these scriptures were originally written by seers who could look ahead to today and

know what would happen, some of the writings are strangely prophetic. One day a Parsi friend who has read a lot of our scriptures, both Vedas and *Puranas* (classical texts), was discussing karma with me and he asked, 'Why is it that in the *Garuda Purana* they say that a man who enjoys too much sex will be spredeagled in hell on a red-hot pillar of iron?'

"I replied, 'Well, look at yourself! You have had a lot of sex, through which you have also contracted a venereal disease. For the strictures caused by the VD you were treated by a hot steel rod poked up your urethra. Don't you think there is some kind of connection there?' He couldn't say anything after that."

"So you maintain that there's nothing like guilt in Hinduism?" This was a novel idea.

"The word 'Hindu' is a Persian corruption of the word 'Sindhu,' which is the Sanskrit name for the River Indus. India is also called Hindustan, which makes anyone who lives there a 'Hindu.' This means there is no Hindu religion. There is only the Vedic religion."

"What about Aghora?"

"We can hardly call Aghora a religion when it has no dogma. And if you argue that Aghora is just Tantra taken to the extreme, then what else is Tantra but the Veda expressed in a new way?"

"Hmm."

"Now, in their original form the Vedas had no commandments and no use for apportioning guilt, so they could not bother themselves with sin. They were concerned only with karma, and there is nothing like a moral sense to the Law of Karma; there is only cause and effect. The Law of Karma is a law of physics, a law which cannot be repealed any more than the law of gravity can be repealed. You can temporarily evade the Law of Karma, just like you can temporarily evade the law of gravity, but eventually it always catches up with you. If you jump off the ground you can avoid gravity for a second or two; if you fly high in an airplane, for a few hours. But what goes up will still have to come down."

"And if you fly into space?"

"Even if you head off into space you will still be affected by the gravity of some heavenly body or other. But how likely is it for you to fly into space? Do you have enough good karma for that? How many humans in the history of the world have made it into space?"

"A handful."

"And all of those that have gone and survived thus far have returned to Earth after a few days or weeks at the most. It's all a matter of shakti. You need just a little shakti to jump; you need a moderate amount of shakti to fly in an airplane—you need influence or money to get you a ticket, and influence and

money are also types of shakti. But to go into space you need tremendous shakti, and to become permanently free of Earth's gravity while still in your physical body you need more shakti than any human being has been able to accumulate thus far. King Trishanku tried to get to heaven in his physical body, propelled by the force of the Rishi Vishvamitra's austerities, and where is he now? Hanging upside down for all eternity, suspended between the earth and the sky."

"What about the people who know how to go into space with their astral bodies?"

"They remain limited by Earth's astral gravity. To become permanently free of Earth, free even of its astral gravity, is something only the Rishis can do."

I nodded my head contemplatively.

"The Law of Karma is *the* law of the universe; it is the basis of divine justice. Like it or not you have to abide by this law. If you break the Law you will have a penalty to pay, but that penalty is only a reaction; it has very little to do with guilt and retribution. A bad karma is bad mainly because you have to pay a price for performing it. Bad karmas make you and those around you suffer. Once you realize this principle you will try to stop performing bad karmas, if you are sensible, rational human being. As you generate less bad karma your suffering will gradually decrease, which will make your joy increase. It is all very simple and mathematical.  $2 + 2 = 4$ ; it can't equal 3 or 5.

"You obtain sin only when you add guilt to bad karma, when you tell people that they are evil and are bound for hell because they have performed bad karmas. There is a tremendous amount of guilt being passed around nowadays by self-proclaimed swamis and babas who chatter on and on about 'sin.' But are they experts in the Law of Karma that they can know who is headed to hell and who to heaven? In different religions the ideas of sin are different and can conflict. What is a sin in one religion, like killing animals in Jainism, may be required in others, such as in Judaism and Islam. The phony swamis are ruining what is left of the Vedic religion by trying to tie it down to their wrong ideas about its dogma. The Vedic religion is the only religion that tells each individual to carve out his own niche; that is why it is eternal. And if our country now has seven hundred million people then there must be seven hundred million gods here, all with their own individual religions.

"Jesus said, 'Hate the sins, not the sinners.' But I ask you, why should anyone even think about sin? If you assume that your followers are going to sin won't that encourage them to do so? This is why there is only one perfect religion: the Veda. It is the Eternal Dharma because there is no question of sin. Show me even a single mention of distinction of sin in the Veda and I will bathe in your urine! In the Upanishads, yes, such things may occur. The Up-

anishads were written by the junior students of the senior Rishis. Children are bound to make mistakes. Not in the Vedas, though. But then, the Rishis had a totally different perspective on existence than we do. When two Rishis used to meet they would not greet each other with, 'Hey, Rishi!' like people might do today. They would address each other as *Aryaputra* (Son of the Just), or as *Mahanubhava* (Great Experienter). What grace, to speak of one another as 'Great Experiencers'! What broadness of vision that required!

"But even this broadness of vision creates a problem! When people have no fear of sin many of them unfortunately begin to believe that they can somehow escape the Law of Karma. This tends to make them lazy about maintaining their purity, which lets their bad karmas accumulate. It is a real problem: if you harp on sin like some Christians do you tend to perpetuate it; if you try to ignore it, it tends to increase."

"So what do you do?"

"If you are the head of some religion you have a big problem. But if you are like you and me you worry about your own things, and let God take care of everything else."

A pause ensued, followed by an engaging discussion of potential mates for Stone Ice. When we reached the section of road which skirted a certain ashram Vimalananda expelled a puff of air from his cheeks in disgust and spat, "Just what we need here—one more self-styled *bhagavan* ("God"). You've listened to this infamous bugger talk, haven't you? This 'bhagavan' says that he contradicts himself because of the nature of Reality, or some such thing. Now, the real Bhagavan will speak only in *Para Vani*—in telepathic speech—and in *Para Vani* it is impossible to contradict yourself. It cannot be done, because *Para Vani* is *Prasadika Vani*, a direct expression of Reality which does not require the medium of words for its expression. We can only conclude from this claim of this 'bhagavan' that he is irrational."

"Well, he in fact claims to be irrational, because he says the universe is irrational."

"If that is so then I have nothing more to say, because then there is no Law of Karma, no cause and effect, and no meaning to the whole universe. Which may well be—but if that is the case then how does a 'bhagavan' arise from the chaos?"

"Well, if the universe is irrational . . ."

"Enough of this bull! He is just an idiot who doesn't know what he is talking. He just goes on jabbering to collect donations from his disciples so that he can eat, drink and be merry with his lady devotees." He paused, then continued calmly. "Enough about this character; why should we pollute our minds by bothering ourselves about him? We have our own things to think

about, instead of finding faults with others. Nature knows Her job best. If the Law of Karma does exist this fellow will one day get the lesson of his lifetime.

"Look," he said, pointing his index finger at me, "When I point my finger at someone else I always remember that three fingers are pointed at me and only one finger is pointed at him. Then I know that it is my *ahamkara*, my ego, which is accusing him, and that my accusation makes me fall prey to the law of action and reaction. I may do one finger's worth of damage to him, but three times as much damage will come to me. This helps keep me from becoming aggressive."

"Most of the time."

"If I didn't remember this I might be finishing people off left and right. It's very easy to do, once you have accumulated a certain amount of shakti. This is also one reason that some sadhus scuttle themselves. The more shakti you have the more scrupulous you have to be since the karmic implications for any of your actions become graver and graver. You have to walk through the world like an elephant that is being chased by a yapping dog. The elephant knows that a single tap from his foot will be the end of the dog. But he refrains from squashing the dog because he knows that the dog does not realize the gravity of what it is doing. If you do succeed in enraging an elephant, watch out! You will never escape. When Franklin Roosevelt was informed of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor he said simply, 'Does Mikado realize the gravity of what he has done?' And Admiral Yamamoto, who never was in favor of the attack, said, 'I fear that all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill it with a terrible resolve.' We all know what happened next: Japan was finished, utterly. But look at the Law of Karma! Japan is now headed for the top again, at the expense of the United States."

"Do you think the United States shouldn't have responded to Pearl Harbor?"

"If they hadn't responded you might be speaking Japanese or German today. No, the United States had to respond to end the tyranny of Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo. But even though it was the right thing to do it was still a karma, and karma is karma—full stop. Every action creates a reaction which will inevitably occur. But karma is so very deep that whether a specific karma is going to be good or bad for you in the end is no easy thing to know.

"I rarely even give money to beggars and when I do it is almost always to blind ones. Your eyes are the organs that lead you into projecting your mind outward into the world. All your senses tend to do this, but your eyes are primary. Suppose you are walking down the street behind someone with long, flowing beautiful hair. You start to fantasize about how her face looks. Then 'she' turns around—and you see that 'she' is a boy! Your eyes have led you



astray. The blind find it much more difficult than you or I to project their awareness out into the world; the *samsara*, the ever-changing outer world, does not exist for them, practically speaking. The blind deserve alms because their lack of sight makes it more difficult for them to perform karmas.

“But suppose I feel so bad for the blind that I donate my eyes after I die. That is quite a blessing for some sightless individual; it is a very fine thing to get sight after many years of blindness. But look at the result for me! The blind person who gets my eyes will be attracted by so many things since everything is new to him. The sensory attraction will make him want to enjoy those pleasures. He will make efforts to enjoy them and self-identify with his enjoyment. But karma is created every time he self-identifies. And who is responsible for that karma? I am! Why? Because I gave him sight. I enabled him to desire so many things, and to be able to act on those desires. Had I not interfered he would never have had either the idea or the opportunity to want and to experience so many things. It is thus my responsibility and I have to pay for it. The price may not be too heavy so long as he behaves himself. But suppose he sees a beautiful woman and, overcome with his new desires, rapes her—then it is I who am guilty of rape, because I facilitated his crime! Though it may seem very unfair, this is the way things are. And this applies to any organ that is donated: heart, kidney, liver, even the skin used in skin grafts. You have to be very careful of whom you bless and how you do it.”

Vimalananda swerved a bit to miss a jaywalker and then asked, “Have you ever heard the Hindi phrase *ankhon ki tara?*”

“Yes—‘star of the eyes’; isn’t that equivalent to the English phrase, ‘apple of my eye’?”

“Right. It would be better if that phrase was *ankhon ko tara.*”

“Which would mean, um, ‘the eyes were saved’?”

“Exactly. When your eyes have been ‘saved’ they are no longer susceptible to being overcome with desires. This is why controlling all your senses is so important. Once there was a king who couldn’t sleep. It’s not uncommon; kings have so many things to worry about. Most rulers even today will look for a woman, or a drink, or some amusement to divert themselves when they have insomnia. Many of our past rulers, though, had more refined sleep-inducing methods. This one was a poet, so as he strolled sleepless on his terrace he repeated to himself the first line of a poem he was trying to write. It was a poem on the appropriate subject of slumber.

“‘*Shete Sukham Kas Tu?*’, repeated the king, ‘*Shete Sukham Kas Tu?*’ ‘Who is it that sleeps happily?’ Without warning, from out of the darkness beneath him, came a rejoinder: ‘*Samadhi Nishtah*’—‘He who is in permanent *samadhi* (spiritual trance).’

“‘Very good,’ thought the king, ‘and very true. OK, *Shete Sukham Kas Tu? Samadhi Nishtah*—‘He sleeps well whose consciousness is ever connected to the Universal Consciousness’; that is the sort of ‘sleep’ that is truly valuable. Good! Now, *Ko Shatrur Iva? Ko Shatrur Iva?* Who is the enemy?’”

“Did he mean, ‘the enemy of sleep?’”

“Yes, and by extension enemies in general; the Great Enemy. He wanted something that would fit both meanings. What is the use of poetry that does not have many layers of meaning?”

“The king kept muttering, ‘*Ko Shatrur Iva?*’ until the voice he had heard before volunteered, ‘*Nijendriyani?*’—‘one’s own sense organs.’ They are the enemy of sleep. When you fall in love with a woman will you be able to sleep without her? If you are obsessed with riches they are bound to keep you awake at night. And so it is with all the senses; they are the enemy of sleep, and of *samadhi*.

“‘Wonderful!’ said the king, ‘*Ko Shatrur Iva? Nijendriyani.* And now, *Mit-rani Kani?* Who are my friends?’

“‘*Jitendriyani*—the conquered senses,’ came the voice, which was right yet again. You don’t want to destroy your senses, like some of these yogis claim. You want to bring them under your control and make them work for you.

“When the king heard this last response he called down below to the speaker: ‘Please be so kind as to show yourself, great poet!’ And who stepped out into the light but his own watchman! ‘I never knew of your greatness before,’ the king continued. ‘You must become my adviser!’

“‘No, your majesty,’ came the reply. ‘I have been serving as your watchman because I wanted no one to know of my talents, so that I would be left alone to do my own things. I answered you only because as your servant I felt an obligation to assist you. Now I must leave your service and find a new place where I can live in peace and quiet.’ And off he went, in spite of all the baffled king’s pleas.”

“Just as you continue to escape from the people who discover too much about your talents.”

“If you want to preserve your solitude you have to be ready to leave. You won’t be able to leave if you are not careful of whom you bless or curse, because that sort of karma can bind you like steel cables. Moreover, what is a blessing for the person you bless may end up being a curse for you. Think for a moment of the Emperor Akbar, who had no sons until he was blessed by the Muslim saint Sheikh Salim Chishti. Even after that blessing it is said that his Queen became pregnant only after the saint’s own one-year-old son, Balle Miyan, died. By knowing this we can know something of the kind of blessing that Salim Chisti gave to Akbar. We know that he absorbed some of those of



Akbar's karmas which were preventing him from having a son. These karmas then blocked Salim Chishti from having a son—so his own son died. It was as if he transferred his son to Akbar.

"But because Salim Chishti enabled that boy to be born into Akbar's family the saint became responsible for some of the bad karmas that this boy performed when he became the Crown Prince and later when he ruled as the Emperor Jehangir. And let me assure you, Jehangir was responsible for some very nasty karmas. I doubt that dealing with these karmas was any fun for the poor saint."

"Do you think he was not aware that there would be repercussions from his blessing?"

"Oh, he probably was, but he must have been overcome with emotion. When he saw that the Emperor himself had come to him barefoot to ask for a son he must have said to himself, 'Let whatever happens tomorrow happen; today I will make this man happy!' Only a Muslim saint has enough guts to give such a blessing; not a Hindu. Hindu saints are too cautious; they want to make sure whoever they bless will be able to handle the blessing. It is good to be circumspect, but then the emotion can't freely flow."

"Does that mean that you think Muslims are superior to Hindus in some regards?"

"Of course! It's only the bigoted Muslims that I don't like. And I don't like the bigoted Hindus any better."

"How could Salim Chisti have become overcome with emotion if he was a saint? Shouldn't saints be beyond emotion?"

"Saints are beyond the *Three Gunas* (the three fundamental qualities of physical and mental reality), but only those who follow the path of *jnana* (transcendent, unqualified wisdom) go beyond all emotion. Misery remains in *bhakti* (devotion). But that misery is the misery of separation from the beloved, not the misery of hatred. That misery is so fierce that we call it *mahapida* ('massive affliction')—which is why we call *bhakti asu ka marg* ('the path of tears'). When you become so God-intoxicated that the tears in your eyes blind you to the world you will see nothing but God everywhere you look. And when you see your God standing before you in a pitiable plight, you won't be able to stand it. You will do whatever you can to help that God out, to make Him happy, even if that act makes you more miserable. Don't ever listen to the so-called swamis who tell you that you have to become cold and dead in order to make spiritual progress. They can say such things only because they have forgotten what it means to have a heart."

We had now reached the Poona Cantonment, and shortly thereafter we arrived at our destination: the home of Shernaz, a Zoroastrian who by the time

I met her had already been part of Vimalananda's circle of 'children' for nearly a quarter of a century. As she scurried off to make us some tea Vimalananda looked out the window to a tree he had become friendly with, laughed suddenly, and said, "Always be mindful, Robby, of everything that you do! Once I told Shernaz to feed monkeys every Saturday for ten Saturdays, to reduce an affliction of Saturn in her horoscope. I warned her that not just any monkey would do; they had to be *langurs*, the type of monkey which *Anjaneya* (the monkey-god Hanuman) is reputed to be. Langurs are vegetarian. In spite of being small they are very, very strong. Fortunately for her a troop of langurs lives in the graveyard near here, and they roam through town looking for handouts on Saturdays."

"Just on Saturdays?"

"Yes, they somehow know that Saturday is the day they are likely to be fed. A male—and my God, he was a big one!—led the pack. When someone offered the troop some food he would first approach and check out the terrain to make sure it was safe. Once he was satisfied he would summon the others with a peculiar sort of cry. Only then they would come to eat. Every Saturday this whole process would be repeated at Shernaz's house when she fed them with a prescribed article of food. Unfortunately she then became frivolous and decided that if ten Saturdays would help her eleven Saturdays would do her even more good. So she fed them for an extra Saturday."

"Wouldn't feeding them more normally do more good?"

"Perhaps, but it was more important for her to do as she was told. She was not feeding them because she loved them. She was feeding them for her own benefit, and when she became greedy for more benefit Nature decided that she needed to be taught a lesson. One fine morning during the week following that eleventh Saturday the langur chief swung into her home through an open window. He strutted around the house for a while in a furious mood and then left. Everyone who was inside was scared silly, including Shernaz, Arzoo, and Shernaz's son Sohrab. I happened to come to visit shortly afterwards. While they were telling me all about him, exaggerating his size and ferocity and everything else, he came back. He was really enormous for a langur. He strutted all through the house, growling but not touching anything.

"When he came to where we were all sitting at the dinner table he sat on the table right in front of me. He caught hold of my right wrist, still growling and showing his teeth, and patted me gently on my head. Then he jumped off the table and jumped back out the window. Because I lived so long in jungles I am used to animals, but you should have seen everyone else! I told my quaking friends that this fellow would not live long, and that they should close their outside windows for the next ten days so that he couldn't get back

in. He started harassing everyone in the neighborhood from that day. On the tenth day he was jumping from one roof to another when he slipped and grabbed an overhead wire and was electrocuted. The local people, many of whom regard langurs as incarnations of Hanuman, took his body in a big procession and had it cremated. And you know, even the other langurs in the big fellow's troop joined the procession! It was just like they knew exactly what was happening. First they collected somberly around the body—even the babies behaved themselves—and when the body was carried away they marched along with everyone else. And people say that animals have no intelligence and no emotions! I think it is the humans who are deficient!

"Everyone learned a good lesson from this incident. Even Shernaz learned not to try to be so smart about things which humans cannot easily understand, like the relationship between monkeys and Saturn."

"Now wouldn't you say," I said, scratching my head reflectively, "that this Goliath of a monkey effectively died because of her extra feeding? Doesn't this make Shernaz incur at least some of the karma for his death? Not to mention the karma of disturbing the relationship between Saturn and the langurs?"

Just then Shernaz arrived with our tea, and Vimalananda asked her, "You remember the big langur, don't you, Shernaz?"

Shernaz replied, with some satisfaction, "He was a giant!"

"By having Shernaz try to placate Saturn," Vimalananda went on, "I was trying to relieve her of some of the pressure of the karmas she was having to experience. Suppose you are destined to have a rock fall on your head. If the rock is a boulder there will be nothing left of you after it lands, but if it is only a pebble it will bounce right off. This is how it is with karma. Unless someone takes your karmas on himself you cannot escape experiencing their effect. You can diminish their bad effects, however, and enhance the good effects by the skillful use of sadhana. When you fail to do as you are told, though, as this woman did—I am telling you to your face," he said, looking pointedly at Shernaz, "you are bound to get yourself into trouble; then all your efforts may be wasted. And that, too, is an experience provided to you by Saturn."

"Is worshipping Anjaneya the best way to control Saturn?"

"Yes it is, for many reasons, but especially because Anjaneya knows how to manage the Law of Karma. I think you know that at one point during the *Ramayana* Anjaneya flies over the ocean to Lanka where He was to search for Sita."

The *Ramayana*, the other of India's two great epic poems, is the story of the life of King Ramachandra, or Rama, the seventh avatara of *Vishnu*, the Great God Who Preserves The Cosmos. During the fourteen years that Ramachandra resides in the forest His wife Sita is stolen by the Ravana, a *rakshasa* (demonic being) who is king of the island of Lanka. With the help of an army

of monkeys and bears Ramachandra invades Lanka and after many tribulations kills Ravana in battle and regains Sita. Before the invasion Ramachandra sends Hanuman over to Lanka to reconnoiter the area and locate Sita.

"Anjaneya leapt into the sky and was flying bravely toward the island when he suddenly felt Himself begin to weaken. When He looked around He saw the reason: the giant demoness Simhika. She said to Him, 'I am very hungry, O son of the wind god, and very glad to see you! It happens to be your destiny to enter my mouth and be eaten by me!'

"When Anjaneya examined His causal body to find out if she was telling Him the truth He got the shock of His lifetime when He saw that, yes, it was His destiny to enter her mouth. But if He allowed Himself to be eaten how would He be able to accomplish the mission that His beloved Lord Ramachandra had sent Him to perform? Anjaneya was not concerned for His own life, but He was concerned for the success of His mission, for He thinks only of Rama. He realized that something needed to be done urgently, because Simhika was drawing His shadow, and so Himself, nearer and nearer to her."

"How was she doing that?"

"Your shadow is a part of you, isn't it? If I can grab hold of your body and pull you toward me why shouldn't I be able to do the same thing with your shadow? Shadows are made up of matter, and even though that matter is very subtle shadows are not that difficult to pull, provided that you know how to grab hold of them.

"Anjaneya, who had been thinking fast, hastily used His *siddhi* (extra-natural ability) of *Mahima* to expand His body into enormous size. Seeing that her meal had become the size of a billowing cloud Simhika opened her mouth equally wide. Then Anjaneya suddenly contracted His body, using His *siddhi* of *Anima*, and fell into her open mouth with the force of a thunderbolt. When He emerged from her body after tearing her vital parts to pieces with His claws Simhika's hulk fell into the ocean with a gigantic splash. Then Anjaneya was free to continue His flight to find Sita. In this way He complied with the letter of karmic law but escaped its undesirable consequences."

"Does Saturn have no effect at all on Anjaneya?"

"Saturn has to cast his glaze on everyone; there is no exception. He also had to affect Anjaneya, but he couldn't figure out how to do so. In fact, he even asked Anjaneya for help! He said, 'You are *Maha Rudra*; how will I sit on you?'"

"*Rudra* is another name for *Shiva* (the god of death and transformation), fine, but why *Maha* (great)?"

"Anjaneya is the greatest Rudra because he is the Final Rudra, the last of the eleven Rudras, just as *Mahakala* ('Great Time') is the First Rudra, the *Adi*

*Rudra*. Anjaneya, who is an incarnation of Lord Shiva, is the perfection of Shiva. The Rudras control life and death by controlling memory. Life is just a memory; bitter or sweet, it is nothing but memory.”

“You mean that if I can’t remember I might as well not even be alive?”

“That too, but without memory life *itself* is not possible. You exist because of ahamkara, which is your ‘I-causing’ faculty. Ahamkara continuously self-identifies with every cell of your body and every facet of your limited human personality. Without ahamkara you cannot exist as an individual because it is ahamkara that integrates the many many parts of you into *you*. Mahakala, the Rudra who separates you from your life, causes you to die by causing your ahamkara to remember that She is the Kundalini Shakti. When Kundalini sees Mahakala She is so overwhelmed with love for Him that She can think only of Him, and cannot continue to remember your mediocre human personality for even an instant longer.

“But death is not the end; oh no, not by a long shot. So long as your causal body continues to exist you must be reborn after you die, so that you can self-identify with a new body and personality. Only when you can completely forget yourself—when you have nothing with which to identify because your karmic warehouse has been emptied of all unpaid karmic debts—can you completely cease to exist. Only when you get into the causal body can you go beyond it. And then, finished! You have gone beyond attribution into *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* (pure non-dualistic consciousness, unstained by even a shred of ego).”

“But until then you are stuck.”

“So long as you have a causal body filled with rnanubandhanas that remain to be worked out Saturn can keep you under his thumb, subject to fate and to the Law of Karma. Thought waves are continuously being projected into your mind—your astral body—from the karmas collected in your causal body. Most people forget that these thoughts are simply temporary manifestations. They try to cling to them or avoid them, and that creates yet more karma.

“There *are* ways to lose your causal body other than Nirvikalpa Samadhi, but most of them are not so easy to come by. You know, even if you live in India for lifetimes on end, there are some things going on that you would never suspect. You would never even dream about them unless you are meant to see them. For instance, there is a place in India where every day three or four chosen people bring a fresh corpse. They remove its clothing, wash it, and prepare it in certain other ways. Then they take it to a giant luminous figure with long black matted locks and fixed, staring eyes which never blink. He takes the corpse’s head and cracks it open and eats part of the brain. Some-

times, depending on his intentions, he may eat other parts of the body as well. By his consumption of the brain the dead person’s causal body gets completely eradicated, which means that he or she never has to be born again. This being has to have one corpse every day, and where he gets them from is a mystery. To see it is truly horrifying, but I saw it, and survived.”

“My goodness! But this doesn’t mean that anyone who eats brain is destroying that corpse’s causal body, does it?”

“If that were true then all the cannibals in New Guinea would have merged by now! No, it is no easy thing to destroy your causal body, and so long as you have a causal body you will continue to be subject to the Law of Karma, and to fate. So long as you have karmas you will have memories and experiences, which is where Saturn comes in. Saturn stands for experience, good or bad, and your memory is the sum of your experiences. The Rudras cause forgetfulness, which is the only way in which old life can cease and new life can begin. The Rudras can do this because They self-identify so little with Their own ‘bodies.’ Mahakala, for example, has no single form; He takes whatever form He needs to perform His task. Anjaneya may be *Mahavira*—the ‘Greatest of Heroes’—but He is also *Dasanudasa*—the ‘Servant of Servants.’ He self-identifies with Rama so much that He rarely remembers His own body. Because of this detachment Saturn cannot affect the Rudras—much.

“When it came time for Saturn to afflict Anjaneya he couldn’t figure out how to do so. So he asked Anjaneya, ‘How can I sit on you?’

“Anjaneya told him, ‘Sit on my tail.’ When Saturn did, Anjaneya’s tail flipped him over and pinned him. Then Saturn could not even move, much less throw his gaze on Anjaneya. Anjaneya’s mace controls all the planets except Saturn, who is controlled by His tail.

“In spite of being pinned, though, Saturn still eventually exerted his effect. When Anjaneya went to Lanka and was captured there Ravana caused His tail to be set afire—the same tail that had pinned Saturn. Thereafter Anjaneya heroically set fire to the entire city of Lanka. Sita’s prayers protected Him from being scorched, but even so the tip of His tail was slightly burned in the process.

“Moreover, due to the exuberance of his heroic nature Anjaneya lost control of Himself just for a moment. As He soared through the sky He was so full of shakti that just for a moment some of this shakti overflowed into His sweat. He caught Himself in the next moment and retracted most of that shakti back into Himself, but a tiny amount of that shakti escaped His body in a drop of sweat. That drop of sweat happened to drop from His body into the open mouth of a female crocodile who lay just below Him. She conceived immediately, and shortly after gave birth to the sage *Makaradhwaja* (‘The Crocodile-Bannered One’).

“Anjaneya, the perfect celibate, thus had to experience loss of His *ojas* (subtle essence of semen), however slight, which caused Him to father a son, just as an ordinary householder does. Anjaneya had to experience that aspect of life thanks to the effect of Saturn, the planet of experience. In certain things no one is spared by Nature.”

“I have never seen Anjaneya’s name mentioned in the Vedic lists of the eleven Rudras.”

“Anjaneya does not appear anywhere in the Vedas; He has nothing to do with the Vedas. He is strictly Rama’s heart. Do you know the story of His birth?”

“Not entirely.”

”The story of Anjaneya begins with a Rishi who was named *Rishya Shringa* (‘Antelope Horn’) because he had a horn on his head. King Dasharatha had wanted for long years to father a child, and although his guru Vasistha Rishi had tried various methods he had failed to produce any offspring for the king. Vasistha therefore requested Rishya Shringa to perform a sacrifice known as the *Putra Kameshti Yajna* for this purpose. After the sacrifice Rishya Shringa distributed its *prasada* (consecrated offerings) to the king’s three wives. As Kaikeyi, the king’s third wife, was trying to decide whether or not to eat it a hawk, of the kind we call a kite, came along and snatched the *prasada* from her grasp. The kite flew straight to where a certain female langur named Anjani sat, and dropped the *prasada* into her hands. Anjanii ate it and became pregnant with Anjaneya.

“Back at the sacrifice the remaining *prasada* had to be divided so that Kaikeyi could have some. All three queens ate the *prasada*, and became pregnant with Rama and his three brothers as a result. All four of these brothers were filled with divinity, but their divinity was limited, because the *prasada* had been subdivided. Only Anjaneya’s mother Anjani got a full piece, which is why Anjaneya’s power is unlimited.

“Besides, Anjaneya was born because of the intervention of two Rishis, Angiras and Rishya Shringa, whereas Rama and His brothers were blessed by Rishya Shringa alone. The blessing of a single Rishi is enough to create a god, but when you are blessed by two, well, that is something else. That’s one of the reasons why I love Anjaneya so much.”

“Where does Angiras come into the picture?”

“Before Anjani was a monkey she was one of Indra’s celestial dancers. One day Angiras Rishi was sitting in Indra’s court deep in meditation, watching her dance. When she finished her dance she mocked him, saying, ‘Look here, you old man, didn’t you enjoy my dance? If you did you should tell me so.’

“Angiras replied, ‘My dear, I was admiring not your artistry but the artistry of the One who made you and Who made you want to dance.’

“She became annoyed, and told him, ‘What do you know about dance, anyway? You are bereft of artistry.’

“It is never wise to insult a Rishi. Angiras replied, ‘Oh, is that so? Would you like to see my artistry? All right then: become a female monkey!’ Then Anjani realized what she had done. But it was too late; a Rishi’s curse must always come true. All she could do then was beg for forgiveness. Angiras, after his heart had been softened by her wretched pleas, modified his curse: ‘You will become the mother of a monkey god who will be immortal and whose fame will endure as long as the sun and the moon endure.’

“A Rishi’s curse is always a blessing in disguise. It will change you for the better, no doubt about it, just as it changed Anjani. Without the curse she would never have become the mother of such a great being. Anjani was born on the earth as a female monkey, but with the memory of her previous existence. Before she fell to earth Angiras had given her precise instructions on how to worship Lord Shiva. When the kite flew by and dropped the *prasada* from the *Putra Kameshti Yajna* into her hands she had no idea of what it was or where it had come from, but she took it to be Shiva’s *prasada* and ate it. This is what faith can do for you.”

“Faith, and following instructions,” I said, mischievously, with a quick glance at Shernaz, and we all laughed.



More obedient than Shernaz, and more fortunate than she, was a Bombay couple in financial distress who invited Vimalananda to their home. While there he observed, “It is a good thing that you have a well in front of your house. Burn a little incense there every day and wait. If I am correct a monkey will come. Offer him a wheat *chappati* (unleavened bread) and a lump of *gud* (crude cane sugar). If he eats any of it you are made.” Four days after this conversation a monkey appeared, took one bite of the *chappati*, and vanished. Within a month this fellow sold some property for a fabulous profit and quickly parlayed that money into more than a million rupees. All this happened in the middle of Bombay city, in an area where there are no monkeys for miles around.

If Vimalananda had been willing to use even one of his various “knacks” for his own benefit he could easily have made for himself the millions that he “made” for others. Instead, he was perennially short on ready cash. This severely limited his stud choices for Stoney, for mares continue to eat even after they cease to race, and stallions charge covering fees for impregnating those mares. Many were the stud farms that Vimalananda surveyed, and many

were the stallions, both Indian and foreign born, whose racing and breeding prowess we discussed over many a cup of tea, but the choice finally came down to the best deal rather than the best stallion.

The best deal he could strike in 1977 was with Vitu Karve, a trainer who was the son of the well-known jockey Ramu Karve, whom Vimalananda had first known thirty years before during his first foray into the world of racing. Vitu, who had recently opened a small stud farm, needed mares and was willing to make contingency deals. He was willing to pay for Stoney's upkeep himself and to give over to Vimalananda her first live foal, after which Stoney would belong to Vitu. It was an all-round gamble: Vimalananda was wagering that her first live foal would be a humdinger while Vitu was betting that Stoney would throw some additional good foals after that first one. Vimalananda's enthusiasm for this bargain was minimal, for Vitu's stallion would pass on merely adequate genes to Stoney's child, but without cash there was then no alternative that would have paid Stoney's way other than selling her outright, an idea which Vimalananda detested.

On the day Stoney left for stud Vimalananda sat in Bombay with me and Roshni, staring long and hard at the wall on which hung one of his favorite photos: a shot of him and his then-trainer Maneckjee leading Stoney back to the Paddock after she had won the Mother Lode Cup. Vimalananda looked in the photo to be on the brink of kicking up his heels with pleasure as he escorted in the prancing Stoney.

As the three of us sat together thinking our private thoughts we chewed *paan*, that popular Indian chaw that is composed of betel nut, betel leaf, *khatta* paste, slaked lime, and sundry other additives. Vimalananda always enjoyed a good *paan*, not least because he had fond memories of his mother and aunts feeding it to him when he was young. I was learning the art of *paan* preparation, which is a ritual in itself, from Roshni, who had recently started making *paan* for Vimalananda. First you select the leaf, which must have no brown spots of deterioration on it. As Vimalananda loved to remind us, "Three things must always be kept turning: betel leaves, rotis, and horses." If you don't turn betel leaves regularly they will rot; an unflipped *roti* (tortilla-like flatbread) will burn; and a horse who does not keep walking or running will likely to die of acute colic. Once you have selected a worthy leaf you deftly slice out its central rib, then coat the leaf with the lime and *khatta*, whose mixture creates the red color that *paan* chewers are always spitting out. Atop this sanguine spread go the other ingredients, and then the whole mixture is folded into a triangle, square or cone.

Roshni had added a little tobacco to Vimalananda's *paan*—she wanted it to have none and he insisted that it have some—and as he spat out its remains

he began to tell me the secret of his prize mare's racing success: "Just after Stoney had come to me I asked my son, 'What do you want for your birthday?' That fellow knows me too well, so he replied, 'First promise me that you'll give it to me.' I promised, and then he told me, 'I want Stoney to win a race.' Now I was stuck. What if she wasn't destined to win, or I was not destined to make money from her? But I had promised, and I had to go through with it. I sat and did *homa* on Stoney's behalf, and she won a race as a result. Then I warned my son: 'Don't you ever try to trap me like this again or you've had it, whether or not you are my son.'

"Stoney won six races altogether. I knew that she had it in her to win, but I wanted to make it sure. So one day I went to my Junior Guru Maharaj to get some insurance. I pleaded, I pestered, and I coaxed. I told him all sorts of things, and even accused him of not caring for me. I also hinted that maybe it was beyond his capabilities. Finally he lost his temper and said, 'You don't think I can do it, do you? Well, I will show you just how I can do it. I will sit on that mare myself and win five races for you. First, I will come from the back. Then, I will go start to finish. Then . . .'

"The old man described in detail exactly how each race would be run. And you can believe it or not, but those five races were run just as he had predicted and she won each one. Am I right, Roshni?" Roshni nodded her assent. "He must have done just as he had predicted he would do; he must have possessed the bodies of the jockeys at race time, and forced them to do as he wanted them to do."

"Which made him responsible for the karma involved in arranging things so that she would win."

"Naturally; why else would I bother my mentor with such trifles? To deal with such karmas is child's play for him, but it is better for him to have to deal with it as a favor he has done for me than it is for me to deal with it as something I did for myself. And it's not like I expected something for nothing; I did something nice for him in return for this favor. After all, a fair exchange is no robbery."

"So why should he have refused at first to grant your request?"

"Well, why should he grant it? Should he indulge me in every request that I make? Besides, even if such karmas are child's play for him they are still karmas. I am asking him to soil his hands for me. Guru Maharaj has the power to make my mare win a hundred or a thousand races, if he wants to. But each race that he manipulates adds to the load of karmic filth that he has to wash off. Why should he bother?"

"You know, most people go to saints to ask them for money, or to punish their enemies, or to get their children married, or whatever, but they are all

stupid. When a saint has given up everything worldly how will he be able to help you with your worldly problems? I was equally stupid at first. My Junior Guru Maharaj asked me at least ten times if I preferred to have money or devotion to God, and I always said, 'Money,' because I thought that if I had money I could purchase anything I needed.

"One day when I was with him he asked me the same question. When I gave him the same answer he got so angry that he gave me a good slap. That slap somehow changed my way of thinking, and from that day on when anyone asks me what I want I always say, 'Bhakti, because if I have true devotion God will provide me with whatever I need.'"

I opened my mouth to speak but he intercepted my riposte.

"I know what you are thinking; you need not speak. You are thinking: 'If now you want nothing but bhakti, why did you ask Guru Maharaj to make Stoney win?' Don't worry, I am already prepared for that question. I have plenty of reasons ready for you. First, my rnanubandhana with Stoney, which I want to be completed in the best way possible. And whether anyone likes it or not this time around she is a racehorse, and racing is her lot in life. The more she wins the more she'll be respected and the better she'll be treated, both in the racing stables and now at stud. Second, it's a sort of competition between me and Guru Maharaj: I am testing him to see how much he is willing to soil his hands while doing things for me, and he is testing me in much the same way. Third, what about my rnanubandhanas with my poor friends at the racecourse? When one of my horses wins and they make money they bless me, and there is value in such blessings."

"And in curses too, I guess."

"O my God, there is tremendous power in curses! When I say that most of these jockeys and bookies are going to be finished I am not talking through my hat. Some years back there was a horse named Mount Everest. What a horse he was, Robby—a real mountain! He won race after race, and the punters at the track all knew that they could bet him fearlessly.

"Derby Day came around, and Mount Everest instantaneously became the 'on money' favorite. Everyone backed him down to 1 to 10 'on money'—meaning that for a bet of 10 rupees you'd get only 11 back: your bet of 10, plus 1. For most horses this is terrible odds, but not for Mount Everest. Everyone knew he was going to win, so it was just like getting 10% interest on your money for leaving it in the bank for half an hour.

"The bookies also knew he was going to win and decided to do something about it to save themselves from certain ruin. They got to the jockey and offered him an immense sum. The jockey refused, hesitated, wavered, and then agreed. Derby Day arrived, and everyone who was anyone went to the track

to watch Mount Everest win in convincing fashion. And what happened? Mount Everest's jockey tried frantically to hook him by making his pre-planned errors. But the horse was so much better than his rivals that the best the jockey could do was to cross the finish line neck and neck with another horse in a photo finish. Like everyone else at the track I was watching very carefully, and I was sure that Mount Everest had won. But the bookies had prepared for this too; in a few moments word came that the photo finish camera had failed. Failed! This was the only time in the world, up to that moment, that a photo finish camera had failed. The company that made the camera was so concerned to protect their reputation that they checked the camera later—and found nothing wrong with it. But that was later; on the day of the race there was no photo, which meant no review, which meant that the unbeatable Mount Everest had been pipped at the post."

"These things happen."

"Of course they do; unbeatable horses do get beat. It is also true that winning a photo finish is often just a matter of luck. When a horse gallops he thrusts his head first forward and then back with each of his strides. Suppose that at the finish line two horses are nose and nose, and one's head is pushing forward when the other is pulling back. Then the first one's nose will cross the finish line before the second one's will, even if the second one's body is in front of the first one's body. That nose will make all the difference between first and second place.

"But Mount Everest was not supposed to have been in a photo finish in the first place. He should have trounced his rivals, and when he did not there was silence at the racecourse. Total silence—everyone was so shocked. Everyone knew what had happened, it was so obvious. Mount Everest himself made the conniving even more obvious when he won his next race, the R.W.I.T.C. Invitational Cup, convincingly—by streets! In fact, the Derby was the only race he ever lost. There was an enquiry and everything, but nothing could be proved, so the culprits went scot-free.

"Or so they thought, until the morning after the race when *The Times of India* carried the tragic news of the death of an entire family that had drowned in the Arabian Sea. A few days later a suicide note surfaced and the truth came out. It seems that the father of the family had been skimming money from where he had worked to feed his gambling habit. He had lost steadily, as ordinary racegoers always do, until he was about to be found out. Then he recklessly took an enormous sum from the office on Friday. He planned to wager it all on Mount Everest, recover his arrears, and replace it before anyone would come to know. After the unthinkable occurred and Mount Everest lost the race, he realized that he would be going to jail, and

that as the family's only breadwinner his wife and children would starve. He took what he thought was the only honorable course of action left to him. At least this way they would still be together as a family and would see what fate had in store for them next time around.

"Can you imagine what his last thoughts must have been as he choked to death under the water? Like everyone else at the racecourse he knew that Mount Everest had been hooked. Don't you think he must have been thinking of the jockey and the bookies, the people who had caused him to kill himself? And what about the last thoughts of his family? This kind of curse, one that is delivered with all the force of someone's last breath, possesses a terrible power. So I would not want to be in that jockey's shoes, not even if you offered me tens of millions of rupees. He's going to be regretting his action for a long, long time."

"And the bookies will surely regret as well."

"Yes, the bookies too; where will they go? They cannot escape."

"If the curses of poor people are so powerful, what about all the curses that Mamrabahen has been spewing at me?" Mamrabahen hated me ever since she asked Vimalananda whether he loved me or her more and he had told her that he loved me more because I did not double-cross him. Mamrabahen thereupon began to repeatedly threaten to kill me, or at the very least to disfigure my face with acid, and amused herself thereafter by continually hurling maledictions in my direction, consigning me to multifarious hells in a multiplicity of unpleasant ways.

"I have told you before not to worry in the least about Mamrabahen's curses. First of all, I am there to protect you. Second, everyone asks me about blessings and curses but no one bothers to ask me how long a blessing or a curse will last. Isn't it important to know? If you know that a certain curse will only be short-lived you need not go to much trouble to try to lift it. You need only keep quiet until the end of the time limit and then you are free. Likewise, if you know how long a blessing will last you will be able to know how long you have to make use of it to progress.

"To know how long a blessing or curse will last you must first know in which form of speech (*vani*) it was delivered: *Vaikhari* (oral), *Madhyama* (mental), *Pashyanti* (visual), or *Para* (telepathic) *Vani*. Oral curses and blessings are almost worthless because your tongue burns whatever it speaks. This is why speaking mantras aloud dissipates their shakti. Even speaking someone's name too much spoils its sweetness. Even saying 'I love you' aloud is far less meaningful or effective than saying it mentally, or looking at someone and letting the love flow through your eyes or, best of all, using telepathy. In the old days the real gurus would bless their 'children' with Para Vani. Those blessings

would go directly to the target and hit the mark; their effects would last a lifetime and nothing else needed to be done. *That is the power of Para Vani.*"

"When that man committed suicide because of Mount Everest's defeat, was his dying curse in some higher form of speech?"

"Very likely it was, even though he probably was not aware of it."

"But Mamrabahen cannot use higher speech herself?"

"How can she? She tries to do sadhana, but she has no *niyama* (internal discipline). As soon as she gets some shakti she gets angry with someone and shouts at them, which burns it away with her tongue. Or she goes with some man and screws it away with her lower mouth, or does something else that eliminates its effect. The time to get worried is when you are cursed by someone who does good sadhana, because she will put some of her shakti into that curse.

"This applies to blessings, too. Think of it this way: if you beg money from a beggar you will only get small change, because that is all he has to give you. This is like an oral blessing. If you go to a merchant and he is pleased with you he will give you a good amount, but he will still calculate how much he gives you according to how much he can afford to give. This is like a mental blessing. But if a king is pleased with you, well, the sky's the limit. Real kings know how to give. This is one reason why they call good sadhus *maharaj* (great king), because they know how to bless—and to curse. A saint or a sadhu can only really bless or curse you when they are overcome by love or by wrath. Then the force flows from them without their even being aware of it.

"You can know a lot about a saint from the results produced by his blessings. Think of Mukunda Babu, who in his earlier years was a schoolteacher. When Mukunda Babu was growing up his grandfather had gradually taught the boy the entire *Ram Charit Manas* (the version of the *Ramayana* composed by Tulsidas). After he got older Mukunda Babu used to recite this *Ramayana* here and there in his spare time, for which he earned a little money. Then a sadhu who worshipped Anjaneya blessed Mukunda Babu, and now the ex-schoolteacher lectures before huge audiences of people. People are ready to give him millions, but fortunately for him he accepts their money on only one day of the year. Tulsidas clearly did not write his book on Rama with the intention that other people would use it to make money. But by not demanding money for his programs Mukunda Babu limits his exposure to the negative karma of selling spiritual knowledge.

"Any blessing that you get has to filter through both your causal and astral bodies, causing certain of your karmas to project outwards for fulfillment. Because a good sadhu delivered the blessing Mukunda Babu's mind is kept firm so that he does not desire name, fame and so on. He is tempted, accord-



ing to the Law of Karma, but he does not succumb to temptation like so many 'swamis' do. If he did succumb we would know that the sadhu who blessed him was a false sadhu."

"Do you know the sadhu that blessed him?"

"The sadhu was just an excuse, a medium through which the blessing was given. It was in fact Anjaneya Himself who blessed Mukunda Babu through the sadhu."

As if in thought Vimalananda paused, which permitted the flat to fill with street noise from two floors below. Then he continued: "Now I have given you a couple of good examples of saints' blessings. Here is an example of the power of a saint's curse: Kamran, king of Kandahar, was the brother of Humayun, Akbar's father. One day when Kamran was out hunting he shot a pregnant deer, who even though she was mortally wounded managed to struggle to the feet of Shri Chand Ji to die with her head on his foot.

"Now, Shri Chand Ji was no ordinary mortal. He was a great saint in his own right, and was also the son of Guru Nanak, who was a *Siddha* (perfected being). Shri Chand Ji was amazed that this doe had sought him out to die at his feet. He was so amazed, and so filled with love for her and for the Nature that had created her, that he blessed her from the depths of his heart. He was still in this mood of tremendous love when Kamran, who had been tracking the deer, arrived to claim his prize.

"Shri Chand Ji tried to reason with him, and explained that since the doe had come to him and taken refuge at his feet that he could not part even with her body. But Kamran was a cruel and unreasoning man, and he insisted. He was the king, after all, and was not used to people defying him.

"Then Shri Chand Ji was filled with such agony for the fate of the deer that it poured from him in the form of a terrible curse: "Your son will blind you, and make you beg in the streets before he murders you!" And it happened. In fact, Kamran was disemboweled."

"He shouldn't have insisted."

"No, and neither should you. If you are ever cursed by a real saint you have to expect the worst."

"And if a real saint blesses me should I expect the best?"

"You must. If an ordinary sadhu blesses you, expect an ordinary blessing that will last a short time. The effects of a great saint's blessing will last months, or years, or maybe your entire life. A *Siddha's* blessing gives you both worldly and spiritual benefits. At first you will prosper like anything. Then, after three or four years—seven years maximum—you will begin to feel, 'Why do I have all this? What is it for? Why should I not go out and live in the jungle?' And you will."

"And if a Rishi blesses you?"

"A Rishi's blessing lasts for lives and lives. Sometimes a Rishi, or some other *Mahapurusha* (immortal being), will give the blessing *Chirayur bhava!* ('Live indefinitely long!') If this meant that the person who was blessed should become a *Chiranjivi*, one who lives for millions of years at a time, then the whole world would be populated with ancient people by now. There would be no room for anyone new, which we can see is not the case. What this sort of blessing really means is that those who receive it will be reborn as humans every time they reincarnate. This gives them a chance to finish their jobs sooner, continuing their progression along the road to liberation through each succeeding birth without any further delays as animals or plants.

"A Rishi's curse is something unique because it always turns out to be a blessing in the end. It may plague you for many lives, but it will purify so many of your bad karmas that once you emerge from it you will become quite different. The curse makes all those bad karmas come out all at once.

"Will the curse on Mamrabahen cause all of her bad karmas to come out?"

"That is obviously happening already. But in order for such a curse to change you you have to admit your faults and stop performing evil karmas. Mamrabahen, on the contrary, is performing more and more evil karmas; she refuses to improve. I have been trying to improve her, but it is not working. You know, one of the greatest blessings you can obtain is to have someone near you who will always correct your mistakes for you."

"Is that why Birbal used to correct all of Akbar's mistakes, because he appreciated what Prithviraj had done for Chand Barot?" I asked, as the story of the great king and his loyal servant who had been reborn as the mighty Emperor Akbar and his closest confidant abruptly recalled itself to my mind.

"Perhaps."

"Surely Mamrabahen must be able to do something right."

"Oh, yes, she is quite clever. One thing she knows is pedigree; she can tell you the pedigree of almost every horse racing here in Western India. She also knows the sorts of influence that the various sires and dams have on their progeny."

"But the only good this has done her is to embroil her with jockeys."

"Yes, that long-ago curse has prevented her from ever being able to profit from her knowledge. It is so very difficult to escape from the effects of your karmas.

"This is a true story: There was a king who, having fathered no child during his first marriage, adopted a son. Sometime thereafter he married another wife who bore him a son. The second son's mother wanted her own son to succeed to the throne, and eventually, blood being thicker than water, she



convinced the king to accede to her demand. But how to get rid of the adopted son?

“After some thinking the king decided to send the boy to his neighbor, a vassal king who did most of his dirty work for him, including murders. The boy carried a sealed letter from his adopted father to the vassal. The letter read: ‘Give this boy *visha* (poison).’

“When the boy reached the river at the edge of the vassal king’s city he lay down on the riverbank for a nap. The king’s daughter happened to come down to the river, and when she saw the handsome boy on the bank she instantly fell in love with him. Seeing the letter he was carrying she opened it and read, ‘Give this boy *visha*.’

“Looking at him with eyes of love she said to herself, ‘What a fine young man! How could anyone, and his own father in particular, want to poison him? The king must have simply left out the letter ‘ya.’ He must have meant to write ‘Vishaya’—and that is my name! So I am to be given to this prince in marriage! How wonderful! But I must correct this oversight.’ She added ‘ya’ to the word ‘visha,’ replaced the letter, and awoke the boy.

“She then led him joyously to her father, who read the note and said, ‘How fine! My daughter is to become a queen! They must be married immediately!’ And so they were. The young couple was then sent back to the first king with many presents—jewels, elephants, and whatnot—and a note from the princess’s father: ‘King, you have done me great honor by marrying your son to my daughter and thus making a queen of her. Please accept these meager presents in gratitude!’

“When the boy’s adopted father read the note he realized both that his plan had backfired, and that there was nothing he could do about it. If he were to make his natural son king after him the other king would be terribly insulted, and might disrupt the whole alliance system. So he had to keep his trap shut, and after he died his adopted son became king. And that was that.”

“So everything is predestined?”

“By no means; there is such a thing as free will in the world. How much free will you have in any given situation, though, depends on how much you have used up in the past. Using your free will today creates karmas that become your fate tomorrow. Every time you use your free will to try to avoid your fate, to try to swim against Nature’s current, you create new karmas whose effects will not always be obvious to you until much, much later.”

“And presumably the more people you affect the bigger your karma, like the jockey who hooked Mount Everest. Which means that someone like Mao Tse-tung, what with the Cultural Revolution and everything else he has done to the people of China, is going to have an ocean of karmas to answer for.”

“Without a shadow of a doubt. The more authority you have over people the more conscientiously you must exercise it.”

“Lao Tse said, ‘Ruling a great kingdom is like cooking small fish.’”

“And I agree with him. When you are a ruler you must be very cautious, for things that you might think of as minor can soon become major when you look at them from the perspective of the people you rule. If enough of them die cursing you with their last breath you’ll be finished, done for, for ages. It is the rare person, like Akbar, who can endure the luxuries of princely life without being ensnared by them. But even he made some missteps—he was only human, after all, and no human is perfect. He may even be still be paying for some of these mistakes today.

“Tansen, Akbar’s chief musician, was really Tansen Pandey. His father’s name was Makaranda Pandey. ‘Pandey’ is derived from *panda* (‘priest’), which means they were a Brahmana family. Makaranda Pandey was unsuccessful at siring a child until he started to perform devotional services for one *fakir* (Muslim religious mendicant) named Mohammed Gous who lived near him. After some time Gous became pleased with Makaranda. One day when he was in a peculiar mood he called the Brahmana over to him and spit in his palm, and then put the spit in a paan. He told Makaranda, ‘Eat this and your work will be done.’ He did, and it was; Tansen was the result.

“The other Brahmanas, bigoted as Brahmanas usually are, told Makaranda, ‘You have swallowed the spittle of a Mohammedan, so now you have become a Mohammedan.’ Makaranda replied, ‘All right, then I am a Mohammedan.’ And so Tansen was reared as a Muslim, even though he came from a Brahmana family. What do you have to say to that?”

“Nothing,” I replied with bitter heat. “I have no more use for orthodox Brahmanas than I have for any other kind of Hindu fundamentalists. I have already had difficulties with Brahmanas who refuse me entry into certain temples, as well as Brahmanas who think that the secrets of Ayurveda should not be opened to me just because my skin is white. Whites may be racist, but there seems to be a vast amount of anti-white discrimination right here in India too.”

“You are lucky that you have come here in the ‘70s,” Vimalananda replied soothingly. “Twenty or thirty years ago it would have been nearly impossible for you to do what you are doing.

“After Tansen entered Akbar’s service he was recognized almost immediately as one of the Nine Jewels of the court. He became famous throughout the kingdom, and Akbar was very pleased with him. Then one day when Akbar was feeling expansive he said to Tansen, ‘Wah, wah, what a superb musician you are!’ He was taken aback when Tansen replied humbly, ‘Compared

to my guruji I am nothing at all, O Refuge of the World. Yes, I am a good musician, but Haridas Swami, my teacher, is much greater than I. I sing for money and fame and to please you, but he sings only for God.'

"This piqued Akbar's curiosity. He loved excellence, so he told Tansen, 'You must request your guruji to come to my court so that I can hear him sing.' Tansen replied, 'He will never come here, Your Majesty. He cares nothing for the world's grandeur. But if you will come with me in disguise then perhaps we will be able to hear him sing.'

"Akbar went incognito as Tansen's guest to listen to Swami Haridas worship the Lord with song. Midway through the performance he was so overcome by Haridas's singing that he forgot himself and cried 'Subanullah!', which is a Muslim way of saying, 'Outstanding! A marvel of God!' Haridas then immediately knew that a Muslim was listening to his music, and asked Tansen who he was.

"Tansen said, 'This is the Emperor, and he is very pleased with your singing.'

"Haridas said, 'He may be the Emperor, but I do not sing for emperors.'

"Then, to show his humility, Akbar offered Haridas Swami a vial of priceless perfume from Persia. Haridas took it and poured it onto the ground in front of him.

"Akbar gasped, and forgot his humility. He said, 'If you were not going to use it you should have given it to Krishna.' Haridas said, 'Go and see.'

"When Akbar went to the Krishna temple nearby he found that the image was covered with the same essence which he had just poured out onto the ground. Then Akbar understood—a little—of what Haridas was. Akbar was fortunate in that he behaved as a servant toward God—and God was the only thing he ever respected in that way—and so he respected the servants of God. Here is another effect of having ample good karmas in your account. Good karmas give you the opportunity to be exposed to saints who will help you get your priorities straight by humbling you. This happened to Akbar more than once.

"Meanwhile, Tansen stayed on with Akbar. He was really a great musician, though he did have some major character flaws."

"Like what?"

"How about the vicious jealousy that led him to kill everyone, like Gopal Naik, who might remotely be construed to be a threat to him?"

I had no answer to that, so Vimalananda continued: "Tansen composed two *ragas* (modes of Indian music)—*Darbari Kannada* and *Miya ke Malhar*—especially for Akbar. If you play *Darbari* correctly you'll see an image of Akbar, sitting on his throne, raising a rose to his nostrils. Tansen was widely famous for his ability to sing the *Raga Deepaka* (the Kindling or Igniting

Mode). He had so thoroughly mastered *Deepaka* that when he sang it at dusk all the lamps in the palace would light themselves, automatically. When Haridas Swami left his body, certain courtiers challenged him to light the Swami's funeral pyre by singing *Deepaka*. Tansen's arrogance got the best of him, and he accepted the challenge. He was able to light the pyre, but it was too much of a strain on him. He immediately fell ill. He was engulfed in heat; he felt as if his entire organism was on fire."

"Do we think that maybe the evil karmas created by killing Gopal Naik and all those other musicians somehow influenced this malady?"

"It's very likely."

"I guess this served him right for being so egotistical."

"Yes; you might keep that in mind. None of the court physicians knew how to treat this sort of disease. For six months Tansen was in agony, roving aimless about the country, his very being aflame, looking for relief. As luck would have it—which means, as his karmas arranged it—he ultimately reached the small village of Vadnagar in Gujarat. As he dragged himself through its streets he heard beautiful music coming from one of the houses. He recognized the music as the *Raga Megha*, the Cloud Mode—and what better thing to put out a fire than rain! The singers were two sisters, Tana and Riri, and Tansen requested permission to meet them. When the villagers discovered that the great Tansen himself had arrived they advised the girls' father Kanchanrai to have nothing to do with this Muslim entertainer. They warned him that he and his entire family would become outcasts if they helped him in any way. In spite of these threats to his family Kanchanrai invited Tansen into his house. The girls sang *Megha* so well for him that he was cured. Tansen offered Kanchanrai immense rewards, but they were politely declined. For Kanchanrai and his family wanted nothing to do with the Mughal court. Tansen then returned to Akbar's court, where the Emperor was wonderstruck at his story.

"Then it became Kanchanrai's turn to experience the results of his karmas. The courtiers who had challenged Tansen to misuse *Deepaka* goaded Akbar to believe that it was Kanchanrai's disdain for the throne that had led him to refuse a reward. Now it became a matter of principle, and Akbar insisted on summoning the father and his daughters to the imperial court. When the villagers discovered this they told Kanchanrai, 'You see, we told you so. Now you too will become Muslims. Perhaps the Emperor will even take your girls into his harem.' In order to protect their honor, and that of their family and village, Tana and Riri snuck away from their home and committed suicide together. And we can be sure that they were not thinking pleasant thoughts about the Emperor as they died."

“Didn’t Akbar regret what he had done?”

“Oh, he did, he did, much later; but what was the use of regret then? Two brilliant musicians, who like Tansen could control prana through song, were lost to the world. And why? Simply because Akbar insisted on having his way. Remember this, when you are tempted to insist on having things your way.”

## chapter four **TIMIR**

IN EARLY 1978 I was introduced to Vimalananda’s newest horse, a handsome compact colt named Timir, when I watched him win his first race. This occasion was also noteworthy for me—it was the first time I had been able to cheer home one of Vimalananda’s horses—and I found winning to be as electrifying a feeling as he had promised it would be. For the first time I understood the seduction of that sensation, how for sporting types like Vimalananda each victory could be as thrilling as his first.

I got an even greater thrill a few weeks later on the day Timir gave jockey Hemant Pawar an armchair ride to the 1000th win of his career. As Timir catapulted past the finish line all the railbirds around us erupted into huzzahs for horse, owner and rider alike. Cama and young Godrej pumped Vimalananda’s hand; Firoz clapped him hard on the back. I convoyed Timir’s beaming proprietor down the steps toward the gate where his ‘child’ would soon appear. After all the losing mounts had returned dispirited Hemant brought Timir forward so that Vimalananda could grasp one side of his reins. Mr. Lafange, the trainer, then grabbed the other side, and the three humans gave the conquering horse his triumph by leading him ceremoniously back to the paddock.

Though I had previously spent time at the Bombay racing stables my visit there after that afternoon’s last race was another first for me: the first day that I helped Vimalananda distribute tips to the grooms after a victory. The heroic Timir got his tip of carrots and alfalfa first, of course, for he was watching us as we arrived. Horses love to watch people, and their heads generally emerge from their stalls instinctively when visitors walk by. Timir was one of those horses who enjoy a telepathic ability to know in advance when a friend is headed for the stable; he always seemed to be expecting us whenever we showed up. After Timir and his handlers had been fed I lowered myself into a

folding chair and took a good look at the community in which I would spend much of my next seven years. A groom served me tea. As I sipped it I thought, "I could easily get used to all this."

Though no other pleasure can really compare to afternoon tea in the Bombay racing stables I soon learned that, as in racing venues the world over, its veneer of gentility sits atop a compost heap of plots and paranoia, pride and jealousy, overconfidence and frustration and, above all, cash and the rumors of cash. Skillful players learn that "money makes the mare go," and that innuendo and deviousness can make the mare's owner gain a status in the racing fraternity that his mares may never gain on the track. Truth at the racecourse can be amusing and interesting, but the appearance of truth usually counts for far more than its reality. That afternoon in the stables, though, I was most struck by how far withdrawn we seemed there from the Bombay which surrounded us. It was as though the uniformed guards at the gates of that treed and flowered biosphere of repose brandished some sort of authority that prevented all encroachment from the never-sleeping metropolis beyond. Redolent of the good farm smells of feed and dung, the stables reverberated with the caws of the ever-watchful jungle crows, the gentle whinnies of the hungry horses, and the fraternal murmurs of their handlers. God must surely be here in this heaven: What could be wrong with this world?

A wave of Vimalananda's hand summoned me out of my reverie, and I lifted myself from my seat to be introduced to Dr. Kulkarni, the vet who looked after Mr. Lafange's horses. Laughing, Dr. Kulkarni said to Vimalananda, "Oh, so here's the American on your team. Now you'll be able to use American 'medicines' for your runners that the lab won't be able to detect."

"What a joker you are, Dr. Saheb," said Vimalananda with a smile. Everyone at the racecourse knew that Vimalananda dosed his horses with all manner of permissible Ayurvedic, homeopathic and patent medicines, and even some from the Arabic medical system known as Unani. Though he never told anyone but me and Roshni what he was giving, the results they produced were evident to all observers. Perhaps Dr. Kulkarni thought that in the elation of victory Vimalananda would let some secret or another slip, but he did not know as I did that Vimalananda never allowed himself to be carried away by any species of intoxication.

After some further racecourse small talk we drove back to our digs. It was a day or two later, as we were driving to the two-thousand-year-old rock-cut Mandapeshwar cave temples in North Bombay to perform some rituals, that an opportunity surfaced to ask Vimalananda the question that had been exercising my mind: "Did you know before you bought Timir that he had this sort of rnanubandhana with Hemant Pawar?"

"Knowing all rnanubandhanas with all beings is a hell of a job," he replied. "I *did* know, even before I purchased him at the 1977 Auction Sales, that Timir had the chance to shine out. His pedigree is solid, and he has brought good karmas with him to experience during this lifetime. I knew Timir would do well, based on his fitness, and knew how much Hemant wanted to win his thousandth race. I didn't ask Hemant to ride him, you know; Hemant came on his own to ask me. I've known Hemant since way back when he was an apprentice, years and years ago, and I know what a good eye he has. He would not ask for a mount unless he was confident that he could win on it. As soon as he asked me for the mount I agreed. It felt like the right thing to do, and it was."

"Due to the rnanubandhanas between you, him, and the horse?"

"What else could it be? There is nothing in the world but rnanubandhana. Rnanubandhana is created and destroyed according to the mandate of the Law of Karma. Please don't think that anyone can be exempted from the Law of Karma. There are exceptions to every other law but this one. When God Himself comes to Earth He becomes subject to the Law of Karma, so what about you and me? Even the Rishis have not been spared by the Law of Karma. The Rishi Durvasas, who was the son of the Rishi Atri and the extraordinary Anasuya, was always irate. He inherited this incredible irritability from the blessing of Shiva, who, when upset, is anger incarnate. It was Durvasas who cursed Shakuntala, the young girl who neglected to serve him when he came to beg from her. Shakuntala's only crime was that she was thinking so fondly of her husband that she could remember nothing else. Because of this curse the girl was separated from her husband for years. Eventually she realized that it was all for her benefit—but what a hard lesson it was!

"But Durvasas too met his karmic Waterloo. King Ambarisha and his wife loved Krishna immensely; every day Krishna Himself would come to eat the food they offered to their little idol of *Bala Gopala*, the Baby Krishna. One day Durvasas and thousands of his disciples came to Ambarisha's palace for dinner. Durvasas already had a bad reputation, and whenever he was in town everybody would quake and quiver.

"Ambarisha and his wife were busy feeding Krishna when Durvasas arrived on the scene. The queen politely told Durvasas, 'Maharaj, please wait until we put Gopala to bed, and then we will take proper care of you.' Durvasas, who had come to test Ambarisha, got wild. Ambarisha said, 'Maharaj, you have such a high respect for God that it really doesn't behoove you to lose your temper this way.' Durvasas snarled at him, and asked, 'Who is this God of yours?' He didn't know Ambarisha. How could he? He had come to Ambarisha full of the ego of his *bala* (might). *Bala* and *kala* (stratagem, finesse)

rarely exist together in one person. Ambarisha could not compete with Durvasas's power, but he was full of finesse. As usual, finesse won."

"Out from the tiny idol of Krishna sprang Vishnu's divine weapon, the *Sudarshana Chakra*. It sped straight for Durvasas, who decided to run. The *Chakra* (discus) chased him over hill and over dale, through deserts and forests, through all the three worlds. When there was nowhere left to run to Durvasas hid himself in a lake. The *Chakra* hovered there above his head, whirring menacingly.

"Then Durvasas knew he was defeated. He said to Vishnu, 'I was wrong, O Lord. Please forgive me. What is my punishment?'

"Vishnu said, 'The fruit of ten thousand years of your penance is to be forfeited.' And so it was. Ten thousand years was not much to Durvasas, who had been doing penances for much longer. The worst thing for him was having to admit his fault.

"Durvasas had to pay dearly for insulting Ambarisha. But Durvasas is himself a great devotee of Krishna; how could he ever dream of insulting either Him or His other devotees? The answer is simple: It was the effect of Saturn. When Saturn's 'gaze' falls on someone it usually causes them hardships, often by making them do things they would never do under normal circumstances. The Rishi Vasistha lost all his sons because of Saturn. Due to Saturn the Rishi Vishvamitra twice lost the benefits of thousands of years of penance because of his dallying with Menaka. In fact, one result of Vishvamitra's dalliances was that very Shakuntala who Durvasas cursed with separation from her husband. The play of the Rishis is really unique."

"I thought you told me that if you can completely conquer 'what comes naturally' to you, then Saturn can have no effect on you, and that immortals like the Rishis have been able to truly conquer their own natures."

"True; but it is also true that even the most minimal attachment of your Kundalini Shakti to your body will interfere with your ability to control your own nature. So long as a Rishi remains embodied he must remain at least slightly attached to his body, and Saturn has to cast his glaze on every embodied being; there is no exception. Everyone in the universe has to falter sometimes. Even the Lords of the universe remain subject to the Law of Karma. Fate can affect any immortal being who becomes subject to the time, space and causation of our universe, no matter how tenuous or temporary that attachment might be.

"To know karma is to know fate; but fate is not such an easy thing to know," he repeated, as if to himself. "In fact, I doubt that anyone really knows fate fully. Even the gods are unable to fathom it. Do you know the story of Indra and his parrot?"

"No, I don't."

"Indra had a pet parrot. One day he got the thought, 'Someday my beautiful little parrot is going to die. But when will that day be?' This question started to prey on his mind so much that eventually Indra picked up his parrot and went to Brahma, the Creator. Indra asked Brahma, 'Great lord, when will my beloved parrot die?'

"Brahma replied, 'I am sorry, Indra, I am only the Creator. I don't know about things like death. But now I am myself curious, so let us go and ask this of Vishnu.'

"Indra, his parrot and Brahma went to Vishnu and asked the Preserver of the Cosmos the same question. But Vishnu responded, 'I am only the Preserver; I know nothing of destroying. For that we must go to Lord Shiva.'

"All four of them trundled off to put the question to Lord Shiva. But Shiva answered, 'Though it is true that I am the Destroyer I do nothing on my own initiative. I only act according to fate. When it is written in someone's destiny that his time has come then I am there to take him. If we want to know when the parrot is going to pass on we must ask Vidhata.'

"Indra, the parrot, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva accordingly made their way to the residence of Vidhata—Fate personified. As soon as they entered his presence they asked their question, but Vidhata merely said to them, 'Look at the parrot.' When they did they saw it lying dead on its back, its little legs sticking forlornly upward. Shocked, the four gods asked for an explanation.

"Vidhata told them, 'It was written that the bird would die only when it, Indra, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva all met with me at the same time. This was the only way in which the prerequisites for its death could be fulfilled. It was because the parrot's time had come that you, Indra, got the idea to come and inquire. Had you ignored that thought the parrot need never have died.'"

"And that was it? Indra and the Trinity learned a good lesson and had to go home parrotless?"

"That's right."

"Huh. . . Is asking questions what comes naturally to Indra?"

"Of course. From the celestial point of view Indra may be the king of the devas, but in the context of the human body he represents *indriya*, which means sense organ. All that the sense organs do all day long is ask questions. They are always looking outside to hear, touch, see, taste and smell what is going on. If asking questions is not 'what comes naturally' to the sense organs I don't know what is. If Indra had been able to control his own nature he would have asked himself why he had asked himself that question. Then he might still have his parrot. Don't forget: your conquered senses are your friends, and your unconquered senses—the ones that you allow to do what

comes naturally to them—are your enemies.”

“All right, I can see that. Does this also mean that just as it was written that the parrot had to meet his quietus in the presence of the Big Bosses it was also written that Hemant should win his thousandth on Timir, and that I should be there to watch you lead him in?”

“It certainly seems that way, doesn’t it? There is still a thing like free will in the world, but sometimes when the karmas have become very concentrated there is very little space for free will to operate. If this weren’t the case how could astrologers ever predict the future accurately? We know that they can; you have experienced it yourself.”

“True.”

“When your karmas become very, very concentrated in a certain area no amount of effort can enable you to escape Saturn and cheat your fate.” He laughed a quiet laugh. “R. D. Shah is a mathematical wizard and an amateur palmist who learned some of his palmistry from me. He is also something of the classic ‘absent-minded professor.’ If he is deeply engrossed in some problem he will go out into a rainstorm without any cover and will look up into the pouring rain without even being able to recognize what it is.

“One day he came to me so fired up that he could barely talk. I waited patiently for him to calm down, when finally he spit out: ‘I’ve seen a palm which is so unusual that you must come look at it and tell me if I am interpreting it correctly.’ He took me to the man whose palm he had read, and when he saw the palm again R. D. Shah suddenly told the man, ‘You are going to murder someone within four days. Please come to my house so that I can make sure you don’t.’

“None of the people there believed this prediction except me, for I did see murder written in his palm. The prospective murderer’s best friend, who was sitting next to him, objected: ‘I’ve known this man for years, and I can tell you that he would never murder anyone.’

“R. D. Shah asked for the friend’s hand, looked at his palm for only a moment and gasped, ‘You are going to be the victim! Oh, my—please get out of town immediately!’ No one listened. They all probably thought he had gone crazy. But I didn’t, because I had seen the victim’s palm, too, and saw in it the same thing that R. D. Shah saw.

“R. D. Shah went to the prospective victim’s wife, but she ignored him. Three days after the prediction was made the victim carried a large sum of money to the prospective killer, who promptly murdered the man for his trouble. When R. D. Shah heard of this he came to me and broke into tears. It was pitiful. He sobbed, ‘I tried to prevent it but I couldn’t do a thing.’

“On a whim R. D. Shah went down to the jail and looked at the man’s palm

again. He said, ‘You will be convicted and sentenced to hang, but appeal the conviction! Your conviction will be overturned on appeal.’ All of this took place exactly as predicted.

“When he was freed the murderer came to R. D. Shah for a third look at his hand. The verdict? ‘You will become a *yati*, a Jain sadhu.’ And it happened.”

“And all this detail shows up in the palm?”

“No, the outlines are there, but the details have to come from elsewhere, from the palmist’s intuition. Palmistry is after all a form of astrology, and in any form of astrology you can at best be right 85% of the time on calculation alone. For the other 15% you must use your intuition. R. D. Shah is a good palmist; he used his intuition, and it did not mislead him. In spite of all the warnings and implorings the murder happened just as predicted.”

“Couldn’t it have been forcibly averted?”

“Perhaps, if someone had used enough force. When you bless someone, you lighten their heavy load of bad karmas. Someone could have blessed the victim with long life. But we would have had to find someone who had enough shakti to give that sort of blessing and also had the desire to give it. And even if we had found someone like that what is the guarantee that the prospective victim would have been able to digest the blessing?”

“Digest the blessing?”

“Here is an example of what I mean. Sevadas Aghori was a very good sadhu, but he was so heavy that he could not even wash his backside after he defecated. He had a devotee named Chunilal who did this washing for him. When it came time for Sevadasji to die he called Chunilal to his side, gave him a stone, and told him, ‘Offer incense to this stone every day and you will always have just enough money to live on.’

Chunilal told his guru, “No, Maharaj, I need more.”

Sevadasji said, “It is not in your destiny to have more.”

But Chunilal insisted, which caused Sevadasji to reflect over how Chunilal had done a very dirty job for him for so long. So Sevadasji used his power to create the sum of one hundred thousand rupees, which he gave to Chunilal. Chunilal took leave of Sevadasji, but he had not travelled even a couple of miles toward the city of Baroda when this money was robbed from him. Then he had to return to Sevadasji and accept the stone that had first been offered to him.”

We had arrived at the caves, and were welcomed by a group of Vimalananda’s spiritual “children” who were to worship with us.

“Do gurus give out knowledge the way Sevadasji gave out money?” I prompted as we walked toward the temple.

“There are only two ways in which you can get knowledge from a guru,” responded Vimalananda emphatically so that his “children” could hear. “One

way is via rnanubandhana. If the guru owes you some debt of knowledge from a previous birth, if you are his creditor, then he will have to pay you back. Where will he go? The other way is how Arjuna got the knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gita* from Krishna: *mat prasadat*, by God's grace. There is no third way.

"Look at how easily I step over this channel in the floor," he said as we entered the caves. "That is how easy it is when you have *kripa* (grace) from your guru: you step over the samsara from the physical to the spiritual without any difficulty. If there is no *kripa* you may slip and bang your foot, or trip and break your leg. When a guru gives *kripa* to a disciple it is spontaneous; the guru himself doesn't know how he does it. Krishna saw that Arjuna had pure love for him. When He also saw that Arjuna could not understand what He was trying to explain Krishna said, *Divyam dadami te chaksuh*: 'I give you a divine eye.' That was *kripa*, a spontaneous outpouring from the heart. The result of *kripa* is that the disciple's mind becomes utterly firm. Before *kripa* the mind will always be moving from object to object, but after *kripa* it becomes perfectly one-pointed. *Kripa* can be used only for spiritual purposes, and it cannot be spoken. Whoever says *kripa* can be spoken or willingly given is a fool.

"The same holds true for *kalyana*, which is mainly mundane and only slightly spiritual. *Kalyana* will improve your material life, but it will not make your mind very one-pointed. You cannot take from a guru anything more than what he owes you unless he gives you grace, either *kripa* or *kalyana*; and even if he gives you grace you may not be able to hold onto it, just as Chunalal could not hold onto the *kalyana* that Sevadasji offered him."

"This means," I offered, "that *kalyana* and *kripa* are varieties of blessings."

"*Kalyana* and *kripa* are," continued Vimalananda, "two of the many varieties of blessings. And *kripa* is really a wonderful thing; it is so wonderful to have a one-pointed mind! Does anyone really know the power of the mind? Listen to this story. Once in a certain kingdom the king had fallen ill. No one knew how to cure him; even his personal physician failed. The king became so wild that he called his prime minister to his presence and then told him, 'If you don't get me cured I'll have your head separated from your shoulders!' Kings can be unreasonable like that."

"So can yogis, fire and water."

"Right. The prime minister was no physician, and had no idea of what to do. He gaddled about the city, trying to find a way to keep his head on his shoulders. As he wandered a madman stopped him and asked him what was wrong. When the prime minister explained, the madman asked, 'Are you prepared to spend a lot of money?'

"The prime minister replied, 'To save my head I'll do anything.' So the madman took him incognito to the biggest sandalwood merchant in the city. This fellow had completely cornered the market in sandalwood, but appeared to be in agony.

"The prime minister asked, 'What is wrong, my good man?'

"The merchant replied, 'My warehouses are so full of sandalwood that I will never be able to sell it all unless the king should die. If the king dies then everyone in the country will burn sandalwood in his memory. So I am praying twenty-four hours a day that that bugger of a king should die.'

"The prime minister immediately understood that this single-pointed concentration was the cause of the king's illness. He therefore immediately bought all the merchant's sandalwood. The merchant forgot about the king, and when the king became well he rewarded his prime minister handsomely."

"So in this case, at least, one man's forgetfulness became another man's salvation."

"It takes tremendous energy to remember things. This is why Kundalini never gets an opportunity to wake up in most people, much less rise. So long as your memory is strongly connected to your own karmas all of Kundalini's energy will be taken up just in the act of remembering who you are. And there are plenty of karmas for you to remember. Forget for a moment the karmas in your causal body; what about the ones in your greater causal body?"

"Huh?"

"Your greater causal body, or *mahakarana sharira*. Everything that has ever happened in the cosmos has left its mark there. Each action gets registered on each particle of Mind throughout creation and can be recalled to awareness. This is the Universal Memory. In order to make Kundalini wake completely you must forget to identify even with that; you require perfect forgetfulness."

"Perfect forgetfulness."

"Yes, because as She awakens you will gain access to the memories of all your past karmas. We call this *punassmriti* in Sanskrit. If you gain *punassmriti* before you are able to handle it—before you can digest what you will remember—then you might get trapped in those memories."

"So you don't think it is good to try to recapture the memories of your past lives, like some Westerners are now starting to try to do?"

"How will that help them? Fortunately most of these people will just hallucinate something and think it is real, and will build some complicated construction around it to entertain themselves. But a few will really tune into their rnanubandhanas, and those are the ones who will be in real danger. What do you think would happen if you were a mother who realized that your child had murdered you in a previous life? Would you be able to behave in a



purely maternal way in this lifetime, and get beyond your desire for revenge? Or would you get stuck in that previous reality and keep the whole cycle of retribution moving along? I thank God for the magnanimity of Nature which causes us to forget almost everything of our past lives when we are born!

“But even perfect forgetfulness is a later stage. First you have to learn to remember. You haven’t forgotten Jean Valjean, have you?”

“How could I?” Vimalananda could turn even *Les Miserables* to his purposes.

“After Jean Valjean was caught stealing the bishop’s candlesticks the bishop protected him instead of accusing him. That one incident changed Jean Valjean for the rest of his life. That is why I remember, every morning of my life, that I am going to die. When you go to the smashan this is what you should tell yourself: ‘As this corpse is, so will I be; forget not, forget not.’

“Now enough—it is time for us to do our work,” he concluded, and we proceeded with our ritual. Though he sat after we completed our worship and joked with his other ‘children’ for a bit he showed no interest in resuming this conversation until we were on our way back to South Bombay. Then he began again: “You were talking of blessings earlier tonight, but do you have any idea of how many types of blessing there are? Each blessing is a karma, which means that each has its own consequences. Probably the simplest way for me to bless someone is to take away some of that individual’s bad karmas—but if I do that then I will have to suffer those karmas myself. The Law of Karma is very strict: When there is an action, someone or some thing will have to experience the reaction. Taking on someone else’s karmas is therefore a crude and unsatisfactory way of blessing. Not only will I make myself miserable, but I will use up all my shakti working off the bad karmas of only a few people. Then I will have nothing left for all the others who have *rnanubandhanas* with me.

“One way to bless someone which will cost me almost nothing is for me to rearrange that individual’s karmas. If he or she is destined to suffer miseries to pay off some bad karmas I can arrange for some good karmas, ones which were supposed to ripen and emerge later, to emerge now. But once these good karmas are exhausted there will still be those bad karmas to pay off, and there will not be any good karmas left to cushion the blows. The last condition will then be worse than the first. This is obviously not much of a blessing, but some people I know who did not deserve wealth in this lifetime have demanded it from me and I have given it to them in this way. If they are sensible they will use this wealth to perform more good karmas, to rebuild their karmic credit balances.”

“And if they don’t they’ll be finished?”

“Completely finished. Now, *Pitri Tarpana* can also be a blessing. Suppose you have an ancestor (*pitri*) who has been reborn as a horse who draws a carriage. Because you still possess some of his genes and chromosomes his consciousness in his new form is going to affect yours.”

“How?”

“While he was living his *ahamkara* identified with his entire body. The only part of that body that remains after his death is that body’s pattern of genes and chromosomes, a portion of which resides in you. Because everything that has ever happened in the cosmos has left its mark there, his ‘mark’ remains on those genes and chromosomes for as long as the pattern remains relatively intact. As long as his ‘mark’ is there his awareness will continue to resonate, to some extent, with those genes and chromosomes—which means that his awareness will be able to influence your awareness via the genetic material that he has bequeathed you.”

“Oh my God! How long will that influence last?”

“Vedic tradition speaks of seven generations.”

“Is this some sort of numerological number?”

“Not at all. Don’t you remember how many times an ordinary horse must be crossed with a thoroughbred before its progeny can be registered in the thoroughbred stud book?”

“The eighth cross becomes a thoroughbred.”

“Which means that the ordinary bloodline becomes effaced after—“

“Seven generations! Oh my God! So the people in the Bible were not just talking through their hats when they spoke of a sin being visited on their heads, and on their children’s heads, ‘up to the seventh generation.’”

“Not at all. Now, if your ancestor was some sort of a saint the influence of his awareness on you might be fairly positive. Otherwise it will probably not help you much, and might prove greatly detrimental. What *would* be helpful for you is to break your ties with him in such a way that you help him out as well. To do this you perform a *Tarpana* ritual, which forcibly draws that ancestor’s spirit to you. Obviously it would be easier to do this if your ancestor were bodiless, but it can be done with him embodied all the same.

“When the spirit of your ancestor leaves the body of this carriage horse the body will drop down without warning onto the road. No one in the vicinity will understand what is going on. Someone may even accuse the horse owner of cruelty to dumb animals. During the ritual the horse will remain unconscious, and after it is finished the horse will jump up and start lurching about. Then at night, when no one is around, that spirit will leave the horse permanently to go to another womb, and the horse will die.”

“And that breaks the tie?”



“Not at all; you still have his genes and chromosomes. But now he has moved up a little in the world of manifestation, so his influence on you will improve—a little.

“But this is only one of your many ancestors. My Senior Guru Maharaj used to say, ‘When you know just by looking at a person all about his father, father’s father, and so on, twenty-five generations back, and when you can tell what that person was in his last twenty-five births, and you can see into the future to what he will become in his next twenty-five births, then you may say that you have learned—a little bit. You have learned a fraction of what you can know.’ What a mentor! Twenty-five generations is only the beginning; a real Rishi will know millions of generations, all at once.

“If I perform Pitri Tarpana for your forefathers and foremothers it will bless you by helping you to distance yourself from their negative influences. But an even subtler way to bless you would be to perform Tarpana for the Rishi who founded your *gotra* (clan). This will make the Rishi so happy that he will bless you from the overflowing of his love—and I will stay free of even the slightest stain of karma. Another way for me to bless you would be to worship your personal deity—your *ishta devata*—on your behalf. When your deity is happy you are bound to be blessed! You ‘bless’ yourself—you improve your own innate nature—every time you perform sincere worship of your *ishta devata*. You can also bless yourself when you personally worship the Rishi who originated your *gotra*, or personally perform Pitri Tarpana for your ancestors. In each case you change your consciousness by regulating the activity of certain of your genes.

“And what about curses?”

“There are many, many different ways to curse. Two of them are rituals which are common in South India called *Kegamati* and *Bhanamati*. They were so common when the British were ruling the country that a special police cell was created to deal with all the cases that occurred.”

“You’re kidding.”

“Not at all. These rituals are usually performed only on individuals, but I have seen cases where an entire village was affected. In this village everyone worked hard and was as normal as could be during the day. After sunset, though, they would all take off their clothes and run caterwauling through the streets, stark raving mad. A daughter might show her vulva to her father, and her father might show his pecker to her. Everyone would be shouting and screaming bloody murder. Come daylight, they would all forget what they had done during the night, and start their normal lives again. These people’s lives were thoroughly disrupted by the curse, but the only difference between their daytime and their nighttime lives was a shift in their awareness, a change in consciousness.

“No one can deny that human consciousness is dependent on chemicals. If it were not how would intoxicants and other psychoactive drugs affect us? Just a change of a few molecules and a whole new pattern is created. All you need is for a few cells to distend or a few tiny blood vessels to contract and the mind changes completely. You must have noticed how your attitude changes from moment to moment. At the office you may be tired, angry and upset, but most of the time you will forget all that as soon as you reach home, where you relax and enjoy yourself. There are many, many factors which affect your nature, your *svabhava*, but the whole thing boils down to control of the chemical patterns of the brain. How much or how little *ahamkara* self-identifies with your body, which determines how free Kundalini can be, is controlled by your chemistry. When Saturn wants to affect your consciousness all he has to do is make some minor alterations in your metabolism.

“This is why Aghoris are fond of intoxicants. As long as you remain in control of your intoxicant—as long as you are consuming the drug and it is not consuming you—you can direct it to alter your nature in any way you see fit. This is especially true of *bhang* (a preparation of marijuana leaves): whatever thought you hold in your mind stays there without effort. If you can concentrate on disengaging Kundalini from Her coverings you can make quick progress with the help of intoxicants—but they are useful if and only if you can control your mind. If your consciousness is inundated by intoxicants you are sunk, because then they will reinforce and intensify all the limitations of your nature.

“As long as your *svabhava* is not perfectly controlled you will be subject to Saturn’s control, and believe you me, it is no joke to be able to control your nature. Even Shiva Himself was once affected by Saturn. When He and Parvati were married all the planets except Saturn came to bless the couple. Parvati took Saturn’s absence as an insult and demanded that Saturn be instructed to appear. Shiva smiled gently and told Her, ‘Goddess, why not leave well enough alone? It is better that he is not here. In fact, he has done us a special favor by not coming.’

“But Parvati was adamant—Shakti in Her awakened, uncontrollable form—and Saturn was obliged to come. He didn’t stand in front of the couple; he just glanced at them from a distance. But as soon as Shiva saw Saturn He experienced his own true nature and went into *samadhi*. Saturn makes you experience yourself as you really are, down deep inside. Since Shiva’s nature is pure consciousness, that is what He experienced. Shiva stayed in *samadhi* experiencing that consciousness for seven and a half divine years, and all during that time Parvati was livid. How could She enjoy holy nuptials with Her husband when He was deep in *samadhi*? When at the end of those years

He came back down to normal consciousness Shiva told Her, 'Now you see why Saturn was not invited to our wedding.'

"Then Parvati in a rage cursed astrology that it would never be 100% accurate without adding plenty of intuition to it. She also cursed those who make their livings by astrology that they would always be miserable beggars."

"Has that happened?"

"Many of the astrologers I know are in fact miserable, and some are literally beggars."

I also had seen some suggestive examples. "And this is due to Parvati's curse?"

"Yes, and also because they have forgotten much of the original knowledge of Jyotish. Parvati's curse is able to affect them strongly because of their weak intuition. Do you know the Sanskrit word for intuition? *Ishtabala*—literally, 'the strength of your *ishta devata*, your personal deity. You won't be much of an astrologer unless you have a healthy relationship with a personal deity.

"In spite of Parvati's curse, Jyotish is still the best tool we have for predicting fate, because Saturn represents fate. It is good to be able to predict fate, which can overpower almost anyone."

"Shouldn't astrologers also worship the planets?"

"Why just astrologers? Worshipping the Nine Planets is a good way to control your nature. We in India worship the well-placed planets, to encourage them to assist us more vigorously, and try to placate the afflicted planets, to request them not to pervert our minds or lives. We respect the planets as Mahapurushas of the type known as *munis*. Like any other beings—Rishis, deities, your next-door neighbors—they respond positively to attempts to butter them up. A few of India's kings and yogis have even gained control, or at least influence, over eight of the nine planets by successfully completing *sadhanas* for them. But very few of these *sadhakas* (people who perform *sadhanas*) have ever been able to control the most powerful and difficult to placate of all the planets: Saturn. Only the very bold or the very rash attempt to control all Nine Planets, for when you fully control the Nine Planets you control the entire manifested universe."

"Not so easy."

"No, but it's been done. Ravana did it. Ravana was a Siddha; he had become immortal. His Kundalini was therefore completely under his control, which meant that Fate could no longer affect him. He had gained complete control of his *svabhava*, his innate nature. Control of his *svabhava* gave him the power to conquer the planets, including Saturn. After he conquered them he took them home with him and kept them face down on the steps leading up to his throne. He could have gone on for ages like this, since the planets could have no effect on him if they could not see him. But that would have

obstructed the Rishis' play, so they sent *Narada*, the Celestial Troublemaker, to solve the problem.

"Narada went to Saturn and said, 'You are the most powerful of all the planets, but here you are lying face down in front of Ravana's throne unable to do anything about your condition.'

"Saturn replied, 'Because I am face down my gaze cannot fall on Ravana, so I cannot affect him. Advise him to turn me over and I will do the rest.'

"Narada understood, and went to search out Ravana. After praising him to the skies Narada suggested to Ravana that he might like to turn the planets over, so that he could enjoy their misfortune more fully. Ravana liked this suggestion, and as soon as he turned the planets over onto their backs Saturn's gaze fell on him, and his mind became perverted.

"Now, Ravana knew the effects of Saturn as well as anyone else did; something came over him to make him agree with Narada's suggestion. *What* came over him is another question. Part of it was his own *svabhava*, his innate nature. He was a *rakshasa*, and *rakshasas* always love to humiliate their enemies. But when he was in complete control of his *svabhava* how could he lose this control in an instant for no apparent reason? Perhaps it was the words of Saturn, spoken to him through Narada. What is clear is that as soon as Ravana turned the planets over Saturn's gaze fell upon him, and from that moment on his intellect began to be distorted.

"The first effect of Saturn's gaze on Ravana came via his wife. One day she enquired of her husband, 'You are now immortal, which is fine, but when will you ever be free from having to exist?' Ravana said to himself, 'Oh my God, I've forgotten about that!' He realized that his wife was right. So long as he was immortal he could never hope to improve further. You must die if you don't want to stagnate. Ravana was trying to change his innate nature to become one of the gods, but Nature would not permit him to do that, because it would disturb Her balance. So Ravana's intellect *had* to be altered. There was nothing wrong with Ravana's desire to die, of course, but it would never have occurred to him had not his intellect been impaired.

"It was his previous penance of Lord Shiva that had made Ravana immortal in the first place, so Ravana went back to do more penance of Shiva. After long, hard penance Ravana again gained a vision of Lord Shiva. Shiva asked him, 'What do you desire?'

"Ravana told Him, 'Lord, please give me some way to die.'

"Lord Shiva looked at him askance and said, 'I'm very sorry, but you should have thought of this earlier. I have already blessed you with eternal life, and you know that whatever I say must come true. How can I go back on my words now?'

“But Ravana insisted, and Shiva eventually gave in. He said, ‘All right. I can’t revoke my boon, but I will amend it: *Parastri haranam, Ravana maranam.*’ (Ravana will die when he steals another man’s wife.)

“Ravana was shocked. He said, ‘Lord, I am King of Lanka, and I must set an example for my people. If I take someone else’s wife my subjects will follow suit, which will make me the cause of much misery and immorality. I could never stoop so low as to do that.’

“Shiva replied, ‘Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu, is going to be born on Earth. You will take His wife, and He will be forced to kill you. Then, dying at the hands of God Himself, you will go to the heaven meant for warriors who die on the field of battle, and your merit will be great. Moreover, your death will act as a warning to anyone who would be tempted to steal another man’s wife.’

“And so it happened. It was only because Ravana was such a great devotee of Lord Shiva that he got the opportunity of enjoying such an auspicious death. If Shiva, the god of death, cannot make His devotee die well then what is the use of Shiva? Because no one knows this everyone thinks Ravana stole Sita out of lust. If that were the case would he have kept her a prisoner so long in the grove, unharmed? No, he would have had his way with her long before.”

“Orthodox Hindus think of Ravana as a total blighter.”

“Don’t mention those idiots to me; what do they know about the *Ramayana*? They only know how to parrot what someone else has told them.”

“So was it Ravana’s fate to become immortal and then to die?”

“It would seem so. He had performed tremendous penances in order to achieve immortality, and he never would have been able to complete them unless he had been fated to do so.”

“So his death was fated too.”

“It was, and there is a good reason for it too. He and his brother Kumbhakarna were originally *Jaya* and *Vijaya*, Vishnu’s two doorkeepers. Once they foolishly insulted the four Rishis known as the Sanatkumaras, who cursed the pair to fall to Earth as demons. Vishnu then promised that He too would be born on Earth to redeem them. First they were born as Hiranyaksha and Hiranyakashipu, and Vishnu killed them in the Boar and Man-Lion Avatars respectively. Then they became Ravana and Kumbhakarna, who were killed by Vishnu in his Rama incarnation. Then they incarnated again, and Krishna killed them. Curses and blessings, for seven births at a time.

“It was a curse that caused Rama to lose Sita in the first place. When Parashurama met Ramachandra they fought, and Parashurama cursed Rama.”

“Parashurama was the sixth Avatara of Vishnu, and Ramachandra was Vishnu’s seventh Avatara. It doesn’t seem very spiritual for Vishnu to fight Vishnu.”

“*Parashurama* (“Rama-with-the-Axe”), who is immortal, is a Brahmana, and Ramachandra was a Kshatriya, a warrior. Because Parashurama’s father had been killed by a Kshatriya Parashurama vowed to use his battle axe to rid the earth of warriors. He did it, too; he did it several times. As soon as he heard of Ramachandra, the powerful young Kshatriya, a clash between them became inevitable.

“Ramachandra defeated Parashurama handily, though, and took Parashurama’s power away for Himself. Then Parashurama, irate at being defeated by a upstart youth, looked at Ramachandra and said, smiling ironically, ‘All right, my child, you have taken my Shakti. It doesn’t matter. But you will be thrown out of your kingdom. You will lose your own Shakti,’—meaning Sita—‘and you will have great difficulty in retrieving her.’ And so it happened. Without that curse there would have been no *Ramayana*.”

This was not the version of the *Parashurama-Rama* story that appeared in either the Sanskrit *Valmiki Ramayana* or Tulsidas’s *Ram Charit Manas*. In both of those texts Parashurama came to Rama upset that Rama had broken Lord Shiva’s bow. Although Parashurama wanted to fight Rama, Rama refused to fight and thus pacified Parashurama gifted his shakti to Rama.

Since it did not seem apropos to object to his choice of story at that moment I asked instead, “If Rama took away all of Parashurama’s shakti how did the old man have any left to curse Rama?”

But he was ready for me: “If Rama had taken *all* Parashurama’s shakti Parashurama would have fallen dead right there. But Parashurama is immortal, so obviously some of his shakti remained.”

“Some sort of core, personal shakti remained, and Rama merely took away his ‘discretionary’ shakti, you mean?”

“Something like that. Parashurama’s words had the effect of a curse. He was so upset that his emotions took control of him and he spoke from his heart. He may not have even meant to do it; it may just have been something that was pressing on him so strongly that it had to come out. But when it came out it had enough force behind it to come true.

“Besides, Nature wanted Parashurama to lose his shakti somehow or other. Both he and Rama were avatars of Vishnu, but Parashurama had already finished the work that he had been sent to Earth to do. Rama was *adhikara* (fit, appropriate) to take on the older avatara’s sakti, and he needed that extra shakti to be better able to do his own work, which was just beginning. It was only a matter of Nature’s finding a way to transfer that shakti from the one to the other. In this case a curse did the job; in some other situation it might be a blessing.”

All I could say in response to this was, “This business of blessings and curses is really complicated.”

“I’ll say! Here’s an illustration from my own life. A poor musician named Damle once came to me for help. He was paralyzed from the waist down, and maintained himself by tutoring pupils for a few rupees a month. When I saw him something came over me and I kicked him. I don’t know what happened, but after that kick he could walk again. Then I told him, ‘A young woman has just started studying music with you. Please ask her to marry you. You and she can then teach classes together, and she will be very lucky for you. You will have plenty of money.’ He listened to my words and married her, and they were happy.

“All this happened years ago. Then one day a few weeks back I suddenly got the thought, ‘I wonder how Damle is? Why don’t I go see him and check him out?’ I had helped him out, but I was wondering if the blessing had been sufficient. How strong a blessing is, is determined by how many of those bad karmas disappear or are reshuffled for later experience. Changing someone’s destiny is not a joke. If there is a tremendous load of bad karmas, even a strong blessing may only make a dent in them. This is why they say *garib ki naseeb garib hai*: a poor person’s destiny is to be poor.

“When I arrived at his house Damle greeted me with every mark of respect. Eventually the conversation came around to him, and he told me, ‘All is fine with me and my family that way, except that some one or another of us is always sick. My wife and I make plenty of money, but it all seems to go to the doctors.’

“I had been afraid of this. Too many bad karmas. I told him, ‘I really love your music. Please play Kedara Raga for me, and let us see what happens.’ I knew that if he could play Kedara well that something would come over me again, and he would be benefitted. But his destiny was such that he never got around to playing it for me. So I had to leave him to his destiny. Beware of fiddling about too much with other people’s destinies, my boy, or you might end up like Sheikh Salim Chishti!”

“At least you didn’t follow his example, and bless Damle and his wife to have a child.”

“Thank God! But that probably wouldn’t have been necessary anyway. Poor people, even in rich countries like America, always have many children. It is easy to be born into a poor family because there are many spirits who have such a heavy load of evil karmas that they are destined to be afflicted on Earth. To be born poor into a large family in a cruel, dangerous environment will make any soul miserable. It takes plenty of luck—good karmas, blessings—to be born into a rich family; look at how long it took John F. Kennedy

to get a son. All across America people who can’t have children are literally purchasing them from other countries, including India. Think what sort of karmas those children must have: born in poverty as an orphan, then whisked away to opulence. If you are meant to enjoy wealth, if Nature desires it, then you will have it whether you want it or not, and no one can stop you from getting it.

“When India was rich it was the same way, which is why Akbar could have a son only after Sheikh Salim Chishti blessed him. After all, how many people can accumulate enough good karmas to be born Emperor of the World? Very few. The being who became Akbar’s son Salim had many good karmas, but not quite enough to be born as Akbar’s son. In order to be born he needed that extra push in the form of the saint’s blessing. But what about all the bad karmas? They still had to come out, and when they did they corrupted his mind. He became an opium-eating drunkard who was not at all worthy of his father.

“Akbar himself was born as the result of a blessing, but the circumstances were different. After his father Humayun had been driven from his throne and was roving about in Sindh he met a good fakir, who understood something of what was going on. When the fakir, who knew Prithviraj Chauhan’s capabilities, perceived that Prithviraj needed a womb in which to be born, he decided to endow his daughter with a matchless son. He gave her away in marriage to Humayun, and then blessed the couple by saying that their son would rule as Emperor of India.

“To be born as the child of a deposed ruler is not so difficult. To be born into power and luxury is much harder and a much harder situation to ‘digest.’ In fact Akbar’s chief disappointment in life was his son Salim, the very person he had gone to so much trouble to bring into his life! He always called Salim ‘*Sheikhu Baba*’ in honor of the fakir whose blessing had caused the boy to be born. By the time Salim was in his mid-thirties he had despaired of ever succeeding to the throne, because his father’s health seemed indestructible. He took to heavy drinking and, his mind was addled by intoxicants, his ears were swayed by evil counsel. He rebelled against his father, and set himself up as King of Allahabad. Eventually he marched on his father’s capital city, and soon two armies, one his and one his father’s, were arrayed facing one another, ready to fight.

“This time Akbar, who had indulged his son in everything throughout his life, had had enough. His wife sensed this. Before every battle Salim’s mother would worship Akbar’s favorite sword and then present it to him. This time as she handed the sword to her husband she said, ‘My only request is that you spare my son’s life.’

“He told her, ‘You have forgotten that a wife should think of her husband first. You are more attached to your son. All right, for your sake alone will I spare his life.’

“Out on the field of battle the two antagonists met. Akbar told his son, ‘Sheikhu, why do you want all these men and their families to suffer? The quarrel is between you and me. Why don’t we fight it out together? I am an old man, and you are young and strong. Whoever wins can take the kingdom.’

“In his drunken foolhardiness Salim agreed, and the two men fought as both armies looked on. Within a few minutes Akbar, who was an old wrestling cory, had pinned Salim, who was no fighter, to the ground. There is nothing worse than to be humiliated in front of those you command, and Akbar knew it. He told his son, ‘Now, shall I kill you? No, I won’t. I have promised your mother.’ He had Salim thrown into the dungeon and took his wine and opium away from him for four days.

“Then he sent for his son, who was thoroughly chastened, and made him Crown Prince. But Akbar’s enthusiasm for life had been snuffed out, and within a year and a half he died, having realized the futility of pomp and worldly glory.”

“That must have been when he came under the influence of Saturn.”

“Yes, that was when his fate caught up with him.”

“I have tried to explain your theory of karma to various of my friends,” I said, resigned to being dim, “and many of them ask me, ‘If this business of action and reaction is true, and if you kill me today it is because I killed you sometime in the past, how did this all begin? What was that first karmic debt?’”

Vimalananda smilingly answered, “That first debt is the first step in the creation of the universe: the projection of the *Adya Shakti*, the original Shakti, Nature, the foundation of everything. Because she projected from the Absolute, She owes the Absolute everything, beginning with Her very existence. Debts multiply from there as She tries to reunite with Her source, the Supreme Shiva. Because She feels incomplete on Her own She craves reunion. When this transcendent, cosmic Shakti merges again with Her Lord Shiva there is nothing left to support creation, and the universe dissolves. This is called *pralaya*. When your Kundalini Shakti—your own ahamkara, the thing which self-identifies—merges with her personal Lord Shiva then you cease to exist as an individual. This is *laya*, dissolution of your false identity in the ocean of the Absolute Reality. *Laya*, which is *pralaya* on the micro-cosmic scale, involves withdrawal of all your projections back into their source. After *laya* occurs there is no karma, because no individual remains to self-identify.

“Every action including passivity contains karmic activity. Passivity is active in the sense that it is a conditioned state, which makes it part of Shakti. The cosmos exists so long as Shakti exists; without Shakti there is nothing, not even Shiva. Without Shakti *shiva* (auspiciousness) becomes *shava* (corpse). You keep asking me about the Kaulas; now listen carefully: Only after you have realized Shava in your life will you be fit enough to understand Kaula.

“Everyone is lecturing on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which Krishna recited to Arjuna, but does anyone really understand it? Take the first two words only: *Dharmakshetre kurukshetre*. How can a *kurukshetra*—a place where actions, or karmas, are performed—be a *dharmakshetra*—a place of *dharma*, of righteousness and holiness? It seems to be a contradiction until you think it through clearly. First, what is a ‘kurukshetra’? Your heart, which is continually beating—‘kuru, kuru, kuru.’ Your heart can become a place of *dharma*, a ‘*dharmakshetra*,’ in only one way, and that is by taking Lord Krishna’s advice: ‘Go ahead and perform karmas, because you were born to do them, but leave the results to me.’ What he means is, you can write as many checks as you like on the Bank of Karma—but don’t sign any of them! You don’t have enough credit in your account to pay for all the karmas that you perform, but Krishna does. Let Him sign the check instead. Then you will be free—free not from action but from your self-identification with your action. This is the essence of the *Gita*. Turn the word *gita* (song) around and you get *tyagi* (renunciate). What you have to renounce is your ignorant self-identification with your actions. Right now you are a *kshetra* (a field of activity), and what you must become is a *kshetrajna* (a knower of the field). Only through *jnana* (wisdom) can *dharma* arise.

“But just telling yourself that you are not going to self-identify with your actions will not work. Your ahamkara must self-identify with your body, even to a small extent, for as long as your body exists. Otherwise none of your essential bodily processes would be able to continue to work, which would spell the end of your physical being. But this self-identification, which creates more karma, is often karmically fatal. Ahamkara is free to identify with anything She likes; there is no guarantee at all that she will only self-identify with beneficial things. Even identification with mental images can be dangerous, because any image with which your mind self-identifies gains the power to affect you. Sadhana is essential because sadhana gives you a beneficial image for ahamkara to identify with, an image which once empowered can help you tremendously.

“When you worship a deity and completely self-identify with Him or Her your ahamkara will no longer find it easy to self-identify with the actions of your body. If you can completely identify yourself with your deity He or She will then do all your work, and karma will not be able to touch you. When an

Aghori eats meat and drinks wine, for example, he doesn't bother about it. He thinks to himself, 'Because of rnanubandhana the body must do these things. I offer it all to You.' But if when you eat meat you think, 'Oh, how delicious! I like it,' then you are lost. Finished! Karma will cling to you like mud. It is better to be like the lotus, which rises out of the mud but is not defiled by it. Mud cannot stain or soil a lotus. As long as you fail to self-identify you can remain a witness to everything you do while your body continues to fulfill its rnanubandhanas for as long as it continues to live. But is it so easy to act without self-identification? Try to enjoy sex without self-identification and you will see how hard it is."

"Is it better then to enjoy vicariously?"

"Not much better; that can become a karma too. Have you ever heard that saying in Marathi which refers to a certain well-known Maharaja of yesteryear: *Malle chode, mallerao raje?*"

"I haven't heard it."

"It is really untranslatable, but it roughly translates, 'The wrestler does the pumping and the king gets the pleasure.' As he got older this king could no longer sustain an erection. He still liked sex, though, so to get some vicarious enjoyment he would order one of his wrestlers to screw a woman in his presence. The sort of gratification that the Maharaja got from this kind of sex did in fact create less karma than if he had gone out and had sex himself—had he been able to do so. But he still collected some karma from having ordered the couple to copulate. And what if he decided to go around and secretly spy on couples who were engaged in sexual embraces? That invasion of privacy without being asked would also be a karma. Only if the event happened in front of him without any request on his part could he be completely free of all karmic attachment to that sexual act—provided that he didn't mentally self-identify himself with the wrestler."

"And if he did?"

"Then he would be participating in the karma. Karma is a matter of self-identification."

"So better to avoid sex altogether."

"Maybe—but that can also lead you into trouble. We say in Hindi: *Tapeshwari se rajeshwari, aur rajeshwari se narakeshwari* (penance to riches, and riches to ruination). The first part of this saying means that the Law of Action and Reaction causes a yogi who does severe penances in this life to be reborn as a prince, or as the scion of a very rich family. If you have done a really good job of penance you may get a chance to be reborn into a family of yogis, where you will be able to continue right from where you left off. However, as Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, this is rare. Usually it is *shuchinam*

*shrimatam gehe*—rebirth in splendor—in which case you will be able to discover your dharma, your proper job in life, only through your guru's grace.

"But what happened to *ante matih sa gatih?* If you die planning to continue your penance won't you do so, since the thought you have when you die determines where you will end up?"

"But who says that the very last thought you have before you die will be for more penance? If you have spent your entire life restricting yourself you'll probably be thinking of those restrictions when you die. But thinking of a restriction is really a thought of the thing you are restricting—which is where you will proceed."

"So doing *sadhana* (spiritual practices) in this life is no guarantee that you'll be doing it in your next life?" An alarming prospect.

"No, there is no guarantee at all, because of the Law of Action and Reaction. When a sadhu stringently restricts his food during one lifetime Nature will say to him in his next life, 'Since you denied yourself so much last time around you will now have the most delicious foods.' If he lived naked or in skins or rags he will wear silks and gold brocades encrusted with jewels in his next birth. If he lived in a cave or out under the sky Nature will give him a palace to play in. And if he tied up a loin cloth and never went with a woman in this birth then in his next birth he will be chased by women even during his childhood, and will be introduced to sex very early. All of this holds true for women too.

"The result? Well, unless the child is very special he will be unable to remember anything of his previous life. Instead he will become enthralled by all the beautiful sense objects that Nature will give him. Ma is so magnanimous; She never frees anyone from the world so long as they continue to desire it. Becoming enmeshed in Maya the child will remember nothing of his past penances; he will not realize that he is now a ruler or a rich man because of his past austerities. During his life of luxury he will enjoy his karmic pension until all his good karmas are finished. After he dies all the evil karmas that he performed during his riotous life of indulgence will catch up with him, and he will fall into hell. And hell is not out in space or under the ground somewhere; hell is right here. Hells are types of wombs, some of which can be really terrible. Only after most of these evil karmas have been burned away will he then be qualified take birth in the world again, though not necessarily as a human. So watch out! You may get yourself into trouble if you try to go against Nature, even if you only mean to speed up your own progress, unless you have a good guide who will keep his eye on you."

I had by then developed confidence in Vimalananda's competence in matters arcane. He impressed me at our first-ever meeting when he answered all

the questions on my ethnographic questionnaire (which was the tool I was using to fulfill the conditions of a project funded by NEH to investigate Ayurveda in Poona) before I could even ask them. Months later, after I had tied my loincloth too tight, he showed me how to tie a tobacco leaf to my swollen testicle to relieve the swelling (and grinned an I-told-you-so at my nausea when I left the leaf on too long). He taught me to follow instructions by creating a persistent and vexatiously itchy skin rash after I had a glass of milk at Shernaz's house on a day when he had specifically told me only to drink water there until further notice.

Once he saw that he had my obedient attention he included me in some of his experiments, like the one with the packet of ash from a Tantric homa in Kashmir. He had me mix a pinch of the ash into hot milk every night for a week, and when I did a pack of howling dogs showed up outside my dormitory room punctually at 1 A.M. on each of those seven nights to serenade me. Greatly though my sleep-deprived fellow students groused, they never discovered the source of these visitations. Nor did I, for though Vimalananda was pleased with the results of his experiment he said no more, when I enquired as to its significance, than, "My idea was to introduce to you a certain ethereal 'presence,' and that has been done. Your concern should be with getting your work done. If you need to know more than that this 'presence' will tell you itself, in due time."

It was because I wanted my work to be done expeditiously that I turned to Vimalananda when a spirit who had harassed me during my first year at the college returned after a sabbatical. Long afterward I learned that the college hostel had been built on land that had previously served as a Christian cemetery, but when I was first assaulted a few months after my arrival there my assailant's provenance was a complete mystery. During an attack, which would come when I entered that no-man's-land between wakefulness and sleep which is called in Sanskrit *tandra*, the entity would jump without warning onto my chest and squeeze the breath out of my lungs. Though enfeebled with fear during the initial encounter I somehow realized that my only avenue of rescue was to awaken, and somehow I did that when next it beset me. Fear quickly became animosity; soon I was driving the thing away by angrily repeating in that twilight state a mantra taught to me by a yogi. After some months the shade went on furlough. When it resumed its predation I complained to Vimalananda, who merely said, "It won't be back." And it hasn't, since.

I had had a generalized faith in Vimalananda from the moment I met him, but the seemingly unrelated permanent departure of the weird spirit and the unforeseen arrival of the barking dogs convinced me that his knowledge of the ethereal world was unparalleled. He quickly became the helmsman of my

voyage through Indian society as well when he saved me from official censure after my Sanskrit professor had finagled me into making unnecessarily disparaging remarks about the near-moribund state of Ayurvedic teaching and practice at the time. When to his demonstrated expertise in both the physical and non-physical realms I added the marvelous erudition he used to expand my perceptual skyline in every subject I raised with him, I became persuaded beyond any reasonable doubt that I had found in Vimalananda an exemplary friend, philosopher and guide.

## chapter five

# SCARLET RUBY

STONE failed to get into foal at Vitu Karve's stud farm even in early 1978, due at least in part to Vitu's unwillingness to spend much money on her feed. Vimalananda soon decided to send her elsewhere, but where? All the other stud farms insisted on seeing the color of his coin. When things seemed bleakest Nature stepped in, as She usually did for Vimalananda in a pinch. This time She arrived in the form of Mr. Gokuldas Madhavas, a friendly industrialist and race horse owner growling his way through life. Gokuldas, who to my eye most resembled a mature and knowledgeable frog, was introduced to Vimalananda by Gokuldas's shy niece Prabha, who brought her angelic voice to Vimalananda for training on a regular basis. On hearing of Stoney's dilemma Gokuldas insisted on attempting to prevail on Erach Ghasvala, a dapper Parsi who owned a stud in the South, to accept Stoney into his farm on favorable terms. This was a boon in itself, but the icing on the cake—in Hindi we say “the fragrance on the gold”—was that Scarlet Ruby stood in Erach's yard.

Vimalananda had once owned an unofficial share in Scarlet Ruby. Though he was but a part-owner, he had involved himself in all facets of the horse's training throughout his racing career. Scarlet Ruby's record speaks to the value of Vimalananda's participation: win after effortless win, including some of the Classic races. Once he retired to stud Scarlet Ruby made a name for himself as the first stallion foaled in India to sire a significant crop of winners. Though now long in the tooth he continued to sire successful foals, and Vimalananda, thinking perhaps of how fine it would be to see the offspring of a tryst between two of his most beloved equine friends, decided without hesitation to try to engineer their union.

This necessitated negotiations with Ghasvala who, like us, had a decided fondness for Black Dog, a blend of premium Scotch which is sold only in the



Indian subcontinent. During a meeting over Black Dog in Bombay, Vimalananda proposed to Erach that he accept Stoney on a contingency basis. After her first live foal, who would go to Vimalananda, she and all her future progeny would become Ghasvala's property. Ghasvala countered by suggesting that if he decided to accept Stoney he would give Vimalananda half of the first live foal. Vimalananda understood him to promise a half-share in the second as well. Ghasvala then hied himself back to Bangalore, promising a swift decision.

I didn't attend that meeting and wasn't much engaged in these deliberations. When I next arrived in Bombay the matter had come down to the wire, for Vitu was insisting that we decide immediately whether or not Stoney would be staying with him for the rest of the year. In fact, if Ghasvala did not accept her as a brood mare that very night there would be no choice but to leave her in Vitu's hands for another potentially fruitless year. While Roshni and I sat near the phone anxiously awaiting Ghasvala's call Vimalananda nonchalantly launched into a numinous discourse for that night's avid listeners, a cohort from the group of a dozen or so "spiritual children" who regularly came weekday evenings to listen to Vimalananda deliver his "talks."

I was becoming antsy, and said, "Ghasvala hasn't called yet."

Vimalananda replied, "Pipe down, will you? The night is not yet over."

"But what are you going to do if he doesn't call?"

"I'm not going to worry about it at all. I am relying on Nature to arrange something for Stoney, and I am confident that Nature will not let me down."

"You may not be worried, but I am about to start biting my nails."

"Calm down, my boy, it's all a matter of fate. Stoney will end up wherever she is destined to be. I am confident for many reasons that she has a good destiny, and that wherever she goes she will be happy."

Vimalananda then began to sing a *bhajan* (devotional song), and ten or fifteen minutes later came Ghasvala's call accepting Stoney. After Vimalananda laid the telephone receiver in its cradle he looked at me with an imperious grin and said, "Nature didn't let me down after all, did She?"

The assembled spiritual "children" then all smiled at me condescendingly, as if to cluck, "You doubted because you lacked faith." Their smiles chafed me, for though Vimalananda sometimes praised these "children" for their spiritual fervor, both to their faces and to his other acquaintances, he was in private quite aware of their limitations. "Bashermal," he would say to me in a reflective moment, "is the foundation of this group. He has learned well, and now spends all his free time traipsing around the countryside performing *homa*. There is nothing wrong with this; it is a good thing. But he could learn even more if he spent more time with me. After all, I was the one who taught him to do *homa* in the first place. His little bit of knowledge has gone to his head.

"It is the same with Kalubhai, who keeps trying to impress me with his astrology. He has developed what he believes to be a foolproof system to make money at the racecourse and has become a regular racegoer, even though I have told him more than once that in all my decades of gambling that I have never seen a foolproof system. He thinks he knows quite a bit, and sometimes I have had to be harsh with him, because I don't want him to ruin himself. This has hurt him, I know, but I simply can't be a sugar-coated quinine tablet. Better he should be hurt a little bit now and learn his lesson than to have someone else burst his bloated balloon later, which might hurt more. Doshi comes to me mainly to try to impress me with his supposed spiritual achievements and experiences, and Harshbhai and some of the others come mainly to get favors—marriage of their sons and daughters, improvements in their finances, expansion of their factories.

"I advised Natvarlal not to get married because it is not in his destiny to be happily married. Then his relatives started to pressure him, and reminded him how dreary life can be when lived alone. In the end he gave in, and came eagerly to me to get my blessing. What could I tell him? I told him, 'Go ahead!' Now he comes to me complaining about his household problems, and about his health. His eyes were always weak, and now that he is losing semen regularly his sight is getting even weaker. But what can I do? I gave him my advice and he didn't take it. Marriage is like a wooden *laddu* (ball-shaped sweet): if you bite into it you get splinters in your mouth, but if you don't bite into it you spend the rest of your life wondering how it must have tasted.

"Then there is Bhogilal, who really does very nice *sadhana*, and doesn't have enough money to get married even if he wanted to. He is friendly with a good *sadhu*, who keeps telling him to come live in the ashram and forget his foolish little job, which barely pays him enough to live on. In the ashram he would be fed, clothed and sheltered, and could do *sadhana* all day long. What could be better for him? Here is God telling him, 'Come, my boy, I want you to do *sadhana*, I have made all the arrangements,' but does he move to the ashram? No! He is afraid to leave the safety of his circle of relatives and friends. Also, somewhere deep in his heart he still thinks he might be able to get married one of these days. So he stays on where he is and does his *sadhana*. But half of his mind is on the pinups he has on his walls, and that half induces him to masturbate. How will he ever be able to build up enough *shakti* to make spiritual progress if he won't stop having orgasms for at least a few months? It's a waste, I tell you, a real waste of good potential."

It was the same story with the other "children," like Dr. Martanda, who would come to Vimalananda with the intention of showing off his Ayurvedic knowledge. Usually, though, the doctor found himself being taught something

new, as he did on the day he flourished under Vimalananda's nose a small plastic envelope containing a small brown object labelled "camel nose insect."

"Doctor Saheb, have you just been in Rajasthan?" asked the galvanized Vimalananda, without even breaking conversational stride. "Look, Robby, camel nose insect! Anyone who has ever spent much time around camels knows that a male camel becomes uncontrollable when he goes into rut. When he becomes really excited he will evert his soft palate—bring it all the way out of his mouth—and then trumpet his virility so that the entire neighborhood can hear. Doctor Saheb, would you please imitate that noise for my Robby?" Dr. Martanda hereupon begrudgingly produced a truly remarkable noise by grunting loudly while vigorously shaking his head from side to side. I saw Vimalananda stifling a smile.

"At this point," Vimalananda continued, "you must beat the camel severely about the head and neck until he calms down. Otherwise he will break his chain and run amok, trampling people and other animals. Once he calms down he will begin to sneeze, and out from his nose will come lots of white worms. Only the virile camels have these worms, and the most virile produce the most worms. The worms die immediately, and dry into the state that you see this one in. We use these in Ayurveda to treat respiratory ailments and menstrual maladies. Am I right, Doctor Saheb?" Dr. Martanda could only shake his head "yes," in amazed silence. At first I had some doubts about the veracity of this rather too far-fetched story, but when years later on a camel safari in the Rajasthan desert I made enquiries I found that all its details checked out.

Vimalananda tried periodically to make his "children" understand the error of their ways, but they mostly preferred to continue in the way they were going while he mostly preferred not to interfere. "Give them enough rope and they will hang themselves," he would say. "Because Nature loves me She loves my 'children' too, and does much of their work for them. But many of them have come to expect me to force Nature to solve all their problems. Why should I? I did my sadhanas for my own benefit, and for the benefit of those who love me for myself. This is why I am mainly interested in paying off my existing rnanubandhanas with these so-called devotees. They believe they are doing something great if they bring me sweets and flowers now and again. They think that I should recognize the 'depth' of their devotion and be prepared to do whatever they ask of me. Do they think I am going to become their slave? Ha! If they are sensible they will take advantage of what I have to offer; if not, well, once the debt is paid I'll go my own way and they can go theirs."

Parekh, who owned a transport company, was one of the few lower-maintenance devotees. He neither claimed to be something he was not nor pre-

tended to be smarter than he was. Whenever Parekh would send us lunch unannounced we would know that he had a problem—one of his trucks had gone missing, perhaps, or maybe he wanted to convey a grossly overweight payload. He would inevitably arrive a few hours after his food did, and would begin to massage Vimalananda's legs while he explained his trouble. Vimalananda would then speed off in his astral body to ameliorate the problem while the massage was going on, and Parekh would sail home afterwards confident that his most recent difficulty would soon be a thing of the past.

As Vimalananda and I sat playing chess a few days after one such transaction he told me, "Parekh is one of the few sensible people who come to extract work from me. He never tries to show off. He knows he is coming to beg and he comes humbly, which I appreciate. Next, he doesn't disturb me while I am doing the work; on the contrary, he helps me out by his massage." He paused to checkmate me charmingly as I helplessly marvelled yet again over his prowess at the game. Or rather his prowess at arranging prowess for himself. Though he had been chess champion of his college Vimalananda could still be beaten by another well-trained player when he was playing on his own. But when he called a disembodied grandmaster into his body while he went elsewhere on an astral errand he was quite unbeatable. His favorite 'substitute' player was Paul Morphy, whom he claimed had reincarnated as Bobby Fischer. Both men specialized in "the play of the knights," the skillful use of those pieces to interdict the opponent's movements. I never grew tired of watching Vimalananda's seemingly disorganized chessmen suddenly sweep invincibly around the board like an armored whirlwind. Occasionally when he was thoroughly preoccupied elsewhere I could wear down his concentration sufficiently, by using the Indian strategy of never moving a piece to any square where it has no support, to win a game off him. But those occasions were rare.

"You know, Robby," he continued as I reset the board for the next game, "all these swamis talk about samadhi as the highest goal, but I think they are fools. What is the use of these spurting samadhis, anyway? Fine, you go off into a trance, but when you drop back down to earth you are just as you were before. That sort of samadhi state stays separate from the normal waking 'you.' I think it is much better to retain consciousness on this plane even while you shift your main focus to other realities. Here I am playing chess with you, but as I play I can go to America to check on how your parents are doing, or I can visit *Patala* (the underworld), or the planet Venus, or my Guru Maharaj, or wherever I please, and still sit here acting as if I know nothing. To be truly aware you have to know what is happening far away today, what has happened here long ago, and what is going to happen anywhere in

the cosmos during the coming decades. But all the while you continue to function effectively in this time, space and causality. Awareness on all levels at all times—that sort of enlightenment has some use.”

This sort of awareness was particularly useful to those students like me who approached Vimalananda for help during their exams, for every student who did so inevitably scored well. It was best to advise him in advance, but even when informed after the fact he seemed able to influence results. Shernaz’s daughter Arzoo, whom I was tutoring at his behest, made it a post-test ritual to stand before him with a hang-dog look, telling him timidly that because of some stupid errors she would not do well in a certain subject. After chiding her a little for her carelessness Vimalananda would tell her, “Don’t worry about it; wait and see the result.” After she received that assurance Arzoo would without fail score best in that subject in which she had done the worst.

Though he never explained to me how he manipulated examinations Vimalananda was forthright about the means he used to help one of his friends with her piano recitals: “She likes to give performances, but they make her so nervous that she slips up in her playing. I want to help her out, because she is my ‘child.’ Every mother wants her child to shine out. The *Chaya Purusha Siddhi* is very useful for this sort of thing. *Chaya* means ‘shadow.’ You achieve the *Chaya Purusha Siddhi* when you can bring your own shadow to life and gain control over it. This is not a very difficult siddhi to attain, really; the main restriction is that you have to repeat the mantra at a certain time of day while you sit on a riverbank. Once you have achieved this siddhi you can send your shadow wherever you please and it will do your work for you. When performance time for my friend comes around, for instance, I simply send my shadow to the concert hall to stand behind her, and transfer some of my confidence to her. Then she plays confidently, and her show is a success.”

The University of Poona’s Ayurvedic examinations, which spanned a three-week period every year and a half, consisted of a dozen or more three-hour periods of writing long-hand answers to essay questions, followed by half a dozen practicals. These became real torture sessions in the 107°F heat of April 1978. On their completion I made tracks for Bombay, ready for what I felt was a well-earned vacation. There I found Vimalananda in an excellent mood, for Stoney was finally in foal. Shortly thereafter Arzoo made her first trip to Bombay, and Vimalananda decided that we should all have an outing to Tirthakshetra, our favorite hot springs. Arzoo stayed at Harshbhai’s house, where she was stung by a wasp on the inside of her thigh on Sunday, the day after her arrival. Too embarrassed to tell anyone she suffered silently until she reached Vimalananda’s flat on Monday, when Vimalananda noticed the pain on her face and forced her to disclose her misery to him. “Let’s solve this

problem right now,” he said. “Robby, go get me the broom!” Was he going to sweep the pain away, I wondered? Yes he was—he had Arzoo spread her legs modestly, and then stroked the swollen area with the delicate tips of the grasses that compose this sort of broom. Arzoo and I were both amazed, for *voilà!* the pain disappeared instantly, and the swelling began to subside.

But there was no time for awe; we had to be off on our excursion. The most famous of the several hot springs near Bombay are at Vajreshwari, near Ganeshpuri. At that time Tirthakshetra was little known and rarely frequented. The first two of its four pools are too hot for anything except cooking, so as soon as we arrived we would put our rice and dal into a small cloth bag and leave it to parboil in pool no. 1 while we coddled ourselves in pool no. 3. On this occasion we enjoyed both a good soak and a pleasant lunch, and were reluctantly wending our way back toward the city, jugs filled with mineral water, when our automobile conked out. Though Vimalananda tried over and over to start it the battery continued to die, and soon was dead. There we were in the middle of an unfamiliar jungle, miles from the nearest town. Night was falling. For ten minutes we tried to start the car by pushing it, to no avail.

Vimalananda then opened the car’s hood and stared concentratedly at the engine. After he closed the hood he paused for a few minutes, and when he again sat behind the wheel and turned the ignition key the engine started instantly, as if nothing was wrong. We drove uneventfully back to Bombay, saved yet again by “Nature.” As soon as we reached home the car quit and would not start for anything. We discovered the next day that the starter solenoid was burnt out. Vimalananda sent me down to make an offering to Anjaneya, saying, “You should be thankful to Anjaneya that you are here in Bombay now. If not for him we might still be out by the side of that road.” I accordingly made a beeline for the Anjaneya temple near the fire station, to praise Him for saving us the previous evening. While there I also sent up an orison of thanks to Nature for sending me such an intercessor as Vimalananda, and a plea to keep him interceding for me indefinitely.



June 1978 found the winds of change, spawned perchance by the impending monsoon, sweeping across our string of horses. When he took up racing again after a hiatus of more than two decades Vimalananda’s first trainer had been the genial, foul-mouthed, owl-faced Maneckjee, and his first horse the grey Zomaral, which he owned half and half with his trainer. Shortly thereafter Stone Ice arrived, and after old Maneckjee’s death both horses went along

with Scarlet Ruby to Maneckjee's son Zubin to train. They remained there until the day when Scarlet Ruby was sent to stud and Zubin neglected to obtain for Vimalananda his portion of the money due him for his "unofficial" part share in the horse. Vimalananda, who was quick to react to unfairness, lost his temper and predicted that Zubin's charges would do poorly during the upcoming Hyderabad season.

When Vimalananda would occasionally prognosticate for trainers or owners who did not know him well they would often think him drunk or insane even when those predictions later came true. But Zubin, who had planned multiple winners in Hyderabad, knew enough of Vimalananda's influence with Nature to realize what sort of predicament he was in when these winners failed to materialize. A few months after this prediction of drought Vimalananda met Zubin at a party in Hyderabad and greeted him with, "So, my boy, how goes your season?"

"What season?" asked Zubin, jauntily. "I am here on a holiday!" Then Zubin meekly buttered up his owner over the evening until Vimalananda magnanimously proclaimed, "I will permit you to win one race, on the last day." Zubin did in fact win one race in Hyderabad that year, on the last day of the season. He then quit training altogether.

Vimalananda's horses were thereupon transferred to one Appagaru. When a year later Appagaru went off to train in Bangalore, the horses went to Mr. M. Lafange, where they sat when I arrived on the scene. Lafange was not a bad man, but he was cheap. From the beginning he tried to save money by scrimping on his horses' rations and on the straw they used for their bedding. I never much liked him, but so long as he catered to Vimalananda's whims I at least endured him. In 1978, though, two new owners entered his stable and Lafange got too big for his britches. Plans were therefore afoot, initiated by the ever-scheming Dr. Kulkarni, to transfer Vimalananda's horses to the care of Mr. Tehmul Antia, a handsome scapegrace whose charming wife Dinaz did everything she could to make us feel that we would be welcome in her husband's stable. Tehmul could only get a trainer's license if he could show to the Club that he had a minimum of six horses under his care, and Vimalananda's string of six—Zomaral, Elan, Repay, Kamaal, Timir and Bajarangi—would enable him to comfortably satisfy that requirement.

I completely lost my sympathy for the Lafanges on the morning I went to request Mr. Lafange to appear before Vimalananda in his hotel room, that by his contrition he might avoid the loss of Vimalananda's horses. When I reached Lafange's home I found no one there but his wife, who replied to my query with some asperity: "Mr. Lafange cannot come to Mr. Vimalananda whenever he is summoned! He is busy with his other owners."

"Fine," I said, and left in a huff, thinking, "He'll soon have plenty of free time for those other owners." I arrived at the hotel ready to present my case in detail, only to find that Vimalananda had already made his mind up to shift from the world of Lafange's rnanubandhanas to Tehmul's karmic milieu. Mrs. Lafange's fresh insult provided us a convenient excuse for moving on, and we prepared a story of innocent lack of recourse: "We wanted you to come to settle things, Mr. Lafange, but you were busy with your other owners."

In the end it was Lafange himself who did the deed, when a day or two later Roshni called him from Bombay and he told her that everything was just fine with the horses in Poona. Thoroughbred horses are a finicky lot, each with its own idiosyncrasies; Elan, for example, would only take her carrots grated. The trainer was expected to take care of these individual requirements, and was paid for doing so. Shortly after Roshni called Vimalananda to report that all was well Arzoo, who acted as our spy at the Poona stables, called to report that all was in fact not well. Arzoo notified Vimalananda that the horses were getting no carrots or other treats and that there was a shortage of bedding straw. Vimalananda promptly called Roshni back and accused her of shielding Lafange. Roshni promptly "got wild" and called Mr. Lafange, but got through only to Mrs. Lafange, who told her that all was well. Roshni then called both husband and wife liars, told Mrs. Lafange that Mr. Lafange was "dead" to her, and hung up.

To tell an Indian woman even in jest that her husband is dead to you is a dreadful insult, for it acts as a sort of request to Nature to bring that death about. Being an Indian woman Roshni knew very well that Mrs. Lafange would be sure to retaliate. Indeed, when Vimalananda called Lafange in the evening to patch things up Lafange told him, "Take your horses out of my yard!" Lafange expected that Vimalananda would then beg forgiveness for that slight, which would allow Lafange some moments of self-righteous satisfaction before he would grudgingly permit the penitent to scramble back to his fold. Little did he know that Tehmul was waiting to step into his place, that to Tehmul those horses swiftly went. Then, after it had become too late for any entreaties, the Lafanges realized that they had lost their fount of golden eggs. Had Roshni not lost her temper the horses might still be with Lafange, for Vimalananda usually harkened to supplication as readily as did Prithviraj Chauhan. Lafange was predictably livid when he discovered the defection and refused to speak to Dr. Kulkarni ("that traitor!") for weeks thereafter.

"At least," said Vimalananda on his arrival in Poona at the end of the drama, puffing contentedly on a cigarette, "Lafange now has some other owners. I've been wanting a new trainer for some time, and one of my reasons for waiting so long to leave has been Lafange's lack of horses. Every time

I hinted that I might shift Lafange or his wife would come to me whining about how poor they are and how they would be ruined without my string. I don't hate the man, so I didn't want to destroy him. But I am really glad to be free of him and his mokul."

I had dropped in on the Lafanges only once before, in the company of Vimalananda during the 1977 Poona season. On that occasion he had drawn my attention to a large rock that sat completely covered with the red powder called *sindura* smack dab in the middle of the parlor of the small flat the Lafanges called home. "Yes?" I asked him with my eyebrows. "Mokul," he whispered. After we left he explained to me that a *mokul*, which is a sort of Muslim angel, had taken up residence in that rock, and that while the Lafanges were aware of the good he could do them they couldn't seem to comprehend the ill he could cause if he weren't pleased.

"I am glad to be free," Vimalananda continued, "because the Lafanges are always asking the mokul to do things for them and keep trying to bribe him by offering him this and that. But because the mokul doesn't appreciate their greedy attitude he is never in a very good mood, and so their prosperity is never very good."

"Aren't they asking for trouble by fiddling about like this with an ethereal being?"

"And how! They're in way over their heads. They don't comprehend anything of how the mokul thinks, and I am very much afraid they will just continue creating trouble for themselves until they are destroyed. I tried to explain to them how to take care of the thing, but they wouldn't, or couldn't, listen. Then I told them that I'd get rid of him for them. But they think he is going to be their ticket to the big time, so they refused that too. It's so ironic; they don't know what to do with him but they insist on holding onto him."

"Like a baby pulling a dog's tail."

"That's right. Even if he is a good dog he will probably bite you if you annoy him long enough. Then why should you cry about it when he does?"

"This is all the Law of Karma at work again, I suppose?"

"What is there in life but the Law of Karma? My concern was not to be dragged down with them, and now that Nature has given me a way to exit gracefully I have taken it gladly. I know that Tehmul is no saint either—have you looked closely at his physiognomy?—but he owes me something, since I have helped him get his license. Also, he is inexperienced, which means that he won't interfere too much with me—at least for a while. Hey, Arzoo!"

Arzoo had, after putting some rice for our lunch in the pressure cooker, come to the front room to listen to the latest in the Lafange saga.

"Why is it that after an hour of cooking we have not heard any whistle

from the pressure cooker's safety valve? Shouldn't the cooker's pressure have built up by now?" Arzoo agreed that it should have, and we all filed into the kitchen to probe the mystery. There was the cooker, cooking merrily, but not a sign of any pressure.

Arzoo then clumsily blurted out a confession: "Now I remember! I put water in the vessel with the rice but I forgot to add water into the bottom of the cooker. Now it's too late; the rice must be burned." She began to hyperventilate and wail: "What if the cooker is damaged? If it is damaged my mother will kill me!"

"Oh, pipe down," said Vimalananda genially as he took charge of the pot, and when he opened its lid there sat perfect rice steaming fragrantly within! "Your mind was on my talks instead of on your cooking, but because Nature loves me She loves my 'children' too, so long as they don't get too big for their breeches. But don't try this stunt when I'm not around or you'll be saving up to buy a new pressure cooker! It's time you learned to concentrate on your work."

I knew that admonition was meant for me as well, for I had just been officially made Vimalananda's racing agent and was now expected to handle much of his business both at the stables and in the offices of the R.W.I.T.C. As it was my responsibility to ensure that there was enough money in each horse's account to cover that month's B.T.F. (Basic Training Fees) and race entrance fees I quickly made friends with most of the office staff and, since I also handled the matter of the vet bill, Dr. Kulkarni quickly became my friend. Many of the other trainers also began to acknowledge my presence, having concluded early on that I would only work so hard for Vimalananda's benefit if I were his (probably wealthy) silent partner. I did what I could to foster this useful misapprehension, which helped to open the doors of the racing fraternity to me.

And what an unusual world that fraternity was! There were the "big" trainers, like Ardeshir Rustomjee, who kept in their own stables the Club limit of 60 horses but controlled more via their villeins. After thoroughly drilling these bright and seemingly pliant assistants in their training methods the big trainers would "lend" them enough horses to be individually licensed. The owners who trafficked with these assistants would then be confident that even though their horses were not officially saddled in the master's stables the master's eye was on them nonetheless.

Next came the mid-size and small trainers, some quite talented, who had never accumulated quite enough good press or good fortune to join the ranks of the big boys. A few of these were private trainers, who trained horses for a single owner. Some trainers were ex-jockeys whose knowledge of how both to boot home and to hook horses made them really expert players of the game. Param Singh, who began mid-sized but soon graduated to bigness,

was one of my favorites in this genre. Both he and his able assistant Nusrat Hassan, who afterwards also became a major trainer, had great respect for Vimalananda and always made it a point to chat with me as well.

Near the bottom of the heap of trainers sit the *masalawalas*, who are satisfied only when they can make their charges win at long odds. A *masala* is any mixture of spices that is used to flavor food. Each Indian recipe has its own masala, without which the dish falls flat. Similarly, each horse or mare requires its own pattern of "spicing" in the form of track work, veterinary treatment, handicap and the like for her to create a tasty bet for her owner and trainer. A racecourse masalawala, who specializes in "cooking" horses that no one else would "eat," works overtime disseminating disinformation to ensure a glorious repast for himself and his friends.

Masalawalas will do anything to get their horses fit enough for a good gamble. Sometimes masalawalas take healthy horses and sedulously hook them for months together until they drop so far out of the public eye that no one will take a flutter on them even when they look fit enough to run a good race. Sometimes they take broken-down plug horses and patiently return them to racing fitness, and sometimes they experiment on defective, neurotic or uncontrollable horses with unorthodox training methods. Whatever his preferred methods you know a trainer is a real masalawala when you can never tell that his horses are on the job. Foremost among the masalawalas during my time was Mohammed Mustapha, who was ably assisted by his son Mashallah, 'Mashie' for short. They invariably greeted me as I walked by, and invariably never gave me the slightest idea of what they were up to.

Owners also come in large, medium, and small sizes, the smallest of them owning only a part of a single horse. It is widely rumored that some big owners enter the racing business for the express purpose of gaining tax relief by losing money, for horse racing is reckoned in India to be an "agricultural undertaking" which attracts favorable tax rates. It is said to be an open secret that many owners launder their "black" (illegal) money by betting heavily, for once the government tax is paid on a bet any winnings therefrom become "white" (legal) money. Regular bettors in those days abated their tax burdens by opening special accounts with bookies. When a "1 + 4" owner told his bookie that he wished to bet Rs. 100 the bookie would write "Rs. 100" in his book and would charge tax on that amount, but would calculate the owner's bet as Rs. 100 + 400 = 500 and would pay off on that amount. For a "1 + 9" owner the tax was paid on Rs. 100 and the wager became Rs. 100 + 900 = 1000. "Mad" bettors who wagered hundreds of thousands of rupees on a race placed those sums with private, often illegal, bookies, and any winnings from those bets remained wholly un laundered.

Horses belong to one of five handicap classes in Western India. Two-year olds enter the system in Class V-A and are promoted or demoted as they win or lose. Those who live up to their potential rise to the ranks of the *crème de la crème* who occupy the top handicaps of Class I, and those who are but nags tumble down to Class V-B, where they become masala fodder. Our Timir, for instance, was a reliable Class III horse who after flirting briefly with Class II remained in and continued to win races in Class III throughout his career. The biggest tests of talent in Western India are the Classic races, which are terms races that are at least theoretically open to horses of any class. At that time the Classics included the Indian versions of the 1000 Guineas, the 2000 Guineas, the Oaks, the Derby and the St. Leger, and the R.W.I.T.C. Ltd. Invitational Cup. The big trainers handle most of the Classic winners and Class I horses, leaving only the dregs of the upper classes to the mid-size brigade. The masalawala eternally plays his horses between classes V-B and V-A, with the occasional foray into class IV.

Tehmul's yard, which sheltered horses from all the classes, soon became my own classroom. There I watched horses schooling and lounging, spurting and galloping, loosely rolling and gently trotting. I discovered that work in the sand is good for horses with dinky joints, and swimming benefits those whose bodies are stiff. I learned how horses are fed and groomed and their stables cleaned, and was introduced to bog spavins and bone spavins and shin splints, and how to treat them (one of the best ways to treat shin splints being to wash the area repeatedly in the horse's own urine). I saw how swollen joints were chemically blistered to reduce them and how tendons that had bowed out were "pin-fired" to create thick bands of scar tissue to hold them in place. I learned to extract useful rumors from the current of vulgarisms and ribaldries that circulates like irrigation water from yard to yard, and to note without overt comment the many inequities and grievances as they accumulated. I studied jockeys for falsehoods and inconsistencies as they dissected a defeat with the owner and trainer, aware that they were already thinking of their next rides as they described their last ones. In between I rewarded myself for all this work by sitting in awe of Nature's plan, as I watched the late afternoon sun shine on necks and flanks and hindquarters that rippled with quivering well-tuned muscles as the horses gambolled and tit-tapped through their evening walks.

Tehmul notched his maiden success as a trainer on August 15, 1978, India's 31st Independence Day. His first winning mount was our milestone-maker Timir, who won in a spectacular dead heat. As he passed the winning post an infuriated Vimalananda snapped, "Had Shernaz not disturbed me last night Timir would have walked this race!" Shernaz had disturbed him to tell him of

Arzoo's high fever; he resented the distraction not because he did not care for Arzoo but because Shernaz by this time in her life should have known how to deal with a fever. Arzoo's fever, which turned out to be typhoid, went on for weeks—as Vimalananda had predicted some weeks earlier in the wake of an amazing event.

One ominous afternoon a monkey climbed in through the front window of Shernaz's house and advanced to the middle room where Arzoo lay sleeping on her bed. Next to the bed stood a full-length mirror, and when the monkey saw himself therein he saw a rival. He probably threatened that opponent a few times before he lost his temper and threw an uppercut at him, a punch which broke the mirror and lacerated his hand. His screams of panic and fury awoke Arzoo from a deep sleep into the terror of finding herself lying alone, flecked with mirror shards, covered with the blood of a monkey who raged just a foot or two from her bed. When Vimalananda was told of this he said solemnly, "This bodes very ill for Arzoo's health. I will try to avert it, but I think she is about to fall seriously ill," and so she did. She also recovered completely, thanks to Vimalananda's nursing.

Timir continued to create landmarks in the lives of his affiliated humans when the young, talented, personable Homi Mehta became a full-fledged jockey by winning his 40th race on his back. Everyone loved Timir. Though he tended to be somewhat testy his behavior was generally genteel. Most male horses who are not expected to win Classic races are gelded early on to keep them tractable, but Timir had escaped the castration knife because he was a "double rig": neither of his testicles had ever descended into his scrotum. Another reason male horses are caponized is to keep them from wasting their energy in masturbation, which becomes quite the fixation with some of them, as it did with Repay, the horse who had begun the 1978-79 season as Vimalananda's great hope. Repay was unusual in two ways: while most horses sleep standing up he would instead make up a nice bed in the straw for himself each night, and lay down to sleep; and he had a striking predisposition for self-fellatio.

Many of Vimalananda's horses showed some sort of sexual peccadillo. Elan, for instance, who had returned to racing from stud, would regularly become so aroused by any well-hung stallions nearby that she would begin to swish her tail and gush fluid from her vagina, which did away with any interest she had in her work. But Repay's was a rare and strange case, for every other horse (in India at least) masturbates by rubbing against a handy surface like the door of his stall. Even Dr. Kulkarni, who had seen most every equine aberration, was perplexed: "It's astounding," he informed Vimalananda. "At first I could not believe it when the groom told me that he was sucking him-

self off, but it is true. We have tried to stop him with a ring, but he refuses to quit until he has an orgasm. In fact, it has now become a daily habit. I know you don't like to cut your horses, but I don't think you have a choice in this case." Unwilling to give up just yet Vimalananda instructed the groom to continue trying to interrupt Repay's persistent sperm-swilling, first with the ring, which was positioned on the end of his penis to hinder erection, and then by applying bitter herbs to his organ to discourage him from taking it into his mouth. Neither of these expedients worked, though, and eventually a reluctant Vimalananda had to agree with Dr. Kulkarni's assessment. Repay was emasculated in the spring of 1979.

During this period of our protracted focus on semen Vimalananda found one day the occasion to enlarge on its nature and importance, and on the implications of its wastage. "You must know," he began one evening after an afternoon of viewing the recalcitrant Repay at the stables, "that the word *shukra* means semen in Sanskrit."

"I do," I replied.

"And you know that *Shukra* is also a name for the planet Venus?"

"Yes. The texts also state that the planet Venus, is the guru of the *asuras*. In that context they call him *Shukracharya* (*Shukra* + *Acharya* [teacher] = 'Venus the Guru'). When the texts say 'asura,' do they mean the asuras who are the enemies of the devas? The asuras that some people call 'demons'?"

"Yes, those asuras."

"Who are supposed to live under the earth, in Patala?"

"Well, not exactly. Patala is on a different plane of existence from our Earth, an astral plane. The asuras are a sort of degenerate race of astral beings. The devas, who are also astral beings, are willing to help us humans if we know how to properly propitiate them. The asuras are much more selfish, and use their power to delude other beings into believing what the asuras want them to believe. A lot of this 'flying saucer' business has to do with the asuras. They like to play around with humans, pretending to be divine while they experiment on us. Some deluded people even worship the asuras—but they usually regret it in the end.

"Asuras are very fond of indulging themselves with meat, alcohol, and sex. I like to call asuras *shukra-charya*, 'those whose behavior is motivated by semen,' because they believe in using sex freely for enjoyment, and don't mind wasting semen. That is why asuras worship the god Brahma, the creator. The planet Venus is called 'Shukra' in Sanskrit because Venus is in charge of sexuality. 'Shukracharya' can thus also mean 'Semen-Teacher,' which is quite an apt way of translating Venus's name."

"Why?"



“Because Shukracharya possesses the *Sanjivini Vidya*, the knowledge (*vidya*) of return to life (*sanjivini*). That is, he can bring the dead back to life, which he does with the help of semen. Sanjivini Vidya is so great that you can take a corpse, bury it, and make a contract with Mother Earth to keep it inviolate for up to six months. Then you can still bring it back to life after that six months, with the same soul, same personality, and same karmas, good for another hundred years.”

“Isn’t this what some sadhus do?”

“When an Aghori is about to die he will find someone else who is on the threshold of death and will then enter that body. This is called *para-kaya-pravesha*. Through it you can live on and on and on. But it is different from *Sanjivini Vidya*.”

“I keep hearing stories about the Sanjivini Vidya. What exactly is it?”

“Good question. If you want to know about Sanjivini Vidya you should ask Shukracharya directly. All I will tell you about it right now is that it has something to do with semen. You’ve heard of cloning, haven’t you? Sanjivini Vidya is a sort of super-cloning, in which thousands or millions of beings can be produced from a single spermatozoon. But it is not that simple to perform.

“Sanjivini Vidya mainly utilizes the subtle form of semen—the ojas—instead of the physical sperm. The asuras are very practical, and they are very interested in physical semen, so they follow Shukracharya. And he in turn tries to get them to go beyond the physical semen to the ethereal ojas, from the mundane into the more subtle regions of being. It is one facet of the eternal play of guru and disciple.

“Sanjivini Vidya interests me because of the role it played in an incident which happened long, long ago. Its repercussions are being felt even today, so listen carefully! The asuras are so jealous of the fact that the devas are allowed to run the cosmos that they do nothing but plot wars against the devas to challenge them for dominion of the universe. All the wars have the same result: the devas are defeated until they seek help from some superior being, like Shiva or Vishnu, Who helps them regain heaven.”

“Why should the devas always lose first? Aren’t they the good guys?”

“They are good, but they are also complacent. They are easily satisfied with their achievements and have no interest in progressing further. This makes them vulnerable to the asuras, who are always hungry for more, always willing to try something new.

“Why not just have a universe without asuras, since they’re so much trouble?”

“Because you can’t have devas without asuras. The devas balance the asuras and vice versa, which is natural. Without asuras the devas would let the

universe stagnate. Nothing would ever change, because the devas believe in the status quo. Asuras believe in change, and in fact the devas change only when the asuras force them to change. But the asuras are so selfish that if they were allowed to rule the universe they would quickly demolish it. You cannot trust asuras with authority because even though they can achieve great things they also create great chaos. Like children they can be both very kind and very cruel. They can perform terrific austerities, penances which the devas could never dream of doing, but when their austerities produce shakti they always misuse it. Fortunately for us not all asuras are experts at sadhana. Most asuras are very foolish, in fact. They can follow the rules and restrictions of sadhana nicely for a while. But then, because they have no inherent sense of purity, they dissipate the shakti they are building up by breaking their own rules. Thank God that they do, for otherwise they would still be running the universe, and it would be in a terrible mess!

“During these wars with the devas the asuras had a distinct advantage in that any of their number who were killed in battle could be brought back to life again. The devas lacked this advantage because their guru Brihaspati, the planet Jupiter, lacked knowledge of the Sanjivini Vidya, which was Shukracharya’s exclusive preserve. The devas knew that they would always be in danger of being conquered by the asuras as long as Shukracharya alone had this power, so they decided to employ subterfuge. They sent Kacha, Brihaspati’s son, to Shukracharya to learn the Sanjivini Vidya by trickery.

“When Kacha reached the city of the asuras and informed Shukracharya of his intention to learn Sanjivini, all the asuras warned Shukracharya against it. They knew that if Kacha learned that vidya the devas would be able to use it against the asuras in battle.

“But Shukracharya told them, ‘I will never turn away anyone who comes to me for knowledge. The devas have humbled themselves sufficiently to send the son of their preceptor to me, and he will study.’ The asuras had to keep quiet in front of their guru, whom they relied on to provide them with the energy to enjoy the things they valued most in life: good food, good wine, and plenty of combat and sex. They kept quiet to his face, but behind Shukracharya’s back they grumbled.

“Kacha was such a brilliant pupil that he attracted the attention of Devayani, Shukracharya’s daughter, who promptly fell in love with him. Shukracharya encouraged his daughter’s suit because he knew that she loved Kacha purely. The word *kacha* means the loincloth a boy wears during his period of study while he is celibate. So when I tell you that soon Kacha and Devayani were ‘married by the ceremony used in heaven’ I mean that Devayani divested Kacha of his loincloth—and with it his sexual continence.



“This development alarmed the asuras even more, for now their enemy was wooing their preceptor’s daughter. Thinking it best to get Kacha out of the way once and for all they waylaid him one evening in a lonely place, killed him, and left his body for the wolves. When Kacha didn’t come home at night Devayani was very upset. Even Shukracharya was concerned, and by using his yogic powers he was able to discover that Kacha had been murdered. With the help of Sanjivini Vidya he brought Kacha back to life.

“But asuras do not give up so easily. They waited for another opportunity and before long took Kacha unawares again and killed him again. This time they pounded his body into a paste and mixed it into sea water. Again, however, Shukracharya revived him, because of Devayani’s tears.

“The third time the asuras decided to make sure. They killed Kacha, burned his body, and dissolved his ashes in a bowl of wine. Then they offered the wine to Shukracharya to drink. Shukracharya drank it, exclaiming as he did, ‘Victory to the asuras!’

“Again Devayani cried and cried when Kacha did not come back to her. This time Shukracharya tried to reason with her: ‘Daughter, the asuras will never permit Kacha to remain alive, and I cannot continue to revive him. It is better that he stay dead.’ But she was adamant; she told her father bluntly, ‘I cannot live without Kacha.’

“As he prepared to employ the Sanjivini Vidya yet again Shukracharya got the shock of his lifetime when with his yogic hearing he heard Kacha tell him, ‘Wait, I’m inside you!’ With his yogic vision he discovered Kacha to be inside his own belly. Now he was really in a fix. If he brought Kacha back to life he himself would be torn to bits as Kacha emerged from his abdomen, and Devayani would lose her father. If he did not raise Kacha from the dead Devayani would lose her lover. What to do?

“Shukracharya decided that he had no choice but to teach the Sanjivini Vidya to Devayani. As he taught it to her Kacha, listening from inside his belly, learned it too. When Devayani pronounced it to resurrect Kacha Shukracharya’s belly burst open and he dropped to the ground dead. Then she pronounced it again and revived her father.

“Shukracharya looked at them both solemnly and said, ‘Well, I never wanted things to work out this way. Had the asuras not been so stupid this never would have happened. I curse them for their stupidity!’

“I am also to blame for falling prey to the desire to drink wine. This desire clouded my perception, else I would have been able to see Kacha in the cup before I drank it. I curse wine-drinking, because it causes one to give out secrets which should never be given out!

“Kacha, now you are as good as my son, because you have been reborn

from my belly. You and Devayani are my own. I want the two of you to get married.’

“Kacha said to him, ‘Gurudev, I cannot. You yourself have said that I am now like your son, because I have been born from your belly. If I marry Devayani now it will be like the marriage of a brother and sister. Moreover, I now have what I was sent here by the devas to obtain. I must therefore now go back to my real home.’

“Devayani said to him, ‘So you loved me only for that purpose. You deceived me. Go then! But I curse you that your knowledge will never be of any use to you!’

“Kacha replied, ‘Even if I am unable to use my knowledge I can teach it to others, and they can use it. But I curse you in turn that you will never find a man of transcendent wisdom to marry; you shall have to marry a king or a prince.’

“And that is what happened, to each of them. When like Kacha and Devayani you are full of shakti because of having done lots of austerities any curse or blessing that you pronounce must take effect. However, the force of these curses drained all the shakti from Kacha and Devayani so that neither could make use of the Sanjivini Vidya even if they wanted to. Shukracharya’s knowledge was thus saved.

“Whose fault was this debacle? Mainly Kacha’s. He came to Shukracharya as a stooge of the devas to steal knowledge, which is forbidden. Also, he used Devayani. He led her along when he was interested only in the knowledge and not in her. And when he knew he was in the wrong why should he have cursed her? He should have kept his mouth shut, and accepted the results of his actions. But his wounded ego made him lash back at her, which compounded his guilt.

“Now, a subtle mind will ask, ‘Why did it happen that both Kacha and Devayani were overcome with the desire to curse, which made them both forget the Sanjivini Vidya?’”

“Yes, why did that happen?”

“It is simple: Shukracharya perverted both their minds with the help of a certain *siddhi*; he *forced* them to curse one another. He did this not because he was being selfish with his knowledge; in fact he had planned all along to teach it to Devayani since he really did love Kacha as a son. But both still had imperfections—Kacha’s deviousness and Devayani’s sensuality—which convinced Shukracharya that he had to prevent them from obtaining the knowledge until they were fit to use it properly. Knowledge placed into the wrong hands always causes problems. So Shukracharya made the best of a bad situation by ensuring that both of them would be born on Earth, which is what

happens to those from the heavenly spheres who lose their shakti. They will have to remain on Earth until their imperfections disappear; then they will both remember Sanjivini.”

“That could take a while.”

“Is Shukracharya in any hurry? He believes in doing a thorough job since there is no question of the limitation of time. But then he is no ordinary being; he is a Muni, a Mahapurusha. In fact he is a one-eyed Muni. He lost his other eye because of *Vamana*, Vishnu’s avatara in the form of a dwarf Brahmana.”

“And how might that have happened?” I greatly wished to know how his version of *Vamana*’s story differed from the textual ones.

“You know that the devas and the asuras once churned the Ocean of Milk to obtain *Amrita*, the nectar of immortality. At that time Vishnu helped the devas, led by Brihaspati, to defeat the asuras, kill their king Bali, and steal all the Amrita. This was a karma for which the devas later had to pay. As guru of the asuras Shukracharya was also the guru of their king. After he used Sanjivini to bring Bali back to life he worked to enable Bali to conquer the devas in turn. Eventually Bali triumphed, and Vishnu, the Preserver of the cosmos, could do nothing to protect the devas. How could He? He had broken his promise, given at the time of the Churning, to provide the asuras with some of the Amrita they had worked so hard to obtain. This caused Him to forfeit His right to help the devas on this occasion. Karma is karma, after all; it shows no favoritism, not even to the gods themselves.

“But in order to protect dharma Vishnu had to somehow return control of the cosmos to the devas, so He devised a ruse. He arranged to be born as the *Vamana* Avatara. Immediately after His birth He approached Bali at Bharuch (the ancient Bhrigukaccha), on the north bank of the holy Narmada River.

“Just then Shukracharya was causing Bali to complete a great sacrifice that would reinforce his position as ruler of the cosmos. At the end of every sacrifice offerings are made to Brahmanas, and *Vamana* was filled with such profound spiritual radiance that Bali decided to make his offerings to this tiny ascetic. When Shukracharya perceived that *Vamana* was in fact Vishnu and had come to take the kingdom away from Bali, he warned his disciple not to give anything to the dwarf. But Bali was determined, and said to his guru, ‘When the Lord Himself comes to me as a beggar and requests something of me won’t it increase my glory to give it to him? Whatever the outcome I will get to see Him in His true form, and I will get His blessings.’

“When he saw that his disciple was prepared to rebel against his order Shukracharya cursed Bali to fall into Patala, deprived of all his wealth and glory. Bali willingly accepted his mentor’s curse, and when he told *Vamana* to

ask for whatever He wanted *Vamana* replied, ‘All I want from you, O king, is as much land as I can cover in three steps.’

“Bali said, ‘That will be a truly paltry gift. Ask for more!’ But *Vamana* insisted, so Bali resolved to give three steps worth of land to *Vamana*. To seal his promise he prepared to offer a *dana vrata*, an oath of donation. The central act of this sort of vow involves pouring water onto the ground. This makes the Earth and Water Elements witnesses to the pledge. It is very dangerous to make such an oath, because if you break it Earth and Water will turn against you. Then any body of water you come across may try to drown you, and the earth may literally slip out from under your feet.”

“As in an earthquake?”

“Yes. It is better never to make any vows, because they can land you in very hot water. It is much wiser just to play it safe by doing your best without promising never to fail. It is very difficult never to make any mistakes. In fact, every human makes mistakes, which is why I tell people never to worry about their mistakes. Worry is not useful. What *is* useful is to make different mistakes, to learn from your mistakes so that you don’t keep making the same ones over and over again.”

“Was Bali wrong to go against his guru’s order?”

“Shukracharya thought that he was. But Bali was determined to give *Vamana* what he had requested, and was ready to swear to that effect. From his side Shukracharya was equally determined to ensure that his disciple did not lose his kingdom. As the moment for the oath approached Shukracharya shrank himself to miniscule size and entered the spout of the water pot. When Bali tried to pour the water out onto the ground, therefore, nothing came out.

“*Vamana* knew what was going on; how could He not know? He took a blade of *darbha* grass, which is so sharp that it can cut your finger, and stuck it into the spout. The blade of *darbha* poked out Shukracharya’s eye and his own blood spilled out onto the ground to seal the oath. After the oath was taken *Vamana* expanded from His dwarf body into a being of enormous size. With His first step He covered the entire Earth, and with His second step He covered the rest of the universe. Then He looked down at Bali and said, ‘Now, where shall I put my third step? There is no place left to put it. You have broken your promise.’

“But Bali said, ‘No, Lord, I am still here. When you put your foot on my head you will have encompassed everything.’ Vishnu smiled at Bali’s cleverness, and did so. In this way Bali got the great blessing of having Vishnu’s foot placed on his head. Vishnu awarded Bali immortal life in exchange for his gift of the cosmos. Bali still rules his subjects down below the surface of the earth. No one realizes it, but an offering to the Earth is really an offering to Bali.

Rishis could teach them for one hundred years and still have more to teach. Westerners are so far behind us in spirituality that to shine out among them is nothing. It is child's play for our so-called swamis to go abroad and try to impress all the monkeys over there with their so-called knowledge. I can tell you one thing: A real guru will come to the Westerners only when they decide that they are ready for real knowledge, and they invite Shukracharya."

"And just where will they go to search for Shukracharya?"

"They won't need to search for him; when they are sincerely ready he will appear. They are his disciples, he is responsible for them. It is a great blessing to be guru or king to a bunch of asuras, because you are in a position to improve them. Unfortunately they tend to fall back into their old habits very easily, since their innate natures cannot change. Even Shukracharya tires of them now and again. I call people asuras when even though they have the desire for sadhana they cannot seem to follow the basic rules of discipline. I am willing to try to help such people out, but most of them are by no means ready for spirituality yet and I grow tired of them too."

I thought of one of Vimalananda's well-loved spiritual "children" from the West who while reading the *Upavana Vinoda*, a text on the Ayurveda of plants, remarked a little too flippantly how its pages prescribed that certain weird things be planted under trees to make their fruits or flowers grow to the size of an elephant's trunk. Though this sort of conjecture seemed harmless enough for me it occasioned a violent cloudburst from Vimalananda, who insisted that I write this errant fellow and advise him to try these substances on himself, that he might develop an elephant-trunk-sized penis. Chastened and distressed by his faux pas the 'child' wrote back to discover how to again enter Vimalananda's good graces only to find that he was already there, for Vimalananda was always enthusiastic to forgive.

But do not forget, for the *Upavana Vinoda* contretemps provided him yet further fuel for occasional anti-Western commentary: "Part of the problem lies in the way Western culture has developed. The West is so utterly contrary to the East in so many ways that it is no wonder that people from the two areas cannot understand one another. For example, Indian dance focuses more on facial expressions than does ballet. In fact, the best Indian dancers can display all the possible emotions with their faces alone. Or consider *haute couture*. Until recently in India a man's honor rested on his turban and his mustache. If you were to shave off a Rajput's mustache or take his turban from him he would never be able to bear the shame; he would commit suicide. But today we have adopted the Western trait of judging everyone by their footwear. Nowadays the first thing anyone does is to look down to see what sort of shoes you are wearing, and whether they are properly shined.

"And what of sex? We in India, or at least a few of us, still know how to enjoy sex. And I don't mean just the Tantrics, whose sexual practices are as far ahead of the foolish things that your American 'experts in tantric sexuality' write about as the sky is distant from the earth. Even our rulers understood sexual refinement. Take the Emperor Akbar: not only was he noble, he was versatile to boot. He invented *biryani*, the famous dish of meat and rice, and *jelabi*, the well-known sweet. He even developed his own variety of mango as well. You can still find Aam-e-Akbari and Aam Jehangiri, the varieties of mango that he and his son developed, in a few parts of North India. Back in Akbar's day the imperial gardeners would feed these trees blood, saffron, marijuana, musk and various other substances while they were growing. These things would gradually percolate into the tree's fruit, and turn its flesh a beautiful saffron color."

"Blood?"

"Yes, the best fertilizer for mangoes is blood; that's where much of the blood from the slaughterhouse in Deonar ends up." Deonar is the Bombay suburb which hosts Asia's largest slaughterhouse.

"So when I eat a mango I may in effect be drinking blood?!"

"Yes, and when you eat a banana you may be eating a rat, because the best fertilizer for banana trees is dead rats!"

"Euuw!"

"The Law of Karma, my dear boy, the Law of Karma. Anyway, one mango from one of Akbar's trees could give you a beautiful intoxication that would last for an entire day. Now, Akbar's enjoyments were as refined as his fruit. When he was interested in loveplay he would take half of one of those intoxicating mangoes for himself, and would send the other half to his favorite wife. She would know from this that the emperor would be calling on her that evening and would prepare herself accordingly. In the evening both would eat their slice of mango, and by the time they met they would both be nicely excited. Then they would have a beautiful loveplay.

"That was the sort of refined sex that Akbar enjoyed. Do we find such sexual refinement anywhere in the West? No, and it is because sex has become so free and so common over there. You see a girl, you like her, you go up to her and say, 'Hey, how about a nice screw?' No preliminaries, no romance. Sex in the West is now seen as nothing more than a bodily function which you should relieve whenever you feel the need to do so. No wonder perversions are so rampant in the West. Once you have stripped all the mystery and the emotional excitement from sex what is left but the technique?"

"You're not trying to tell me that we will find sexual refinement anywhere in India, are you?"

“Oh, no; forget it! At least Westerners are not so inhibited as today’s Indians are. Today’s Indians are hopeless when it comes to sex.”

“Haven’t you always said that there are a few Westerners who could learn how to perform Tantric sexual sadhanas properly?”

“Yes, I have; but the question is, will they be able to do without sex long enough to gain control over it? They live their lives so fast that they think everything can be done instantly; they have no patience. Most Westerners today believe that all their desires, and their sexual desires in particular, should be gratified immediately. But there is nothing speedy about refinement; it takes time and restraint. Refinement occurs automatically in all aspects of life, and especially in sex and in spirituality, if you just slow down. Westerners think the spiritual urge can be gratified in the same way that they gratify their sex urges. No wonder that most of them end up with fake gurus.”

“Do you have a theory as to why these differences between East and West?” I knew he must.

“The reason for all these cultural differences is the great difference in the *svabhava*, the inherent nature, of Westerners and Easterners. There are three main traits inborn into a Westerner. First, he wants to make money and become a millionaire; his god is money, no doubt about it. Second, he wants to enjoy what he earns; he sees no reason to save it. Third, he calculates: first phase, second phase, third phase. These three traits explain why so many Westerners try to mix commerce and spirituality.

“Once a sadhu was invited to the USA. The American who was seated next to him in the plane became curious—a shaven-headed fellow in saffron robes sitting in the next seat—and asked, ‘Excuse me, sir, who are you?’

“The sadhu answered, ‘That is just what I am trying to find out: who am I?’

“The American then realized that he had come across an intelligent fellow, and asked, ‘How are you searching?’

“The sadhu replied, ‘By means of “Om.”’

“The American realized that there was some potential there; like most Americans, he was a good businessman. When the plane stopped in London he phoned ahead to his people in New York and told them to meet the plane at the airport.

“After the plane took off again the American said to the sadhu, ‘Please put your hand on my head.’ When the sadhu did so the American intoned, ‘Om, Om, Om. I am now your disciple. You must instruct me.’ The sadhu didn’t know exactly what to think.

“There was a crowd of people to meet the sadhu and his new disciple once the plane landed in New York. The poor sadhu didn’t know that it had all been arranged beforehand; he thought it was spontaneous, so he went along

with it. Pretty soon he was lecturing one day, holding a meditation camp the next, and so on. ‘Om’ pillowcases came onto the market, along with ‘Om’ books and so many other ‘Om’ products.

“After doing this for some little while the sadhu said to his American promoter, the man he had met on the plane, ‘What have you done to me? When I’m not talking I’m meeting people individually, and we are always flying off to some city or other. I have lost all my peace of mind. I want to go back to India.’

“The ‘disciple’ said, ‘But Swamiji, why go back now? You have \$2 million in the bank.’

“Swamiji said, ‘What is the use of \$2 million when I have no peace? You be my chief disciple, take all my money, and run everything. I am going back to India to get my peace back.’ And that is what happened. He got his peace back and the American took over the business, made a lot of money, and enjoyed his life.”

“Which means he was cashing in his good karmas.”

“That’s right. America is perfect place for withdrawal of good karmas because it is the place where this effect of commercialization is most pronounced. Why? All because of the gravitation in that part of the world.”

“Gravitation?”

“Yes, the quality of the gravity there. For that matter it’s all due to our gravity, and to something in our water, that India has always been a special place, that everyone here different. India can never go completely communist because our people are stoic. Because they believe in the life beyond they try not to create problems for themselves in this life if they can help it. If belief in the after-life had not been there we would have gone communist long ago. During the 1942 Bengal famine, which even Western historians agree was a man-made famine created to fill the pockets of certain businessmen, people would sit starving outside fancy hotels in Calcutta and beg food from those emerging after ten-course meals. It never occurred to those starving people to get together and storm the hotel and steal the food. Even though they died like flies they never tried to grab for themselves. Why? They remembered the Law of Karma. These people had every right to steal and eat but they didn’t. That is India.”

“So is everyone in India a saint, even the beggars?”

“Far from it! Some of the greatest evil in the world has been perpetrated here, like that engineered famine, and the *Visha Kanyas*. What I am getting at is that most people in India even when they are miserable still know that they are suffering from the effects of previous bad karmas. This makes them think twice and three times before reacting to their misery. India is a deposit

counter for good karmas, at least for most of our people. We believe in the life hereafter and work towards it. Now we too are suffering from the effects of the American disease, but originally we in India believed in stock-piling our good karmas and using them only when there is real need. We had the same philosophy about money too. Even now most Indians prefer to save rather than to spend. Did you know that an English scholar has estimated that one-third of the world's total wealth is buried under the desert in Rajasthan? From what I have seen there I think he may be underestimating the amount. It may be more, but it is certainly not less.

"The Western countries, and America in particular, are withdrawal counters for good karmas. You might say that most of the people there are enjoying their karmic pensions. They have suffered and toiled over many lives and now they are getting the result—and wasting it away. Some are doing some sadhana, I grant you, but only a few are doing penance compared to the number who are frittering away their penances.

"Think of the word *saha*, which means to endure, to go patiently through hardships without rebelling. When you invert *saha* you get *hasa*, which means to laugh. If you endure all your evil karmas at the beginning of your life then you can achieve your goal and live comfortably at the end of your life. Then you will have nothing left to do but laugh like a madman because of the overwhelming joy of it all. But if you enjoy yourself at the beginning of your life and waste all your good karmas you will find that your end is lamentable. And since what you are thinking about when you die determines your next rebirth—*ante matih sa gatih*—your future birth is likely to be lamentable too. It is always better to endure whatever fate throws your way. You will definitely receive your reward—eventually. But if you try to laugh now you are heading for sorrow in the end. Don't forget the old saying: 'He who laughs last laughs best.'

"When all of America's good karmas have been used up then only their bad karmas will remain, and you don't know what will happen. Westerners don't know what they are heading for. Because they are rich they can purchase more luxuries and kill more animals than poor countries like ours. But when the time comes for them to pay it all back they'll be ruined, I tell you, ruined. We are seeing the decay already. Look at television. It is an extraordinary thing which has become an emotional addiction for millions of people. So many people, with Westerners leading the pack, get all their emotional stimulation from TV. This is frightening, because many Westerners now live machine-like lives; even their love is machine love. Westerners have become so dependent on their gizmos that they can't live without them, just as we cannot live without our servants. They have become slaves to their machines.

"When you have a servant you must always be sure that the servant knows who is boss; otherwise the servant will take over. Here in India we are slaves to our servants. They can tyrannize us and we humor them because we need them to get our work done. Westerners think they have solved this problem by building machines. It is true that machines can't go on strike, don't take tea breaks and have no emotional problems to interfere with their productivity. But machines are also living beings, in a sense. The machine says, 'So, you've created me to be your slave? All right, now I'll control you.' And that is just what happens. It is the Law of Karma.

"Westerners have created a modern machine-filled world for themselves, which is fine. But in the process they have lost much of their humanity, which is a much more terrible thing than losing your life. So I thank God that India is still a poor backward nation for the most part. We still possess part of our humanity. We still have our traditions to fall back on, and our peculiar approach to life. I think India is a fine country to live in, because we have everything, good and bad, over here, and you are not protected from anything. You have no choice but to learn to deal with everything, sometimes in the most disgusting circumstances."

"Perhaps Saturn, who is the power behind those of your experiences that you never wanted to experience, has some sort of special relationship with India?"

"Of course he does, and why not? At least over here we worship him as a God. The few Westerners who even think about Saturn call him a devil! If you were he where would you like to be?"

"Westerners have spent decades trying to protect themselves from unpleasantness, but they, like us, will eventually have to learn to deal with reality. Saturn will force them to do so. Now they are intoxicated with their machines and addicted to their pleasures, but like all other intoxications these will not last. An Aghori may take intoxicants and indulge in sex, but such activities always remain under his control; no good Aghori ever lets any intoxication control his mind. Addiction to anything but God is a sure path to misery; addiction to God is the only path to happiness."

## chapter six **THE CITY OF DELUSION**

AS BOMBAY'S IMPORTANCE in my life accelerated I increasingly understood why Vimalananda had had to leave his life of many years as a itinerant sadhu and resettle in his hometown. Bombay was so crowded for him with tangled heaps of rnanubandhanas that nothing less than physical residence there would suffice for their unravelling. People daily arrived at his doorstep to confront him with shopping lists of cravings to be satisfied, but few of these solicitants showed any concern for him or his condition. Most were little more than embodied karmic debts who were striving to entrap him, and few of this group appreciated interference from his own Jaya and Vijaya (Roshni and me). Fortunately none of them possessed the power of the Sanatkumaras, or their curses would have kept Vimalananda busy preventing his doorkeepers from falling deep into Patala. Roshni's strategies and protocols may have differed from mine but our ends were the same: to preserve as much as possible of Vimalananda's energy from being suckled from him by these smarmy vampires and to keep conditions in the flat from going completely cattywampus.

Vimalananda's spiritual "children," except for Parekh, usually came to glean wisdom from him by night. The day's callers were of a more mundane genre: a continuous and occasionally entertaining parade of musicians, astrologers, doctors, lawyers, businessmen, politicians, impostors, vagabonds, wastrels and cranks, all seeking some species of profit. Many of them were experts in their fields, like Sayed Sahib, an Arab who occasionally introduced Vimalananda to oil sheiks. When I first met Sayed Saheb two enormous glass jars had just been delivered to Vimalananda's residence. Sayed Saheb spent most of his hour there eyeing the jars as if trying to figure out how much he could make by selling them. When he finally left I asked Vimalananda who he was.

“Sayed Saheb? Oh my, as a con man he’s tops! You’ve heard of people in California and Florida back in the ‘30s selling people a tract of scrub forest and calling it an orange grove? People talk about such things, but Sayed Saheb has actually done it, right here in India. He actually painted lemons on the trees in order to do it!

“His most successful swindle was the way he separated the Saudis from their jewelry. Some members of the Saudi royal family wanted to quietly dispose of some family treasure; Sayed Saheb assured them that he easily could handle the transaction in Bombay, no questions asked.

“The Saudis flew into India in their private plane and landed at a small airstrip south of Bombay. Sayed Saheb had arranged everything; all they had to do was hand over the gems and take the cash and off they would fly again. Now here they were on the runway, the Saudis with their jewel cases and Sayed Saheb with a suitcase full of money, which he opened to show them that there was no hanky-panky going on.

“All at once there was a clamor of sirens. ‘It’s the police!’ shouted Sayed Sahib as two jeeps filled with his accomplices brandishing guns sped toward the plane. As Sayed Sahib grabbed the baubles he thrust his suitcase into the hands of the startled Arabs and told them, ‘Quick, take the money and fly!’ Which is what they did, and once they were in the air and headed back to safety what did they find when they opened that case? Newspaper! Bundles and bundles of newspaper cut to the appropriate size, with a 100-rupee note on top and on bottom to make the bundles look legitimate.”

“They must have been pretty irate.”

“Irate! If they had ever been able to locate Sayed Sahib they would have dismembered him, after first flaying him alive. But he was lucky, and he escaped that time too.”

“So his good karmas haven’t completely run out yet.”

“Not yet.” And probably they would not, so long as he kept Vimalananda happy. Sayed Saheb also pursued legitimate businesses. He always insisted on giving Vimalananda a cut of the money that he made from a sheik who had been impressed with Vimalananda’s talents. A pattern developed: Sayed Saheb would offer, and Vimalananda would demur. Then Sayed Saheb would tarry until Vimalananda left the room for some reason and would then hide a bundle of bank notes for us to find later, Easter-egg-like.

Another of Vimalananda’s associates, Sidi Saheb, used his restaurant as a cover for his various less-than-legal activities. I appreciated Sidi Saheb for teaching me the approved Bombay way of politely handing a cigarette or *chillum* to another smoker by using three fingers. Vimalananda did not appreciate it when from time to time Sidi Saheb would try to test him by bringing

him some marijuana or hashish laced with arsenic, aconite or some other poisonous intensifier. Vimalananda would smoke it and be troubled by the mixture for a while, but he would send most of the noxious effect to Sidi Saheb, who would land in the hospital for a few days as a result. This would temporarily calm him down.

Sidi Saheb, who was a great worshipper of Shiva, built next to his restaurant a Shiva temple with a full-time priest to perform worship there. When the priest was discovered in flagrante delicto with a woman inside the temple there was a hue and cry whose volume increased the next morning when the priest’s dismembered body was found inside the shrine. “Lord Shiva became angry at his fornication and punished him,” was the explanation. It was rumored that when Sidi Saheb would put out a contract on a rival he would arrange to have the victim’s corpse cooked into a curry which he would then feed, with due philanthropic fanfare, to the widows and orphans of the community. The poor loved Sidi Saheb, the police hated him, and his rivals feared him. To Roshni and me he was just one more act in the ongoing Vimalananda Circus.

One performer in that extravaganza whom I found personally distasteful was Shantilal the musician. Though he was a talented singer his speaking voice was almost as obnoxious as his personality, which grated through a paan-stained face that looked like nothing so much as a deteriorating jack-o’-lantern. I was easily peeved by the arrogance in his voice when he talked to me. It did nothing for my mood that every time he arrived I was forced to go downstairs and fetch him a cup of specially-prepared cardamom tea. I came to resent this service. When the ringmaster noticed my attitude he quickly set me straight.

“What are you so upset about?” Vimalananda asked with some vexation. “Your rnanubandhana with Shantilal requires you to minister to him. You are merely paying him back. Is that such a big deal? Pay him back now and get it over with if you don’t want to have to come back and take care of it later. Besides, he is an interesting-case study. Think about him for a moment. He is a walking hospital. Right now his main problem is arthritic knees. Modern medicine can give him relief in a few days, but within a couple of weeks he will relapse. Ayurveda would cure his problem permanently, but it would take at least six months—and he wants quick results.

“Now, I am interested in helping Shantilal because I too have a rnanubandhana with him. Forget past lifetimes; I owe him from when he helped me out at a very critical period in this lifetime. When my son Ranu died I had no money to cremate him. Shantilal had just been paid for some singing he had done and when he saw how miserable I was he gave me his whole paycheck. Only then I could burn my son. I paid Shantilal back afterwards, of

course, but how can I forget that at a critical period in my life he was there to help me out? Other people might forget, but I cannot. I cannot adequately pay him back with money when his gift to me was more than mere money. Even Ranu, wherever he may be, still owes Shantilal a little something for arranging to dispose of his old body.

"I must pay Shantilal back for the sincere, compassionate love he showed in helping me out in time of need, but I don't want to take his karmas on myself. The main cause of his arthritis is a whore he has been visiting. He spends his money on that whore instead of on his family. Because of too frequent sex his ojas is very low and his joints have become weak. Too much sex usually hits you first in the knees.

"I have tried to persuade Shantilal to give this woman up. Even Nature has tried: Once when they were in bed together they were both burned, as if by a cigarette, in their private parts. But nothing has worked. Meanwhile, I have to think of the Law of Karma. Even though I don't approve of his activities I still owe him this rna. Healing him helps me pay off the rna, and I am interested in dying with a clean balance sheet.

"I think that the best way to handle this situation is to locate a spirit who has some rnanubandhana with Shantilal. The spirit of Shantilal's father, who was very unhappy because he could not see his son before he died, will do nicely. Now that he has become a spirit, he is ethereal and can enter Shantilal's body without Shantilal's knowledge. When? Near dawn, when Shantilal will be in a deep, deep sleep. Then, because the old man is in an ethereal form he can literally 'blow' the impurities out of the body, from the knee joints to begin with. Gradually, Shantilal's entire body can be cured.

"Now, Shantilal is still wasting his energy with that prostitute, so he may recreate his arthritis again—which will be his problem. Meanwhile he gets what he wants, which is relief. His father gets what he wants, which is to be with his son again. And I am also happy, because my rnanubandhana with Shantilal is settled without any overt action on my part."

Vimalananda shook his head. "Unfortunately Shantilal has never been able to prosper by knowing me. Last year I finally forced him to sing Kedara Raga for me, and now he has for some unknown reason started going on pilgrimages to all the holy places, which he has never done before. In fact, he has become so 'holy' that when I told him I was thinking of going to visit the States again he told me, 'Why do you want to go to that land of sex and meat-eaters? What is wrong with our own country?' He forgets that I have seen much of our own country while he was busy all during his life enjoying illicit sex.

"He doesn't ask himself why he has suddenly started going on pilgrimages, because he is too egotistical to do so. But he should think about it. He doesn't

have sense enough to think of such a thing himself, preoccupied as he has been with women and what is underneath their saris. His mind is being forcibly turned towards God, so that at least when he dies he may remember God. That will give him at least a chance for a good rebirth—*ante matih sa gatih*—no matter what sort of evil karmas he may have done in this life."

"Pilgrimages are good then?"

"Very good."

"Is this why saints go on pilgrimages?"

"No, a good saint's mind is already turned in God's direction. Saints go on pilgrimages mainly to enjoy the presence of their beloved deities, and to purify the pilgrimage places where their Beloveds live."

"Which need to be purified after people like Shantilal visit them?"

"Unfortunately, yes. Hence the theft of King Krishnadevaraya's emeralds from that temple in the South."

If I rarely welcomed Shantilal's advent I was inevitably delighted when Chotu, one of Vimalananda's oldest friends, would present himself at the door. Once arrived Chotu would roost with us for the day, ruminating over old times in Vimalananda's dairy and at his rock quarry. Like the day when Vimalananda nearly killed himself in a runaway truck; or the time when he was experimenting with explosives and accidentally sent a multi-ton rock scudding through the air like a cannonball all the way to the next island.

Roshni and Chotu used to be bridge partners when they played against Vimalananda and Mamrabahen. One day the two of them connived to stack the deck in such a way that they bid and made a little slam. Vimalananda, at first skeptical, became furious when they divulged their secret. Then he shuffled the cards himself, and thumped them down on the table. He had Chotu cut the deck and Roshni deal, and as soon as he picked up his hand he laid down a grand slam. Then he asked them how they liked it.

Chotu would always demand to be fed when he came, and Vimalananda would always oblige with his usual brilliant cookery. Vimalananda loved to cook, and fed his Beloved through the mouths of whatever people, animals, or plants might be handy. One memorable Vimalananda monologue began on such a day, when lunch preparations had just begun. Vimalananda was just saying, "There is no escaping the Law of Karma. Your karmas may provide Dr. Shantilal Mehta, India's premier surgeon, to care for you, or they may give you Dr. Gomes," when Chotu began to cackle.

"Dr. Gomes?" I enquired

"Dr. Gomes," explained Chotu, "was the manager of the rock quarry. He really handled the labor very well, but he was almost always drunk. Most of the time when the boss here would send me out to look for Gomes I would



find him lying senseless in the gutter. Having him as a manager was convenient because he would treat the workers for free. Every injection he would give them would develop into an injection abscess, so when we would see laborers walking around rubbing their arms we would know that Gomes had been up to his tricks again.”

At this point the doorbell rang and in flounced Miss Motibahen Bambhani, toting as usual her multiple containers of home-cooked lunch. None of us cared for Motibahen, not even Vimalananda, but giving proper respect to the food also implied giving respect to the cook, and we were at least polite to her until she left. Then Vimalananda said, as he stared at her vegetables, “Who does she think she is trying to fool? She makes a big show of her devotional service, but we all know what is on her mind. She pretends that she is chaste, but you can see from her face that she is enjoying regular sex, probably with her ‘friend’ Mr. Ginwalla.”

“With him?” I asked unbelieving. “She must be fifteen or twenty years younger than that old Parsi.”

“That is precisely my point. Do you think they are having an affair because she loves him truly? Forget it! She stays with him because he is so useful to her. She must have seduced him, probably after first feeding him to the gills, and now she has him dangling from her pubic hair. She thinks she can similarly entice me into bed with her and then tow me around by my cock. She doesn’t know that I have escaped from much worse traps than hers.”

He sighed. “I don’t like to toot my own horn, but very few people with real spiritual credentials have ever been able to stay in Bombay for very long without being ruined. Even the best of sadhus have been affected, if only in a small way. And sadhus who have not perfected themselves are lost once they come here, completely lost. This is why I call Bombay *Mohamayi Nagari*, ‘The City of Delusion.’ Did you know that the very ground on which Bombay is built is cursed?”

“You mean that blessings and curses can affect land and water too??”

“Yes, they can. In fact, tradition states that the entire Konkan, the whole southwest coastal strip of India, is cursed. Whole districts of Eastern India are cursed. The Tapti River, which flows through Surat in Gujarat, is cursed.

“Specific villages are also sometimes hexed. Once I took some of my friends to such a village. During the day it was deserted, and seemed harmless enough. As night fell I drew a circle with a mantra around our group and warned them that I would not be responsible for what would happen to any one of them who dared to step out of the circle before daylight. That night the spirits of the people who had lived there when the village was cursed came to harass us. They harassed us all night long, shouting, ‘Come one step outside and we will

make you just like we are!’ By morning my friends were thoroughly shaken, let me tell you. They forgot ever again to ask about the nature of spirits.

“In Bombay’s case the curse affects the minds of everyone who lives here. Part of the effect comes via Bombay’s gravity, part from our drinking water, but quite a lot of it comes from our food. All the food that is grown and cooked in this area is affected by the curse. When people eat this food they partake of the effects of the curse and fall prey to delusion.”

“And this curse is separate from the faults of food that are due to the avarice of the farmer, the middleman, or the merchant, the unthinking hurry of the cook, and the forgetfulness of the eater.”

“Yes, and those faults just reinforce the curse.”

“This curse presumably makes people like Miss Bhambani and Mamrabahen worse than they normally would be.”

“Naturally.”

“It must disturb even the great Chotu,” I said impishly, and Chotu belled in mock offense.

“Yes, even Chotu.”

“Haven’t you and your family also been affected by this curse?”

“For fifteen generations we escaped it and thrived in Bombay, thanks to the blessing that was given to our ancestor Seth Sagal Shah, and the protection that our own personal deities provided us. Our family traded with China and dealt in silk and silver. We made money fairly by adding a fixed 10% of cost to the price of our goods as our profit. We were pretty well shielded from misery until my father’s brother’s mind was degraded by greed and our fortune disappeared.”

“How did that happen?”

“Well, as the eldest of three brothers my father was the head of their joint family. All went well until he inherited a great deal of tainted money from his father’s brother, who had earned it through his legal practice. Shortly thereafter one of my father’s two brothers demanded the division of the loot. The case went all the way to the High Court, where millions of rupees were wasted in legal fees.”

“Amazing! The money that came in from legal fees contaminated even the good money you were making from your business. Is this a matter of the ‘one bad apple can spoil a whole bushel’ rule?”

“That’s right. Bad money can easily contaminate good money.”

“But still, if your family was protected how could your uncle’s mind have become subverted?”

“He fell under the influence of his wife Putlibai, who was the daughter of a bookkeeper, an accountant—and what will an accountant think of other

than accounts? She pestered him to get a full accounting of his share for so long that he was eventually led astray, and estranged himself from his brothers. She was doing this mainly for herself, of course, not for him. She had not grown up with money and had no idea of how to live with it. Why, when the car came for her on her wedding day to take her to the wedding she sat on its running board instead of inside it—she had never been in a car before! And what did she get for all her pains? She became notorious for being the destruction of the family fortune. How can I say notorious? Well, the High Court case was named after her and even now everyone who studies the law of joint families studies that case, the Putlibai case.”

“I still don’t quite understand how your grandfather’s mind became so disturbed that he permitted the wedding to occur.”

“Nothing is permanent, not even a saint’s blessings. Obviously our period as a prosperous family had ended, and we had to disappear from the scene. Nature needed a pretext to terminate our prosperity using Putlibai as Her instrument.

“That does not amaze me. What does amaze me is that we could carry on in Bombay for as long as we did, for fifteen generations. Partly it was because we were householders. It is easier to try to neutralize this kind of curse when you are a householder. But when you are a sadhu the effects of such delusion are truly profound. If it is hard for you and me to avoid the negative influences of Bombay you can imagine how hard it must be for someone who has renounced the world in the pursuit of God.

“I personally know the truth of this story: There was a good sadhu at Mount Abu who once cured a Marwari lady of tuberculosis by using nothing but ash from his fire. After a year of, ‘Please, Maharaj, just this once,’ he finally agreed to come to Bombay for a brief stay with the lady’s family. A good sadhu knows that he has to pay back his hospitality, in part to try to negate the effects of the food he eats. So this fellow told the lady’s husband, a wealthy cotton merchant, to lock him in the toilet for twenty days. When he came out he told the merchant to buy all the cotton he could find in the market, and to sell it only when the sadhu directed him to do so.

“Before long the merchant had cornered the market. The sadhu had himself locked in the toilet again, this time for a month—no food, no water, nothing. When he came out he told the merchant, ‘Sell!’ He sold, and made one hundred million rupees. Do you know how much money that is? This was almost fifty years ago, so it would be equivalent to more than a billion rupees today (tens of millions of dollars).

“When a Marwari makes money he becomes deliriously happy, and this merchant was no different. He started to feed the sadhu with rich food

cooked in *ghee* (clarified butter), and all the finest sweets. Before long all this heavy food had an aphrodisiac effect on the poor sadhu. All alone for years in the jungle, eating nothing but roots and fruits, drinking only water, and never toying with any woman. The result? He got entangled in an affair with the merchant’s wife.

“When the merchant found out about the affair he was in a quandry. He couldn’t insult the sadhu who had given him all that money, but he didn’t want to go on being cuckolded either. He decided to be generous. So he hired a goldsmith’s daughter and gave her to the sadhu to enjoy. Soon the sadhu was enjoying both her and the wife. He had been in the forest a long time, so he had plenty of appetite for sex.

“This went on for so long that the merchant finally became exasperated. One day he told the sadhu, ‘You stop this nonsense now or I will call the police!’

“The sadhu lost his temper and said to him, ‘Fool! Have you forgotten that I made you? My penance is finished now, true, but I have enough left for one last curse: Become a beggar!’ Overnight the merchant became a beggar. Before long he died, still a beggar. The sadhu took the two ladies with him and supported himself and them for several years by making Ayurvedic medicines. But he was completely ruined as a sadhu, all because he came to Bombay in Kali Yuga.

“So many sadhus have been ruined that way here in Bombay. Sadhus are easily fooled by devious people. This is partly due to action and reaction—a sadhu is trying to reach the heights, so there is always a tendency to plummet—but it is mainly because he has become unsophisticated. He has begun to act like a child, or a dunce, or a demon, and like an animal he can be easily ensnared by those who are still sophisticated, particularly when they start to feed him.

“If you think about these things long enough you will eventually begin to wonder about eating.”

“Wonder what?”

“Wonder, ‘Why should humans and animals have to eat at all, if eating is such a dangerous business? Why shouldn’t they live like plants and get all their nutrition from the sun?’

“Well,” I offered, “other than the obvious scientific reason, which is that you cannot get enough energy from the sun fast enough to move around as much as animals move around, I don’t know.”

“If we did not eat what would we do with the Law of Karma? Without karma and rnanubandhana how would the play go on? They are essential parts of the world. Do you have any idea of how thoroughly rnanubandhana permeates our lives? Look at this paint on the wall. Even it has a rnanu-

bandhana with me. When that rnanubandhana is finished it will flake off, or I will get the idea to repaint it. Even the stones that make up the floor have a connection. How can you explain it except via the Law of Karma? Or think of a fly who is born and then dies within a few seconds. What sort of karma did it do to force it to take birth for such a short period, or even to take birth at all? It is all perfect when you consider rnanubandhana.

“And don’t delude yourself to think that plants do not perform karmas. What do you think their roots are doing? While absorbing water they may be annihilating so many millions of bacteria. Every living being is subject to the Law of Karma, except the man who has learned to do without food altogether, either from the upper mouth or from the lower mouth, the genitals. Such a being is a *Vayu Ahari*; he lives on air alone, and gets his prana directly from the atmosphere and the sun. Until then, though, you have to eat, and eating is as much a karma as is collecting food to eat.”

“So what is the answer?” A certain sense of resigned despair at the piousness of the Law of Karma flitted through my mind.

“To begin with, always try to eat with people who owe you food, karmically. To pay back a debt of money is very easy; such a rna is quickly dispensed with. But how can you ever pay back a debt of food? Once that food had entered your circulation and been converted into the very tissues of your body how can you ever requite it? Repaying such a debt could bankrupt you.”

“Bankrupt your shakti, you mean.”

“Yes. This is one of the reasons that a good sadhu will never take food from anyone on a regular basis if he can avoid it. This is also the reason I try to avoid eating other people’s food.”

“Except Motibahen’s.”

“This is my point. If I have a rnanubandhana with her that will best be fulfilled by eating her food then that’s what I need to do. A sensible person who cannot avoid eating will take food only from those who have appropriate rnanubandhanas with him. That way he will not create new rnanubandhanas with people who might project their own delusions onto him. At least this way you can get used to one set of delusions and become immune to them. And besides, do I encourage Motibahen to bring her food over here?”

“No.”

“Correct. I prefer to eat my own food, which I cook whenever I am in the mood to do so. Home-cooked food is always better for anyone, which is why Bombay has the dhabawalas.” The *dhabawalas* are men who bring hot home-cooked lunches to hundreds of thousands of workers in Bombay every day. “You can look at the dhabawalas if you want proof that it is not impossible to live in Bombay without scuttling yourself. It just requires some effort, and

the dhabawalas are willing to make the effort. They have never gone on strike and have never been known to molest any of the ladies whom they collect lunches from. And why not? Because they are devotees of Vitthala; they spend all their spare time worshipping Him. When their minds are full of Vittala how can any base thought disturb them?

“One reason I like to stay with Roshni is because I like to eat Roshni’s food when I am not in the mood to cook. Roshni’s food is tasty and does not disturb my mind. Why? Because she is serious about her sadhana. She repeats her mantra while she cooks, which gives the food a beautiful spiritual vibration. Also, she feeds me out of love and not because she wants to extract something from me, as most people do. There have been so many like Miss Bambhani who have tried to ruin me over the years, but I have not yet scuttled myself. I was born in Bombay; I know the ropes.”

“But why then,” I interrupted, “do you continue to live in Bombay, when staying here means you have to cope with this curse and all these other problems?”

“Ah, my boy, that is the Law of Karma,” Vimalananda replied sadly, his gaze drifting momentarily off into the distance. “I have my karmic debts to pay off. There are so many types of rna: debts to your parents, to your teachers, to the knowledge itself. One type of debt is to the place you were born in. Once I’ve paid off all these debts, goodbye! But until then I have to remain. When your foot is trapped underneath a stone you don’t pull it out abruptly, if you want to preserve your skin. You lift the stone carefully, little by little, and little by little you remove your foot, ever so slowly until it is freed.”

“What about the people who come along and try to step on the stone while you are trying to remove your foot?”

“Well, you have to be prepared for them. Years ago my Junior Guru Maharaj came to me and said, ‘You had better watch out, babuji—he always called me ‘babuji’—someone is trying to use black magic to kill you.’ I had not expected this. I knew I was in danger. In those days one of my aunts was trying to do away with me for my inheritance. She had tried to have me killed before, more than once, by various methods. But by using black magic she was upping the ante.

“I told him, ‘Pah, Maharaj, don’t worry about it even for a moment.’ He loves me so much that he was very concerned for my welfare. But he knows I can take care of myself when it comes to black magic.

“I made some inquiries from an ethereal friend and found out that my aunt had hired Balam Bhat to do the work. I have always been blunt and outspoken, so I went myself to Balam Bhat and came to the point: ‘Balam Bhat, you have been our family priest for decades. You presided over my naming ceremony, the first cutting of my hair, my first meal of cooked food. How

could you ever dream of lifting your hand against me, when you have looked upon me as your own son?

"At first he denied it, but when I persisted he flew into a rage and said things like, 'Who do you think you are? I will finish you off!'"

"Then I said, 'All right, go ahead and try,' and went to the smashan. I told my friend, 'You were right, it is Balam Bhat who is trying to do me in. What shall I do?'"

"My friend told me, 'Don't worry about a thing; let me handle it.'"

"And how he handled it! Next morning there were twenty-three corpses to be disposed of: Balam Bhat and twenty-two of his relatives."

"My goodness!"

"Yes, it is unfortunate that it had to end that way, but Balam Bhat had asked for it. Besides, his death prevented him from incurring the karma of killing me."

"Didn't you have a mountain of karmas to deal with, though, from initiating the whole process?"

"Naturally. Even though I never explicitly told my ethereal friend to do in Balam Bhat and his whole family I did authorize him to handle the job, which makes me responsible for what happened. But I escaped from those karmas too. In fact, I offered all the victims as Nara Balis! Thank God for my mentors; they taught me how to deal with such things."

"So you were saved again, as usual."

"Why not? If you take life here as a challenge you'll decide to succeed at it or die trying. Why be frightened? But since Bombay is such a dangerous place, in so many ways, you have to be sure to always use stratagem (*kala*) instead of force (*bala*) to pay off your rnas, if you don't want to be sunk."

"This is why you are fond of Birbal."

"Yes, that is why. He was a master of stratagem." Out came a sudden chuckle that started a story: "You know, many of Akbar's courtiers hated Birbal passionately because he was so close to the emperor. They schemed day and night over ways to do away with him. No matter how hard they tried to catch him off guard he would almost always outsmart them. For example, when one of them told Akbar that Birbal claimed to be able to read minds Akbar asked Birbal to demonstrate this power. Birbal replied, 'Your Majesty's mind is much too subtle for someone like me to read. But I do know what everyone else is thinking. They are thinking, 'May God bless our Emperor to rule over us in power and prosperity for many years, and may his fame spread far and wide.' Isn't that so, O members of the court?'"

"I suppose all the courtiers then had to agree that Birbal could read minds."

"Could they do anything but agree?"

Three laughs merged above the remains of our food. We moved into the sitting room, and as he sipped his tea Vimalananda continued: "Another time they thought they had a foolproof plan. It required an accomplice, so they recruited the royal barber with the help of a huge sum of money. A few days later while he was shaving the sovereign the barber slyly said, 'You are enjoying yourself in such luxury here, my liege. Don't you ever wonder how your father must be passing his days in heaven?'"

"'What a fool you are!' said the emperor. 'How do you think I would be able to enquire about my father's status in heaven?'"

"'I know a magician, Great One, who can send anyone to heaven while still alive to check up on our dead ancestors.'"

"Akbar stroked his mustache thoughtfully, then said to the barber, 'Make the necessary arrangements, and send someone immediately to bring news of my father.'"

"'I will do so immediately, master,' said the barber. 'But we must send an important and experienced person on this errand, someone who will know just how to act in heaven, and how to find your father.'"

"'Hmm,' said Akbar. 'Who do you have in mind?'"

"'Why, Prince Birbal, O Refuge of the World,' replied the wily barber."

"'Birbal!' boomed the king. 'Why Birbal?'"

"'No one in the world is as clever or wise as is Birbal, Your Majesty,' offered the barber obsequiously. 'Who else will be a fit ambassador from your court to the court of heaven?'"

"'Hmm,' said Akbar. 'All right, we will send Birbal. But just exactly how do you plan to do this?'"

"'What we will do, your worship,' said the barber hastily, sensing success, 'is to put Birbal into a special house built in the smashan. Then we will set the house on fire. Because of the powerful mantras this great sage will recite, the fire will not kill Birbal. Instead, it will take him straight to heaven, alive and unhurt. I have been there myself on a visit, more than once.'"

"'It sounds like the barber was embellishing the script.'"

"'He was probably salivating over the bonus he had been promised if this scheme actually worked.'"

"'Did Akbar believe any of this?'"

"'No, he knew what sort of man his barber was.'"

"'Wasn't he concerned, though, that Birbal might not be able to escape and would be burned alive?'"

"'He probably was concerned, but he also knew that Birbal could take care of himself. Besides, he wanted to teach all his jealous ministers a good lesson, and he enjoyed keeping Birbal on his toes.'"

“Birbal arrived at court the next day to find a rude surprise awaiting him, for Akbar ordered him to get ready to go to heaven straightaway. When he heard the details of his mission, Birbal immediately recognized the nature of the trap and knew who had set it. He thought for a moment and then said, ‘Your majesty, when I am ready to go to hell for you going to heaven will be a pleasure. But if I am to go I will need quite a lot of money to make my preparations.’

“‘You may have as much money as you need,’ the Emperor assured him.

“‘Also, I will need time to make arrangements with my family before my departure,’ said Birbal.

“‘How long will you need?’ asked Akbar.

“‘Three months,’ replied Birbal, and this period was granted to him.

“Now Birbal had some breathing time. He gave the money to his wife as insurance, just in case he should fail to escape. Then he set out to save himself. He began by planning out a tunnel from his house to the smashan. All night long he would dig to extend the tunnel, and each day he would work in the smashan preparing the hut he would need for his voyage.

“Birbal finished the hut and the tunnel just a few days before the end of his three-month grace period, and on the appointed day he called on the emperor and declared that he was ready to go. He was then taken in a gala procession to the site and entered the hut, which was just atop the tunnel. The pyre was then lit, and the fake saint began to chant ostentatiously. Birbal had cleverly selected the greenest wood that he could find, so it did not take long for a mammoth cloud of smoke to accumulate. Under the cover of this smoke he crept off through the tunnel to his own house, taking care to fill in the mouth of the tunnel as he went. He waited there silently in hiding for three months, without cutting his hair or beard. In fact, he was gone so long that Akbar was worried that he actually was gone for good.”

“Well, Akbar had put him in mortal danger, so it served him right, didn’t it?”

“Yes, I’m sure Birbal deliberately prolonged his stay in hiding, just to rub some salt in the wound. When Birbal did return to the court after those three months he made a sudden, dramatic appearance there. Akbar embraced him in ecstasies and said, ‘How are you, my dear friend? How was your trip, and how is heaven?’

“‘It was a long, dangerous trip, your majesty, but somehow I managed it and made it back here to give you a report.’

“Don’t keep me in suspense, Birbal, tell me how my saintly father is doing!’ said Akbar loudly, playing to the gallery.

“Oh, he is very well, my lord. All is fine in heaven.’ And Birbal went on and on, describing the glories of the angels and the luxuries of the blessed. Then he concluded with, ‘But there is one thing . . .’

“‘What is it?’ said the emperor anxiously, while all the courtiers showed their great concern.

“‘Well,’ said Birbal, ‘Your father gets everything he wants—good food, elegant clothes, beautiful women, all the comforts. He is sad only about one little thing.’

“‘What is it?’ asked Akbar impatiently.

“‘He told me not to bother anyone about it,’ said Birbal, stretching out the suspense.

“‘But now that we have found a way to reach heaven,’ said the Emperor, ‘we can send anything to him from here,’ and all the courtiers nodded in agreement.

“‘Welllllll,’ said Birbal, ‘your papa said that he gets everything he asks for in paradise—except for a good shave.’

“‘What,’ asked Akbar amazedly, ‘has no dead barber yet reached heaven?’

“‘No, sire,’ said Birbal, ‘none so far.’”

I had to interrupt: “What an insult to barbers!”

“Well, Birbal really wanted to make the barber twist in the wind. He said, ‘Look at my appearance, lord. Wouldn’t I have shown myself to you clean-shaven if I could have located a barber? I even had trouble recognizing your father, his hair and beard were so long. He sends you his blessings, and he did request you—if it was no trouble . . .’

“‘What request? Tell me immediately!’ Akbar thundered.

“‘Your father asked you to send him a good barber, if you can spare one.’

“‘But of course,’ said the emperor grandly. ‘In fact, let us send this noble barber of ours! It is he who showed us how to reach heaven, where he has visited more than once, and he deserves to return there now.’ And that was the end of the barber.”

“Did Akbar really have him burnt alive?”

“It’s hard to say. Some versions of this story say that the barber was burned. Others say that he avoided becoming a nice roast by confessing everything, that he then spent most of the rest of his life in the dungeon for attempting to murder Birbal. Whichever was his fate it served him right, which proves my point. If Birbal had tried to use force to save himself his enemies might have been able to gang up on him and kill him. He used deception instead and was saved. I myself use deception freely so that, God willing, those whom I love and who love me will continue to be saved.”

“Even the ones who fight with you?” I tossed in provocatively.

“Yes, even people like Roshni and her family.”

Roshni, who had meanwhile arrived home from work and was knitting peacefully in her chair, glowered at him lovingly over the tops of her glasses.

“Doesn’t deception imply karma?”

“Karma is everywhere. But if you deceive people without literally lying to them, like Yuddhisthira did—*naro va kunjaro va*—then the karma is much reduced.”

Asvatthama, the son of Guru Dronacharya, shared his name with an elephant. When during the great war that the *Mahabharata* chronicles it looked as if Dronacharya had become unconquerable Krishna directed that the elephant Asvatthama be killed and that a rumor be spread that it was Asvatthama the man who had died. After hearing this rumor a worried Dronacharya came to Yuddhisthira, whose name was a byword for truthfulness, to ask if his son were dead. Though the two of them were fighting on opposing sides Dronacharya, who was Yuddhisthira’s weapons guru, knew that Yuddhisthira would not lie to him. Indeed, Yuddhisthira loudly replied to Dronacharya, “Asvatthama is dead!” Then, following Krishna’s instructions, he added in a whisper, “*Naro va kunjaro va* (“either the man or the elephant”). Dronacharya, who could hear only the first phrase, wrongly concluded that his son was dead. This knocked all the fight out of him and he was himself killed shortly thereafter, which benefitted the cause of Krishna and Yuddhisthira. But even though they represented the letter of the truth Yuddhisthira’s words had the impact of a lie. Due to that deception Yuddhisthira had to start walking on the ground again, instead of walking a foot above it as his unwavering adherence to truth had previously permitted him to do. If that was the effect of “much reduced” karma I hated to think what might have happened to Yuddhisthira had he performed overt *guru droha* by openly lying to his guru.

“What I really don’t understand about this story,” I said to Vimalananda, “is why the karma for lying didn’t cling to Krishna instead of to Yuddhisthira when it was Krishna Who forced Yuddhisthira to violate his personal dharma by speaking what amounted to a lie.”

“It is very simple,” replied Vimalananda. “Krishna didn’t identify with His advice to Yuddhisthira and Yuddhisthira self-identified with his deception to his guru. Krishna was *Yogeshvara*, the Lord of Yoga. Karma rolled off Him just like water rolls off a duck’s back. He would create a situation, watch it being played out, and still remain a karmically-alooof observer. Wah, Krishna, wah! No one can know every aspect of Your play!”

Vimalananda glanced momentarily at Roshni and Chotu before continuing: “Anytime you act with self-identification, my boy, a karma is created no matter how noble your motives. And rnanubandhanas can multiply rapidly when your karma involves putting your neck out to try to save someone. This is something I know only too well. My dear old friend Faram, Roshni’s late

father, really loved me and used to look after me; I in turn had looked after him. I even postponed his death more than once. You can ask Chotu about it if you like.” Chotu nodded gravely.

“Unfortunately, towards the end of Faram’s life something happened to his mind—it was Mahakala, Death Personified, inciting him—which made him become very argumentative with me. Not only that, but he cheated me more than once. I warned him several times that he was playing with a live wire, but he persisted. He had always been obstinate.

“After a lot of this there came a time when I had to go to Delhi. I warned him not to eat fish, beef, or pork while I was out of Bombay. You see, he was a Parsi, and they eat everything. I also exhorted him not to curse me in any way, because I knew this would be the excuse Mahakala would use to take him away. And I told him, ‘I know you’re not going to listen to me, and that you are going to eat meat and abuse me. Don’t worry, though; even after you die I’ll look after your children.’ I promised his wife and children that as soon as he died I would come immediately no matter where I was, and I made them promise not to remove the body until I got back. Then I left.

“After finishing my work in Delhi I went down to a certain sacred mountain in South India. No females are permitted there, and no men dare ascend it except on one day during the year—Maha Shivaratri. On that day they go up the mountain early in the morning, worship at the Shiva temple, and come right back down. It is not a mountain for the curious or the insincere.”

When I first visited this mountain, a month after Vimalananda’s demise, I discovered that on one Maha Shivaratri not too long before two hundred men had lost their way in the fog and died of exposure. It was apparently a hell of a job to get all the corpses down off the hill.

“There are dense elephant jungles on this mountain, filled with plenty of dangerous wild animals. There is also a huge bull elephant; he and I are the best of friends. Whenever I would go there he would sit near my fire and play with my hair using his trunk. He is not really an elephant, of course; he is something else entirely.

“There I was on the mountain sitting at my fire, keeping track of all my loved ones ‘long distance’ with its help, when suddenly I saw the dead body of my friend Faram. Then I saw that he had eaten fish and had called me all the foul names in the book ending with, ‘I never want to see his blessed face again.’ As soon as he spoke those words he keeled over and died. When I saw that I knew he was dead.”

“You didn’t wonder if the vision was true?”

“The fire never lies. Ethereal beings may stretch the truth on occasion, but the fire will never be false to you. I was sure he was dead and was plunged into

despair. How would I ever get back to Bombay in time for the funeral and fulfill my promise to his children? The promise was the action. Now I was experiencing the reaction. I have always believed that promises are meant to be kept, but here I was on a mountaintop far from civilization. I would have to hike down to the road, catch a bus to the nearest town, and then find a train or plane. All that would take at least a couple of days. I had to be in Bombay in a matter of minutes. It looked impossible.

"While I was worrying over this my elephant came up to me, nuzzled me with his trunk, and asked, 'What's wrong?' I explained everything, and he told me, 'I'll see that you get back to Bombay immediately. But first you must promise me that you won't bring this fellow back to life.' He knew my habits. There was no other way, so I promised him. Another promise, another karma.

'Close your eyes,' he told me. When I opened them I was on the landing in front of my friend's flat in Bombay. The door was open.

"I was a little shaken to think that I was back in Bombay, but there was no time to lose. I rushed into the flat. Roshni met me and with tears in her eyes told me that her father's body had just been taken away just minutes before. I rushed to the Tower of Silence in pouring rain. Ask Roshni; she'll tell you." Roshni nodded her assent.

"The Parsis believe that the fire is polluted if it touches a corpse. They neither bury nor burn their dead. Instead they expose them in a place called the Tower of Silence for the vultures, crows, rats and other scavengers to polish off. They perform plenty of rituals before the body is taken into the tower—otherwise how could the priests make a living?—but once the bodies are laid out on the marble slab inside they get eaten all the same.

"According to their traditions no non-Parsi is supposed to even look at the body of a dead Parsi after it has been washed. I have never cared for such bigoted traditions, so I went in straight away. I think I am still the only non-Parsi ever to enter a Tower of Silence. All the mourners were shocked, but no one could prevent me. I went up to my friend, kissed him, and said, 'Well, old boy, I couldn't save you this time. But don't worry, I'll look after your kids.' The priests sat there aghast, but all they could do was to cough suggestively while they fanned themselves, as if their fire was troubling them greatly. I ignored them; how can you take a priest seriously if he is afraid of his own god?"

Roshni, Vimalananda and I would drive past the Tower of Silence from time to time, mainly on those occasions when we went to eat at Tehmul's residence up on the top of Malabar Hill. The building in which Tehmul stayed used to be part of the garden of the bungalow in which Vimalananda was raised. Half-a-dozen high-rises have since sprouted in place of the bungalow,

and the hyper-rich now pay \$10,000 a month or more per flat for the privilege of calling Malabar Hill home.

"Was it your promise to Faram that has made you a part of Roshni's karmic family?" I queried, glancing over to see if this would get a rise out of Roshni.

"No," Vimalananda scowled with a grin, "I already had a complicated rnanubandhana with Faram which brought me into contact with Roshni and her other family members long back. But this promise did cause me to have to begin to stay with this family in order to save it. And that has led me into a whole new series of rnanubandhanas, with Parsis in particular.

"The original home of the Parsis was ancient Persia, which some of us call *Vasistha Bhumi* ('the land of the Rishi Vasistha'). Ages back Vasistha Rishi went there and taught the Persians how to worship the fire. For centuries they practiced their religion sincerely. Then almost 1400 years ago Caliph Omar led the Muslim invasion of Persia, and who abetted his conquest? The Zoroastrian priests! They betrayed the secrets of the country's defence to him. The Zoroastrian religion has some good techniques for obtaining siddhis, and had these priests could have supported their own king by using their occult powers. If they had Omar might never have been able to conquer their country. But the priests were tempted by money, and invited Omar in. And what was the first thing he did after conquering Persia? He executed all the Zoroastrian priests that he could catch! He was an orthodox Muslim, and like many orthodox Muslims he sincerely believed that all other religions are false and should be eliminated. The few Parsi priests who survived fled to a ship and sailed here to India. What other country would take them? Our doors are open for everyone: the Parsis, the Jews, everyone. India is a big garbage dump for all the religions that have no place left to go."

"So the Parsis landed here and started to thrive again."

"When they reached India they landed at Sanjan in Gujarat. On hearing of their arrival Jadavji Rana, the king of that region, sent them a bowl filled to the brim with milk. That was his message to them. The message read: 'My kingdom is already full of people, and there is no space for any more.'"

"Now what to do? Fortunately one of the Parsis, Dastur Meherjee Rana, had a brilliant idea. He took some powdered sugar and added it very carefully to the milk, so that no drops spilled out. Then he gingerly laid some rose petals onto its surface. This was his reply to the king: 'Your majesty, we are so few that we will blend in among your people as easily and invisibly as this sugar dissolves in this milk, and like the sugar our presence will "sweeten" your domain. Like the rose petals we will provide you beauty and fragrance without being any burden.' When Jadavji Rana 'read' this message he said to his advi-



sors, 'This is a man of subtle intelligence! This is the kind of man that we need in our kingdom. Let them remain!' And ever since then the Parsis have done well for themselves here in India, because of stratagem, not strength."

"You seem to really like the Parsis in spite of all your ranting about them and their priests."

"Does he have any choice?" an aroused Roshni asked sharply. "He is part of our family now, he has become one of us!"

"Quiet, you!" growled Vimalananda affectionately. "I may be one of you, but I will never become a Parsi, even if I could. And I can't, thank God, for even though the Parsis are a miniscule minority they still refuse to permit conversions. At least they have not abandoned their fire worship. But very few of today's Zoroastrians have any real affection for their god the fire. Most of their priests have forgotten the true meaning of their religion, and all they have left are empty rituals. But they do know how to extract money from the people. Suppose some part of your body is removed in an operation. Whether it is a wart, a finger, or your penis, an orthodox Parsi must spend thousands of rupees for special ceremonies for it. And what is the holiest substance to Parsis? Bull's urine, processed in a certain way, which is also fabulously expensive. Was any of this Zoroaster's idea? No, it was all an invention of the priests. The priestly classes in every religion are always scoundrels."

"If Zarathustra's religion has been despoiled by its priests hasn't Hinduism also been distorted by some of its priests?"

"Our Vedic religion has been absolutely ruined by its priests, the Brahmanas. Could the Muslims have ever sacked Somnath (a famous Shiva temple in the Western Indian state of Gujarat) if the priests there had not been corrupt? No. Even now most priests do all sorts of rituals without having any idea of what it is they are doing or why they are doing it. But they still collect hefty fees for what they do, just because they are Brahmanas. It was the law-giver Manu, who came along much later than the Vedas, who invented all this business of Brahmana supremacy. You don't find it in the original Vedic tradition. Back in Vedic times the Rishi Vishvamitra even decided that there was no need for any restrictions about the intermarriage of castes after he married a *dasyu* (a member of an outcaste group). Vasistha Rishi opposed him in the beginning but eventually had to go along."

"Why?"

"Vishvamitra was born a Kshatriya, and had been a king before he became a Rishi. His motto was, 'Succeed, or die trying!' Vasistha was a Brahmana, and Brahmanas always believe in going with the times, because they are beggars. If they don't give allegiance to the king how will they be fed? It was the same principle that led the Zoroastrian priests to try to strike terms with

Omar. Even now the Parsis will support whoever is in power—first Jadavji Rana, then the British, and now the Indian government. They are opportunists, just like our Brahmanas. Vasistha, who was a Rishi, cared nothing for money, fame, or any other such worldly prize; but he did understand that discretion is the better part of valor. He followed Vishvamitra's lead and eventually he even became the guru of a group of *dasyus*: the Zoroastrians!"

"You don't have much value for Brahmanas, do you? Haven't they done any good at all?"

"I draw a distinction between the real Brahmana and the Brahmana by birth. Listen to this Sanskrit *shloka* (verse): 'By birth everyone is a *shudra* ("one who performs laborious work"), by *samskaras* you become a *dvija* (a "twice-born"), by learning you become a *vipra* ("one who shakes with ecstasy"), and by knowing the Absolute Reality of the Brahman you become a *brahmana*. I bow down again and again to those true Brahmanas, the knowers of the Absolute. It is they who have made India a spiritual powerhouse."

"But you don't seem to care much for *Adi* (the original) Shankaracharya."

"Although the original Shankaracharya was a famous philosopher and evangelist of Vedanta, he was still only a *jnani* (a knower of Reality). He was not a *vijnani*, a Siddha. Although he was a great man he did commit some blunders."

"Everyone makes mistakes."

"Yes, but everyone does not set out to change the world. At first Shankaracharya was afraid of Ma. He preached that Shakti was to be rejected and only *Shaktiman*, the Controller of Shakti, the Ultimate Absolute, was to be worshipped. He somehow forgot that it is utterly impossible for *Shaktiman* to exist without Shakti. Ma had to teach him some hard lessons, in Kashmir and Mithila—remember the Mandan Mishra episode?—before he could realize this."

"What happened in Kashmir?" When Shankaracharya went to Mithila to challenge the knowledgeable Mandan Mishra to a debate he was on the point of winning when Mandan Mishra's wife insisted that Shankaracharya debate her as well. She began to speak on sex, a subject about which the celibate-since-birth Shankaracharya knew nothing; he had to plead for a recess to learn about it. Leaving his physical body in a cave he used his astral body to reanimate the physical body of a recently deceased king. He then used that body to learn all about sex with the willing help of the women in that king's harem, who thought their liege had risen from the dead. After he had collected enough knowledge Shankaracharya departed the old king's body, re-inhabited his own, and returned to Mithila to complete Mandan Mishra's defeat. But Mandan Mishra's wife got the last laugh when she reminded Shankaracharya that he had taken a vow of celibacy. Because he taught that only consciousness is real it was his consciousness that had taken that vow.



But in order to win the debate he had enjoyed sex with his consciousness, albeit in another body. Thus he had broken his vow.

“Well, Shankaracharya was touring around in Kashmir, preaching his doctrine of non-duality and saying all sorts of wrong things about shakti. Now, Kashmir is a stronghold of Tantra, one of Ma’s chief haunts. The very word *Kashmir* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *Kshira Bhavani* (‘Ma’s Milk’), which is the snow that falls there. Shankaracharya was playing with fire when he went there to insult Ma.

“One morning as he was about to begin his talks an old woman came up to him and said, ‘My son, quit this slander of Shakti; were you not born from a woman?’ When he started to preach to her she disappeared.

“At noon the same thing happened, but with a middle-aged woman; he ignored her too. In the evening, a young girl came to him—notice how She has been getting younger with each appearance—and told him, ‘Great Sage, if you don’t stop defaming Shakti you are headed for big trouble.’ Still he ignored her—until he developed a sudden, intense case of diarrhea which lasted until he woke up out of his stupor. What was Ma to do? She had tried to persuade him to change, but when he refused she realized that he was set in his ways and that only a good karmic purge would do. After taking all this strong medicine that Ma had to dish out to him Shankaracharya finally learned his lesson. Now the Shri Chakra, the greatest *yantra* of Shakti, is worshipped in all his monasteries.

“But God wasn’t finished with Shankaracharya yet! Next Lord Shiva took His turn with him. Shankaracharya was bathing one day in the city of Banaras, which is Shiva’s home, when Shiva took the form of a *chandala* (‘dog eater’; the lowest of the low) and splashed some water on Shankaracharya. No Brahmana likes to be touched by an outcaste or by anything that has touched an outcaste, and Shankaracharya said testily, ‘Oh chandala! Take care of where you splash!’

“The chandala said, ‘Maharaj, of what should I take care? You teach that the world and everything in it, including our physical bodies, are unreal. The touch of that water on your flesh must therefore be equally unreal.’

“Shankaracharya was momentarily taken aback by this answer, but then he recovered and said, ‘I was speaking not of your body but of your samskaras.’

“To this the chandala replied, ‘If my samskaras reside in my body how can they be any more real than it is? And besides, are we not bathing in the *Ganga* (the River Ganges), whose waters remove all sin? If this is true its waters must negate my evil samskaras as soon as they touch me.’

“All of a sudden Shankaracharya realized with Whom he was talking, and fell at the chandala’s feet. Shiva had taught him yet another good lesson.

Shankaracharya was still discriminating on the basis of purity and impurity, and Lord Shiva showed him that the real purity is internal.”

“Which I suppose is one reason why Lord Shiva drinks poison.”

“Yes. Lord Shiva drinks poison, but never lets it fall lower than his throat. That way He is always in perfect control of the poison’s effects. Lord Shiva is called *Nilakantha* (‘Blue-Throat’) because all the poison He has consumed has turned His throat blue. Do you know the name of the poison He drank on the occasion of the churning of the Ocean of Milk?”

“*Halahala*.”

“Which is a word composed of two other words: *hala* and *ahala*.”

“Which basically mean ‘shaking’ and ‘nonshaking.’

“Right. Mahakala kills you by shaking you—shaking your Kundalini’s self-identification with your body and mind. If you could remain unshaken under all circumstances you would never need to die. Aghoris take intoxicants to teach themselves how to remain unshaken. If you hallucinate or lose control in any other way when you take an intoxicant know that the intoxicant has ‘shaken’ you. *Halna nahi* (‘never get shook’) should become your mantra.

“The best way to avoid being ‘shook’ is to follow the path of bhakti. Shankaracharya was a jnani. He knew how to do a few things, which is nice, but he forgot that God knows how to do all things. Isn’t it better to surrender to God and let God take care of everything? When Mirabai was given poison by her husband she first offered it to her beloved Krishna, Who transmuted that poison into nectar. *That* is the way to live your life, the way that Baba Chandal Das lived his.”

“Baba Chandal Das?! The ‘Servant of the Dog-Eater’ Baba?”

“Yes, Baba Chandal Das was the great devotee of Lord Shiva in His *chandala* form. Can anything be low to a dog-eater? When this saint would arrive somewhere he would shout to the Lord, ‘Baba Chandal Das! My bhakti, Your shakti—Your inspiration, my words—that’s how my work gets done! Baba Chandal Das!’

“Baba Chandal Das was the real thing. But Shankaracharya was not Baba Chandal Das and only learned a little from what Lord Shiva as *chandala* could have taught him. Shankaracharya’s fundamental error was to spend his life moving about in India defeating people in debate.”

“How so?”

“He taught *Brahmam sat, jagan mithya*—the Absolute is true, the Relative is false. But if the Relative is false and you are debating in the Relative you are just raising falsehoods to defeat falsehoods. What is the use in that? Moreover, if as he taught there is only one Reality of which everyone is a part then who is debating whom? Can the One debate with the One?”

“Uh, well, no. But at least Shankaracharya wrote a number of beautiful hymns, like the *Saundarya Lahari* and the *Bhaja Govindam*.”

“Yes, he wrote beautifully, and I appreciate his work. But was he fully aware of the implications of what he wrote? Take just one example: he wrote, ‘Bad sons are sometimes born, but there is no such thing as a bad mother.’ Esoterically, this is quite true. Reverse *atma* (soul) and you get *mata* (mother). The Atma or Soul never leaves the body as long as it is alive; in fact, the body only lives because the Atma is within. This makes the Atma a good mother. Her son is the body, which is always a bad son because it is always getting embroiled in the *samsara*. But no matter what evil thing the body does its mother the Soul never forsakes Her child. Only a physical mother can be a bad mother. A woman who has not realized the Ma within her is a bad mother. So in the mundane sense Shankaracharya was wrong in saying there is no such thing as a bad mother. In Kali Yuga there are bad mothers everywhere, though bad sons are still more common than bad mothers.”

“I’m not sure that I see your point here.”

“My point is this: The writer of that verse was himself a terrible son. Shankaracharya was still a young boy when he wanted to run away from home and take the vows of *sannyasa*, renunciation of the world. His mother naturally refused him permission to go out and ramble about the world. Any real mother will feel protective of her child, and Shankaracharya’s mother was a good mother.

“But Shankaracharya was determined to leave, and decided on a different course of action. He had been sent into the world for the specific purpose of establishing the orders of *sannyasa*, and he had been born with certain siddhis to assist him in this work. One day when he and his mother were down on the banks of the river he used his siddhis to trick her. He created an illusory crocodile which gripped his leg firmly and began to drag him into the river. You know the ferocity of crocodiles.

“Shankaracharya called out to his mother in mock fright as the fake crocodile tugged him down, ‘Ma! Ma! Save me! Give me permission to take *sannyasa* and then I can be freed! Otherwise I am doomed!’ Can you imagine the intensity of the terror that attacked his mother in that moment? It was like a knife being pushed into her chest and slowly rotated in her heart. She had no choice; she gave him permission, and off he went.”

“So he deluded her, which sounds a lot like what Yuddhisthira did to his guru. But what was Shankaracharya supposed to do? He had to go and fulfill his mission, didn’t he?”

“But did he need to cheat his own mother in order to achieve his purpose?” There were other ways in which he could have made her agree. It was

he who decided to force the issue, to have things his way; that made this act his personal karma. And look what has happened because of this evil karma! His followers have imitated his example, and from Shankaracharya’s time onwards most of these followers have been bad sons, and cowards. Because they are afraid to meet the world on its own terms they hide from it behind their saffron robes. What was the use of Shankaracharya’s siddhis? They got him what he wanted in the short run but tarnished the results of his life’s work in the long run. This is the difference between a *jnani* and a *vijnani*. Let this be a lesson to you: Unless you are very, very cautious the use of siddhis may have consequences that can persist for centuries or even millennia.”

Dusk was falling as Harshbhai appeared at the door to end our afternoon of private audience. As I listened to this “spiritual child” describe to Vimalananda his marriage plans for his daughters I reflected on the siddhi warning. Here was Vimalananda, judiciously employing his many siddhis to keep slowly, slowly disentangling himself from his *rnanubandhanas* with people like Harshbhai. Trying simultaneously to keep from losing his skin and to avoid generating any new karmas as he dispensed with his expiring ones, Vimalananda lived with an *elan* and a *joie de vivre* that could only arise from his moment-by-moment recollection of the imminence of death. Love of the Deathless was the root from which blossomed his love of we who are doomed to die, and I found that the deeper I probed his love the less of a bottom I could find to it.

## chapter seven **REPAY**

OUR GREATEST TINGLE during the Spring 1979 Bombay Race Meeting was the announcement of a blessed event: the debut in our world of Stoney's first foal, a colt whom Vimalananda promptly named Redstone. The spring's most unusual incident, however, occurred midseason when Vimalananda felt obliged to exercise yet another of his siddhis to deal with Behram, the husband of Shernaz and father of Arzoo. He had unexpectedly and inopportunistically arrived in Poona from Iran just in time for Navroz, the ancient Persian New Year's Day which many Indian Zoroastrians still celebrate.

Vimalananda hurried to Poona a few days after Behram's arrival and summoned me to Shernaz's place. I arrived there to find him sitting in Shernaz's front room, smoking and remonstrating with her. Seeing me he smiled with some cynicism and said, "What a life I lead! Is it my job to take responsibility for everybody's evil karmas? If you knew this family's whole history you will know what I am up against. Here is Behram, a boozier and womanizer, who used to spend all his money on himself and beat his wife if she asked for any. When it came to the stage that he had decided to desert Shernaz and the children I lost my temper. I came here when he was out and told Shernaz to give me two matchsticks, which I tied together with the help of a mantra. Then I told her, 'Take these. If Berham can ever leave you as long as you have these I will cut my own throat.' That was more than twenty years ago and they are still together—and so are the matchsticks." Shernaz proudly showed them to me.

"Times were tough then, so I told Shernaz, 'Every day when you go to the little corner where you pray you will find ten rupees. That money is meant for food for you and your children. As long as you don't misuse it you will continue to receive it, every day of your life. The day you start to act funny that will be it.'

“For years ten rupees appeared daily. She used that money to help keep the wolf away from her door. Sad to say, though—and I’m saying it in front of her—her intellect eventually became perverted . . .”

“No, it wasn’t that way at all, I . . .”

“Yes, perverted,” he insisted as Shernaz strove to defend herself, “I know what I am saying; don’t try to deny it. Did you or did you not start to waste that money on liquor, meat, cinemas, and other such trifles?”

“But that was all for the children . . .”

He cut her short: “But you were told it was for food, weren’t you?” But she continued to try to justify her actions, and Vimalananda, seeing her uncontrite, overrode her and continued: “One day there was no money there. She came to me to complain but I told her: ‘I warned you. If you have bungled I can’t help it. Now you please do without.’”

“And what about your *maasi* (maternal aunt),” he said to Shernaz, annoyed, “what about that dog that I gave her? When she and her husband,” he said to me, resuming his narrative tone, “were passing through a difficult period I gave them a small dog. So long as the dog remained in their house their fortunes skyrocketed.” Back to Shernaz: “And what about the day your *maasi* cut her wrists? It was only because the dog set up a howl that people were drawn there and saved her.”

Back to me: “Unfortunately she or her husband made a mistake one day, and the dog disappeared. It ran away and was never seen again. Then she came to me for another dog. But I told her, ‘You don’t get *halvah* (an Indian sweet) whenever you please. You had your chance, but you were not meant for it. Now forget it. Anyway, your work was done; you got your prosperity. Now hold onto it.’”

“After I joined the matchsticks together for Shernaz, Behram got a steady though low-paying job and started sending money to his family. Eventually he went to the Middle East, where he started to earn lots of money. Now he has just landed here and has announced that he will never go back to work. He feels it is time for him to relax and live off his children’s earnings.”

“But the rest of the family doesn’t agree with him! Ask Shernaz, Arzoo and Sohrab and they will all say, ‘Send him back!’ So now what should I do? If I don’t interfere he will become comfortable here and their lives will become hell—and I hate to see that happen to any of my ‘children.’ And if I do interfere, well, there’ll be some karma involved. We’ll see what happens.”

Our talk then turned to horses and courses until Behram made his appearance. That night we drank Behram’s Scotch. The next night Vimalananda, who had carried a bottle of Scotch with him from Bombay, brought his bottle over to Behram’s house to offer him drinks in celebration of his return to India. Af-

ter a couple of drinks Behram’s tongue began to wag freely as he explained all about his plans for his retired life. He was in the midst of describing his plans for his new life in India: “Sohrab has a job, Arzoo will be out of school and then can get one, and we should be able to live comfortably on what they earn . . .” when all at once Anjaneya entered Vimalananda’s body and gave that poor wretch a withering glance. Behram stopped short in mid-sentence, looking dazed and confused. After a few moments he pulled himself together and said, “No, no, my children should continue as they have been. I will go back and see that they enjoy life at my expense. I am proud to be able to take care of them.”

All of us spectators were simultaneously stunned and pleased, but we took great care to show no emotion whatsoever lest Behram change his mind yet again. Vimalananda left for Bombay the next day, and it was only a couple of weeks later, after Behram had departed for the Middle East and Vimalananda had again appeared in Poona, that anyone even dared to mention the events of that evening.

Vimalananda was bemused by the whole episode: “What an unexpected turn of mind, to have him change his tune in mid-sentence, eh? Isn’t it amazing what Anjaneya can do?”

“Are you sure you didn’t put something in his drink?” I asked suspiciously. “It was so sudden, such an abrupt reversal of plan.”

“Are you talking out of your wits, Robby? You were drinking from the self-same bottle; you tell me. Was there something in the Scotch?”

“You know very well what I mean.”

“Well, nothing physical was added to the Scotch; what was added came from elsewhere. The nice thing is that Behram thinks he changed his mind on his own. That pampers his ego and makes it less likely that he will change his mind again any time soon. He’s the kind of guy that likes to make a decision and stick with it, even if it is the wrong decision. Tamasic people are like that.”

Shernaz then began to thank Vimalananda profusely, but before she could pick up steam he derailed her: “Anjaneya did the job, didn’t he? You’d better thank him instead of me. But now that your work has been done it’s time to have some fun. Let’s celebrate! If you had gone to some sadhu or fakir to do your work he would have taken your money and had you bow down to him and told you to leave. But I am not a sadhu or fakir. I don’t think you’ll ever run into any sadhu or fakir who is such a toy to be played with.”

“So is that what you are,” I asked, pleased, “a toy?”

“For those who love me I am. Everyone in the world is miserable, all due to the effects of their karmas. Why not try to lighten things up?” At Vimalananda’s instance we then enjoyed some drinks, helped him cook a delicious dinner, and ate together in the midst of what he called a “laughing spree.”

Poona allowed Vimalananda time for repose and enjoyment, for fewer people came to disturb him there than when he held court in Bombay. He thus had more occasion to “lighten things up” in the lives of his local loved ones. He delivered his tales with impeccable timing, and his jokes were always in good taste even when they were vulgar. Many of them came from the classics: “Sanskrit is a *samskaric bhasha* (‘well-bred language’),” he would say. “Even its dirty jokes are refined. Here is one: Once a young man wanted to make a living in the king’s court as a poet. No one values poets nowadays, but back then kings made careers in poetry possible. When he arrived at the gate that led into the king’s palace, however, the young man found that he never could seem to catch the king’s attention. The monarch was always surrounded by big important pundits who did not like any competition and so kept the king perpetually entertained.

“After a few days of this disappointment the young man became frustrated, and wrote on the wall at the king’s doorway a bit of Sanskrit verse. I’ll translate it for you: ‘The king’s door is like a vulva, and the pundits are like a penis. They enter and exit over and over again, enjoying great bliss, whereas I, like the testicles, must remain outside, eternally squeezed between the two.’ Note the hidden meanings as well. By comparing the king’s entranceway to a vagina he also meant that the king was being ‘screwed’ by the ambitious pundits. By comparing the pundits to a penis he was suggesting that they had all the intelligence of a pizzle; and so on.

“When the king emerged from his palace the next day and saw this bit of doggerel he was struck by its sophistication, and asked who had written it. When the young man was produced in front of him he congratulated him on his sagacity, and welcomed him into his court as a full-fledged poet.”

Another favorite ‘anecdote’ of Vimalananda’s, which is even today current in Banaras, addresses the important question of, “How can we know that the famous poet Kalidasa was the he-man of his time?” The answer: Kalidasa was one day wandering partly clothed along the banks of the Kshipra River when he came across a bathing beauty. Embarrassed, the girl quickly covered her breasts with one arm and her pubic region with her other hand. Simultaneously overcome with both passion and inspiration, Kalidasa composed a poem in a flash: “O fortunate young woman, who can cover with but a hand her nakedness. O unfortunate Kalidasa, who even after grasping himself with both fists finds that two fingersworth yet remain to be concealed.” Wide-eyed at her vision of his manhood the girl cried, “O my yes!” We thus have her testimony that he was the he-man of his time.

Vimalananda’s teasing was also refined, particularly when he turned his truly unrivaled linguistic abilities to its service: “Once I lived in a place where

my neighbor woman, whose name was Dhani, used to do nothing but gossip all day long. I used to call her ‘Mrs. Wagging Tongue.’ At first I ignored her, but finally I got so fed up with her that I decided to teach her a lesson. You know how much I like to sing. Well, on that day I composed a new song: *Dhani gappa mare, sa ni gappa mare?* (‘Dhani is gossiping, why is she gossiping?’). And I began to sing it loudly.

“When Dhani heard it she confronted me. She asked me what I thought I was doing. I told her innocently, ‘All I am doing are my vocal exercises. You know how to sing an Indian scale, don’t you? The scale goes *sa re ga ma pa dhi ni sa*. I am singing nothing beyond those syllables.’ And then I began to sing even louder and more ardently, *Dha ni ga pa ma re, sa ni ga pa ma re? Dha ni ga pa ma re*, and so on, until it was obviously that she understood me. I had no trouble with her gossiping thereafter.”

Vimalananda also liked to demonstrate that ordinary speech can also work wonders when delivered judiciously: “On one occasion, as Dr. Martand and Arzoo and I were driving outside Poona, we saw so many grapes growing alongside the road that we became hungry for some. We stopped where we saw a heavy-set man working in his vineyard, and Dr. Martand insisted on approaching him for us. But when he tried to show off his knowledge by telling the man how unhealthy he looked the fellow told him, ‘Get out of here! I won’t sell you anything!’

“Then I told Arzoo to go address the farmer as *pahalwan* (‘wrestler’), and to speak to him sweetly. When she did he told her, ‘Not only can you have some grapes, my girl, you can have them for free. But don’t give any to him,’ he said, pointing at Dr. Martand, ‘he can’t have any at all!’”

Vimalananda obligingly placed his talents for communication at my service when during June and July of 1979 I busied myself with my mother, who had come all the way to India to see for herself my condition and to scrutinize the crowd I had fallen in with. Vimalananda, who regularly reminded me of my rnanubandhana with my parents and the need to fulfill it gracefully, acted the part of host to perfection. Training all his powers of persuasion on her to convince her of the worth of my studies, he first saw to it that her Bombay tour was a red-letter one, and then set us up with his friends and associates in other parts of India. She and I travelled together pleasingly for five weeks, capping our circuit with a last visit with Vimalananda. She departed confident that I was indeed in good hands, and I could then reoccupy myself with racing.

There was no laughter in Repay’s life that summer, for he had lost his gonads and was now expected to start earning his corn bill. He had dropped down into Class V-B during the period when he was quaffing semen, but now that he was not preoccupied with his penis his interest in racing im-

proved dramatically. By August 1979 he had become fit enough for a hard gallop, which Vimalananda and I drove down to Poona to watch. We had Tehmul schedule it before dawn, that we might watch Repay work without betraying his fine fettle to any tipsters or gamblers. We followed the same procedure at every morning gallop: a swing by the stables to inform Tehmul of our arrival and to make a quick check of the horse before he set hoof to track, a sprint to the stands to take split timings for each furlong (200 meters) of the run on our stopwatches, and a sprint back to the stables to check the horse's wind and legs as he highstepped his way back in. When the grandstands at a racecourse are empty and a single horse flies down the track bunching and releasing his muscles in the exhilaration of the sprint, you can hear otherwise inaudible sounds that can be remarkably diagnostic: the whoosh of the galloper's body, the thud of his hooves, even sometimes the grunt of his breathing. On this occasion we both heard and saw Repay do an outstanding job, and no one but us seemed to notice him. The chances for a quick coup seemed to multiply before our eyes.

Too enthused over our prospects to immure ourselves immediately in the hotel, we breakfasted idly at the Club, and then reported again to the stables. It was a beautiful forenoon at the Poona racecourse, a day to laze now that the early work was done, and Dr. Lobo, a friendly chap who was one of the official Turf Club veterinarians, was sitting in Tehmul's yard. As we chatted Dr. Lobo, who knew a little of Vimalananda's reputation, delivered up a challenge by saying that he doubted that all the stories that people told about yoga could be true. Vimalananda glanced at me and I shrugged my eyebrows. Then Vimalananda asked Dr. Lobo to participate in an experiment. He asked the vet to feel his pulse, and while the man was holding his arm Vimalananda went on and on about 'the many unusual things that happen here in India.' The vet was a man with a dark complexion. When I saw his face become rapidly pallid I knew Vimalananda must have stopped his heart. This being a tremendous strain on his body I waited only a few seconds before wigwagging to him to quit. He took pity on me and complied, and as he continued to chatter away cheerily his pulse normalized and the color drained back into Dr. Lobo's face.

In short order the vet found some excuse to depart, and after he left Vimalananda laughed in triumph. I objected, perfunctorily: "Was the showing off really worth the exertion?" He dismissed me with, "His reaction was priceless! It was worth it just to see how funky he became. Now he will not prattle on about what yogis can or cannot do!"

Racing in Poona was much more relaxed than racing in Bombay. For one thing, the track is not an island of green in a sea of skyscrapers. In Poona

broad tree-lined streets cluster about the racecourse and in the east the Empress Gardens offers a thickly arboreal vista. For another, Vimalananda being an outsider in Poona had only a few chums to chat with among the local racegoers. One of the more notable was Poona's premier Chinese dentist, Dr. Wang, who came like clockwork every week with his wife. We appreciated his occasional work on our teeth and would always smilingly offer whatever information we had when he would smilingly ask which horse we favored.

But the Wangs did not sit with us, for in Poona there are but two enclosures: the Members-cum-First and the Second. When Mr. Lafange had been our trainer we sat just above the Members' boxes, on benches which though outfitted with green cushions were benches nonetheless. With our switch to Tehmul our status improved, for he had a friend whose box was almost never used. We now arrived on the Poona racing scene like royalty circulating among commoners and seated ourselves among the hoity-toity rather than with the hoi polloi. To the right and below our box was the Indian gentleman who had married his European nurse; a bit further down sat the Maharaja of Gwalior. Far in front perched the wanton Bapsi, who cuckolded her seemingly-impotent husband Porus with whomever she could. The box to our immediate left was usually occupied by the face and the cigar of the delightful Maharaja of Mudhol, our favorite among the racing gentry, with whom we spent many a pleasant evening over drinks and dinner after a rousing afternoon at the track.

Perhaps the least aesthetic of all our new neighbors were the obese Mr. and Mrs. Kumar and their obese daughter. They wanted nothing to do with us po' folk, which made me quailless about dubbing them "The Three Pigs." Mr. Kumar's had a way of perpetually rejamming a gigantic cigar into his mouth which wonderfully reinforced, like the apple wedged into the maw of a suckling pig destined for the oven, his own porcineness. Even Vimalananda had to agree that they were three of the most hog-faced humans that he had ever seen. Rumor had it that they made most of their money in "leather currency," which is a euphemism for the flesh trade. It was easy to believe this to be true of the cruel-mouthed Mrs. Kumar, a sow who looked hungry enough to cannibalize the runts from her litters.

We enjoyed many a joke at the expense of the Three Pigs, but there is justice in the world, alas, and soon it became evident that Mr. Pig's beady little eyes had homed in on Repay. Kumar was no fool, and he could see that Tehmul and Vimalananda were cooking up a masala for the first win of Repay's career. Kumar had access to vast sums of money, with which he could drive Repay's odds down with or without us; this made it a case of "do we want the porker inside the tent pissing out or outside the tent pissing in?" Tehmul bro-

kered an agreement and Kumar did all the betting. When Repay scooted comfortably home in September as a 7-to-1 outsider I sat silently watching when Kumar arrived at the stables after the race, plunked down our share of the winnings (about \$10,000), and left to tend to his other “investments”—or perhaps to dip his snout down into his dinner trough. His profit would have been at least ten times as much.

I opened my jaws after Kumar had departed: “Repay did a pretty good job of ‘repaying,’ didn’t he?”

“Why do you think I agreed to name him ‘Repay?’” replied my contented mentor. “I knew that he had that sort of rnanubandhana with me, that he would be able to amply requite his debt, to redeem his pledge. I had no fear of that; I was only uncertain of when it would happen.

“And you’re not sorry Kumar got in on the deal?”

“Not at all. Remember, always distribute your karmas! Sharing your good fortune creates ‘partners in karma.’ It spreads the karmas around, which reduces your own burden significantly. It is better to share your profits with good people, but if you can’t have good people then use whoever God sends you—within reason.”

Back at the hotel redemption continued to occupy his mind: “We have been talking casually about ‘repaying’ and ‘redemption,’ but do you know what a serious matter it is to redeem? Probably the best blessing, the best gift of all, is the gift of fearlessness. When you give fearlessness you tell that person, ‘Look, you must endure your karmas yourself, but I can give you the courage to endure them.’ In fact, there used to be a sadhu in Girnar named *Abhayananda* (‘Bliss of Fearlessness’) who was ready to give fearlessness to anyone. He didn’t last long, though; how could he? Such behavior interferes with the Divine Plan.

“Fearlessness is a great gift, but it is not redemption. To redeem is to say, ‘I will bear your karmas for you’—that is the highest. Very few can do this, or even want to do it. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who was a truly great saint, only took someone else’s karmas onto himself in three cases; only three and no more. No, in all history there has only been one Redeemer: my Jesus. And He had to pay very dearly for taking all those karmas; He had to be crucified.

“A few years ago the Pope came to Bombay. Imagine that! I went with Roshni’s mother to see what would happen. There was a mammoth crowd. The Pope drove up in a Mercedes, got out, raised his arms and said: ‘Repeat after me: That which should have been done by me has not been done by me; that which should not have been done by me has been done by me.’ We all repeated it. Then he said, ‘By the power of the Holy See I absolve you of all your sins.’ Roshni’s mother was very impressed by this drama. But does the Pope

really think that it is so easy to absolve everyone’s bad karmas? When Jesus tried to do the same thing for the Jews He died a most terrible death. This sort of painless absolution of sins is all a delusion, as of course is the infallibility of the Pope. Were the Popes who ordered the Crusades or the Inquisition infallible? Or the ones who ordered young boys to be castrated just because the church wanted some sopranos? Was any of this Jesus’s idea? I think not!”

“Jesus was the One Who could say, ‘Come unto me.’ He was the only One Who ever could say, ‘Come, I will suffer for your sins. Forget them, and live a new life.’ One look from those eyes of His and you melt completely; all Rajasic and Tamasic qualities gone! These Christians harp on sin, sin, sin, and by teaching sin they perpetuate it. They have forgotten the teachings of Jesus. Jesus said, ‘Forget your sins! Give them to Me, and I will wipe the slate clean. You start over, and never return to them.’ And what agonies He had to endure for taking so many karmas over onto himself; my God! But He endured them willingly. Not even Krishna did what Jesus did, and that is why I will ever love Jesus. He was the real thing.”

Rajas and Tamas represent respectively an overwillingness to act and an underwillingness to act. Should both these tendencies disappear from the mind nothing would remain but that state of quiescent clarity known as *Sattva*. I too love Jesus dearly, and my own emotions rose to my eyes as I watched the image of His smiling face coalesce in my mind. How deep was His clarity, to sustain Him throughout His ordeal! I asked, “Didn’t Jesus also die on the cross to teach us to bear each other’s karmas in the same way that He bore ours, even to a reduced degree? After all, if you love your neighbor as you love yourself, and if everyone is really an emanation of God, then you are ultimately me, and when I take on your karmas I am effectively saving myself.”

“That is precisely what so many great Christian saints have done. They have worshipped Jesus by giving back to Him the gift that He gave to us: the gift of compassion. It’s so wonderful!

“Jesus could create such a marvelous play, such an unprecedented lila, because He was the emanation of a certain Rishi. All the avatars of Vishnu, like Rama and Krishna, emanated from Rishis; in fact, Jesus and Krishna emanated from the same Rishi. But look at the difference in their play! Krishna was *Gopala*, the ‘Protector of the Cows.’ ‘Gopala’ also means ‘He Who Restrains His Senses,’ and this is what Krishna taught to His devotees. Jesus, on the other hand, was the Good Shepherd.”

“Does this mean that if Krishna was the *Gopala* Jesus was the *Meshapala*, the ‘Protector of the Sheep?’”

“Yes, I suppose so.” He laughed, momentarily nonplused. A rare pleasure! My *bon mot* had struck home. Then he shot back, “But why Shepherd? Be-

cause of the sheep mentality of most people. Like sheep people easily become lost in the wilderness of the world; that's why they need protection. Jesus is prepared to go out into the wilderness to save those sheep, to search for them until He finds them and carries them home with Him. This is why there is no need for intelligence in Jesus's religion, which is one of pure love. In fact, you can hamper your progress in your sadhana of Jesus if you use your intelligence. You simply have to be ready to follow wherever Jesus leads you, in perfect faith that as long as you follow Him you can never go astray.

"The main difficulty with everyone is that they have no faith. Jesus used to complain about this all the time. One way in which animals are better than humans is that they have no conscious self-interest; they do not anguish all the time about what happened in the past and what is yet to come. Humans forget that God is doing everything for us already so there is no need to prepare anything. It is only because of our ill fate that any of us worry. If we didn't worry we would be perennially happy, for we would accept whatever God chose to offer us according to our karmas. But the weight of our karmas interferes with our happiness. It causes us to plan and anticipate, and to experience anxiety and worry. Look at how we planned Repay's run and worried over its outcome, when we could have just relaxed and let God do His work. This is why a saint is the only truly happy person. A real saint has gone beyond worry.

"Here is a question for you: Millions of people bathe in the external River Ganga every day. All the authorities—the saints, the holy books—say that bathing in the Ganga washes away all evil karmas. If this is true, why hasn't everyone who bathes in the Ganga become enlightened by now, since you become 'enlightened' when your karmic burden is lightened?"

"Good question. I don't think I know why."

"Well, let's assume that you bathe in the Ganga and come out perfectly clean of karma. But as soon as you step out onto the riverbank you start to perform new karmas again. *Voila!* There you are, right back in the soup. Which is why there is no escape from the Law of Karma until you change your consciousness. Though we humans imagine that we are in charge of our destinies, fate is far more complicated than you can even imagine."

He settled back with his Scotch while *ghazals* emanated from a well-worn recording of the famous vocalist Begum Akhtar, and began again: "Even Rishis can be bewildered by Fate. Consider the case of Parashara Rishi, who was an authority on Jyotish, a subject which is nothing more nor less than the knowledge of the play of the Nine Planets. One day as Parashara walked through a fishing village on the River Yamuna a realization struck him like a flash of lightning. He saw that a child conceived at a precise instant on that day would become one of the greatest of sages, and a redactor of the Vedas. A

Rishi can give birth to thousands of beings simply by wiping the sweat off his forehead, but Fate perverted Parashara's mind. He decided instead that he should enjoy sex with a girl himself and father a child through copulation. That this would cause him to lose the fruits of centuries of his penance did not occur to him at the time.

"As Fate would have it a beautiful young fishergirl named *Matsyagandha* ('Fishy Odor') was standing nearby. She was not an ordinary girl; her father was a king and her mother was a celestial damsel who had taken the form of a fish as the result of a curse. She was called *Matsyagandha* because her body smelled fishy."

"Only to be expected if your mother was a fish. But I read that her real name was *Satyavati*."

"Maybe so, but I call her *Matsyagandha*. Parashara hailed her and explained his plan without any hesitation. Back then people were not as embarrassed about such things as they are today. The girl readily agreed to his proposal, thinking, 'To become the mother of a Rishi's child is a rare blessing!' But she told him, 'It would not be good to enjoy sex right here in the village. Let us go out onto the water.' So they got into a boat and went out into the middle of the water, where Parashara created an island for their love-making. Then when Parashara approached her she said, 'The sun is witnessing our play. Please request him to turn away.' So darkness fell at the precise moment when the child had to be conceived.

"After their loveplay was over Parashara was pleased, and granted *Matsyagandha* the boon of permanent body fragrance. Thereafter she was called *Yojanagandha* ('She Whose Fragrance Can Be Smelled at a Distance of Eight Miles'). The child, who was born the same day that he was conceived, was *Krishna* ('Dark-Complexioned,' due to the darkness at his conception) *Dvipayana* ('Born on an Island') *Vyasa* ('The Complier'), who is commonly known as *Veda Vyasa* ('Veda-Arranger'). Besides reworking the Vedas *Vyasa* composed a number of literary masterpieces, including the great epic of more than 100,000 verses known as the *Mahabharata*, and the sublime story of Lord Krishna that is the *Shrimad Bhagavata*. If *Vyasa* had never been born, none of these stories would ever have appeared in our world. But isn't there something strange about all this?"

I drew a blank.

"Why did he ever get the idea to write these stories down? Does a Rishi have any use for the written word? None whatsoever; he always prefers to use *Para Vani*—telepathic speech. But *Vyasa* was the son of a Shudra girl; Shudras are mired in the awareness of the physical. It's natural; they have to toil hard to earn a living, and their minds focus on their toil. The only reason that



the thought of a physical representation of his knowledge even entered Vyasa's mind was this mundane influence on his intellect. Vyasa was born as he was because Nature wanted that all this should be written down for the benefit of those of us who live in Kali Yuga. Parashara's intellect was perverted precisely because Nature needed the offspring of a Brahmana and a Shudra to redact the Vedas and create the *Mahabharata* and the *Shrimad Bhagavata*. Isn't Nature wonderful?

"This is another reason why the caste system is no longer applicable in its original form. Even today no orthodox Brahmana will accept into his family any son of a Brahmana father and a Shudra mother—but that was Vyasa's parentage. And what he accomplished no other Brahmana could accomplish. Does this make him better or worse than an orthodox Brahmana? Neither; he is what he is, a distinguished immortal.

"Vyasa was once asked to father children on two princesses. He agreed, and like his father before him decided to use sexual intercourse instead of some other method to fulfill his commitment. Why did he prefer physical sex? Because his consciousness was affected, even if minimally, by the fact that he had been born as the result of a sexual act. Look at how deep and long-lasting the effects of sexual karma can be! Unfortunately, Vyasa's preference for sex created some unintentioned karmas of its own. The first princess was so terrified by Vyasa's imposing demeanor that she paled when he embraced her. This caused Pandu, her son, to be born pale. The second couldn't endure Vyasa's intense aura and closed her eyes, which caused her son Dhritarashtra to be born blind."

"Was it that simple?"

"It is that simple when you're dealing with a Rishi. A woman takes a man's shakti when he ejaculates into her, and nourishes that shakti with her own shakti to create a child. When the woman and the man have more or less equal shaktis, as they usually do when they are both humans, their shaktis will have a more or less equal influence on the child that results. But a Rishi is not a human. A Rishi is a super duper who has super shakti, and only a similarly super woman will be able to unite with him as an equal. Any human woman who tries to unite with him will function mainly as the mold into which he pours his shakti. If the woman doesn't open herself to him completely the Rishi's shakti will not penetrate her evenly. The 'mold' will thus not be completely filled, and wherever the shakti doesn't reach there will be a deficiency in the child."

"O.K."

"The first princess was then requested to return to the Rishi for another try at producing a healthy crown prince. But she wanted no more of that, so she

secretly sent her servant girl instead. That girl had no inhibitions, and was so pleased that she was going to enjoy sex with a Rishi that she surrendered herself completely to him. Through her surrender some fragment of Vyasa's super-qualities were transmitted through her into the fetus, who became her son Vidura. These qualities made Vidura clairvoyant from birth."

"Let me get something straight," I interrupted. "The *Mahabharata* war was fought between the five sons of Pandu and the one hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, which means that it was actually fought between two sets of grandsons of Vyasa."

"Precisely."

"My my, a civil war that was really all in the family. No wonder Vyasa had to write the *Mahabharata*; it was a family history."

"Yes, but there's more. One of Pandu's five sons was Yuddhisthira. Another was Arjuna, the great warrior who was Lord Krishna's great friend. Arjuna sired Abhimanyu out of Subhadra, Krishna's sister, and Abhimanyu died in the war because Arjuna had stolen Subhadra. But before his death Abhimanyu had impregnated his wife Uttara with Parikshit, and it is thanks to King Parikshit that we have the *Shrimad Bhagavata*. The *Shrimad Bhagavata* was transmitted to Parikshit by the Suta, who heard it from the great Rishi Shukadeva, who heard it from his father Vyasa."

"Shukadeva being yet another of Vyasa's children."

"He was the most amazing of Vyasa's children, for he was not born from a womb. He escaped the taint of copulation by springing instead from the rubbing of the *arani*, the sticks used to create fire for Vedic sacrifices. This is why he is called *Araniputra* ('Son of the Arani'). Because Shukadeva was not born as the result of sex he did not discriminate according to gender. Celestial damsels would throng to him as he roamed naked in the jungle. They would feel completely relaxed with him because he never showed the slightest trace of awareness of their sexual identity. But if Vyasa approached the women would quickly hide, for they could feel that he saw them in a different way."

"Even though he was also pure-minded."

"Yes, even though he never lusted after them, Vyasa's awareness was ever so slightly sexual, because of his birth. That was enough to make a difference.

"Vyasa created the *Shrimad Bhagavat* for his own pleasure, and for the pleasure of his son Shukadeva. He might never have released it to the world had he not wanted King Parikshit to obtain *moksha* (liberation) by hearing it. Parikshit had been cursed by a Rishi to die by being bitten by a snake. As the king listened to the Suta recite the *Shrimad Bhagavata* for seven days Parikshit released his attachments to the world, and welcomed death when it arrived."

“Why would Vyasa want Parikshit to obtain moksha?”

“Why wouldn’t he? He wanted to wind up the karmas of that branch of his family, and what better way to do it than arrange for his great-great-grandson’s liberation?”

“How would that help the family?”

“Haven’t you been paying attention? If you can help yourself out by doing Pitri Tarpana for your ancestors, you can help your ancestors out even more by becoming liberated. It’s the same sort of thing.”

“Are you saying that Vyasa released the *Shrimad Bhagavata* into the world just to save his great-great-grandson and to improve his family’s karmic pedigree?”

“That was his immediate purpose, but by doing so he also ensured that it would be handed down to posterity.”

“How did that happen?”

“The Suta, who was present when Shukadeva recited it to Parikshit, later retold the *Shrimad Bhagavata* to a group of sages who had assembled in the Naimisharanya. These sages and their disciples were responsible for introducing the *Shrimad Bhagavata* to the rest of the world. You should only read or listen to the *Shrimad Bhagavata* when you are ready to abandon, temporarily or permanently, the mundane outside world, as those sages who had withdrawn from the world into the Naimisharanya did.”

Though the *Naimisharanya* is a forest in North India, some writers have proposed that the word also be read as the ‘forest’ (*aranya*) of ‘blinking’ (*naimisha*), which would refer to the inside of the human body. A sojourn in the Naimisharanya would then imply a turning inward of the normally outward-pointed senses, to heighten awareness of the inner cosmos.

“And like Parikshit,” Vimalananda continued, “you must cultivate your interiority if you hope to enter into the inner, astral world of the *Shrimad Bhagavata*. What does *Parikshit* mean?”

“‘Tested.’” Technically speaking, *parikshit* means “surrounding, extending,” as heaven and earth extend out to surround us, but I knew that Vimalananda was thinking of the word *parikshita*, which means “tested.”

“Exactly. Only when a disciple is completely tested is he eligible to be taught. You should understand from his name that King Parikshit had gone through the grind. He had become thoroughly prepared for the knowledge that was given to him. Anyone who wants to get the real juice out of the *Shrimad Bhagavata* needs to be prepared to self-identify with King Parikshit when they listen to it. When you hear it you need to be able to temporarily ‘become’ Parikshit, which you will only be able to do if you have been painstakingly ‘tested.’”

“So King Parikshit was delivered this wisdom via the Suta. I thought *suta* was just a word that means ‘son.’”

“Suta does mean son, but it also means the metal mercury, a woman after delivery, a charioteer—it has so many meanings. Because it is a Sanskrit word all these meanings must be related. You are a student of Sanskrit; you tell me what these things have in common.”

“Well . . .” I was stuck.

“They are all carriers. They transport essence around in the world until it reaches the point where it can manifest. Think it over.”

“They deliver things? They represent the cosmic courier service?”

“Yes, they deliver. The Suta’s father was the charioteer Romaharshana, who was personally killed by Lord Krishna, seemingly by mistake but in fact as a blessing.”

“How was that?”

“Have you ever heard that ‘the father lives on through the son’?”

“Yes.”

“A child transports the essence of its parents—their genes and chromosomes. Romaharshana was not pure enough to act as a fit vehicle for the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, but when Krishna killed him He purified him. This made Romaharshana’s son pure enough to deliver the *Shrimad Bhagavata* to the world. Romaharshana must have already been quite an advanced soul, otherwise he would not have even been fit to be killed and purified by Krishna Himself. But he was not quite pure enough. What does *romaharshana* mean in Sanskrit?”

“Horripilation; goose flesh; the body hairs stand on end.”

“Which is caused by cold, fear or some other strong stimulation, including spiritual experiences. Romaharshana was highly evolved, but not quite evolved enough to transport this particular shakti.”

“Did Lord Krishna’s act of killing Romaharshana serve as a sort of Pitri Tarpana for the Romaharshana family?”

“Yes, if you want to look at it that way.”

“Well, Romaharshana’s death paved the way for the transmission of the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, which has benefitted millions of people. Some of those benefitted are bound to bless it and its writers, and some percentage of those blessings are bound to flow to those who arranged to ‘transport’ it to us, no? Sort of an ongoing astral royalty payment?”

“I think we can be confident that the *Shrimad Bhagavata* has enormously benefitted everyone who was involved in bringing it to light in our world, and all their ancestors too. It particularly benefitted Parashara, who by siring Vyasa made it all possible. And Parashara certainly needed some benefit, to

help counteract the karma that he incurred by inseminating Matsyagandha. While it was very good for the world that Vyasa was born, it did not do Parashara much good to have enjoyed sex with a Shudra. That act entangled him in the play of her karmas, which were of a pattern quite different from his. These karmas forced Parashara to take birth again to experience the repercussions of his act. Every taint, and especially that of copulation, must be erased.”

“Is copulation such a big taint, then?”

“Do you remember that you once asked me about a certain Vedic sacrifice in which beer is brewed?”

Months had passed but he had not forgotten. “Yes, the Sautramani sacrifice. I had asked you why the ritual text specifies that the barley from which the beer will be brewed must be taken from a eunuch.”

“Here is your answer: The Rishis who created this sacrifice intended the barley to be collected from someone who is a born eunuch, not from a eunuch who has been cut. A natural eunuch has not even been exposed to the energy of sex, much less the experience of copulation. Such a person has the potential to be the living embodiment of the *nirakara tattva* (‘The Principle of Formlessness’), because what is sex about if not the creation of new forms?”

“But even a natural eunuch only has the ‘potential’ to embody formlessness. Didn’t the Rishis expect the sacrificer to locate someone who had realized this formless potential, and not just find any old barley-donating natural eunuch?”

“Exactly! Our Rishis were not fools. What possible use would an ordinary eunuch have been to them? The essence is what counts, not the outer garb.”

“Is this the sort of thing that Jesus was talking about when he talked about someone who makes himself a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven’s sake?” I was thinking of Matthew 19:12.

“Yes, the same sort of thing. And remember that in this context Jesus says that this is not for everyone, but only for those who properly understand it.”

“Maybe for those ‘who have the ears to hear?’”

“And the eyes to see.”

“Oh. . . So—the copulation taint was strong enough to force Parashara to take birth yet again.”

“It was. Unfortunately, Parashara’s personality in his new body was rather dull. His father tried to teach him many things, but he failed. Exasperated, he asked his son, ‘Why can’t you learn anything I try to teach you?’

“The boy answered, ‘I do not know, father. I suppose it must be due to my past karmas.’

“The father got wild on hearing this from his dull-witted son and told him, ‘You had better get out of here and go do Gayatri!’ So the boy went out into the forest.

“Here the father’s intellect had become perverted. How could the boy help it if his past karmas were bad; and what father would begrudge his own son his past faults? Parents are there to forgive, not to curse. But without this order from his father the boy would not have succeeded so quickly. His father probably did not know it, but it was important for Parashara to do sadhana of the sun. Why? Because Parashara had deliberately sent the sun away on that fateful day when he had impregnated Matsyagandha.”

“So even that was a karma?”

“A big karma; you have to be very careful when you play about with the Nine Planets. The boy found himself a good spot and made a hammock of twelve stout ropes made of creepers, braced with three cross ropes. He strung his hammock between two trees and sat on it, with a fire beneath him, repeating the Gayatri Mantra. Every year he cut one of the ropes, so that after eleven years he was balancing on a single strand.

“When the twelve years were almost up he said to himself, ‘If I don’t succeed at perfecting this mantra and obtaining a vision of the sun god at the end of these twelve years there will be nothing to do but put an end to myself.’

“But deities are not cruel; they are really very kind. On the last day of his penance he saw a sadhu approaching him. The sadhu had an unworldly, effulgent glow about him, and the boy realized that the sun himself—*Surya Narayana*—had come to him in human form. He bowed to the sadhu, and Lord Surya said to him, ‘So, my boy, what do you want?’ The boy asked for proficiency in astrology. Why would he ask for this? Both because of his previous expertise in astrology as Parashara—that influence was beginning to re-exert itself—and because who better than the sun to teach astrology?”

“Lord Surya then blessed him, saying, ‘Your name will last as long as the sun and moon exist as the greatest-ever expert in astrology.’ Then he disappeared, and the boy left his place of penance. When he reached his home his remorse-filled father recognized him, and tearfully said, ‘I don’t care if you are a dud or not, please come and embrace me.’ When the boy responded with a beautiful Sanskrit verse his father realized that, yes, he had indeed been doing Gayatri all this time, for Gayatri is the mother of Sanskrit. Over the course of time this boy, now called *Mihiracharya* in honor of his penance (Mihira is one of the names of the sun), became a gem at the king’s court.

“When the king’s son was born the court astrologers were directed to predict his fate. All except Mihira said that he would live long, rule wisely and enjoy his glory. Mihira alone said, ‘The boy will die at age three, on such-and-such a day, at this exact moment, gored to death by a *varaha* (wild boar).’

“The king said, ‘Please, Mihira, everyone else has said something good. Kindly change your prediction.’ Mihira replied, ‘I am sorry, O king, but it will

happen as I have said; that is his fate.'

"The king built a seven-story building and put his son on the top floor surrounded by a strong guard so that no boar could get to him. When the appointed day arrived the king and all the jealous courtiers were waiting to see Mihira proved wrong and then punished.

"Exactly at the given moment the flagstaff on the seventh story of the building broke and fell on top of the little boy who happened to be playing below it. Atop the flagpole sat the king's symbol, which was a boar's head made of solid gold and weighing more than eighty pounds. When this image landed on the child one of its golden tusks pierced his chest, and he died instantly.

"Mihira said to the shocked king, 'O king! The boar has killed the boy, as I predicted.'

"The grieving king replied, 'You are the wisest of my astrologers. In honor of this brilliant prediction I now name you *Varaha* (boar) *Mihira*.' Varaha Mihira went on to write many well-known treatises on astrology. His system follows Parashara's system, though, with only a few principles changed here and there."

"As it should; after all, he had only recently been Parashara."

"But even Varaha Mihira did not realize the significance of his words when he spoke of Fate. Fate is so powerful that even things which seem impossible become possible if they are meant to be. And even stronger than Fate is God. As they say in Hindi, *khuda meherban to gadda bhi pahalwan*: 'If God is gracious even a donkey can become a wrestler.'"

"Even Jhendu Kumar?"

"Quit baiting me! Yes, even Jhendu Kumar, but if and only if God went along with his schemes. But God is not going to do that, so you can forget about it. And so can he!"

"At least God was kind enough to let Repay finally repay you."

"Nature is very kind to me, Robby; that's all I can tell you, that Nature is very kind to me. There is absolutely nothing that God cannot do; I have seen it over and over again in my life. This is why I pray day and night for more bhakti, because I know that if my devotion is truly sincere God will provide me with whatever it is that I need."



After my final grueling round of university exams in the fall of 1979 I proceeded to Bombay and watched Repay continue to win there during the early months of 1980. Around this time Vimalananda bought Onslaught, a reliable Class I horse, from Boman Hansotia. Though Onslaught had never won for

Boman he did for Vimalananda, and it began to seem that all our horses were doing well—even Bajarangi, the last horse Vimalananda had purchased when he kept his string with Lafange. In one of his more egregious transgressions, Lafange had insisted that Vimalananda purchase this horse, and Vimalananda had regretted his acquisition ever since. "For one thing," he would say, "his color is liver chestnut, and everyone knows that liver chestnuts rarely keep good health." In Bajarangi's case, at least, this was true. Jockeys would complain that when they sat on him he would try to move his back out from under them, as if they were causing him pain. No one could discover any obvious pathology or do him any good, not even Dr. Singh, the eccentric vet who sought to prove his expertise at equine massage by flaunting at us his copy of the *Turaga Samhita*, a Sanskrit treatise on horses.

I had meanwhile been studying Ayurvedic herbology at the college, and I came one morning to Vimalananda with a proposal that we try on Bajarangi a local preparation of *bhallataka* (*Semecarpus anacardium*), an extremely poisonous fruit which when appropriately manufactured often shows good results in such varied afflictions as goiter, paralysis, and infertility. At his wit's end over Bajarangi Vimalananda agreed, and being dutiful experimenters he and I decided to try some of this restorative as well, just to see what it would do. The horse got two tablespoons, and Vimalananda and I took a half-teaspoon each.

The medication, which had in fact not been properly prepared, gave the horse extreme colic and us two humans extreme skin rashes. At least Tehmul could report that Bajarangi, who luckily survived, became significantly more spirited afterwards than he had been before the medicine, though he was still uneasy when mounted. Vimalananda and I also noticed vastly improved zest and energy.

Vimalananda's skin being darker than mine, his rash disappeared a mere two or three days after he began to ingest the antidote. A *bhallataka* reaction is always more severe in a white-skinned individual, though, and even with the antidote it took a full two weeks for my skin color to fade from bright pink back to normal. Everyone at the college thought I had been fiercely sunburned, but it was just the effects of urushiol, the poison in *bhallataka* which is also the poison in poison ivy, poison oak, poison sumac, cashew shells, mango skins, and Chinese lacquer. It was a poison ivy rash but from the inside out, which meant that I felt the intense itching about an inch below the surface of my skin. It like the pinkness gradually faded with the antidote, but it cost me a couple of sleepless nights of vain attempts to scratch it. "Thank God we knew what was the main ingredient in this concoction," said Vimalananda to me, once it became clear that my reaction would indeed disap-

pear. "I once treated a woman who had been secretly given bhallataka. No ordinary remedy could give her any relief because no one had suspected the truth. She suffered for two full years from its poison before she came to me and got the specific antidote."

Bajarangi was a real preoccupation during much of 1979, and by the spring of 1980 we were ready to throw in the towel on him when the enterprising Dr. Martanda happened to drive us to the stables one afternoon. We escorted the doctor from stall to stall introducing him to Vimalananda's "four-legged children" until we reached Bajarangi, where we recounted our woes in full. "What?" said the doctor. "Such a minor thing, and no one has been able to deal with it? It is obvious that he lacks marrow in the bones of his back. Since the Marrow Tissue is the foundation of Shukra he must have a deficiency of sperms, which has kept his vitality low." Great, I thought. Repay couldn't get enough of his own sperm, and Bajarangi doesn't have enough to go around. "I can cure him," said Dr. Martanda, "with just two doses of medicine. All you have to do after I dose him is to feed him the soup made from one dozen goat thigh bones, and I can guarantee you a cure."

"Dr. Saheb," said Vimalananda smoothly, "horses have no gall bladders, and feeding him something as fatty as marrow soup will give him colic that will kill him."

"Don't worry yourself in the least," replied the ever theatrical Dr. Martand. "I guarantee that no harm will come to him."

Vimalananda and I looked at one another until at last he said to me, "What do we have to lose?" Though Tehmul was not pleased with this proposal at all he agreed to permit the doctor try his potion, for he realized that if anything untoward did happen we would at least be able to collect on Bajarangi's insurance money. The groom was therefore ordered to proceed to the market and buy the appropriate bones. The next morning Dr. Martanda arrived at the stables promptly after the morning work to administer the first dose, Tehmul standing by expecting calamity at any minute. But Bajarangi showed complications neither that day nor the next, and the next jockey to mount him testified that the horse was no longer doing his previous "dance." The goat marrow had presumably filled his bones, for his track work improved weekly. The day that he actually ran a race was one of the highlights of our season. Vimalananda laid no wager on this horse who had let us down so often in the past, but we were just happy to see him out competing with his fellows on the grass.

After running once or twice more Bajarangi still showed no signs of wanting to win, so we disposed of him. After the fact Vimalananda questioned the wisdom of his decision to name our "sperm-deficient" horse *Bajarangi*, which

is the Hindi version of one of the Sanskrit names of Anjaneya. He had hoped in vain that carrying such a name would make him want to live up to the standards of his namesake and run well. Now Vimalananda speculated that the opposite might have been the case:

"It is always good to name your child after God; that's how Ajamila was saved. Do you recall? When death came for him he called for his son Narayana, but got through to Lord Vishnu, Narayana Himself. I had no intention of commercializing Anjaneya's name when I named my horse Bajarangi, but it is possible that it might have seemed that way to the Law of Karma, since he was racing for money. This might in fact have been one of the factors that prevented his progress. It is so difficult to know the Law of Karma in detail!"

"And impossible to know in its entirety."

"Completely impossible, even for the Rishis. It didn't seem like a bad idea to me at the time because Anjaneya has helped me advance my career in the past. During my salad days as a pro wrestler it was the power of Anjaneya that sustained me. Could I have ever done it on my own? Ha!" Anjaneya, who has from His birth been the patron deity of wrestlers, continued to sustain Vimalananda even in my era when he would challenge to arm wrestling the young Maharashtrian wrestlers who used to come to him to get his blessing for an upcoming bout. Invariably the heart patient in his mid-sixties would easily defeat the youthful musclemen, and when they would shamefacedly admit defeat he would tell them, "Don't worry, my boy; which human can withstand the power of Anjaneya? Remember this, and when you return to your village don't forget to pay your regards to the temple of Anjaneya there," a temple whose new image had been purchased by that very Dr. Martanda who had treated Anjaneya's equine namesake.

The Ayurvedic internship program at the Tarachand Ramnath Charitable Ayurvedic Hospital depleted my 1980 spring and summer. Aside from the odd weekend in Bombay I could meet Vimalananda only when he came to Poona to pay a visit to his "four-legged friends." A few of my instructors made regular pilgrimages to his hotel during his stays, hoping to mop up for their own practices the odd treatment tip that Vimalananda would occasionally spill. They were intrigued with his knowledge of herbs and minerals and with his ability to diagnose people by taking his own pulse; he was intrigued with the possibility that he might somehow get some of them to think originally for a change. Aside from Dr. Vasant Lad, though, few of these physicians impressed him.

Vimalananda, who appreciated Dr. Lad's devotion to his guru Hambir Baba and his personal deity *Ganesha* (the elephant-headed remover of obstacles), assisted him and his family in various ways. This favoritism made some

of the other faculty members, who regarded Dr. Lad's station in life as being beneath theirs, determine to take from Vimalananda the assistance that they felt they deserved. As these men had no deep interest in Ayurveda, Jyotish, Tantra, or any other form of classical Indian wisdom, Vimalananda protected himself creatively from them. For example, after Dr. Potdukhe brought his father to Vimalananda one day to ask his help in reversing a chronic intestinal infirmity, Vimalananda said, "Oh, it can be fixed all right—I can guarantee it—but if it is he will lose all his money. Which will it be: health without wealth or wealth without health?" After they left Vimalananda confidently predicted that he would never see them again, and he never did.

The crassness of the bulk of these doctors disappointed Vimalananda acutely. He expected that anyone who had been blessed with the opportunity to imbibe Sanskrit learning ought to evince the same broadness of mind, quickness of wit, and keenness of awareness that seemed to come effortlessly to him. A lack of "art, grace and culture" in otherwise knowledgeable men and women always seemed to disgruntle him. In 1980 he responded to the only invitation he ever received from my college with an address to its staff that went something like this:

It is no surprise that no one wants to learn Ayurveda nowadays since no one is teaching the real meat of Ayurveda. If you really want your students to understand Ayurveda you must teach them that there are only four things in medicine: *duhkha*, *duhkha ka karana*, *karana ka upaya*, *aur upaya ka anta* ('misery, the cause of misery, the remedy for the cause, and the end of the remedy'). As Ayurvedic physicians we want to liberate our patients mostly from physical sorrow. This means that we must be fully conversant with the structures in which diseases develop: the *dhatu*s (tissues) and *malas* (wastes). Teach your students why diagnosis of disease is usually by mala. The wastes are produced during the metabolic processes which produce the tissues, which means that if you know the malas you will know the dhatus.

Unfortunately you people overlook many of the malas, like dandruff. Even examination of dandruff can yield significant information, in particular about the bones, given that head hair is an *upadhatu* (secondary tissue) of bone. In a way the bones are a bridge between the astral body, which is the mind, and the physical body. Bone is governed by *Vayu* (the Air Element), which also appears in the body as prana; what controls prana controls the mind, and vice versa. Also, as a tissue, Bone is the foundation of Marrow, which is the foundation of Shukra, which is the foundation of ojas,

which is the foundation of health. Know dandruff in detail and you can know the patient's health.

If you want good health you must nourish your tissues well, which means you must nourish the tastes in your body. When you lack tastes your metabolism is affected. Even if you lay a big meal before a sick man he will not be interested; his taste is not there. Lack of taste within the body causes a patient of jaundice to lack appetite. Disturbance of the inner taste process causes the appetite to be lost in fever. Ayurveda is the only medical system which describes medicines for supplying to the body the tastes which it lacks; teach your students that!

Actually all the tastes are inside, but we look for them outside, in our food. Our job as physicians is to create the proper taste within a sick person so that proper tissue nourishment will resume and natural immunity in the form of ojas will increase. This is why we use medicines; not just to suppress disease, like the allopaths do, but to return the patient's balance to normal. Your great Ayurvedic author Charaka learned about medicinal herbs by watching what animals ate when they were sick. Students should learn in the same way. You should teach them how to make the plant talk to you, how to make it tell you, "These are my qualities, my tastes, and my useful parts, and I am useful in this disease." Those who really know Ayurveda know that every plant has a thousand uses.

Teach your students why we like to use plants for our medicines. Plants and animals complement one another nicely. Plants breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen, while animals exhale carbon dioxide and inhale oxygen. Teach them all the details of how to collect medicinal plants. When you inform them that plants should never be collected at night, tell them the reason why. Plants breathe at night; and if you collect them then it is like strangling them. If you strangle the plant, do you think it will be interested in trying to help you help your patient? Teach your pupils how one plant antidotes another. Teach them the secret uses of apamarga (*Achyranthes aspera*), tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), and bilva (*Aegle marmelos*), plants which can make you clairaudient and clairvoyant. Teach them the limitations of herbs, and why we also use medicines made from minerals. Above all, teach them the real meaning of *Rasayana* (rejuvenation; literally, "the Path of Rasa"), because it is only through *rasa* (taste, juice, emotion) that rejuvenation can occur.

All the assembled physicians nodded sagaciously and thanked him for his comments, but when we were alone again Vimalananda shook his head with resignation and said, "Is it any wonder that Ayurveda is in such a desperate state today? Your professors seem to be good people, by and large, but most of them simply do not know Ayurveda—so how do they think they are going to teach it? They don't even know the simplest things about Ayurveda, such as how to develop your body. What is the use in knowing about Ayurveda if you can't even develop your body?"

A wrestler was talking. I asked, "What method do you like best for body development?"

He replied, "It depends on the individual. *Bhang* works well for many people. Wrestlers who live in Banaras have made a science of how to use *bhang* as part of their training regimen. After their morning workout they will bathe in the Ganga, get a two-hour massage, bathe again, eat well, and take a nap. On arising they will defecate, to lighten their bodies and minds, then bathe again, then get yet another massage, then take *bhang*. They eat when the intoxication of the *bhang* is at its height. Try it; your body will develop amazingly."

"We do not expect, though, that using *bhang* like this is going to help them free Kundalini from its constraints."

"How could it? In fact, it will make *ahamkara* identify even more firmly with the body. But you have to decide what you want to do with your life; only then can Ayurveda help you. If you want to go the way of awakening Kundalini using *bhang* then you have to use it in another way, which I am sure that your professors are also unaware of. Do they have any idea of the real way to perform rejuvenation? Do they know that while herbs can make you live 400-500 years you can go on almost indefinitely if you know how to use mercury? Do they know that you can extract copper from peacock feathers, and mercury from *bilva* leaves? Or that alchemical gold shows different results from mined gold when seen in the mass spectrometer? They teach chemistry at your college, but do they know anything at all of the real *Rasa Shastra* (alchemy)? Have they ever heard of, much less seen, the many ways to solidify mercury? Or the few ways in which you can make mercury *agnisthayi* ('fire-fast') so that it will not melt when placed into a fire? The true alchemy, my boy, is not even easy to understand, much less do. I wonder how many of your instructors are even interested in understanding it.

"One way in which I am different from most doctors is that most doctors—not all, but most—see sick people as money-making projects. I look at them with Smashan Tara's eyes instead, and see them as my own children. When I can help someone escape from a disease I feel as if I've helped cure my own son or daughter. I love to do that, but I don't want anyone to know

how I'm doing it. Why should they know? If they're sick they should be interested in the result, not in the process. And if they're doctors I don't want them to know how I do things. If they learn they will just go out and commercialize my knowledge; they will use it to earn money from sick people. Besides, can they ever know how many days and weeks of hard work it took me to learn what I know? This is why I always like to try out new methods of treatment, so that no one will be able to pinpoint exactly what I am doing.

"During one period of my life I used to give an ounce of castor oil to every sick person who came my way. No one had any reaction or got diarrhea from it. On the contrary, everyone got some relief from the ailment they had brought to me. One lady who watched me do this to various people decided to be smart. She tried to do the same thing herself, but none of her patients ever responded. In fact, they invariably got worse. Then she came to me and demanded to know why this was happening.

"I asked her in response, 'Who told you to do this?'"

"Then what did she say?"

"Nothing; what is she going to say?"

"Obviously," I said, "something other than the castor oil was doing the trick."

"Obviously," he echoed. "In fact it was something ethereal, something that used the castor oil as a medium through which to exert its effect. Castor oil is itself a wonderful medicine, but this ethereal thing could have used any medium. One day my friend Faram was suffering from intestinal colic. To help him out I picked up the first bottle I could reach on the shelf and gave him two pills from it. The pain disappeared. When I was out of Bombay a few weeks later the pain recurred, and Faram looked for the bottle to dose himself again. This time he looked at the label and discovered that it was a hormonal preparation meant for regulating his wife's menses. He flew into such a rage that he threw the bottle out of the window!"

"He must have had some choice words for you when you got back."

"He always had choice words for me—but then I always fired him too. That's the way our friendship was." To be "fired" in Indian English is to be chewed out, dressed down, or similarly raked over the coals.

"You know, Faram's wife suffered for years with excessive menstrual bleeding. She would bleed for twenty days out of the month. She tried everything, but got no relief. Finally she came to me one day and said, 'Look, I've had enough. I just can't stand it anymore. I am going to go and get a hysterectomy.'

"I told her, 'All you want to do is stop the flow, isn't it? Then why do you worry? Drink this water,' and I handed her a full glass. She drank it, and her menses stopped from that day onwards.



“Whenever I look at a woman I see Ma, and I can’t bear to see Ma in pain. One day when I was at a friend’s house I heard moaning from the next room. I asked him what the problem was, and he said, ‘Oh, it’s my sister. She’s been in labor for the whole day, and there has been no progress so far. I’m not sure whether we’ll need to do a Caesarian or what.’

“I told him, ‘Give me a shiny metal tray, one of those German silver ones you are so fond of.’ I traced a *yantra* on it with my finger. He asked me what I thought I was doing, because he couldn’t see anything on the tray. I ignored him and went into the room where the girl was lying on the bed. I showed her the tray. She couldn’t see the *yantra* either, but within a matter of minutes the child was born. *That is the power of yantras.*”

“Now I understand why all these old friends of yours keep pestering you to heal them or their family members. It’s because they know your capabilities.”

“Having learned a few of my capabilities they are trying to capitalize on them, for their own benefit. Some of them have even told me that I should start healing the sick en masse. But besides the fact that the fame from such programs would ruin my life, what about the *rnanubandhana*? I have to have an appropriate *rnanubandhana* with someone in order to heal them.”

“Is that true of any doctor?”

“Yes, and of any astrologer, or any other professional who wants to do help someone out. But there are so many people with whom I have *rnanubandhanas* that if I tried to heal all of them at once I would run out of *shakti* before very long. I’m not Jesus, and I have never claimed to be a *‘bhagavan.’*

“Sometimes even my own *karmas* become too much to bear, and I’ve even had to use some funny business to cure *myself*. I don’t like to do it, because I believe that it is better to suffer now and be free of the burden of your *karmas* rather than to hide from them. After all, they are sure to catch up with you anyway, eventually. But in a crisis you do whatever is necessary.

“Some years ago a Dr. Durandar lived in Bombay. Somehow or other he had lost his son and nearly went mad as a result. Afterwards he began to treat me like I was his son. He was always coming around to see how I was, and to check on my health. He would give me medicine whenever I needed it—and sometimes even when I didn’t. When I needed antibiotics he would usually give me an injection of penicillin, but one day when he was out of penicillin he gave me streptomycin instead. I had never taken streptomycin before and once had a severe reaction to it: high fever, rigors, the works. I thought I was done for. I called some of my friends who all sat around me crying, thinking I was going to die. So did I. Faram was abusing me, as was his wont. The days he didn’t abuse me I would ask him, ‘What, my child, I have heard none of your beautiful language today; are you ill?’ That would start him off again,

insulting my family members with the foulest of words. I enjoyed it; it was his peculiar way of expressing his love for me.

“Just as Faram was abusing Dr. Durandar left and right for giving me the injection Dr. Durandar unexpectedly arrived to check on his patient. I couldn’t let him see me in this condition—when he looked at me he saw his son, and if he saw me near death now it would be a second big shock for him that might prove fatal. So somehow the fever disappeared and I became perfectly normal again. I complimented him on his treatment, made him happy, and showed him the door. As soon as he left the fever returned, and Faram started to abuse me again!

“Then I lost my temper. I told Roshni to bring me her quilt. It was a beautiful brown satin quilt which her father had brought to her from Burma, and she never lent it to anyone else. It was so precious to her that she slept with it each and every night, but as soon as she heard that I wanted it she handed it over to me. I told her to cover me with it, and after about five minutes I threw the quilt on the floor. I was perfectly all right—but the quilt was hot; all the fever had gone into it. There it lay, literally shivering by itself on the ground. I told Faram, ‘Be careful now: whoever uses this quilt next will get the fever.’

“Then Faram abused everyone loudly and, shouting out the Parsi equivalent of ‘Not in my house!’ had Roshni throw it out the window.”

“And that was it?”

“That was all; I was cured. Don’t ask me how.”

“But if somehow you transferred your fever to the quilt, where did your *karmas* go? They must have somehow gone into the quilt too.”

“Something like that.”

I cringed slightly, thinking of whoever must have picked it up, and then said to him, “So the moral to the story is never pick up anything from the street!”

“Especially not in India!” he laughed.



## chapter eight **REDSTONE**

VIMALANANDA'S INTEREST IN his spiritual 'children' had been corroding for some time, for they were proving to be no more dedicated than Shankaracharya's 'sons.' It waned yet further on the morning that he had a visitation from Doshi's wife. She and Doshi had come to Poona that weekend to accompany us for some homa nearby, and were staying in the hotel room that was next door to Vimalananda's. Apparently these two, conniving perhaps with some of the other 'children,' had decided that it was time for Vimalananda to part with some of his Tantric sexual knowledge. Mrs. Doshi had therefore knocked at Vimalananda's door braless, her sari barely covering her sagging middle-aged bosoms, to beseech this expert for a Vajroli practicum, or at the very least a how-to course in Lata Mudra. It was very difficult for me to see how the evidently dissolute Mrs. Doshi could have any chance to succeed at Lata Mudra, a practice in which two sexual partners invoke Lord Shiva and his Grand Consort Parvati into their bodies before they dally together. How then could she even dream of Vajroli, in which you use your genitals to suck up your partner's secretions during intercourse?

As I remembered Vimalananda's often-repeated advice—"Just slow down and refinement occurs automatically, especially in sex"—it became obvious that the contrapositive must be equally true: "Just speed up and coarseness will overtake you, especially in sex." I was racking my brain for some worthy comment to offer my offended mentor when Vimalananda spat out, "Who does she think she is? Does she think I'll see her naked boobs and lose control? I've seen much better than hers, and I'm still in control!"

Calming him down with sweet words being now quite out of the question I decided to try discharge the rest of his repugnance at her wasteful haste by first intensifying it: "Maybe," I said, "she thinks she's become some great Bhairavi," a Bhairavi being the female in a Lata Mudra partnership, to which

he replied, “Bhairavi, my foot! Can you be a Bhairavi if you are completely lacking in *niyama*? To succeed at any sort of sadhana you first have to learn to say NO to the things that are preventing you from making progress. Roshni has been able to make some progress in her sadhana because she’s learned the three stages of ‘no.’”

“The three stages of ‘no?’”

“Yes. The first stage is n-o—no. No! If that doesn’t work, move up to g-o—go. Go! Get lost! That will usually work, but if it doesn’t, then you have to get tough, and you say F.O.! F.O. is bound to do the trick.”

The Doshi incident multiplied Vimalananda’s ire with my recently inaugurated semi-romantic liaison with one of my fellow Ayurvedic students. He was unhappy that I spent time with this girl that I could have spent meditating or studying instead; he was concerned that some indiscretion of ours might be seized upon by my enemies at the college and used to attack me; he was wary of having the girl’s reputation ruined, particularly if we became physically intimate (which she and I both realized would be highly unwise); he did not care much for the girl herself.

It was in this rather vitiated climate that, not long after the Balam Bhat-Faram-Shankaracharya discourse, he sat me down and said to me, “Your *Sade Sati* is about to begin.”

His tone of voice alarmed me, though the words themselves were not overly sinister; *sade sati* means ‘seven and a half’ in Hindi. I tried to sound plucky: “The ‘seven-and-a-half’?”

“Yes. The *Sade Sati* is the seven-and-a-half year period during which Saturn will afflict the Moon in your horoscope.” This was sounding less and less pleasant. “In Jyotish we respect the Sun as the planet of light, but we regard its effects as harsh; its light ‘burns’ you. The Moon’s light, however, cools and nourishes you, which makes the Moon the most important planet in Jyotish—after Saturn. When Saturn, the planet of dryness, constriction and disappointment, transits the Moon it pinches off the flow of life’s juice and promotes desolation.”

Not a very attractive prospect. I tried to keep my gorge from rising.

“How is Saturn,” I asked slowly, to throttle down my racing mind, “going to affect me?”

“It will affect you in the same way that all the other planets affect you: by its subtle gravity. The planets you see in the sky are gross, physical structures that have a minor effect on us. But each of these gross planets is the physical reflection of a subtle planet whose gravity affects us strongly. Saturn’s subtle gravity spares no one: not his fellow planets, not his fellow devas, not even his father the Sun. Even the Rishis are affected. By nourishing the Sun the Rishis

are able to direct the influence of the Sun on themselves and on the world in general. One of the many benefits they gain thereby is some control over Saturn. But only some, for even they sometimes fall under Saturn’s shadow. As long as they exist on the earth even the Rishis have to be concerned about Saturn. Think of Parashara; even he did not escape, in spite of being an expert in astrology.”

“Great! So now I’m finished. What is going to happen to me? Should I make out my will?”

“No, but I may need to. One of the main effects of the *Sade Sati* is *Chatra Bhanga*.”

“‘The Breaking of the Umbrella?’”

“Exactly. An umbrella is a very useful thing, right? It keeps the sun and rain off your head; it protects you from the elements, from the outside world. The parents and grandparents of a small child form its umbrella. *Sade Sati* tends to cause those relatives to be ‘broken’—to disappear from the scene somehow.”

“By dying, for example?”

“Yes, or going to jail, being kidnaped, or simply running away. Roshni’s *Sade Sati* begins when yours does, because her Moon occupies the same constellation that yours does. You and Roshni both treat me as a father, which makes me doubt that the effect on me is going to be very good. Your parents and Roshni’s mother will probably also be affected.” Prescient words these: Vimalananda died midway through this *Sade Sati*, my mother came very close to death a few months thereafter, and a few months after that Roshni’s mother died, well before the period ended for the two of us.

“Is there anything at all good about the *Sade Sati*?”

“Well, the best time for you to perform any sadhana is when Saturn turns his ‘gaze’ on you, when the influence of Saturn predominates in your horoscope. If you cooperate Saturn can make you experience great spiritual heights. You should always respect Saturn, but never be afraid of him. Orthodox people are afraid of Saturn; they treat him like the Devil incarnate. But if they really are so pure why should they be worried about Saturn?”

“What should I do?”

“One approach to problem planets is to wear gems and perform rituals to placate them. Another approach is to have full faith in your deity and request Him or Her to take care of everything. I prefer the latter approach, except that when it comes to Saturn you really have to have absolute faith in your personal deity if you want to be protected. If your faith is not total Saturn will still be able to affect you. You may therefore want to diminish Saturn’s effects—not eliminate them, which is not possible, but at least reduce them. To

do this you can either worship Saturn, or you can worship Shiva, especially in his incarnation as Anjaneya.

“Look at that photo of Anjaneya there on the wall. Do you see the mace he holds on his shoulder?”

“Yes,” I replied with unnecessary peevishness.

“I have told you before that Anjaneya’s mace controls all the planets except Saturn, who is controlled by His tail. But what does that mean? ‘Hanuman’s mace’ is the name of a *mudra*, a hand gesture, which is nothing but a part of *nyasa*. Nyasa is a way to place the deity you are worshipping into your subtle body so that your deity can pervade your being. A sadhaka makes his internal temple sacred by means of nyasa so that his beloved deity will find it inviting to enter him. When you can properly perform ‘Hanuman’s mace’ and you use it with the appropriate mantra Anjaneya can enter you. Then He can do the work of controlling the planets instead of you. Until you have realized Hanuman in yourself this mudra will give only minor results. Once Anjaneya performs that mudra through you, though, the control will be perfect.”

“I have not yet realized Anjaneya in myself,” I said with real contrition. “I will continue to worship Anjaneya, but the results I will obtain are bound to continue to be limited. Is there anything I can do in addition?”

“Yes, there is. You should read the *Shani Mahatmya* (‘The Greatness of Saturn’<sup>2</sup>); that will help you too.”

Impressed by Vimalananda’s seriousness I went out straightway to get myself a copy of *The Greatness of Saturn* and began to read it. As if by way of reinforcement—Nature confirming the rightness of this act—Saturn popped up for me on my very next trip to the race track.

“You see that old fellow over there in the Maharashtrian dhoti, vest and hat?” said Vimalananda, pointing downwards between races. “That is Deshpande, from Poona. One year he bought a foal that had something wrong with its palate. Whenever it tried to eat it would regurgitate some of its food. Every vet who inspected it said it was incurable without a complicated operation. All of us, including me, thought Deshpande was a fool for wasting his money on it. But he knows some Ayurveda and worked wonders on that horse, I tell you, wonders. He named it Akhlakh, and it won races for him.”

“Akhlakh!” I said loudly. “That’s the name of the horse from *The Greatness of Saturn*, the one that carried King Vikramaditya away into the sky when he sat down on its back!”

“Very good! Now why Deshpande would name his horse Akhlakh is completely beyond me, unless he thought that somehow that name was going to make it fly down the track.”

“Maybe he thought it would make Saturn happy.”

“Maybe. If only it were so easy to satisfy Saturn.”

Saturn was still much on my mind as I prepared at Vimalananda’s behest to leave for the United States and begin to lecture on Ayurveda. He had already forced me to write one little book which Dr. Martanda had volunteered to publish. He had also arranged for a dinner meeting in Poona to introduce me to various newspaper reporters who reciprocated for the good food and copious drink they were served by dutifully writing glowing accounts of my genius. I had no desire to leave Vimalananda to go to work in the West, but he kept reminding me of the rnas to my parents and my homeland which remained outstanding, rnas which I would do better to pay off now rather than later. “And besides,” he would say, “think how happy it will make your parents feel for you to make a success of yourself! Don’t you think they must be worried about whether or not you’ll be properly set up in life before they die? Don’t you want to take that load of their minds?”

One day when he was going on in this vein I interrupted him with, “But I’m going to a country filled with asuras, where the food will be totally impregnated with commercial gravity. I’m no saint; how am I ever going to save myself from being ruined?”

“Don’t worry, my boy,” he said compassionately, “I will always be there with you. Whenever you are troubled remember Anjaneya. With Anjaneya’s help you will never get bogged down in the quicksand.” Then he added, as if in afterthought, “If only all those monkeys over in America would worship Anjaneya they might save themselves from being stuck also.”

He had compared Westerners to monkeys before, but I took this reference to heart, and testily asked him, “Aren’t people in India monkeys too?”

“I know what I am saying,” he replied serenely. “Listen now to why I say it. Though Ramachandra, the seventh of Vishnu’s Avatars, has long since left Earth His dedicated devotee, the immortal Anjaneya, remains. So do the blessings that Lord Rama gave while He walked on Earth, blessings whose effects can be felt even today. I take my mind back to the Dvapara Yuga, perhaps a million years ago, when Rama made three promises. The first was to Jatayu, the eagle who tried to rescue Sita from Ravana without even knowing who She was. Rama promised Jatayu that in Kali Yuga he would be worshipped and adored as perfectly humane, even though a bird. By temperament eagles are killers, but Lord Rama gave Jatayu the powers of sympathy and compassion, to shelter all under his wings. Rama even took Jatayu’s head

2. *The Greatness of Saturn*, English translation of the *Shani Mahatmya*, published 1997 by Sadhana Publications.

in His lap when the old bird died, which is something He did not even do for His own father Dasharatha.

“Whose symbol is the eagle? America’s. America is the first country to help anywhere in the world in time of famine, flood or other disaster. Americans are generous by nature and love to give to others who don’t have enough. And they do it just for the sake of doing it. Not for gain, but because it is to be done, just as Jatayu did for Sita. Some say that in Kali Yuga the giving of gifts is the highest form of religious merit. As Americans have given a great deal they have collected considerable spiritual benefit. Yes, they have also made mistakes, like Vietnam, but they have still done more good than anyone else has. So, America is Lord Rama’s blessing to this Earth through the eagle Jatayu.

“Rama’s second promise was to the monkeys who built the bridge to Lanka. They were blessed that in Kali Yuga they would become great inventors and innovators and would rule the world. This also refers to America. The Americans are ruling the world and are responsible for most of the great inventions that have so radically changed the world. I call your fellow countrymen monkeys because they are descended from monkeys. Even they believe that they are descended from monkeys! But now they have forgotten their ancestry and are experimenting on monkeys. The curses they are receiving from their monkey brethren are rapidly eroding this blessing that Lord Rama gave them.

“The third promise was to Sita, that women will come forward in Kali Yuga. And America is the leader in making women the absolute equals of men. This is why I say that America has been triply blessed. I am so fond of America because of these blessings, not because of its riches or power, neither of which will last forever. They may not last very much longer, in fact, because America is wasting both its riches and its power at a very high rate of speed. Still, the Americans have Rama’s three blessings, and also blessings from Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda. So they will continue to thrive—for a while.

“Now, was no one else blessed by Lord Rama? Well, Russia was; otherwise how could it have ever become a superpower? Russia’s symbol is the bear. The bear Jambavant did help Lord Rama in His quest for Sita, but not as much as the monkeys did. This means that Russia will never have ascendancy over America. Thank God for that; I hate communism!

“Another reason that America is strong can be discovered in numerology. How many states does America have? Fifty:  $5 + 0 = 5$ . Mark my words, if the United States ever adds another state they will be asking for trouble. They use five-pointed stars on their flags, military vehicles, etc. Five is the number of *Guru*, or Brihaspati—the planet Jupiter—who is the world’s protector. And

five is also the number of magic and mystery. The Greeks used to go into battle with their word for five painted on their shields. Also, the American flag has thirteen stripes:  $1 + 3 = 4$ . Four is the number for foundation, so their foundation is firm. As I always say, if the foundation is strong the building will last; if not it will surely fall.”

“Surely you prefer the six-pointed star to the five-pointed star?” Vimalananda used the six-pointed star as the yantra in the bottom of his firepit when he performed homa.

“They are different, but they are both good. The Jews call the six-pointed star the Star of David, and David was no fool to use this star. It is one of the reasons that the Israeli army always wins. You may not have noticed, but a six-pointed star also appears in the Great Seal of the United States, made out of thirteen individual stars.”

“So America’s foundation is good.”

“Most of it is good. But they have performed some terrible karmas also. Don’t forget that the Americans came into possession of America by theft. Armed robbery, in fact; they used firearms. Shouldn’t armed robbery be a prominent part of their lives today? And since they stole the country by using the Fire Element, shouldn’t they be made to suffer by the Fire Element? We see it already: the whole world is warming up, there are forest fires and droughts everywhere; and if there is ever a nuclear war much of the world will be incinerated.

“And what about drilling oil wells and sucking oil out of the earth? The Americans have taught the world how best to prospect for oil and how pump it from the ground efficiently. Oil is the earth’s blood, so shouldn’t they have their blood sucked in return? They must, and look what their medical science is doing to them: it is sucking their blood. Every time one of them goes to a doctor he gets at least one blood test. One thing is for sure: when all these karmas catch up with them they will truly be ruined. The question is, when will these karmas catch up with them? So long as the Americans can just remain true to their heritage and remember to be generous they will continue to prosper. Whether or not they are able to do so will depend on how well they can improve their own innate natures, their collective *svabhava*. It will also depend on how well their good qualities can continue to function in the face of the powerful distortion that the weight of all their evil karmas is creating. Thanks to Lord Rama’s blessings there is still some hope for them.”

Silence descended for a few moments before he continued.

“I tell you, Robby, there is very little to karma besides blessings and curses. Read the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and you will find blessings and curses on nearly every page, just as you find in your Bible too. I have already

shown you how blessings and curses worked in the case of Prithviraj and Akbar. Now listen to how a blessing influenced a famous Western ruler.

“Long ago there lived a Rishi who was a *Kurma Guru*. From the outside he would sit silently like a tortoise (*kurma*), seemingly inactive. But on the inside he would secretly watch what his disciples were doing and would help and nourish them from a distance. In that ashram lived Shabari, an old Shudra lady who used to sweep and scrub to keep the place clean. One day the Rishi’s pet disciple came by and felt compassion for her. He asked her, ‘Ma, do you do any kind of sadhana?’

“She replied, ‘My son, I am just a poor illiterate woman; I know nothing of Sanskrit.’

“The boy told her, ‘Ma, even if you can’t recite the Veda you can still call on God. You just repeat, “Master, when will you come? Master, when will you come? I am making everything clean for You.” Repeat this all the time, when you are doing your work and when you are at home, and you will see the result.’ He gave her this phrase as a mantra in her mother tongue so she would be able to pronounce it. Whatever a Rishi gives you to recite is a mantra, no matter what language it is in or whether it is grammatically correct or not. *That is the power of a Rishi.*

“Every day, all day long, Shabari repeated her mantra. She did it so long and so well that when Lord Rama, who was God incarnate on earth at that time, came that way He stopped to meet her. He even had to accept her gift of jujube fruits to Him. You see, in a Rishi’s ashram all work according to their capabilities and all get results. Isn’t that the way it should be? The Rishis never refused anyone if they were sincere.

“Shabari was so thrilled that Rama had come to her that she wanted everything to be perfect for Him. In order to make sure that Rama would enjoy each fruit she wanted to test them to make sure that they were sweet. So she bit into each *jujube* and tasted it first before giving it to Him. Now, as you well know people in India never offer any food to anyone else that they have already tasted. You would never offer such food to a guest, and most especially not to your Lord and King; that would be one of the gravest of insults.”

“And Shabari didn’t know this?!”

“How could she not have known it? The upper caste people around her would have reminded her of it regularly. But her joy at seeing the Lord Himself was so immense that she forgot everything except wanting to do her utmost to please Him. When Rama looked inside Shabari and saw the depth of her devotion and sincerity, He ate those berries joyfully.

“Rama then blessed Shabari that she would rule as a queen in her next birth. This is the Law of Karma again: first the austerities, then the rewards. She had to

wait many centuries until a good opportunity presented itself, but eventually Shabari became a queen. In fact, she became Queen Victoria, the Empress of all India. Even though her penance was not of a quality that would have enabled her to become an Indian ruler, she did have the qualifications to become queen of a nation of asuras. The real reason that England, which is a nation of Shudras and *Mlecchas* (barbarians) as far as we are concerned, was allowed to rule over us was so that Shabari could rule India by ruling England. Because Shabari in her incarnation as Victoria had a vague remembrance of her previous life some of her previous qualities shone through. This explains why she always believed in religious toleration. She was a well-loved queen, and people still remember her here favorably. Why, there’s even a Victoria Memorial in Calcutta.”

“And Victoria Terminus on the Central Railway right here in Bombay!”

“Precisely. Now, after she died Queen Victoria must have descended into some lower womb. This became inevitable because she did not persist with the austerities which had brought her to that position. Wasn’t Queen Victoria distressed in her last days? Here again is the Law of Karma: you do austerities which result in great enjoyments, but then the enjoyments make you forget to continue you austerities and down you go. *Tapeshwari se rajeshwari, aur rajeshwari se narakeshwari*: penance to riches, and riches to ruination.”

“She needed someone to guide her; where was her guru, the Rishi’s disciple?”

“Well, he had no desire to be born in the West, so she had to go there on her own. But he must still be around somewhere, looking after her from afar like a good *Kurma Guru* should. The Rishis never forsake their ‘children,’ even after both they and their ‘children’ have left their bodies. There is no limitation of time, space or causation when it comes to love. If Queen Victoria had really been lucky she would have had the kind of positive influences around her that Akbar had around him when he became Emperor. Despite his blood-stained heritage he had so many saints blessing him, and had such good *samskaras* from his past birth as Prithviraj, that he was able to overcome his inborn *svabhava*. Akbar was truly lucky in that like Birbal almost all of the people around him were unique, and amazing.”

“Except his children.”

“No, not at all,” retorted Vimalananda, annoyed. “If his son Salim was his greatest disappointment one of his greatest satisfactions was his daughter Taj. His pet name for her was Dilaram. She was a very simple girl on the outside, but very deep within. Once Akbar asked her, ‘Why don’t you ever dress up well to impress the members of my court?’

“She replied, ‘But I am wearing twenty costumes,’ and to prove it she took all of them off one by one. When the last was removed she stood there with her hands covering her breasts, not her genitalia.

“Akbar accosted her furiously: ‘Shameless girl! What do you mean by standing like this before me? Where is your modesty?’

“She replied, ‘But father, you have seen me without clothes many times when I was young. Since then these have grown,’ she said as she indicated her breasts, ‘and this,’ she said, indicating her vulva ‘has not. So I must cover these.’

“What could Akbar say then? She was right. Another time she helped him win a crucial game of chess. You know, Akbar was an expert chess player, what is called a *shatarangi*—he could think one hundred moves ahead. For enjoyment he would use courtiers as chesspieces on the big chessboard of inlaid stone that he ordered laid out in his courtyard. You can still see it at Fatehpur Sikri.

“On this occasion he had rather gone overboard. He was playing with one of his viceroys, and was so confident of his superior skills he had bet the viceroy his kingdom, with the added bonus of Dilaram for a wife. Unfortunately Akbar was having an off game, and at one point he had to stop and think hard. He realized that unless he thought of something sensational that he would be finished—checkmated—after his next move.

“Then Dilaram came to him and showed him how to win the game. She spoke in a couplet: ‘Move your rook like this, and he will have to move like this; he has no choice. Then move your pawn forward two squares and he will be checkmated, and you will not lose your Dilaram.’

“Akbar did as she advised, and won. He tried to make her accept so many things as a reward, but she refused everything. She never married, and when Akbar died she left everything and went to Gokul, where Krishna lived as a child. She was a great devotee of Krishna. When she got to Gokul she said, ‘Here, Krishna, I have come to you.’ And she merged.”

“A Muslim devotee of Krishna?”

“Is that so hard to believe? Rasa Khan, the author of some of the greatest devotional songs of Krishna ever written, was also a Muslim. So was Khan-i-Khanan Rahim, the son of Akbar’s boyhood adviser Bairam Khan. Rahim was something else entirely. When he was governor of the province of Avadh he used to bestow gifts with his hand uplifted and his eyes downcast, to show that God was the real giver, not he.”

Rahim’s wife, Aram Banu Begum, was Akbar’s daughter.

“It was well known in court that though a Muslim Rahim had become a devotee of Krishna. Some of the more bigoted Muslim courtiers were therefore always scheming against him, hoping to trip him up in some way so that he would be humiliated. After a number of abortive schemes they came up with a metrical plot and proclaimed a poetry completion contest. In this sort

of competition the first line of a couplet is given to which a second line must be appended. The prize goes to whoever creates the best second line, the line which best fits with the first. This sort of challenge, which has been used in India since ancient days, was also used to identify someone who had long been missing, or in hiding. In such cases the line that would be publicized would be the first line of a couplet known only to the seeker and the person sought.

“The first line that was concocted for this competition was *kaffir he wo jo khyal nahi islam ka*, which translates something like this: ‘Whoever does not believe in Islam is an infidel.’ The bigots were sure that they had Rahim now. If in his second line he spoke favorably of Krishna it would be a direct insult to Islam, and he could then be accused of blasphemy. If on the other hand he spoke favorably of Islam everyone would know how weak his devotion for Krishna was, and how willing he was to compromise his principles. His opportunism and his fear of loss of position and freedom would thus disgrace him. Rahim frankly did not like the idea of such a trial by verse. But for some reason Akbar insisted, giving Rahim no choice but to accede to his sovereign’s wishes.

“The fanatics could hardly wait for the month to pass until the day of Rahim’s dishonor, but soon enough that day arrived. All the poets who assembled before the Emperor spoke glowingly of the greatness of Islam and the perfidies of the unbelievers. All, that is, except Rahim, who was kept for last, that the suspense might magnify the expected stigma. But when it became Rahim’s turn everyone was dumbfounded when he took the given line as the second line of his couplet, not the first. His couplet became:

*Khyal he wo lam, gesu mere pyare ghanashyam ka.*

*Kaffir he wo jo khyal nahi islam ka.*

Belief there is in that ‘*lam*’ that is formed by the locks of my beloved Ghanshyam.

A heretic is anyone who does not believe in this ‘*lam*.’

“Rahim had created a verse which actually praised *Ghanshyam* (Krishna) by making a brilliant play on the Arabic word *Islam*, which can mean in Hindi ‘this *lam*’ (*is lam*). The Arabic character for the sound ‘*lam*’ is a stroke that looks something like the silhouette of someone’s hair. Rahim could thus legitimately take the word *islam* to mean ‘these locks of hair,’ and could then say that the only true infidel is whoever fails to have faith in Krishna’s hair, that is, in Krishna Himself.

“All the zealots were of course quite discomfited by this sudden turn of events, but what could they do? He had beaten them fair and square. The Emperor was overjoyed that Rahim had acquitted himself so brilliantly. But

when he summoned Rahim for congratulation Rahim told him, 'Your Majesty, you became Emperor thanks to my father, and it is partly thanks to my worship of Krishna that your rule has been maintained. To my knowledge I have never given you any cause for censure, and yet to test me you sanctioned this competition. Now I have lost interest in your court, and I am leaving your service.' Despite Akbar's pleas he left, and then Akbar's real problems began."

"This was not exactly a curse?"

"No, Rahim was too noble a man to curse anyone, certainly not the man whose salt he had eaten for so long. No, he simply withdrew the prayers for protection which he had been regularly offering up all during the time that he had been in Akbar's service. Without those prayers Akbar began to experience the effects of his own karmas more strongly. Akbar still survived for a while longer, for he was lucky enough to have been blessed by a number of saints. The Mughals as a dynasty had even been blessed by one of the Sikh gurus. But when some of the later Mughals tortured the later Sikh gurus the Mughals lost that blessing. This led them to eventually lose India to the British.

"And how do you think the British lost India? They might still be ruling here now were it not for three curses, delivered to them by three kings that they had treacherously overthrown and sent into exile. One was King Thibaw of Burma, who was such a good sadhaka that he could even perform a little Vajroli. Another was Wajid Ali Shah, the ruler of Avadh, who had so perfected his sadhana that Krishna Himself would come and dance before him. And the third was the last of the Mughals, Bahadur Shah Zafar, who was a true poet. His last poem was a heartbroken lament for his fate: 'How ill-starred you are, Zafar, that for your burial you could not even obtain two yards of earth in the bylane of your beloved,' namely India. At one time he had 'owned' all of India; now he retained not even six feet worth of his cherished country in which to be buried. And it was all because of the Britishers. Can you imagine the anguish that he and the other two rulers must have felt as they died? Anguish that was strong enough to bring down the British Empire? *That* is the power of a real curse. So long as Victoria ruled the Rishi's blessing protected her in her position as Mistress of India. As soon as she died these curses were free to exert their effects since none of her successors had the kind of blessing that she had had. Curses and blessings: the Law of Karma. Remember that, my boy, when you are over there in your country."



My departure for the United States at the end of August 1980 coincided almost to the day with the start of my Sade Sati. During my absence from the

scene Vimalananda continued to procure horseflesh, beginning with Redstone, whose other half he purchased from Erach Ghasvala. He also obtained in partnership with Tehmul a very likely-looking filly that he named Meherunnissa in honor of the Emperor Akbar's daughter-in-law.

Kamaal slipped out of Vimalananda's hands in early 1981. After cooling his hooves in first Lafange's stables and then Tehmul's yard without ever notching a win, we had sent him to be trained by Lalloo Dalal. Lalloo, who was a friend of Tehmul's, had approached Vimalananda with a promise to make Kamaal win, and there seemed no reason not to let him try. Lalloo trained mainly for Nawab Saheb, a refined member of the minor Muslim nobility who sold jewels to pay for the corn bills of his horses that ran in colors resembling some peer's livery. One of Nawab Saheb's daughters became very friendly with Lalloo; they were seen everywhere together. It was rumored they were having an affair. Wags commented that such an affair was a sensible use of her time, for it gave her a crow's nest view of Lalloo's plans for Nawab Saheb's horses.

Despite Dalal's promise Kamaal seemed to owe nothing to Vimalananda, for he continued to lose even there. But when Vimalananda requested Lalloo to send Kamaal back to Tehmul's yard Lalloo refused to do so until all his arrears had been cleared, and he counterattacked by demanding immediate settlement of his unpaid bills for extras. Vimalananda being just then exceedingly low on cash he had little alternative but to transfer Kamaal to Lalloo in payment of those 'arrears,' which seemed suspiciously high. Immediately after the transfer Lalloo shifted his horses east for the Hyderabad season, where Kamaal won without further ado. That sudden win created great suspicion in all our minds. Lalloo's explanation was a model of innocence: "For some reason the horse decided to take the bit at last. All my hard work on him finally paid off; I only wish it had done so while you still owned him." Though we might doubt him we had no way to challenge his version of the story, for horses are not machines.

Just before I arrived India again in October 1981, Vimalananda lost his beloved dog Lizoo, who had simply grown too old to continue to live. Vimalananda, who valued love above all else, was hit hard by the loss of this being who loved him purely and unconditionally. I tried to soften the shock of this blow by taking him on a round-the-world tour in December 1981 and January 1982. A sparkling win by his new filly Meherunnissa on December 26 while he and I were at my parents' home in New Mexico raised his spirits sufficiently to spur some of his old enthusiasm. He became so merry, in fact, that he was able to convince my teetotaller parents to sip a little champagne in Meherunnissa's honor.

Back in India in January 1982 Vimalananda went to Bangalore to settle with Ghasvala for the other half of Stoney's second foal. He was accompanied by the scheming Miss Bambhani, who was making noises about entering the racing business herself. But once in Bangalore, Vimalananda discovered that Ghasvala had understood their agreement to be for a half-interest in the first foal only, not the second. Ghasvala, moreover, wanted considerably more for that second foal than Vimalananda was willing or able to pay. As a sop Ghasvala offered him a good deal on another filly, which Vimalananda accepted reluctantly. His heart was set on Stoney's new foal, and he also questioned whether this other filly's action (foot-joint configuration) was a little too upright to be healthy. Ghasvala assured him that this would be no problem. Vimalananda named her Ramakda ("Toy"). Though she did endear herself to us with her 'toy-like' ways her upright action did in fact interfere with her running, which did nothing to endear Ghasvala to any of us.

In February 1982 Vimalananda took me to meet his Junior Guru Maharaj for the first time. He had not dared introduce me before, for he knew what Guru Maharaj could do to me if he lost his temper. In fact, Vimalananda had sent me off to the United States suddenly in May 1977, ostensibly to reconnect with my family, just days before Guru Maharaj arrived unannounced in Bombay for his first visit there since 1959. Even then Vimalananda refused to let Guru Maharaj in the door until Guru Maharaj promised that nothing would happen to Lizoo so long as he remained there. Lizoo had become a dog due to Guru Maharaj's curse, after all, and Guru Maharaj wanted to close out his karmic account with her to free himself of that rnanubandhana. On his part Vimalananda wanted both to retain the love of his doggie as long as he could, and to continually remind Guru Maharaj of the repercussions of this curse.

Guru Maharaj had migrated back to his place of residence before I made it back from the United States that year. After completing such a journey he would not venture off his hill again for at least twelve years. If I was to meet him I thus had no choice but to proceed to his mountain. Vimalananda accompanied me to protect me, as he had previously protected Lizoo, and to get Guru Maharaj to agree to give Redstone the same kind of riderly treatment that he had given Stone Ice a decade before. Vimalananda wanted this in trade for doing some unspecified but essential work that Guru Maharaj wanted done. But Guru Maharaj was not ready to deal, and we had to leave empty-handed.

At the door Vimalananda said to Guru Maharaj, "At least do something for my boy here; do some *Rakta Shuddhi* (purification of the blood) for him!" At this Guru Maharaj, whose love was truly unparalleled, stared at me with

studied bluster, pulled hard on my hair, and started to sting me with slaps about the body. "So, you want *Rakta Shuddhi*, do you?" he shouted, and after he had finished his work he said, "OK, that's *Rakta Shuddhi*!"

A beaming Vimalananda hugged me as we walked toward the car.

"What was all that about?" I wondered aloud.

"*Rakta Shuddhi*—great! He's removed a number of your karmas that have been perverting your mind. You'll be much improved now, whether you like it or not."

I began to think that Vimalananda had partially turned me over to Guru Maharaj, as if saying, "I don't know what to do with this one, Maharaj; you handle him." As time went by I discovered the truth of this surmise; Guru Maharaj later told me that he had had to promise Vimalananda that he would not kill me while he was improving me. However, in the coming years Guru Maharaj took pains to harass me over such things as my then girlfriend and my diet, and came near to causing me serious grief in the imbroglio over Aghori Baba's stick—which is another story.

As Vimalananda and I drove away from Guru Maharaj on the day of that last meeting they were to have in the flesh we saw two pigs coupling—a sight which sent Vimalananda into a rapture of joy: "Guru Maharaj has not deserted me yet! Redstone will win very soon!" And so he did.

Shortly after Redstone's first win I was sitting with Vimalananda in Bombay when Erach Ghasvala called with the sad news of sudden deaths of both Stoney and her new foal. I feared Vimalananda would become distraught, but he was actually happy: "She is free now," he said, "to take a better rebirth, to continue her development. Shouldn't I be overjoyed about that, if I truly love her? Moreover, I now have her son Redstone with me, so the karmic link continues.

"And besides, Erach didn't deserve to have her. He agreed to take her not out of love for her but because he thought he'd be able to make lots of money off her children. Breeding animals for sale is a big karma, even if you are not raising them for slaughter. This is why I never bred my Lizoo. I had no place to keep all her puppies myself, and if I had given them away I would not have been able to keep track of what was happening to them. If one had gone to a family that tortured it I would have had to bear most of the blame, first because I had arranged for it to be brought into the world and then because I placed it with that family. Animals are as big a responsibility as people. Or maybe bigger, in that they can't speak up for themselves." Though I knew that Vimalananda had had some hand in the unexpected demise of mare and foal—I had seen him at work too often to think otherwise—he never admitted any complicity.



Now that Redstone was the only son Stone Ice would ever foal Vimalananda paid even more attention to him, and while we continued to pamper all the horses by bringing them carrots, apples and other treats Redstone received extra-special pampering. One reason that Vimalananda liked Redstone was a certain whorl of hair located in an auspicious spot on his body. He was also overjoyed that Redstone was not an *asrudar*, a 'horse who will make you cry.' In such animals the whorl on their foreheads is so low that they can see it. An *asrudar* makes you weep by mangling your prosperity; either it will personally bankrupt you by losing when you have bet on it heavily, or it will make money for you even while it is causing your business to fail. Stone Ice's perfect star on her forehead, well above the line of her eyes, was one of the things which made her lucky. Vimalananda, who had learned what he knew of horse markings from a Maharashtrian nobleman, the Chief of Jat, would point out such signs to me when he saw them. One strongly propitious combination is the *panchakalyana* ("five auspicious markings"), which is defined as a horse who sports four white socks and a white forehead blaze.

*The American Stud Book*, a copy of which I had brought Vimalananda from the United States, spurred his interest in Redstone's possibilities yet further. He would spend hours pouring over the permutations and combinations created by such noble progenitors as Potooooooooo (Pot8os, or Potatoes) and Waxy, or studying the ramifications of the fact that about 90% of all thoroughbreds are descended from a single stallion named Eclipse who was foaled during an eclipse and never lost a race. We pondered such questions as coat color inheritance—chestnut, bay, brown, black, grey, red roan and blue roan—and why most of the issue in the line of a horse named Geranium had light-colored eyes. Equine, human and divine lineages became a favored topic of our conversation as he enhanced my knowledge both of horseflesh and of the genealogical complexities of Indian myth.

Ancestry even crept into seemingly unrelated subjects, as it did on the evening of a day during which we had discussed with a vet effective treatments for the 'sand cracks' that afflict the hooves of certain horses. Vimalananda began that evening by musing on the nature of the Three Gunas: *Sattva* (equilibrium), *Rajas* (activity), and *Tamas* (inertia). Devas basically have Sattvic intellect, asuras Tamasic intellect, and humans Rajasic intellect. To advance spiritually you first replace Rajas and Tamas with Sattva in your consciousness, and then use Sattva to conquer Sattva itself, that you may go beyond the Gunas. Good karma is basically something that helps free you from your rnanubandhanas and the bondage of Rajas and Tamas; bad karmas have the opposite effect. Enlightenment lies beyond the influence of all of these gunas.

As he was meandering along in this vein inspiration suddenly hit him, and he slipped into story mode:

"It happened once during the reign of Caliph Haroun el-Rashid that three marijuana-smokers who were sitting in the main bazaar of the city of Baghdad started to have a loud argument about which of them was greatest. They made such a noise that they were called in before the caliph, who asked them who they were."

"Who were they actually?"

"They were actually Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Now please listen. The first said, 'I am an expert on horses' pedigrees.' The second said, 'I can tell everything about a man from his face.' When the caliph turned to the third that man said, 'I think it will be better if I don't tell your majesty who I am, because if I do you will have my throat cut.'

"This man's cheek immediately enraged the king, who ordered all three to be confined until he had some opportunity to test their abilities. The first two were housed together and received a regular ration from the palace kitchen, while the third, still smiling, was kept alone and got nothing to eat.

"One day, when the caliph was in a peculiar frame of mind, he sent for the three and told them he was ready to take up the matter of their examinations. He brought out a horse and asked the first man if it was purebred.

"After looking it over the man told the king, 'Definitely not!'

"The king became wild and said, 'How can this horse, which is a present from the Shah of Iran, not be purebred? Tell me how you know or you will die for it!'

"The first man answered, 'I merely looked at the crack in his hoof. All forest animals have cracked hooves. This horse must have also come from the forest, where the rough ground has caused this crack.'

"The king was so shocked that he could say nothing further. He then turned to the second man and said, 'Now, am I of royal lineage or not? Tell me my true lineage!' He was thinking that he would hear that he was of the family of the daughter of Hazrat Imam Hussein. Imagine his reaction when the second man prefaced his remarks with, 'First promise me that you will not punish me for my bluntness,' and said upon receiving that promise, 'You are the son of a cook.'

"The king drew his sword, just as he had after the reply of the first, and said, 'If you cannot prove that impossible statement you will surely die.'

"The man responded calmly, 'Please ask your mother.'

"The caliph rushed to the harem, found his mother, and with drawn sword and eyes reddened with anger demanded, 'Who was my father? The late king, or a cook?'

“His mother looked at him compassionately and said, ‘My son, your father was very old when we married. He could never produce children, and it greatly worried me that there was no heir to the throne. While I was wondering what to do I noticed a young cook in the kitchen, strong and handsome to look at. You were conceived after we slept together.’

“The sobered caliph returned to his court and said to the second man, ‘You were absolutely right, but how did you know?’

“The man answered, ‘It was very easy, your majesty. You sent us rations of food while we were being kept in your palace. No real king would keep an account of how much food his guests were eating; only a cook would.’

“Now the speechless king had nothing left to ask the third man—who was really Sattva—so he was given leave to go with the other two, without ever disclosing his own special capacity. After all, a spiritual man should never disclose his capacities to anyone. And the caliph learned the lesson of his lifetime.”

The lineage question took a turn for the somber when in spring 1982 the war for the Falkland Islands began. This conflict, coupled with the ingratitude of certain Americans of his acquaintance, caused the lovely positivity that Vimalananda felt towards Westerners—which had swelled during his recent world tour—to evaporate with the sizzle of water on a hot griddle. While in the army he had commanded Gurkhas, and was proud of the way they acquitted themselves during this invasion. But he was contemptuous of the operation as a whole: “The Brits have been very lucky in this war,” he observed sourly, “to have America helping them. Otherwise their entire invasion fleet would have been sunk by now by the Argentine Air Force. The Americans were very clever: they sold the right bombs to the Argentines, but gave them the wrong fuses. Without the right fuses how would they explode? Would the Americans have dared to do this to anyone else? No, Thatcher was very clever. She played on Reagan’s prejudices by subtly suggesting to him that the Anglo-Saxon countries should stick together, and Reagan fell for her bait hook, line and sinker.

“But Thatcher is no Victoria, and if she thinks that war can salvage for Britain what is left of its empire she had best think again. The Law of Karma is no respecter of persons, places or things. Britain would have been wiser to recognize that its day in the sun is past, and to gracefully yield her position of pre-eminence. Had the United Kingdom settled with the Argentine government its grateful populace would have showered the Brits with blessings, which they urgently require. Instead, Thatcher has opened herself and her country to the effects of still more curses, which will enlarge their burdens of karmic debt. This war is going to cost both of them dearly, karmically as well as monetarily.”

“But what about the karma of the Argentines? They must have done something to deserve this?”

“They must have; that is the Law of Karma. Their soldiers killed in the field were destined to die at the hands of those Brits and Gurkhas who invaded; that is fairly straightforward. As for the Argentine generals, well, think of the mountain of evil karmas they had created for themselves by causing so many innocent people to ‘disappear.’ Those karmas had to catch up with them some day.”

“But this defeat is just the beginning for the generals, isn’t it?”

“Oh yes; they have plenty of blood on their hands. They have a lot to suffer yet; the Law of Karma will take good care of them, just like it took care of the Shah of Iran.”

“You are speaking now of the most recent Shah of Iran? The man who is said to have installed a solid gold toilet on his personal jet?”

“Yes, that Shah. Do you remember that he staged his coronation at the ancient Persian capital of Persepolis?”

“I do.”

“Persepolis had been a deserted ruin for hundreds of years until the Shah got it into his mind to be crowned there. He wanted to show everyone that he was the legitimate successor to the great Persian emperors of yore, like Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes. But he forgot to ask himself whether those great rulers would enjoy having their ancient citadel invaded by some inconsequential nincompoop. When the Shah’s antics aroused the spirits of those monarchs from their sleep of death they asked themselves, ‘Who is this pip-squeak who dares to strut about comparing himself to us?’ When they looked down on him they saw not a king but the insignificant son of an insignificant cavalry officer who had made himself Shah after a palace coup. All they could hear when this Shah spoke was the barking of an insolent pup. The impudence of this ‘Shah’ who lacked everything that is *shahi* (regal, majestic) so infuriated the dead emperors that they cursed him. Those were the curses that ended the Shah’s reign, just as surely as the curses of King Thibaw, Wajid Ali Shah, and Bahadur Shah Zafar destroyed the British Empire. If the Shah had remembered who he was, and not tried to pretend to be something that he was not, he might be ruling Iran today.”

“Would it have made a difference if the Shah had actually had some pedigree, if he had actually been descended from conquerors?”

“It might have; at the very least, it would have made him understand the gravity of the situation into which he was thrusting himself.”

“Do we think it was Saturn who put this coronation idea into the Shah’s mind?”

*Aghora III: The Law of Karma*

“Who else could do it? The Shah’s good karmas had obviously run out, and it had become time for him to experience the results of his myriad evil karmas. *Vinasha kale viparita buddhi*—‘when the time for your destruction arrives your mind becomes perverted.’”

“And Saturn is just the being to pervert it for you.”

“That is his job.”

“He certainly does it well.”

“Remember that whenever you remember him.”



After Redstone’s next convincing win, in the late spring of 1982, Vimalananda began to suspect that he had a horse who could “go a long way off” i.e. who could win one of India’s Classic races. The horses entrained for Poona shortly after, and on our way to inspect them there he shared his feelings with me: “You know, Robby, I thought I had lost my will to live—but I haven’t; not yet! There’s life in the old boy still! And for this I have to thank Mamrabahen. I never wanted to get back into racing, but she forced me to return. She did it for her own purposes, no doubt, but just as I blame her for some of my problems I have to thank her for some of my enjoyments, which are due at least in part to her insistence.”

He paused as if in thought, then began again abruptly: “Some years back a certain sadhu lived in Girnar with a few disciples. One day he decided to go off a little way into the jungle and sit in meditation. He was really a good sadhu, and after a short while he was doing so well that Indra became frightened and decided to send an *apsaras* down to disturb him.”

In the mythology of the Puranas Indra is always sending some *apsaras* or another down to disturb some sadhu or other, for a hard-working sadhu who performs enough penance may be elevated by the powers-that-be to the Indra-state, and every Indra will try to protect his own position.

“The *apsaras* appeared in front of him to tantalize him, but he was so deep in meditation that he didn’t know what was going on around him. Then she used a *siddhi* to become tiny, and started to dance on him. Still no effect. First she danced on his body, then on his face, and then she jumped onto his matted locks. At last the sadhu felt a disturbance, perceived what was going on, and lost his temper. He said to her, ‘Become a female monkey!’ Immediately she became a female monkey.

“When she realized what had happened she began to cry, but he told her to keep quiet and not to worry. He took her back to his ashram and ordered his disciples to feed her sweets and good food whenever she was hungry. Not

long after that the sadhu left his body, and the monkey lived on in the ashram. When the monkey died she was cremated, and her memorial was placed next to that of the sadhu.

“Look what happened here: Even though the sadhu escaped falling prey to the blandishments of the *apsaras* he still created some karma for himself, but lost some of his *shakti* by losing his temper. Similarly, a whole train of karmas has been initiated because of Mamrabahen, but now at least with Redstone there is a chance that we will see some good results of all our work. Nature is so kind!”

He fell silent as we entered the *ghats* (hills), where all his concentration would be needed, and had me toss a coin, as all drivers did, to the little shrine at the foot of the chief hill. The Konkan coastal strip that contains Bombay is connected with the Deccan Plateau where sits Poona by a road which climbs two thousand feet in the space of a couple of miles. At the time that Vimalananda and I drove it together it was a two-lane highway crowded with the usual Indian transport panoply of trucks, buses, cars, motorcycles, bullock carts and the occasional stray bicyclist, pedestrian and animal. Climbing the *ghats* was exceptionally stressful because of the need to maintain forward momentum without collision and without overheating the engine. My sensory awareness became effortlessly heightened when riding with Vimalananda on the ghat section of the Bombay-Poona road as he meticulously preserved gaps between our vehicle and those on the opposite side of the road. I often watched him merrily miss oncoming conveyances by literally no more than an inch or two. “Gauging,” he would say, “it’s all a matter of gauging. When your gauging is good you can drive confidently,” whether it be on the road or through life. I had no anxiety as he gauged his way through the *ghats* since I knew well how well he could control his car; but when we reached that last inch the self-preservation instinct would still send a surge of adrenaline through me anyway, to remind me of my mortality.

One day as we were driving back into Bombay from Poona Vimalananda was so busy chatting with our guest, a horse owner named Willie D’Souza, that he failed to notice that the traffic light in front of us had turned red. In some amazement Willie and I watched Vimalananda forget to stop, but we were less astonished than was the man who had begun to cross the street at about the same time that we barreled into the intersection. Resentment, incredulity, and inspired aggravation flitted in succession across his face as he hurdled out of our way. I was not concerned for his life (Bombay pedestrians are fleet of foot) but I was somewhat troubled that Vimalananda was not too troubled. Seeing this, and eyeing the startled D’Souza, he commented as he drove on, “You should know by now, Robby, that someone is there to prevent

me from getting into serious trouble even when I goof. And the fellow was not even in serious danger; he had plenty of time to escape. But the look on his face, that was priceless!

"I had a much worse problem the day I was driving down the road, right here in Bombay, when all of a sudden without any warning whatsoever both front wheels fell off! I was shocked, I tell you, shocked! There I sat in the middle of the road, holding my useless steering wheel, as I watched my wheels speed away from me. One ended up safely by the side of the road, but the other one rolled all the way across the street and bowled over a bystander. He had to be rushed to hospital, but fortunately was not too seriously injured." D'Souza and I were now impolitely laughing at the vision of two wayward wheels fleeing the stunned Vimalananda. "There is no security in life, I tell you," he went on. "One minute you are standing there calmly, minding your own business, and the next you are lying in the street, flattened by a runaway tire!"

The next day as I helped Vimalananda cook lunch I was again reminded of his command over gauging. After we put the food on the fire and went to sit in the other room Vimalananda said, "There is really no end to what you can learn. You know how much I love to cook; and many people have enjoyed my food. I think you will agree with me on that."

"I have always enjoyed your food."

"And you know that I have an advantage no Western chef has, thanks to the blessings of Annapurna, the goddess of food. Did I ever tell you what happened when Faram's wife burned the meat?"

"No, I don't think you have."

"Well, she burned it absolutely black. She charred it. Faram, as usual, lost his temper and started to shout at her. In the interest of family harmony I told him to shut up, and told her, 'Ma, please wash all the pieces of meat with soap and water.' She couldn't help laughing, and said, 'Do you know what that will do to it?' I said, 'It's spoiled anyway, isn't it? So just wash it and don't argue with me please.' She washed it, I cooked it, and it came out perfect, without even a hint of burned flavor."

I had seen his wizardry in the kitchen first-hand, close up, so I believed this story instantly.

"Oh, and by the way, Robby, the food is cooking a little too fast; turn the fire down just slightly."

Whenever I put a pot on the fire in a kitchen run by Vimalananda I knew that I could safely leave it to cook on its own, in the absolute certainty that the moment anything went wrong with it he would tell me. This was the power of his gauging.

I adjusted the fire, then thanked him for his care. He took a histrionic whiff of air, said, "Yes, it is. Sometimes when other people are cooking," he chuckled, "they try to show off how expert they are. I don't like show-offs, so I can't help but have a little fun. When they turn away from the food for a moment I will shout, 'Quick, turn off the fire, the food is burning!' and before anyone will be able to get there the food will be burnt!"

I laughed too, and was about to tell him what a show-off he was when he retorted: "Well, if they have the ability they can show it off too; who will stop them? What I object to is fakery, pretending to be something you are not. If they were so smart they should be able to turn down the fire from where they are sitting just as easily as I can turn it up."

Vimalananda's intolerance for pretenders had more than once before inspired him to show me just how little the run-of-the-mill 'swami' in India really walked his talk. "Such people show a trick or two and mislead the public into thinking they are some sort of super-dupers," he would say, before cutting another godman down to size. "I know one who claims to talk to Parashurama face-to-face. Now, Parashurama is a real Bhagavan, God incarnate, one of the Ten Avatars. Anyone who sees Parashurama loses all interest in worldly things and spends all his time alone. His only answer to people's questions will be, 'Leave me alone!' Why? Because that is Parashurama's nature. Parashurama, who is also known as Bhargava, loves to be alone. He lives almost exclusively on the astral planes and above. Bhargava is also continuously moving, which means that his devotee would also go on the move. If he doesn't, and if he says he wants money and an ashram and all sorts of other things, is it logically possible to conclude that he talks to Parashurama face to face? You tell me."

"Haven't you ever pretended to be something you're not?" I asked in mild pique one day after such a diatribe.

"Of course I have," he said, with a laugh at himself as a memory reared up within him. "Once I was staying with a friend at a Dak Bungalow," which is a sort of rest house for visiting dignitaries that the government maintains in small towns that lack hotels. "A barber had come to shave me, and when he had me lathered up he said, 'You know, sir, you look just like Chandramohan,' who was a famous movie star of that time. He was a good actor; if you ever get a chance, Robby, go see the movie *Pukar*. Chandramohan does a beautiful job of playing the Emperor Jehangir in that film."

"I don't know what came over me, but when the barber said this I smiled and nodded and pointed to myself as if to say, 'Yes, I am Chandramohan.' I never actually said in so many words that I was—that would have been too deceptive—but I didn't correct his misimpression either. The thought that he

was shaving the great Chandramohan fired up the barber, so he did an excellent job on my beard. After he left I thought the charade was at an end and I lay down to take a nap.

"I had forgotten, though, that I was in a small town. In Indian villages and towns the barbers act as the news networks. When my companion woke me in alarm from my nap I looked out the window to find the entire Dak Bungalow surrounded by anxious fans, all hoping to see or touch or be touched by the great Chandramohan. It was a hell of a job to extract ourselves from that situation, let me tell you! Ever since then I have thought many times before trying to pretend that I am something I am not. But even in the Chandramohan case I only imitated an actor, not a saint. To imitate a saint is to ask for *real* trouble. Don't forget the sadhus in Girnar!"

"What happened to them?"

"Some years back one of the Nawabs of Junagadh (the principality at the base of Mount Girnar) got so fed up with all the fake sadhus and fakirs who were crowding Girnar that he had his men round them all up. Then he addressed them: 'You shameless idlers! How dare you lie around all day pretending to mediate! I know that most of you are criminals and good-for-nothings. If you are real sadhus, prove it to me! Show me a miracle! If you can't show me a miracle you are going to have to start working for your food! None of the men was a real saint, so none of them could perform a miracle. The Nawab accordingly had his soldiers put each of them in front of a *chakki*, a grinding stone, which they had to turn by hand all day long, grinding grain into flour.

"All these phoney holymen bellyached like crazy as they worked, but now it was too late for them to get by just by pretending to be pious. Finally one really good sadhu who had escaped the Nawab's dragnet came to hear of their humiliation and came down the mountain to confront the Nawab."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know." I could see that he did.

"This sadhu told the prince, 'Even if these fellows are crooks you were wrong to lock them up.'

"The Nawab, who had no intention of letting some sadhu presume to tell him what to do, replied, 'Since you have such a soft spot for these slackers why don't you go join them in the hoosegow!' The sadhu shrugged his shoulders, and accompanied by a police escort went to the prison, where he addressed the inmates: 'When I look at you I am ashamed to be wearing my *girwa* (ochre-colored renunciate's clothing); you have stained it so with your hypocrisy! What kind of sadhus and fakirs are you? When the Nawab asked for a miracle could none of you oblige? Stand back!'

"Then that sadhu shouted, '*Chakki chalo! Dhana piso!* (Turn, grindstones! Grind the grain!).' At that, all the stones began to turn on their own. Amazed, the jailers ran to summon the Nawab, who was appropriately impressed by this demonstration. He told that sadhu, 'Yes, you are the real thing; you can go.'

"The sadhu replied, 'No, Nawab Saheb, I can't go alone; everyone must come with me.' Though the Nawab was reluctant to let the frauds go he could not deny the sadhu, and had to set all the sadhus and fakirs free. As they left the jail the good sadhu told them, 'See that you perform your penance properly from now on. If you fail again, you will be expelled from Girnar!'"

"Did that lesson reform all those lazybones?"

"Yes, for a while."

"Until their natural *svabhavas* reasserted themselves?"

"Well, it is very difficult to conquer your nature, even after you have devoted your life to your *sadhana*. Fortunately someone is always there to test anyone who claims to have his nature under control."

Vimalananda's love of staging practical examinations of putative saints led him one day to take me with him to pay a call on a *baba* ("saintly person"). Our visit was a stopover during a test-drive of a used car that Vimalananda was thinking of purchasing, and the hour we spent cooling our heels before we could see the great man did nothing to improve Vimalananda's temper. Still, as soon as we were ushered into the august presence Vimalananda bowed to him, very low, to show humility. This pleased the *baba* a great deal. Then he asked Vimalananda what sort of business he was in, and Vimalananda replied, "The machinery business."

"Oh," replied the *baba*, "machinery business *very* good business." Then he opened his hand, and some ash poured out onto our expectant palms, for he was one of those people who make things like ash appear from thin air. I collected both heaps of ash in small pieces of paper and folded them into little bundles, which I put into the car's glove compartment after we had said our goodbyes. I accidentally left them there when we returned the car, and within the week that car got smashed both from the front and from the rear. Shortly thereafter the *baba* had a heart attack and later came down with other diseases. Vimalananda claimed not to know how any of this happened, calling it a coincidence. If so it was a truly conspicuous coincidence; I was mightily impressed.

"I began by touching his feet," replied Vimalananda when I brought up the subject, "because in India when you meet a saint you always touch his feet. Touching shows humility, but more importantly it allows you to steal some of the saint's energy. Generally energy enters the body through the head and

*Aghora III: The Law of Karma*

exits through the feet. A true saint is the embodiment of his deity and the energy emanating from him is the energy of that deity. By touching a saint's feet you collect a little of that energy, which purifies your own consciousness and makes it more subtle. The saint loses some of his own peace of mind by this, which is unfortunate for the saint; this is how many saints go bad. First they achieve a good state, maybe by doing hard penances in strict seclusion. Then when they come back into the world they start absorbing the confusion and attachment of their devotees, and they too become worldly. A sensible saint will never let anyone touch his feet except on special occasions, like Guru Purnima.

"Anyone with subtle intelligence who touches a saint's feet will be able to learn a great deal about that saint's innate qualities. Touching this fellow's feet was my first test; I wanted to see how sensible he was and how much energy he had. He unfortunately scored zero on both counts. Next came the question of my 'business.' If he had any kind of real power at all he should have been able to know that I was in the race horse business and not the machinery business. But he had nothing except ash, which did not impress me. There are so many ways in which to produce ash and trinkets from what seems to be nowhere. It's too bad that the old man is unwell, but he should have known better than to try to show off. I am just sorry for the poor car; that ash was the cause of its ruination. Now you see how sticky karma can be!"

"Don't you think you were a little hard on him?"

"Hard?! I was hard on Taat Maharaj. *Taat* means 'gunny-sack,' which is what this fellow wore. One of my friends brought me to Taat Maharaj by telling me he could sit in samadhi for hours at a time while his followers sang and chanted. I didn't believe it, so I went to have his *darshana* (the viewing of a saint or deity). Sure enough, I could see that he was merely closing his eyes and fooling everyone. On top of that I was supposed to bow down to him! While I waited there I examined the room carefully and came up with a plan. Back at home I sharpened the point of a long iron nail until it was razor sharp. A few days later I returned to Taat Maharaj and got into the line to touch his lotus feet. When I got to the head of the line I bent down, raised the nail high above my head, and jabbed it into his foot. My God! What a howl came from that charlatan! His bellowings even drowned out the warbles of his singers."

"Wouldn't most people have responded to a nail in the foot even if they were in samadhi?"

"No, not if the samadhi is genuine. A person who is in samadhi has no knowledge whatsoever of the outside world so long as he remains in samadhi. If Taat Maharaj had actually been in samadhi he would have felt nothing

from that nail, not even a pinprick. But he was just pretending, so he felt it all. Everyone was so stunned that I had time to rush out the door to where an accomplice was waiting in the getaway car, and off we sped. I don't like to think about what might have happened to me had I been caught!"

"Was there no karma involved in that little escapade?"

"There is karma involved in every activity, but this karma was worth it to me to see that imposter unmasked. I do have certain advantages in this department—the advantages of knowing my own karmas and rnanubandhanas—and I can assure you that he deserved what he got from me. Unless you know your rnanubandhanas, though, and know how to negate your karmas, never try any stunts like this!"

Knowledge of his rnanubandhanas and how to negate them seemed to spur Vimalananda into action when one of the doctors at my college sang the praises of one Dada Maharaj, who was reputed by some in Poona to be a great saint. "We must go have his darshana," said Vimalananda enthusiastically when he heard this news.

"Hah, so now this fellow's time is up," I replied with some sarcasm.

"Robby," said Vimalananda, feigning hurt, "am I that bad? Just because you have seen a few coincidences should you always make fun of me when I go to meet some 'saint'? What about Madhavbaba?"

Vimalananda's appreciation for the genuine article caused us always to visit Madhavbaba Patil whenever he came to Poona. Madhavbaba, who lived some two hours or more south of Poona in Narsobawadi, had been so thorough in his sadhanas that now he spent all of his time in some world other than ours, lost in contemplation of his Beloved. Vimalananda, who had known Madhavbaba for many years, respected him as a good sadhaka, and for his part Madhavbaba, who never appeared to recognize most people but blessed all indiscriminately, always recognized and remembered Vimalananda.

But I knew Madhavbaba was different, and indeed, my prediction regarding this Dada Maharaj proved to be true. When first we went to Dada Maharaj he met us perfunctorily and informed us that he had no time for us. Perhaps we didn't seem sufficiently important to him. The very next day, however, he called us back, and personally welcomed us when we came, explaining that he had been soundly remonstrated for his gaffe in a dream the night before and wanted to make amends for his negligence. He verbally pictured for us his spiritual adventures in Rishikesh, when he had seen angels ascending and descending divine staircases, and then described such other visions as seemed to impress his raptly-listening retainers. But as we sat listening politely I could see from the set of Vimalananda's eyes that he felt his

work there to be completed. His interest in Dada Maharaj evaporated as promptly as it had developed, and the old man did in fact die just a few months later.

During the 1982 monsoon Vimalananda spent even more time than usual in Poona, focusing most of his energies on Redstone's progress. During the monsoon it is easier to focus on almost anything in Poona rather than in Bombay, when the rain falls like Thor's hammer onto the backs of anyone unwise enough to get caught out in a downpour. Once or twice each year it rains 18 inches or more in a single day. Then the overworked storm sewers, which can ordinarily handle up to a foot of rain daily, overflow to send nine months worth of accumulated muck into the laps of the luckless commuters scurrying back to homes glazed with mold and mildew. The Poona monsoon, by contrast, is better behaved: it rarely rains more than a drizzle during the day, reserving most of its deluges for the evenings and nights. The rare heavy rain there is at most 7 or 8 inches. Poona during the monsoon is like an English city during a warm spell: temperate, green and inviting. It is at its pleasantest then, and the racing is cool and elegant.

When Redstone won yet another race, this time on the Poona course's verdant turf, Vimalananda determined to try him in the premier "run-up" race for the Classics: The Colonel Pratap Singh of Jodhpur Cup. Part of Vimalananda's fondness for the race derived from its namesake, Colonel Pratap Singh, sometimes known as "the Bayard of India," who was one of Queen Victoria's aides-de-camp and who helped lead the Indian Army in France during the First World War. The only problem, he told me, was that it was supposed to be a "hoodoo" race; no horse who won it ever seemed to win any of the Classics.

"A 'hoodoo' race?" I asked. "You mean races can be cursed too?"

"Anything can be cursed," he replied. "Houses, cars, clothes. What about the Hope Diamond? I wouldn't have it even if it was given to me. First of all it was pried loose from a stone image in a South Indian temple, which was hardly likely to put the deity from whom it was stolen into a good mood. And look at its history! Calamity has followed everyone who has ever possessed it. That in itself should be indication enough that it is cursed. So why not races?"

"Do you think the Colonel Pratap Singh Cup is a hoodoo race?"

"Whether or not it is I have decided to run Redstone in it. If he can't win it it will just prove that he's not Classic material anyway. Why live in fear? Better to go for broke!"

And so we did. As the countdown for the Big Race ticked by we exhaustively evaluated Redstone's trackwork, fitness, appetite and general mood, and kept our fingers thoroughly crossed. In our spare time we made excursions

to those local beings, human and ethereal, with whom we had beneficial rnanubandhanas. One evening we drove to the Sindhi colony in Aundh, near Poona, to meet a family related to one of Vimalananda's 'children.' These people were bickering among themselves continually, and suffering from one disease after another. When Vimalananda visited them he immediately detected the problem: a large banyan tree nearby. No one dared to sleep under the tree at night, for it had a 'reputation.' Vimalananda changed all that, as he has done with the many other trees around India which have become his friends, and asked the head of the household to offer incense to the tree each week.

The man, who must have thought he was very clever, offered incense daily instead until the spirit in the tree came and stood in front of him and asked him what his intentions were. This terrified him enough to remember Vimalananda's words, and to revert to a weekly offering. "Now everyone in the house is well," Vimalananda commented, "all the family members cooperate with each other, and the warehouse of the family business is never empty. No matter how much is removed from the warehouse something always remains there. Many other people have seen this tree, offered it incense, and obtained results. Now the family is happy with me, and the tree is also happy with me—and their combined blessings add all the more to my karmic account balance as we prepare for Redstone's test."

The greatest time-squandering of the entire process centered around Das Bapa, a Tantric from Gujarat who claimed to be able to ensure Redstone's success. Vimalananda was always on the lookout for someone who could give him the reliable race results needed to make money at the track so that he could evade the karma of divining the results himself. He followed the path laid out in a Marathi saying: *pavnyacha sota ne vichu maar*: "Kill the scorpion with the guest's staff." Why soil your own walking stick with the scorpion venom of karma if you can soil someone else's? (Substitute "penis" for "staff" if you prefer the ribald interpretation of the word *sota*.) He had interviewed quite a number of candidates: astrologers, mediums, and one fellow who brought with him a little boy and a dark scrying glass for the boy to gaze into. All these previous contestants had flopped abjectly, however; no matter how expert they might be for other people in other places they always failed with Vimalananda. Perhaps it was coincidence, or perhaps it was not Vimalananda's destiny to win that way. More likely it was Vimalananda, teaching them valuable lessons.

Das Bapa had been brought to us by Mr. Bundaldas, a semi-nobleman with delusions of efficacy. The Bapa made tall claims of having magically fixed bullock races and stuffed ballot boxes by ethereal means. After Vima-



lananda saw some of his capabilities at first hand he lost some of his preliminary doubts about the man's potential. But he was under no illusion as to the source of Das Bapa's powers: "I do not doubt that he has done good avishkaras before," said Vimalananda. "He has been possessed by the likes of Mahakali and of Anjaneya. But you haven't forgotten what happened at the caves, have you? He claimed he was going to do an avishkara of the spirit of the great Guru Gorakh Nath. But Gorakh Nath was there just part of the time; the rest of the time it was just some ordinary little spirit playing about.

"But of course how could we have expected more? Should we imagine that Gorakh Nath, who is immortal, has nothing better to do than to commune with such a mediocre mortal as Das Bapa? And that too, someone with so much karma on his hands? To do much of their work Das Bapa and his own guru have tortured many many *dakinis* (the spirits of women who died in pregnancy or childbirth), and have not even spared the spirits of tiny babies. You just have no idea of how horrible is the price you have to pay if you fool about with these rituals."

"How about the karmic implications for us if he does some work for us?"

"First, he has offered to do this work of his own accord. He is thinking of some way to eventually profit from us, of course; he is not trying to help us because he loves us. But that's not the point. The point is that I didn't ask him to the work, which makes an immense karmic difference. And besides, we first need to see whether or not Nature will permit him to do anything for us before we worry about how to apportion karmic blame or praise. Right now Das Bapa is dancing on the strength of that spirit named Bhima Bapa that he keeps with him. Well, we can stop that, and then we'll see how much water he's swimming in."

"Is digging up dead babies and pregnant women some sort of very primitive Nara Bali?"

"It could be, but it is not in the way that Das Bapa does it, because he is not offering those spirits to Ma. He is enslaving them for his own use. It is true that from one point of view everything is sacrifice, including devotion, yoga, and even magic. But Das Bapa's kind of sacrifice is very selfish, and the karma for it will stick to him like glue. This is why the best sacrifice, the best Nara Bali of all, is the sacrifice of your own self. Offer yourself and all you possess, including your most precious possession—your life—to Ma, and She will save you. But she is not going to save Das Bapa. Just wait until these spirits get their revenge, and then you will see how far away from Nara Bali Das Bapa is."

Das Bapa was far away from us in Poona during the next ten days, three-quarters of an hour away in fact, holed up in the quiet of the Fruitwala Dharamsala in Alandi testing out his predictive methods. Each day Vima-

lananda sent me grumbling to Alandi astride Arzoo's motor scooter to enquire after Das Bapa's health, ask about any necessities to be brought to him or his assistant from Poona, and remind him by my presence that we were expecting results. To me it was a complete waste of two hours each day, as I was becoming surer and surer that Vimalananda was planning to have Das Bapa's head on a platter.

Das Bapa and his man Friday resurfaced in Poona just in time for his first quiz, which took place on the race day that fell on the Sunday before the Big Race. We had expected a straightforward list of winners, and what we got was Das Bapa insisting on accompanying us to the track so that he could "examine" the runners. It was embarrassing to be seen with him, and galling to have to listen to his "advice." Though he did predict one winner, or maybe it was two, neither was unexpected based on nothing more magical than fitness and form. While he and his cheering section of one crowed over this glorious success it became clear to the rest of us that all that was left to do with him was to boot him out of our lives as graciously as possible. This task was now more difficult as he had begun to protest confidently that after seeing the track he now had the necessary "range" to do a good job of predicting the results of the next week's races. We packed him off to Alandi again without delay, to "refine" his technique.

During this week Vimalananda thankfully did not force me to make fruitless runs to Alandi. Instead he sent me to plumb Redstone's prospects at the Bhuleshwar Shiva temple. Vimalananda's first journey to Bhuleshwar had been with Dr. Lad; they had set out in search of a different temple, but took the wrong road and discovered Bhuleshwar. When I accompanied Vimalananda on his second Bhuleshwar trek we took a different wrong road, up the wrong hillside, following the pavement even after it turned to dirt and then became a track. When we pressed ahead we found ourselves alone and roadless on the hillside squarely amidst a flock of goats. A sweetly-smiling young goatherd then fortuitously appeared to navigate for Vimalananda as he backed up the hill and down to the paved road, whence we drove off to find the right road, and the shrine.

On our third expedition we reached the right hill, but in the deepening twilight took the wrong fork of the road at its base. We then found ourselves ascending by the old road, which had been condemned. It was much too late to turn back when our thoroughfare suddenly deteriorated into a steeply-climbing uneven field of fist-sized rocks without any semblance of a guard-rail. Only the sum of our collective good karmas, the weight of our tank-like Austin Cambridge station wagon, and Vimalananda's determination, pluck, and driving skill got us up that hill—but clatter up it we did, and enjoyed our



darshana. Thereafter, having learned from our experiences and having passed these tests that Shiva (or whoever) had set for us, we made regular, safe outings to the sanctuary.

Bhuleshwar's architecture, which is unique in that region of Western India, suggests that it was built as a fortified Tantric monastery, though no one knows who the Tantrics were or how long they remained in residence there. Whoever it was that held the fort in the latter part of the 18th century appears to have run afoul of India's then paramount power in the person of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who dispatched his relative Shaistha Khan to crush their resistance. Shaistha Khan presumably invested the base of the hill and laid siege to the monastery, which cannot have held out for very long since its sole source of water is a small cistern within a bat-infested cave. On some fateful day the remaining residents must have sallied out to be slaughtered; the astral scent of violent death is thickly palpable in the vicinity. Enough local people have seen enough spirits of the unquiet dead there that none of them stays overnight at Bhuleshwar if they can avoid it. When I once spent ten days there meditating in the old guardhouse I could at night clearly hear faint sounds of battle wafting up to me from below and felt acutely the nearby presence of ethereal warriors. On one memorable evening a ghost outfitted in battle armor went so far as to careen through my room. He paid no attention to me and sped on without stopping, engrossed as he was in his ancient, unseen tussle, submerged in his memories of killing and being killed.

Devout visitors to Bhuleshwar walk first down to the cistern to wash their feet and hands, taking care not to drink its water before filtering it through a cloth to remove any lurking Guinea worm larvae. Then they follow from the cistern to the temple a path that is lined with stone heads and torsos that Shaistha Khan's men hacked from the monastery's walls. Only vestiges survive of the erotica that once adorned the temple's exterior. Much exquisite sculpture still remains within, including scenes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, a giant bull, and a female Ganesha, but here also the raiders savaged the figures, and most of them are missing limbs.

Inside the sanctum sits a stone *Shiva linga* (phallic symbol of Shiva) which is unusual not for its shape or size but because it can be lifted from its base. Such lingas are ordinarily regarded as worthless, but at Bhuleshwar water perpetually seeps from some unplumbed shaft into the small cavity which the linga covers. The *pujari* (ritual priest), after removing a little of this water for the worshippers to sip as Shiva's blessings, places into the cavity a small metal dish filled with some pieces of the bananas and milk-sweets that have been presented for offering, and closes the cavity with the linga. Then every-

one sits patiently, sometimes for several minutes, for a peculiar scratching sound. Once the sound both comes and dies away, the linga is again removed, and *voilà!* some of the offerings have disappeared.

Our first thought was that some sort of rodent must be entering the cavity to eat the food, but on close inspection we discovered that none of the holes within the cavity are large enough to admit any but the smallest of mice. Moreover, we on occasion offered the sacred-to-Shiva *bilva* leaves, which were also "consumed" by this mysterious beast—and what self-respecting small animal would choose bitter leaves over sweet treats? It was a mystery over which we expended much conversation.

We lost interest in what was taking the food on the day we realized that the quantity taken could provide answers to questions. When everything was taken the answer was an unqualified 'yes'; when one or two pieces remained the answer was 'yes, with limitations'; and if only one or two pieces were taken the answer was 'limited success.' No pieces taken? An unqualified 'no.' This mode of divination could be used for lost objects, employment opportunities and most any other enquiry provided that everyone there focused on a single query. Once Vimalananda determined to use Bhuleshwar as an oracle for his runners I was making regular, fatiguing pilgrimages to the spot. Never over the many months that I consulted it for this purpose were its predictions wrong: everything taken meant 'a winner'; a few pieces remaining indicated that the horse would win some stakes money, by placing second, third or fourth; and only one or two pieces taken, or none at all, meant 'the horse finishes well back in the pack.'

On this occasion everything went smoothly: my bus was on time, clouds shaded me from the sun during both my walk up and my walk down, the marvelous tree behind the temple sported an excellent complexion, and each and every piece of my offering was lifted. I consequently went into an excellent humor, as did Vimalananda when he heard these details. Our frame of mind remained thus until the following afternoon when we happened to run into one of the Stipendiary Stewards as we were leaving the stables. This conspicuous gentleman peered over his nose at us in a way that he presumed to be dignified, smiled disdainfully, and observed to Vimalananda that he was very courageous to enter his "nice little horse" in such a "big race." I saw fury infuse Vimalananda's face as he controlled himself and said something neutral like, "He will acquit himself well, God willing."

Back in the hotel he said to me coldly, "When this is all over I'm going to have a good laugh at the expense of everyone who thought I was a fool to enter my 'nice little horse' in such a 'big race.' I'll enjoy it as much as Birbal enjoyed humiliating Mullah Do Pyaza."

“What?”

“Haven’t I told you that story before? Mullah Do Pyaza was one of the *hakims* (Unani physicians) in Akbar’s court.”

“*Do pyaza* means ‘two onions.’ What were his two onions: his testicles?”

“Probably. Like most of his fellow courtiers Mullah Do Pyaza hated Birbal with a passion, and was always looking for ways to show him up. One day he had a brain wave. He enlisted one of Akbar’s concubines, promising her that the Emperor would start to pay her more attention if she would cooperate.

“An agonized screech rent the air on the appointed morning as Akbar conducted business in his court. There was a thoroughgoing commotion as two servants carried in the concubine, who had ‘swooned.’ ‘She’s been bitten by a snake, Your Majesty!’ they shouted. ‘She’s dying! What can we do?’

“Sure enough, there on her arm were two puncture wounds which looked suspiciously like those made by a snake. The Emperor’s heart was overcome with compassion. He cried out, ‘Can no one save her?’

“Up sprang Mullah Do Pyaza, who yelped, ‘Fear not, Your Majesty, I am here!’ Then he grabbed the concubine’s arm and began to suck the ‘poison’ out of the ‘bite,’ making a melodramatic pause now and again for effect. When he was finished he told Akbar, ‘I think she is out of danger now, my liege.’

“‘Thank you, oh thank you, Mullah Saheb,’ exclaimed the relieved emperor. ‘You will be richly rewarded for your gallant services.’ Then he turned to Birbal and said, ‘Thank goodness Mullah Saheb was here; you were of no help at all.’

“Birbal was nobody’s fool. He had already figured out what was going on. That taunt hardened his heart against the Mullah. He pondered his revenge carefully, and patiently awaited a fit moment to carry it out.

“That moment came on the Emperor’s next hunting expedition. After a hot afternoon of riding down game Birbal signalled to Akbar that he needed to empty his bladder. After dismounting and assuming the stance he promptly began to shout, ‘Oh, I’m dead, I’m a dead man now!’

“Akbar shouted back, ‘What’s the matter!’

“In obvious pain Birbal whimpered, ‘Your majesty, while I was making water a snake bit me on my member. Now I’m done for!’

“Akbar looked around him, spied the Mullah, and said, ‘Mullah Do Pyaza, you saved the life of my concubine by sucking the poison out of her arm. You must do the same for Birbal. He is my most trusted companion; I can’t do without him!’

“The Mullah tried to make some lame excuse, but the Emperor would have none of it. Seeing that there was no alternative, and knowing that Birbal had got the best of him, Mullah Do Pyaza got down off his horse. He walked

over to Birbal, bent down in front of him, and went to work. As the Mullah kissed Birbal’s penis in submission Birbal whispered to him, ‘So, my child, are you enjoying this little drama now as much as you enjoyed the act you arranged in the palace?’

All in the room enjoyed a good horselaugh over that one, and after I had calmed down I asked, ‘Are you so sure of your four-legged ‘child’ that you are now ready to predict success?’

“Almost, but not quite. Let us see after his spurt tomorrow.”

The spurt, which was the sort of little half- to three-quarters-pace gallop over three furlongs that gets administered as a “lung-opener” to a racer three days before his race, went off well, for Redstone was as fit as a well-strung fiddle. Though Vimalananda still refused to speak definitively he did begin to relax, as if the race was already over and his “boy” had done the job.

It being a terms race there was no handicap to anguish over, and on the eve of the race there was little left to do at the stables except to sit watching Nakhodaji, the ever-smiling Rajasthani farrier, shoeing the next day’s runners as the other horses walked their perpetual circles around the stable buildings. A few horses need to wear steel horseshoes on an outing, but most horses get shod just before a race in aluminum racing plates that are much lighter and thinner than the steel shoes they require for daily wear and work. After the race the farrier routinely changes the aluminum shoes back to steel.

Nakhodaji’s intermittent hammering punctuated the persiflage that Tehmul and Dr. Kulkarni were exchanging over tea as they studiously attempted to avoid extra speculation over the outcome of The Race. Only three other runners were left in it—“Everyone else is afraid of the jinx,” claimed the loquacious Dr. Kulkarni—and everyone wondered whether the meager field would hamper or enhance our boy’s chances. When Redstone’s jockey Chirag arrived to formally discuss strategy he was admonished to run a conservative race by keeping Redstone second behind the horse setting the pace. If the pace was too slow for Redstone Chirag should take him to the front, but only far enough to have a clear passage at the bend. Chirag nodded his agreement, and left to meet the trainers of his other mounts. We departed only when no one remained to talk with. Back at home we spent the rest of the evening in a last perusal of the records of the four runners, trying to determine which would best be able to carry the 57 kilos over the 9 furlongs (1800 meters) of the Colonel Pratap Singh Cup. We went to bed early, and after a good sleep, a good breakfast and a light lunch we proceeded with due temerity toward the racecourse, eyes open to omens.

My first meeting with Vimalananda had taken place on the day that his mare Elan won her first race for him. Vimalananda had gone on to become

the most important influence in my life. I regarded that initial win as a particularly good portent for me. The interest in omens that had been awakened in me by the crash of the monkey's fist into Arzoo's mirror intensified unexpectedly one afternoon during 1979 or 1980 on the eve of a race in which Vimalananda had a runner. Vimalananda and I were sitting peaceably in Tehmul's yard at the Bombay racing stables mulling over the morrow when our gaze turned to a gang of crows who traced a sinister circle around something on the ground about fifteen or twenty meters away. Suddenly Vimalananda jumped up and yelled, "Quick, Robby, go scare off those crows!"

Vimalananda believed emphatically in feeding crows, and daily left food for them outside his Bombay kitchen window. One peculiarly hook-nosed crow became friendly and confident enough to eat from the palms of our hands, and feeding him became one of my Bombay joyances. For Vimalananda to request me to disturb crows was thus uncharacteristic enough to snap me to attention. When I rushed over to shoo the birds away I found that they had been harassing a dying lizard. Vimalananda moseyed up behind and stared at the lizard for a compassionate moment before he turned to me to say gloomily, "Well, my boy, our mare will finish in the money tomorrow, but now I don't believe that the old girl can win. If only we'd noticed this sooner and actually saved the lizard we'd have been guaranteed of victory!" As he predicted our mare did indeed place the next afternoon.

The sight of such a sign before Redstone's Big Race would have winched us up into a heaven of confidence, but we saw nothing out of the ordinary that day, neither on our way to the track nor as we walked to the stands. The first few races went by uneventfully. Though Das Bapa had come near to groveling for another chance to appear there in person neither of us had wanted to have to deal with him, so he had had to send his list of choices of uncertain value. I was not surprised that none of his picks before the Big Race came true. While I noted that he had selected Redstone as the winner of the that race he must have known that it would have been suicidal for him to do otherwise.

Now Vimalananda rose and repaired for the Paddock. I stood at the Paddock's edge, eyeing the four horses as they filed in. Before security had become so tight I would sometimes flash my badge and go backstage to watch the trainer and grooms perform the saddling ritual and administer final touches, like the tweaking of a forelock to make it lie straight. I saw that scene now in my mind's eye as the four runners, two with braided manes, began to parade around their owners and trainers who stood in their business suits tense with expectancy giving last-minute cautions to the jockeys in their silks and white breeches. Vimalananda had taught me how to tell something of a horse's fitness by the sight of his muscles, and it was clear to me that by that

criterion ours was the fittest in this field. Everything went smoothly as the horses came into the Paddock's center to be mounted by their riders and then filed out to head for the track. Diverse criteria for success flitted through my mind as I tried to evaluate our prospects. One indicator of failure, which I had found to be reliable in seven or eight cases out of ten, was to see a horse drop dung while parading in the paddock or walking to the starting gate. That Redstone's bowels did not move in either locale removed one worry from my list.

As the horses wended their way to the gate I pondered the other things that might go wrong. Sometimes a horse who dumped his rider and got loose on his way to the post would gallop away half his energy before he could be caught and remounted. Sometimes one fractious horse would kick another as they were being loaded into the starting gates; sometimes one horse would take so long to be loaded that the others who were already in the starting gates would become fractious themselves. Sometimes a horse would bolt early from the gates again and again, producing a string of false starts that could dishearten other horses and distract their riders. Horses sometimes got left at the start, and some horses just unaccountably got spooked or went sour or hunkered down in obstinacy and refused at the last minute to race.

After what seemed manifold eternities all the horses were loaded. I at least had to concentrate on slowing my breath as my excitement tightened its squeeze on me. Just then, at what was the very last of moments, as the starter lifted his flag and Vimalananda and I prepared to stand to watch the gates open, up popped the ferret-faced waiter whose palm was always open for a tip, bringing us two cups of steaming tea. My heart teetered on the brink for a moment, and then sank down into my dress shoes: tea with milk! Milk, the harbinger no augur wishes to see! Was this last-minute omen going to negate all my work at Bhuleshwar? As I bent down to whisper to Vimalananda, "Does tea signify what milk does?" the flag dropped without warning, and the race began! I shoved my forebodings to the rear of my mind as I whipped up my binoculars and watched Redstone get a good jump out of the gate. It was Saturday, September 18, 1982.

All horse owners are captivated as a race kicks off by a seductive moment or two in which they begin to taste the attainment of their long-cultivated expectancies. Disappointments, recriminations, and prolonged autopsies of what actually happened and what might have been await all but one of them at the finish line, but at that moment of the start the owner's heart and horse leap together. Though I was but a lowly racing agent, that alluring feeling and I were familiars, and I think both I and my owner held our breaths for the first few furlongs of the Big Race and relaxed into respiration only when we

saw that all was going well. The track had some give in it after a recent watering; some observers later commented that it might have been a bit overwatered, and that there should have been false rails. Redstone was second coming out of the gate, and stayed there as the field passed the first few distance poles. Two furlongs, four, then six; we could see that Redstone was handy, and that his competition was still more or less even with him.

Everything was happening according to plan, but I continued to think contingencies. What if the jockey fell off? Race jockeys ride above their saddles, enhancing their speed by leaning forward with their weight above their mounts' shoulders even though this pose increases the likelihood of a fall. But no fall occurred. As the sound of the thunder of horses' hooves began to catch up with the vision of their movement we saw them approaching the bend, and began to urge jockey and horse on with our screams.

The straight is very short in Poona, and when we saw Chirag take a good turn and then start to quicken his mount it suddenly became clear to both of us that he was going to win! Now a bellow mounted from the racing public to mingle with ours as Redstone flashed passed us to cross the winning post a length and a half clear of his nearest rival. The third horse was two lengths further away, and the best pedigreed horse of the day a bad fourth. As Chirag sat back in his saddle and began to slow his mount we stopped shouting long enough to think the same thought: Redstone, our "nice little horse," had done it! I momentarily took back all the nasty things I had thought about Kumar when he leaned over to congratulate us. Mudhol Maharaj was beside himself with fervid glee. Our nearest neighbors wished us well, but most of the other racing patricians glared at us sourly from their boxes, sure that we plebians had no business winning major races.

We ignored these costive disapprovers as we strode down the steep steps to where the beaming Tehmul stood. Some owners become temporarily mute or manic when their horses win, but Vimalananda was a model of evenness and self-possession as he responded to the acclaim of his friends and well-wishers until Redstone arrived. When the whole group started back to the Paddock my shrieks of praise fused with those of the partisan crowd to roll billow-like above all heads—and then it was over. Then all the trainers and owners and bettors and bookies who had had something riding on this race that they had lost let their shoulders sag definitively as they sighed over their fates and began to concoct the excuses that would soon be demanded of them.

I strode back to the Paddock rail, where I saw Tehmul's ferment express itself in his post-race duties: the supervision of the undoing of the saddle's girth buckles, the inspection of the legs, the fond pat on the nose. Though this might have been merely a Classic tuneup race Tehmul had not yet won

any Classics, which made this win a good omen for him as well. After the white ball was raised to signify that no objections had been made the results were confirmed and the photos were snapped as the Stewards presented the Cup. We then remounted grandstands that for the rest of that day's races—only one of which Das Bapa's choice won—remained atwitter at Redstone's celebrity.

After the last race and the obligatory stop at the stables to distribute tips and feed treats to our hero of the day we retired to the hotel for congratulatory Scotch—an assiduously preserved bottle of Black Dog—and for the first of many retellings of the story of Redstone's Brilliant Run. A few days later the race video arrived, and over the next week we must have relived the race visually at least a dozen times, watching Redstone's action, noting Chirag's technique, trying to divine how our "nice little horse" might fare against stiffer competition. The pundits were sure it was a fluke; one turf weekly dubbed Redstone the best horse of the day but sniffed, "he is certainly not of the super class," and lamented that for the second year in a row the Colonel Pratap Singh Cup had been lifted by an outsider.

Super class or not our horse had won, a fact which now lured me into what became a maelstrom of omenological fantasies. Though the events that led up to the Big Race had been filled with all sorts of contradictory presentiments which seemed almost to nullify one another, the revelation that hot tea presaged an entirely different outcome from milk began to exercise my mind. Vimalananda, like Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan, looked to omens as "agreement from the world," clues of Nature's approval or disapproval of proposed human action, and he shared his knowledge of these generously. Useful tokens are often simple: to see milk being brought toward you is usually inauspicious, while water or yogurt brought toward you is normally auspicious. To see a sadhu walking toward you suggests a reduction in prosperity, with a shaved-head Jain sadhu or a Jain nun being a strong sign of likely loss, while seeing meat, fish or a corpse being carried toward you is a strong sign of impending gain. Most any event can presage something or other, but as I was soon to discover one event becomes a herald for the future only when your attention has consolidated around a specific question that requires resolution from Nature.

Omenology bounded squarely to the fore of my consciousness during the very next week as Vimalananda and I were travelling together by shared taxi from Poona to Bombay. When Vimalananda declined to drive to Poona we would usually travel by taxi. Though the taxis normally carry four passengers he and I would often pay for all four seats that we might enjoy privacy during the three-and-a-half- to four-hour ride. When we reached the taxi

stand that evening and there were no other potential passengers we sat in the taxi at the head of the queue and prepared to depart. Just then a harried-looking man clutching a briefcase rushed up and begged permission to take the front seat. We had no objection, and since it would save us a little money we invited him in.

As we drove away the taxi driver announced self-importantly, "We will stop for fifteen minutes each in Lonavala and in Khopoli."

"You are only supposed to stop in one or the other place, and for half an hour," remonstrated the man in the front seat with a nervous promptness.

"I know the rules," responded the taxi driver severely, "The rules say stops may be had in both places, and that is how it will be. If you don't like it please take the next cab."

This shut the man up so abruptly that we were drawn to observe him. He was a singularly unimpressive specimen of humanity, and the peculiar combination of anxiety, preoccupation, distrust and cupidity which oozed from every pore of his blowsy visage had transformed his natural lack of comeliness into a positively ill-favored mien. Suspicion arose in two minds as one as we in the back seat began to question his identity, and his reasons for clasping his attaché case to his bosom as if his whole future were contained therein.

When we stopped as the driver had promised at Lonavala the front-seat man hopped out and promptly disappeared, to reappear only after half an hour. The rest of us were annoyed but said nothing. At Khopoli, after the driver ostentatiously announced, "Fifteen minutes," the front-seat man disappeared yet again, and when twenty-five minutes had gone by without a sign from him the driver came to the table at which Vimalananda and I sat post-snack. He said, "I can't continue to wait around for this fellow. I'll give him five more minutes. If he doesn't show his face by then I am going to go on to Bombay, and he can come by the next cab. If we leave now will you bear witness of his shenanigans for me at the taxi stand so that I don't get into any trouble?"

As neither Vimalananda nor I were averse to giving this oaf a jolt we readily agreed to this plan. After requesting the people at the restaurant to inform the man that we had left we sped off, the man's briefcase lying untouched on the front seat. "I knew there would be trouble with this man as soon as I saw him," said the driver in the beautiful Urdu of the refined North Indian city of Lucknow, "which is why I didn't want to take him with us. When his face did not please me how was he able even to sit in my cab?" Aha! I thought. As a student of physiognomy I knew exactly what he meant. Something was obviously improper about the man, something that violated the canons of auspiciousness, an unsuitable something that should have alerted us to the likelihood of trouble with him. Nature had somehow limned this inappro-

priateness onto his face, and had we heeded the message of his facial language we could have spared ourselves his company.

Had we done that, though, we would have missed sampling the feast of our taxi driver in full extemporaneous flight. By turns self-congratulatory, fearful, indignant and overconfident, his monologue entertained us all the way to the Bombay taxi stand, where he was so pleased with our witness for him that he insisted on buying us paan and cigarettes as treats. We learned then that when the front-seat man had discovered that we had departed with his briefcase he had first clawed at his heart as if it might stop beating. Then, after regaining his composure, he had phoned Bombay in a frenzy to tell the taxi dispatcher to hold his briefcase as soon as it arrived. We three agreed that something illegal must be involved, which made it even less comprehensible why he would leave his briefcase unattended in the taxi while he galavanted about.

Struck by the momentous nature of this affair I was soon seeing so many omens that were so thoroughly empty of significance that Vimalananda felt obliged to warn me not to get so worked up over divination by auspices. His warning came in the form of a story:

"One day, when Akbar woke early, the first person he saw was a one-eyed *dhobi* (washerman) scrubbing clothes in the Yamuna. While he was wondering what kind of omen this was the washerman happened to look up, and bowed when he saw the emperor. Later in the day Akbar tripped on the steps of his palace and bumped his shin; a bee stung him in the garden; the empress was taken ill; and there was a fire in the kitchen which delayed his lunch. 'An ill-omened day,' bawled his yes-men. 'Who did you see first thing this morning, Your Majesty?'

"I saw the one-eyed washerman.'

"His face is inauspicious; put him to death!' they squealed. Out went a posse of soldiers to arrest the hapless washerman.

"Birbal, who had heard the entire exchange, took the man aside to give him a piece of advice as he stood trembling in the court waiting for the emperor to appear and pass sentence. After Akbar arrived and told the washerman how unlucky his face was the man replied humbly, 'Begging your pardon, Lord, but I must ask you whose face is really more unlucky: mine or yours?'

"All the courtiers were aghast at the man's impertinence, but Akbar gestured them into silence. He said, 'What precisely do you mean by that?'

"Well, my liege, yours was the first face I saw this morning, and now I'm about to lose my head.' Akbar laughed in spite of his attempt to remain solemn, and asked the man, 'Who put these words into your mouth?'

"Why, Birbal did, my lord.'

“Well, my good man, Birbal has saved you,’ said the emperor as he ordered that the washerman be rewarded for his trouble.”

“Was Akbar really about to have the man executed for being unlucky?”

“Probably not—but you can never tell with kings, yogis, fire, and water.”

Having gleaned from this that being mesmerized by signs and portents can easily deteriorate into karma-creating superstition I again turned my spare neurons to racing, which had by now shifted back to Bombay. Our reappearance at the Mahalakshmi Racecourse in the fall of 1982 was a festive occasion. Led by Cama and the Godrejs the residents of our home bench greeted Vimalananda heartily and demanded a stride by stride account of the famous victory. Kalubhai also showed up to offer his felicitations. He continued to come listen to Vimalananda’s “talks” in the evenings, but though we also ran into him now and again at the track he and his numerological charts sat elsewhere. It might have been shame over his refusal to take Vimalananda’s advice, or maybe he was simply determined to prove Vimalananda wrong.

Vimalananda’s new-found enthusiasm for life got an extra shot in the arm when the erstwhile Maharaja of an erstwhile state on the Kathiawar Peninsula of Gujarat flew us out to one of his palaces to discuss the making of a film there. We and the film’s provisional producer were treated to a concert by the Maharaja’s court musicians, a poetry reading by his court poet, and gourmet food cooked by his two Paris-trained chefs, served at the Maharaja’s usual dinner time of 2 A.M. During this junket I got the opportunity to boat over to the small island on which Vimalananda’s ancestor Sagal Shah had lived fifteen generations earlier. There I saw the very mortar and pestle in which Sagal Shah’s wife had mashed the brains of their son Chellaya during the famous incident when Lord Shiva came to the couple in the form of a cannibalistic Aghori to test their devotion. Back in Bombay Vimalananda began to contemplate some of his old projects that he was now ebullient enough to think of reviving. His most important project, however, continued to misfire, for after his strenuous race Redstone seemed to be talking longer than normal to recapture his peak of fitness.

An exhausting race can take everything out of a horse; we didn’t want to wreck Redstone by racing before he had recuperated fully. Even worse would have been to have him break down during a race and have to be put down then and there; it happened from time to time. I still vividly remember the day that a horse dislocated his fetlock right in front of me as I stood at the rail watching his race. I was paralyzed with horror as his entire hoof and the joint above it came loose from his leg and began to flop, now against the front of his shin and now against its back, as he continued to gallop insanely down the track articulating naked leg bone instead of metal-shod hoof against its

grass. I could barely breathe from empathic pain as I watched the Club’s vet rushing over to where he finally fell, and it seemed to take ages for the captive bolt of the vet’s pistol to finally release him. For that to happen to a horse we knew and loved was so unthinkable that though we were loathe to do so we scratched Redstone’s name from the list of runners for the Indian 2000 Guineas, the first of the season’s Classic races.

We hoped that rest would enable him to resume form well before the deadline for acceptances for the Indian Derby, for soon a decision would need to be made on whether or not to run Redstone in that most prestigious of races. There is only one Derby in a horse’s career and too few horses with Classic potential in an owner’s lifetime, to turn down a chance however slim to tote home a Derby trophy. But as the Derby deadline neared Vimalananda seemed to relax into a more philosophical frame of mind. A morning or two before the die had to be cast I sat listening to him sing “*Avo Nagare More Hari*,” a truly angelic song that invites Krishna to abide within the singer. At the tune’s conclusion he put aside his harmonium and told me a story that I had heard many times before:

“Sudama was a Brahmana who had been Lord Krishna’s *gurubhai* (fellow disciple); both were disciples of Sandipani Rishi. One day when they were sent out to search for fuel for their guru’s homa fire Sandipani’s wife packed a lunch for them both, but Sudama became so hungry that he ate up both portions while Krishna got nothing. Krishna, who was *Purnatmaka Purushottama*—Perfection Personified—just laughed it off. But you cannot cheat God Incarnate and hope to escape unscathed. Sudama’s fortunes took a nosedive from that day forward and he was soon cast into the direst poverty.

“Years passed for Sudama in a hand-to-mouth kind of existence until one day his wife heard talk of the glories of Dwaraka, where Krishna ruled as king. She immediately sat her husband down and told him to go straightway to Krishna and ask for financial help. Sudama was still embarrassed to see Krishna’s face—a guilty conscience biting—and he could not even dream of asking a favor from someone he had cheated. He refused to go, but his wife had had it with being poor and would not take no for an answer. She said, ‘If Krishna is all-knowing, as you say He is, He will know our plight without your having to say anything and of His own accord will offer you enough to tide us over.’ When he realized that there was no escape Sudama told his wife that he could not go to his old friend empty-handed, like a beggar. He needed to carry a present with him. The cupboard was absolutely bare, so she went out and begged four handfuls of flattened rice, which she tied in a cloth. Taking this ‘present’ Sudama left for Dwaraka with a heavy heart, wondering all along the way what sort of face he could show to Krishna.

“When Sudama reached Dwaraka he introduced himself as a co-disciple of Sandipani Rishi and was immediately taken to Krishna’s splendid palace. Seeing him coming Krishna jumped up and rushed out to embrace him. Krishna then seated him on his own cot, washed his feet, performed ritual worship of His guest, and fed him sumptuously. Then Krishna reminisced about life with Sandipani, and asked Sudama about all that had happened to him after he had finished his studies.

“All this time there was no mention of either Sudama’s need for money. As the afternoon drew toward a close Sudama lost hope and decided to leave. As he was taking Krishna’s leave Krishna asked him, ‘Didn’t your wife send some present for Me?’ Sudama had been so embarrassed at the meagerness of his gift that he had forgotten all about it. As Sudama drew the little cloth parcel from his clothing Krishna Himself grabbed hold of it and ate first one fistful, and then a second. By eating those two fistfuls of rice Krishna consumed all Sudama’s evil karmas from his past births and from this present birth. As He raised the third fistful to His mouth, to remove all evil karmas from Sudama’s births to come, His wife Rukmini, who was the incarnation of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, caught hold of His hand to prevent Him from taking even more. She asked Him, ‘What are you thinking, Lord? If You eat that third handful You will be giving Me away to Sudama as his servant, and I am not prepared to agree to that.’

“Then Krishna laughed, released the third handful of rice, and said to Sudama, ‘Now you can leave.’ Sudama was so upset that Krishna had accepted his gift and offered nothing in return that he lost his temper, and said to Him, ‘*Kripana* (Miser)! I did not want to come to ask You for money; my wife put me up to it. At least You could have done something for her!’ And he walked off. He conveniently forgot that he was in the wrong; that he was the thief, not Krishna.

“All along the road back to his house he rehearsed the excuses he would make to his wife for coming home emptyhanded—but when he reached his village he couldn’t believe his eyes! His pathetic little hut was gone, and in its place was a fabulous mansion. When his wife came out to meet him he almost didn’t recognize her, she was so well-dressed and looked so satisfied. Then he remembered the last thing he had said to his dear friend Krishna, the Krishna who had done all this for him; he remembered that his parting word to Krishna had been *kripana*. Now that Sudama was surrounded by luxury he lost all taste for the things of the world. He turned the mansion over to his wife for her to enjoy. He had a little hut built for himself nearby where he spent most of his time, his mind totally engrossed in Krishna.

“It’s true, Robby,” said Vimalananda in conclusion, “it is true that when

Krishna wants to bless someone He takes away that person’s money, fame, pleasure, and other worldly joys. Eventually, when that man has lost everything, and everyone he knows has deserted him, he has no alternative but to remember Krishna and to get lost in His bewitching eyes.”

Why he was then retelling me this story was not too clear to me, but as I watched Vimalananda stare at the illumined-from-behind transparency of Guru Maharaj that sat in front of his chair an ill-defined ominousness skittered like a cloud onto my mind’s horizon. I knew that Vimalananda revered his Junior Guru Maharaj as Krishna incarnate; they used to wear saris and dance together for love of Krishna. I also knew that Guru Maharaj was quite capable of disrupting lives to guarantee spiritual development. At that moment a not-quite-formed thought flitted swiftly before my eyes, a thought that, had it been fully fledged, would have been, “I wonder if Guru Maharaj has something up his sleeve.”

## chapter nine **PRAKRITI SIDDHI**

HAD I KNOWN THEN what I know now of Vimalananda's Junior Guru Maharaj I would have concluded that in the act of awarding him the transient felicity of Redstone's win Guru Maharaj had successfully stolen one of the few remaining joys from Vimalananda's life. Vimalananda, who must have suspected it all along, tried unsuccessfully to reveal this to me not long after the taxi-driver episode, during the course of an afternoon spent at Bhuleshwar. After offering our worship we sat resting inside the front passageway when Vimalananda looked me over in an unusually peculiar way and said, "I've told you before about Lord Krishna and His siddhi of *Kartum*, *Akartum*, *Anyathakartum*."

"Yes, you have." I remembered his words well. *Kartum*: that which is difficult to do but is doable, which refers to Krishna's mastery over the mundane world. *Akartum*: that which is impossible for ordinary beings, which refers to His ascendancy in the spiritual world. *Anyathakartum*: that which, being beyond both the spiritual and the mundane, is inconceivable to humans. *Anyathakartum* refers to the astral world, the world of the mind, of subjective reality. These three siddhis gave Lord Krishna unlimited power in all three realms: mundane, spiritual and astral.

"*Prakriti Siddhi* is in the realm of *Anyathakartum*, that which is not only impossible but also unimaginable. *Prakriti Siddhi* is the ability to change the innate nature of any part of the Universal *Prakriti*, which means the ability to alter the consciousness of any being in the universe. When we talk about fate we are talking about *Prakriti Siddhi*. This is very deep; think about it very carefully. Fate is an ethereal being who knows and uses the highest of all the siddhis: *Prakriti Siddhi*. This is the only way he can do his work."

"So this is where Saturn comes in."

"Yes, this is where Saturn comes in. Saturn uses *Prakriti Siddhi* on his victims."



“You mean that Prakriti Siddhi is the means that Saturn uses to change your innate ‘nature,’ your prakriti, to force you to experience your karmas, good and bad alike, whether you want to or not.”

“Correct.”

“And Saturn—who represents the force of your karmas—can affect you so long as you have not completely conquered your prakriti, which is ‘what comes naturally’ to you.”

“Yes.”

“So if your fate comes from your karmas, and Saturn’s influence comes from your fate, and Prakriti Siddhi comes from Saturn, then everytime you perform a karma you basically perform Prakriti Siddhi on yourself?”

“Almost. Everyone is the architect of his own destiny, in one way or another, via the amazing mechanism of the Law of Karma, which Nature created to coordinate these innumerable destinies. But Prakriti Siddhi goes beyond the constraints of destiny. Prakriti Siddhi permits you to become the architect of destiny, but only if—and this is a big *if*—you can understand prakriti. If you can know and understand your own prakriti you can change it. This is why they say the real heroes in life are those who change their own svabhava. To change someone else’s prakriti you have to be able to know and understand that person’s prakriti. If you want to be able to alter the consciousness of any being in the universe you must first know the Universal Prakriti, the universe’s innate nature.

“It takes years and years of penance to achieve Prakriti Siddhi on even a limited scale. You begin by learning to change the prakriti of one person, which is much easier than changing the prakriti of a city, or a nation, or a planet. Our Earth is really a very small place. The real Prakriti Siddhi is the ability to change in a trice the character of an entire universe. When you can do that then you become the one who sends the prophets and avatars to the world.

“Prakriti Siddhi as practiced by the senior Rishis can change the behavior of whole nations and planets in the twinkling of an eye. To be able to do that you must be able to control the Adya Shakti, the first Shakti who emanates at the beginning of creation. She being the root of all universes, by controlling Her what cannot be controlled? The reason why only the Rishis possess the true Prakriti Siddhi is that you need to perform continuous penance for millions of births in order to control the Adya Shakti. Only the Rishis can even dream of being able to do something like that. Because Fate needs Prakriti Siddhi for his work they ‘license’ it him to use, but even with this license he can still only act when they direct him to act. Prakriti Siddhi is the means by which the Rishis control the universe. Fate performs all his work in accordance with the wishes of the *Rishi Mandala* (the ‘Circle of Rishis’).”

“The Rishi Mandala, then, is in control of everything that there is.”

“Yes, it is. They are the real Bosses, of all the universes. But when they go too far even the Rishis can sometimes fall prey to Prakriti Siddhi. Why do you think Angiras Rishi got the idea to curse Anjani? There was no need to do so. And after cursing her, why did he promise to make her the mother of an immortal monkey god? It was the effect of Prakriti Siddhi. After blessing Anjani Angiras realized that he did not have enough shakti to fulfill the blessing on his own. Then he had acknowledge his misjudgment and request Nature to help to fulfill it.

“And what about the Rishi Yajnavalkya? Once, in the middle of a public philosophical debate, an ordinary young girl named Gargi asked him some questions that he could not answer.”

“Like what?”

“Like, ‘What is beyond the Absolute?’ After a few of these questions Yajnavalkya lost his head with her and said, ‘Woman, if you speak another word your head will not remain on your shoulders.’ In that moment of losing control of his temper the fruits of ten thousand years of his penance were taken from him. When he realized what had happened—well, it was too late. He just had to start all over again. He married Gargi, too, in honor of her debating skill. But why should he have lost his temper? He lost it because his prakriti was affected. We have a proverb in Sanskrit: *aty ucche patanam*: ‘That which is too high is bound to fall.’ Yajnavalkya had too much pride in his penance, and someone taught him a good lesson. This is the beauty of Fate. Yajnavalkya’s only thought when he went to that assembly was that he would win the debate and walk away with all the cows which were the prizes; instead he came away with a new wife, but minus ten thousand years of penance.”

“Hmm.”

“Parashara Rishi never knew he would marry Matsyagandha. Vasistha Rishi selected the moment for Ramachandra’s crowning without realizing that the result would be that Ramachandra would have to go to the forest for fourteen years. And why should Durvasas Rishi, who loved Lallu (the Baby Krishna), have ever thought to insult King Ambarisha? Only because his intellect had become perverted. A clear case of Prakriti Siddhi, just to teach him not to be too arrogant. So long as they maintain their own independent existence even the Rishis are still subject to the Law of Karma, and when they err Nature creates for them situations in which they will have to admit that they have been wrong, just so their egos will not go out of control.”

“Which means that even the Rishis are not the Biggest of the Bosses.”

“At the center of the circle of the Rishi Mandala sits the Rishi who is running the whole show. He is the chief Rishi of the Rishi Mandala, the only Rishi who

can fully control the Adya Shakti and the Universal Prakriti. All the other Rishis think they have independent existences, but even they are just his puppets. If the center disappears, can there be a circle? Whenever a Rishi starts to get a swelled head and tries to take over the Number One spot, Mr. Big—we can call him The Seniormost—uses Prakriti Siddhi to teach the offender a good lesson. The Seniormost plays about in his own way and no one can ever know him.”

“Isn’t this frustrating for the Rishis? They do penance for millenia and *still* they are subject to Prakriti Siddhi?”

“It is terribly frustrating; if you and I don’t like to admit that we have been wrong the Rishis absolutely *hate* to have to admit that they were wrong. But that’s just the way things are.”

“Hmm. When you mentioned this sort of thing before, you attributed it to Saturn—OK, now I get it! So Shukracharya also used Prakriti Siddhi, to pervert the minds of Kacha and Devayani?”

“Something came over them, didn’t it? Even the gods are not exempt. Krishna Himself never knew that Vishvamitra would curse his entire clan, and even though Krishna did His best to prevent it the curse had its full effect. Even the ocean participated in the curse, despite the fact that Krishna is of the lunar race whose progenitor, Moon, is lord of the ocean.

“Not even Mahakala was exempt from Prakriti Siddhi. He never knew He would have to take birth as Anjaneya.”

“Mahakala never knew he would have to take birth as Anjaneya?”

“No. Do you remember that Shiva blessed Ravana that he would die when he stole another man’s wife?”

“*Parastri haranam, Ravana maranam* (Ravana will die when he steals another man’s wife.)”

“Precisely. Were it not for Shiva the events of the *Ramayana* need never have taken place, since without Shiva’s blessing Ravana would never have needed to abduct Sita in order to die. This made Shiva the cause of the whole thing, which gave Him no choice but to take birth. He had to be available to assist Vishnu in His incarnation as Rama to ensure that Rama would successfully kill Ravana, to fulfill the terms of His blessing.

“And for that matter, Shiva would have never blessed Ravana had Ravana not decided to die, and Ravana would not have decided to relinquish his immortality had he not turned Saturn over, at the recommendation of Narada, when Ravana had the Nine Planets lying face down on the steps leading up to his throne. Something came over Ravana to make him agree with Narada’s suggestion; what came over him was Prakriti Siddhi.”

“Wow!” All these myths suddenly slipped into alignment with one another for me.

“Lord Shiva was also affected by Prakriti Siddhi on another occasion, when He saw Vishnu in His Mohini form as a gorgeous young tribal girl. When He saw Mohini’s garment drop from Her perfect body Shiva was overwhelmed by Her nakedness. He ran after Her like a bull elephant pursues a cow, completely unashamed that His wife was watching Him make a spectacle of Himself. Only after He ejaculated did His mind clear sufficiently for Him to realize His predicament. Why should He have chased Mohini? When the very seeds of lust within Him had been fried, burned to ashes, how could they sprout again? Only Prakriti Siddhi could do it. Lord Shiva forgot Himself, just for a moment, and lust reappeared. And if this power can work against someone like Lord Shiva, who is the embodiment of permanent samadhi and has done the most terrible penances imaginable for eons upon eons, well, it must be something. This is the power of Prakriti Siddhi in the hands of an expert. What do you think happened to King Parikshit?”

“You mean the Parikshit who was the son of Abhimanyu, thanks to whom we have the *Shrimad Bhagavata*?”

“Yes, that Parikshit. When he was out hunting one day he came upon a Rishi sitting in samadhi, alone in his ashram. Parikshit was feeling terribly thirsty and called out for water. When the Rishi sitting in his trance did not offer him any the king became wild, and hung a dead snake around the Rishi’s neck. Then he rode off.

“The Rishi’s son returned to the ashram a few minutes later and saw the snake around his father’s neck. Then he got wild, and spoke this curse: ‘Seven days from now the snake which has been draped about my father’s neck will come back to life. It will bite the perpetrator of this insult, and he will die.’

“The intense Tamas of this curse disturbed his father’s concentration and brought him down from his samadhi. He divined the situation in a few moments and said, ‘Child, child, what have you done? You have been overcome by Tamas. You must remain in Sattva.’

“The boy replied, ‘Father, you don’t know me. I am far beyond Sattva and all of that. I have deliberately cursed the king, and my curse will prove a blessing to him.’

“The father was goggle-eyed in amazement, realizing all at once that he knew nothing at all of the power of his son. He asked the boy, ‘How is that?’

“His son said, ‘Shukadeva, the young Rishi, will now meet the king and deliver to him the text of the *Shrimad Bhagavata*, which otherwise would never have come into the hands of mankind. And Parikshit will obtain moksha by hearing it.’

“And that is what happened. At the end of seven days of recitation, when the snake came to bite him Parikshit welcomed the serpent with these words:

‘Go ahead, bite! Do you think that I am the body, that you can harm me?’ And Parikshit merged his consciousness with the Universal Soul. An ordinary spirit, Dundubhi, who was sitting nearby listening, was freed as well. So it is all thanks to that young rishi that we have the *Shrimad Bhagavata*. What superb play! First he perverts Parikshit’s mind, then he curses him for it, then the curse becomes a blessing.”

“How could that young Rishi find any limitations left in King Parikshit’s mind to pervert if he was so ‘well tested’?”

“It was easy. So long as Kundalini identifies with your body you remain subject to time, space and causation. This means that your consciousness remains subject to the chemical patterns in your brain, patterns which can be tinkered with by anyone who knows Prakriti Siddhi. This is why Prakriti Siddhi is useful only for the living, because the chemical changes which occur in a corpse are destructive only. If a girl comes to a male corpse and jumps all over it and even climbs on top of it will its penis become erect? No. It is devoid of life, devoid of ahamkara. You can, if you like, change the prakriti of the dead spirit, but that change can take effect only after it has been born into another womb—unless you can bring it back temporarily.

“Eknath Maharaj did this when he called one woman’s ancestors down to Earth so that she could feed them in person. Feeding them changed her prakriti entirely, which is why I always say that Pitri Tarpana is so important. You can really change things in your life if you can properly perform Pitri Tarpana. Obviously it would take too long to try to change the prakriti of a whole nation using Pitri Tarpana, so the Rishis use different methods. But for individuals it can be very effective. My Roshni is very clever. She tells me, ‘If you don’t want to teach me anything else, teach me Pitri Tarpana.’ She knows that if proper Pitri Tarpana is ever done for her, her prakriti will change completely. All her bad tendencies will be wiped out.

“But does she realize what tremendous shakti it would take to wipe clean the karmic slate of even seven generations of her ancestors? If you are an ordinary human being it is really not feasible to eliminate all the evil, selfish personality traits of all your ancestors. Instead, you should use your sadhana to interdict and obliterate these traits before they have a chance to enter your mind and distort it. Sadhana is good because through it the gods and goddesses can perform a type of Prakriti Siddhi on you. It is a more limited sort of Prakriti Siddhi than the Rishis use, no doubt, but when a deity uses Prakriti Siddhi on a human being the effect is still permanent. That person’s very genes and chromosomes are changed, and there is never a regression to the previous state.

“One day Rani Rasmani, who owned the temple in which Ramakrishna Paramahansa was employed as a priest, had gone there to worship Ma. But in-

stead of concentrating on her worship she was thinking about her business affairs. When Ramakrishna Paramahansa noticed this he got up from where he was sitting and gave her a good slap. Then he told her, ‘If you want to come to the temple come with an empty mind, and leave your worldly cares outside.’

“Most people interpret this story shallowly. They think that Ramakrishna Paramahansa read her mind and then slapped her as a sort of shock treatment, so that she would not forget the lesson. But these people forget that at that moment Ramakrishna Paramahansa was in *unmani*, a state in which he was not conscious of what he was doing. In real *unmani* there is not an iota of body consciousness, not even for a second. When you grope after the perception of Absolute Reality for too long it leads to madness, the divine madness of *unmani*. Your limited body consciousness is completely effaced, and something else plays within your body. In the case of Ramakrishna Paramahansa it was the Divine Mother, in the form of the goddess Bhavatarini, Who played within him. It was She Who administered the slap to Rani Rasmani, using Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s hand as an instrument. That slap was a form of Prakriti Siddhi; after that slap Rani Rasmani’s mind was always fixed on God.

“Any blessing or curse that you get from a saint or guru is actually one sort of Prakriti Siddhi. Why? Because by blessing or cursing you they are transmitting into you some of the power of their personal deities. For example, Eknath Maharaj had a son who was a bigoted Brahmana. He thought his father was soiling the family name by associating with outcastes and low-born people and he and his wife regularly harassed Eknath Maharaj. Then one day Eknath Maharaj asked the couple to appear before him in the clothes in which they had been married. He sat them down in front of him and said, ‘The two of you make such a beautiful couple. Why can’t your consciousnesses be as beautiful as you are?’ In that second Prakriti Siddhi was performed on them, and their lives changed for good. This is the kind of guru to have: one who can force your mind to remain straight.

“In our world Prakriti Siddhi can be done in two ways: immediately, with a slap or whatever; and slowly, over a period of time. The fast way is much better, because there is an end to the thing. Unfortunately, unless the power of a deity is flowing through you at the proper moment you won’t be able to do it the fast way. Then you will have to use the slow way, which makes everything linger on. But even if you have to use the slow way you can contrive to make the effect permanent. Take the recent case of a wastrel, an inveterate drunkard and debauchee. Even such punishments as being expelled from his home and getting a good beating from the police had failed to help improve him. But after his nature was affected he has apologized to his father, wife and

family, and even worshipped their feet, as a sign of complete submission. He did all these things of his own free will, on his own initiative.

“This fellow will never know what is happening to him, because the process is entirely internal. He will never resist it, because all the changes in his personality come from within. The more egocentric a man is, the more he requires attention, the less likely he is to disagree with his own suggestions. It is only natural for such a man to be in the habit of believing that anything he says or does is right and desirable. He may even congratulate himself for doing such a fine thing, believing that he had thought of it himself. Could any external coercion ever provide motivation like that? No.

“This effect is temporary, to be sure. But even when the treatment is over and the old tendencies of mind return—as they must, since they are deeply embedded—they will have to compete with the new habits which have been formed. How long the effect will last will depend on the quality of material you are working with. A person who has a fundamentally good environment, like a good family, good teaching, and such, will be less likely to backslide than someone like Behram.”

“Is this what happened the night that Behram changed his mind about going back to Iran and Anjaneya came through you? Did Anjaneya give him a dose of Prakriti Siddhi?”

“Yes, He did. I like to try to harmonize families, to improve people who have gone wrong, and Prakriti Siddhi can be very useful for this. Hasn't that family been materially benefitted because Behram went back?”

“It has.”

“Though Prakriti Siddhi in the context of a family is almost always used for harmonization, there are times that it must be used for destruction as well. This problem is very uncommon, of course, because the truly harmonious family is very rare today. But if there is a family which is completely harmonious that family would go on being harmonious endlessly, which cannot be permitted to occur. So, the intellect of only one of the family members is perverted and the whole family falls apart. It sounds cruel, I know, and I know that it is hard to understand why it could be necessary. But only then can a new pattern form.”

“Is this what happened to your own family? That after fifteen generations someone thought that it was time for a change and perverted Putlibai's mind so that she could pervert your father's brother's mind and have him bring the family crashing down?”

“Something like that.”

At this a thin, dejected-looking pariah dog wandered up to us, tail between his legs, and we offered him a sugar cookie. After an brief conceptual struggle

over whether accepting it might entail an eventual kick his hunger overcame his fear and he came up to my hand, accepted the cookie, and began to eat it weakly. I continued to feed him as Vimalananda talked.

“But these are not the only uses of Prakriti Siddhi. There is no end to its usefulness. For instance, long ago when I was a naked sadhu I was invited to Nepal by the Rana. He wanted to test me, so he lined the main staircase of his palace with beautiful young teenage girls, all of them naked to the waist. They had lovely, enticing breasts, but as I was deep in my sadhana I saw all of them as skeletons. I thought to myself, ‘How can I have a romance with a skeleton?’ And Nature was kind, because their prakritis changed, not mine, and instead of seeing me as a sexual object they saw me as a father or brother. Wasn't that better?”

“It was much better.”

“And why go so far away? I used to play about with Chotu right here in Bombay. When I had a dairy in Borivali sometimes we would take the suburban train to the Churchgate Terminus. When I was in a certain peculiar mood I would tell him, ‘Everyone will get down at Churchgate.’ All of the people in our compartment would then get down at Churchgate, no matter what intervening station they had meant to alight at. They would walk out the door of the station and then realize, ‘Oh, no, what have I done? I wanted to get down at such-and-such station, and here I am at Churchgate. I must have slept through it.’ But they had not slept through it. Sometimes I would make everyone on the platform get on the train, even if it was the wrong train for them. Only later on would they figure it out. I used to enjoy playing about in this way. It was harmless fun, because there are plenty of trains for people to catch, and it gave me a chance to test my range, which is important for any siddhi.

“Now an example on a larger scale. Look at India, a poor country with rich enemies. But we have Prakriti Siddhi to protect us. America can send any number of planes, tanks and other armaments to Pakistan, and we don't bother about it. Why? Because planes, ships, tanks, cannon and everything else will not work without human beings. All that is necessary is to pervert the Pakistani soldiers' intelligence. Suppose a formation of warplanes is flying towards our country. What if all the pilots suddenly change course and go in the wrong direction at the wrong altitude, flying straight into our anti-aircraft guns? If they then forget to evade the anti-aircraft fire they will all be shot down. Just think: in the last war seventeen Sabre jets were shot down by one anti-aircraft gun. Seventeen! Is that at all possible? Only with Prakriti Siddhi.

“Or take the sinking of the submarine Ghazi in Vishakhapatnam harbor. We didn't even know it was there until the military police picked up two fish-

ermen who were quarreling over the division of the money that the Pakistanis had given them to keep quiet about their presence. Then the Navy started dropping random depth charges. Random depth charges! They had absolutely no idea where the damned thing was and yet they sank it! Isn't that hard to believe? But it happened. Couldn't the Pakistani captain have thought to move his sub out of the harbor temporarily? He could have but he didn't, because his prakriti was perverted.

"A formation of Patton tanks crossed our borders. What to do? First, Nature was very kind to us; there was tremendous rain for twenty-four hours, quite out of season. The tanks were moving through sugarcane fields, where they got bogged down. Would any general ever think of attacking when the Pakistanis did, when crops are standing in the fields and the ground is still soggy from rain? Everyone knows that it is suicide to send out waves of tanks in these conditions. The Pakistani generals are not idiots, but they forgot what they knew at a crucial moment because their prakritis were changed. Then someone in our army got the bright idea of taking an iron bar and sticking it into the treads of the tanks. With the treads gone the tanks couldn't move, and were easily destroyed. You see, India cannot afford all sorts of premium weapons; we have to make do with what we have. An iron bar costs a few rupees, but it can stop a tank! Isn't the job done just as well? Nature is very kind to India."

"Prakriti Siddhi, then, could be used in any war."

"Why not? Think about the Second World War. Why did Hitler fail to pursue the English and French at Dunkirk? Why did he call off the Battle of Britain and the invasion of England, just when it might have succeeded? Why did he invade Russia two weeks too late? At crucial moments his mind was perverted, just a bit—but that was enough to sabotage all his plans. It was enough to dissolve his dream-edifice of conquest, his Thousand-Year Reich, after a mere dozen years."

"Who was it that perverted his mind? Some Rishi?"

"Maybe. And maybe not. But how does that matter? What matters is that the real use of siddhis, Robby, including Prakriti Siddhi, the ultimate siddhi, is not all this fancy stuff. The real use of siddhis is to make life a little easier for all the suffering beings in our wretched and thankless world. Look at what a gift we are giving to this poor little doggie! When we convinced him that we would not harm him he came near to us in trust, and we've been feeding him. Like all of us he has taken birth just to endure his karmas and is enduring them without even knowing why. We have satisfied his hunger, and loved him. Now we must make him go to sleep so he can get a good rest for once in his life of pain."

The dog did not want to snooze; he wanted to eat more. But we didn't want him to get sick. He sat down all of a sudden, as if pushed, and his head started to droop; though he made several valiant efforts to lift it, sleep overtook him inexorably. Soon he was peacefully snoozing, and Vimalananda and I shared a gentle grin over him. "When you love God," he said softly to me, "you see God in all His creations and cannot bear to see Him miserable. And then you offer everything you can to Him, spontaneously from the depths of your heart, even if that means using siddhis to tinker with fate."

"So don't feel bad," he concluded with a twinkle in his eye, "if you are exposed to Prakriti Siddhi someday. When even the Rishis and the gods have been affected by it why shouldn't you be?" Unexpectedly and unaccountably I had a vision of Vimalananda, his Junior Guru Maharaj and his Senior Guru Maharaj all aiming Prakriti Siddhi at one another, but I brushed it away as inspired by the gust of wind that had just ruffled our hair.



On November 28, 1982 Redstone was nominated by the editor of our racing weekly as Champion Three-Year-Old Colt at Poona in honor of winning both the races in which he ran during the Poona season. His future looked bright, but as he was still not up to par by the time acceptances for the 1983 Indian Derby came due he was scratched from that race as well. We still had no reason to suspect any serious problem, nor had we any time for suspicion with the Auctions Sales impending. Thoroughbred breeding, which is one of the most speculative of businesses, attracts to it a smooth and sophisticated variety of operator. For a week before the sales begin these stud proprietors go on display along with their colts and fillies, and prospective owners buzz about them, Auction Catalogue in hand, evaluating and interrogating. The sellers calculate, cogitate, and deliberate; much tea is drunk and many comments are exchanged; and the vets do a brisk business in examinations for configuration and soundness.

About a third of the horseflesh brought to be vended is disposed of by private sale during these days. What is not purchased privately comes into the auction ring, where it fell in those days under a hammer brandished by Mr. B.K.F. Damania, an aged and crotchety Parsi sports writer known to all by his initials. BKFD's job was to extract the highest price for the lots he was assigned over the three days that the auctions continued, and he speckled his banter with temptations, threats, pleas and coaxings to spur recalcitrant buyers into commitments. There he sat on his little throne under an awning in the Paddock while the rest of us crowded into the seats surrounding him to hear his

patter: "I want some more, I'm not a seller at that price"; "No more, then? All done? Sold, to ..."; or, when the reserve bid was not met, "Bought in."

Because this February we were just watching and not bidding, I sat there surveying the scene on this second of the three auction days. I was thinking of the fact that perhaps two out of every three of these two-year-olds might actually see the racecourse, that maybe half of those might win a race, and that with great luck one out of ten might be a fairly impressive racer. From this perspective Vimalananda was either exceptionally lucky or exceedingly perceptive. For, I had known him his horses's records had far surpassed these odds. An eye for talent, creative dietary supplementation, race manipulation, or Prakriti Siddhi: was there one principal instrumentality of his success, or did they all play their parts?

I mused on until BKFD's gavel fell for the last time that day, when Vimalananda and I progressed to another corral on the Club's grounds to enjoy the highlight of the Sales: the annual auction dinner. It was catered that year by a firm from Delhi, and was excellent. The Club's Stewards were apparently still reeling from the fiasco of two years before, when the Parsi Stewards had ordered Parsi food for everyone. The meat dishes were said to have been tasty that year, but the vegetarian menu was largely inedible. I personally was reduced to making a meal of Kersasp Kolah's Spicy Carrot Pickle with wheat rotis that a myopic eye and a lazy tongue might have misconstrued to be well-worn shoe soles. That dinner caused the Club's vegetarians to rise as one in rebellion. The next year's result was a happier meal, this year's even happier.

This year we sat enjoying drinks and tidbits as we compared notes over prices and purchasers with Tehmul and a few of his other owners, with Dr. Kulkarni, and with Mr. Tejwani, a refined man who built buildings to bankroll his string of nearly a dozen horses. At our table also sat the jolly Barkat Ali Khan, a man Vimalananda much respected for his knowledge of horse-flesh and of music. Barkat Ali had become so disgusted with the discreditable ways and means of trainers that he had had himself declared a private trainer. Now he and his son took care of his horses himself, with some success. Vimalananda had talked of taking such a step himself, but his poor health now precluded him from doing it personally. Nor could his circle of confidants qualify: I being a foreigner would not be permitted to train and Roshni had a full-time job. Mamrabahen would have been overjoyed to nominate her poltroon Jhendu Kumar for the post, but that would have been entirely like hiring a fox to supervise a henhouse. To call Jhendu Kumar feckless would be an insult to those who show some shreds of feck.

I sat at the table silently munching tri-corner samosas and spinach *pakodas*, uneasily watching the greasy Subhashbhai banter with Vimalananda in the

hope of getting him to agree to purchasing a horse in partnership. That there was no chance of that happening I was sure; Vimalananda was neither so naive nor so drunk that he would consider even for a moment entering into a partnership with such a man as Subhashbhai, who left behind him when he walked a slime trail that would put a banana slug to shame. No, I was worried that Vimalananda might try to repeat a stunt of some years previous that he had recalled to mind that very morning. For some reason, back in the days when the British ruled India, he had wanted to get even with Admiral Eric Shipton, so when the Admiral hosted a party Vimalananda came equipped with a sausage. After several drinks he began to feign drunkenness and excused himself to visit the loo, where he inserted the dark red meaty cylinder into his open fly. When he emerged and people saw what they thought was his exposed state they began to cough in embarrassment, until Admiral Shipton himself felt it necessary to take him aside and point out his oversight. "Whaaa?" said Vimalananda besottedly. "Oh, that bloody thing? Here, I'll take care of it..." Extracting a knife from his pocket he chopped that wurst in two.

Vimalananda claims that there were women who swooned on seeing this feat. Admiral Shipton was, I am sure, not in the least amused. At this auction dinner there were fortunately no sausages among the hors d'oeuvres, but I could not shake the feeling that Vimalananda was plotting something or other. Sure enough, after we finished eating Subhashbhai invited us to come with him to listen to music. Vimalananda accepted readily and asked the disgusted Barkat Ali, who being a good Muslim refused to drink, to accompany us. When he summarily declined, we departed. I drove, since I had done no more than sip at my whiskey. I knew that Vimalananda could drive perfectly well no matter how drunk he was, for drink did not affect him as it affected other people. Two years before he had safely driven me and Roshni home after the auction dinner after he had tippled an entire bottle of whisky. No, I was more worried that driving would just excite him more, as it had on that previous night when he sped up, gnarling, just to show he was still in control after Roshni gently chided him when once or twice he veered slightly onto the center line.

Via a number of ill-lit alleys, Subhashbhai took us to a location where he offered us paan, paan that we later discovered had been secretly laced with an illegal stimulant. Vimalananda was now beginning to become enthusiastic about the prospect of causing some sort of massive loss of face for Subhashbhai and the stimulant only heightened his mental clarity. When we pulled up in front of our destination I saw that we were within the purlieu of Bombay's sizable red-light district. As we made our way into the warren of rooms I was staggered by the wondrous sight of a mound of onions no less than four feet

high, attended to by a human gnome who was swiftly peeling each one.

Two women who were evidently prostitutes seated us in a chamber in which sat a harmonium. Subhashbhai began to nod off as the women began their serenade. When they were finished Vimalananda told them, "That was very nice, but I would like to teach you something that I think your patrons will find most enjoyable. Could you please find me a *tabla* player?" Within five minutes a *tabla* player arrived and Vimalananda commenced his teaching concert. Soon all the ladies in the building who were not otherwise engaged had gathered in that small room, everyone appreciating and enjoying Vimalananda's thaumaturgy—everyone, that is, except Subhashbhai, who at one point tilted to his feet and headed for the door. When Vimalananda ran out of cigarettes some half an hour or more later and we bid the sorrowing cocottes adieu we found Subhashbhai lying in the gutter near our car, fast asleep, his driver eyeing him watchfully. As I drove us home Vimalananda said, "This will teach that debauchee a good lesson. Does he think that my mind can be led astray by intoxicants, by women, or by money? Ha!"

Subhashbhai gave both of us a wide berth from then on. By unspoken agreement we told no one but Tehmul of the humiliating performance he had put on. The distressing fact was, though, that he had somehow managed the effrontery to attempt to inveigle Vimalananda into participating in his schemes. This suggested that undersirable influences were beginning to accumulate in Vimalananda's environment, perhaps the curse that dogs Bombay was coming upon him. Another disconcerting reminder of Bombay's nature was provided to us shortly thereafter when Vimalananda pointed out to me a tall dreadlocked sadhu heatedly discussing the race book with a woman, standing on the grass in front of the First Enclosure at the Bombay racecourse just before a race.

"That's Shankargiriji," said Vimalananda.

"The Shankargiriji?" said I.

"The very one," replied Vimalananda. I peered down on the sadhu, as impressed by his appearance—he was said to be at least 125 years old—as I was distressed by his conduct back in 1949 during the Ranu episode. When Vimalananda, then in the jungle with Shankargiriji, saw a vision of the death of his nine-year-old son, Ranu, Shankargiriji repeatedly pooh-poohed it. Vimalananda insisted on rushing to Bombay anyway and arrived in time to meet Ranu alive once more but too late to save the boy from death. "Shankargiriji doesn't seem to do much except gamble nowadays," Vimalananda now murmured. "When his disciples come to see him he has them sit down and play cards. He's entitled to do as he pleases, but I don't like it when sadhus set bad examples for others who are not so advanced as they." The conversation

ended there as I had to go downstairs to the Ring to bet, but that evening Vimalananda, as if from out of the blue, told me a story:

"There was once a woman who as a daily personal sadhana would cook a stack of rotis and feed them to her guru, who happened to be Durvasas Rishi. Every day she had to ford the river that separated her house from Durvasas' hut. One day during the monsoon the river rose so high after she had reached the Rishi with his lunch that she was unable to cross back over. She began to fret about the dinner she needed to cook for her husband until Durvasas said, 'What are you making such a big noise about? Go to the river and tell her, 'Ma, if Durvasas has never eaten even one of my rotis please let me cross, but if he has eaten even one don't allow me to proceed.'"

"The woman wanted to object, for Durvasas had been daily eating a big stack of rotis before her own eyes for weeks and weeks. But Durvasas said, 'Go!' Knowing his reputation as a curse-monger she kept her mouth shut, fearing for her destiny. She went back to the river, told the river what she had been told to say—and the water went down enough for her to cross.

"This really disturbed her mind. That evening while she was cooking her husband's dinner she could think of nothing but the afternoon's incident. It is never good to cook absent-mindedly, and because she was trying to use her limited brain to figure out what had happened she forgot to add any salt to the food. When her husband got home she served him absent-mindedly, which he noticed, and when he tasted the food he said to her, 'What is on your mind, goddess?'

"She replied defensively, 'Nothing; nothing at all!'

"He told her gently, 'Then why did you forget to add any salt to the food? You never forget such things.'

"Now she was abashed, and told him the whole story, ending with, 'But how could he do this?'

"Her husband said, 'Oh, this is truly a minor thing. Let's make an experiment. The river is still high, isn't it? Tomorrow, when you need to cross over to feed the Rishi, tell the river, 'Ma, if my husband has never had sex with me, let me cross over; but if he has enjoyed intercourse with me even once don't let me pass.'"

"Now the woman was really fed up. She was the mother of eight strapping sons! How could he claim he had never impregnated her? But her husband refused to listen to her complaints. Next morning when she reached the river it was in spate. When she told it what her husband had bidden her say it dropped enough for her to pass.

"When she reached Durvasas with her pile of rotis she waited watching while he ate them in peace. When he was done she described to him what had



happened that morning. When he heard what her husband had said Durvasas told the woman, ‘Don’t come to me anymore. Your husband is advanced enough to take care of you himself.’”

Vimalananda fell silent. As I had read a similar story from a book of Indian parrot tales, and I thought he was simply recapitulating it for me. Then Roshni took me aside and said, “Whether or not this happened to Durvasas it did happen to Vimalananda; I was there. That woman with the rotis was Vimalananda’s wife. The river she had to cross was actually Bombay harbor, which she used to cross by ferry to feed Shankargiriji, her guru who then lived in Alibag, on the coast. Both times it looked at first as if the ferry would not be able to go, but it did go—after she talked to the ocean as she had been told to do.”

I had known Vimalananda’s wife for some years by this time and got along with her well enough. But I knew that she had insisted on marrying Vimalananda—in spite of being frightened into illness after a trip to the smashan with him—and that after marriage she had continued to consider her husband quite the useless loafer for failing to focus his life on money-making. Now I found that even the words of the man she had taken as her guru had failed to shake this opinion. Was there any limit to the depth of rnanubandhana’s influence in human life, I had to wonder, or to the pain that that influence could produce?



Saturn had moved into Libra in October 1982 to sit atop my Moon (and Roshni’s too), which accelerated the force of our Sade Satis. Events began to cumulate after Roshni’s departure for East Asia on a Bank of America training tour. First Vimalananda, who had been complaining of shortness of breath for weeks, was diagnosed with congestive cardiac failure. I played the nurse, dosing him with potions and keeping him all but tied to the bed, and restricted him to one cigarette per day. But I saw that he was losing interest in his physical health and did little to complement this treatment with the well-nigh-miraculous powers of self-healing that I had seen him exercise before on so many occasions. The possibilities worried me, and solutions eluded me.

Then the grooms at the track again went out on strike, in continuation of a spell of labor unrest during the previous Poona season which had deteriorated into violence. The Poona police had had to fire some gunshots to control the crowd and of the three grooms who were injured one was literally gelded by a bullet. The police officer who was second in command of that op-

eration was a friend of Tehmul’s and had described the battle scenes for us from his perspective as a maintainer of the public order. He was a gung-ho young man, with an innuendo of a swagger in his stride, who seasoned his conversation with macho observations like, “The real danger, sir, and the real thrill, comes when you have to face an industrial mob. You don’t know what they are like, sir, I tell you, an industrial mob is a real test of a man’s mettle.”

No violence marred this Bombay strike, but as there was a shortage of willing hands to care for the horses I had to go daily to the stables for a couple of weeks to help Tehmul handle them. I had previously watched some of the local *gymkhanas*, events in which amateur riders exhibited their skills, and anticipated being able to do my job at least as well as those teenagers could. Fortunately Fakruddin, the head groom, took pity on me and gave me the aged gelding Onslaught to lead on his walk around the stables. Then for the first time in my life I realized through personal experience what it was like to have control of nearly 1500 pounds of neurotic thoroughbred. Though Onslaught liked to nip at everyone he didn’t rear up much, so I kept my distance from his mouth and was not bitten. Only once did Onslaught make as if to rear, just to show me who was boss, but Fakruddin and Nakhodaji the farrier sped over to help me bring him under control.

“At least,” said Vimalananda to me as I sat next to his bed delivering my report, “this strike is not the communists’ doing.”

“Would the communists be any worse than these people?” I griped.

“The communists? Oh my God! Once the communists in one of the unions at the racecourse decided that they had to have their way, even if it meant harming the horses. So they kept the horses hostage until their demands were negotiated. What did the horses ever do to them? Injure the owners if you want to, but why the horses? Those bastards knew that they had less to lose if they harmed the horses rather than the owners, so they went for the horses first. Such people do not deserve to be humans! I tell you, as soon as they die they will be born into appropriate wombs so that Nature can teach them some fine lessons. Human justice may slip up, but not divine justice.”

“Why do you hate communism so much? Isn’t it more appropriate to hate the people that the communists are fighting, the people who exploit the labor of others and pay them a miserly pittance?”

“One of the many reasons I hate communism is that communists believe that the end justifies the means—which is ridiculous. They believe this because they are frustrated and want to take their frustrations out on others instead of enduring them themselves. If you are miserable you must have performed some karma at some point to make you miserable. Should you not pay for that



karma? Some kind-hearted person may assist you by showing you how to pay off the karma with less expenditure on your part. If he is *really* kind-hearted he might even take away some of your karmas from you and endure them himself. But you can't just grab hold of someone and force him to share your karmas; it just doesn't work that way. That way only creates new karmas."

"Does the end ever justify the means?"

"How can it? Is there an end? The end cannot possibly justify the means because the end *is* the means; the means determines the end. Cause is Effect concealed; Effect is Cause revealed. Only an absolutely desirable end could justify any means to attain it. But any end you can envision must be false, because a goal however noble is a limitation that you impose on Reality, which is unlimited. All limitations however slight are imperfect, which makes them only relatively, not absolutely, true. There is no end so absolute that it justifies any means, except maybe the end of getting yourself back to God. But if you don't understand the Law of Karma you will get into trouble even there. You always have to think of all the potential repercussions from what you do.

"One of Narsi Mehta's songs ends this way: 'People will beat you with their shoes when you sing these songs, but you will go to *Vaikuntha* (Vishnu's heaven).' *Gandhiji* (Mahatma Gandhi) sang Narsi Mehta's songs, but he was never beaten with shoes. In fact he was worshipped. Why? Because first, he was devoted mainly to politics, not to God. Second, he had no faith in these songs. If he had had faith in them he would have left politics altogether. Third, and worst, he used Narsi's songs for political ends—to make people think he was a saint, a *mahatma*."

"He wasn't a mahatma?"

"What does *mahatma* mean? Atma is the soul, which is realized after many, many lifetimes. (*Maha + Atma = Mahatma = "Great Soul."*) That must be really something, mustn't it? Had Gandhi realized even the soul, much less the Great Soul? No, he had not. How can I say that? Well, for one thing, he relied on his intuition to tell him what to do. So many saints do that. But his intuition was always wrong, and what would happen? He would commit Himalayan blunders, confess them to everyone and then start all over again and repeat the process."

"Oh, but come on, you have to agree that he did achieve his goal; he did kick the British out of the country."

"Yes, Gandhi's aim was good. But he should not have claimed to be nonviolent when he was not nonviolent."

"What are you talking about?"

"He may have rejected physical violence, but what about his non-physical violence? What about all the time he spent coercing people to do what he

wanted them to do by threatening to kill himself through fasting? Where's the non-violence in that? And don't ever forget the Law of Karma. You see what Gandhi did, and now look what has happened! Our politicians still use indefinite fasts and demonstrations and general strikes to manipulate people, but now they manipulate them into voting en masse for whichever candidate shares their caste or their religion. *Gandhiji* may have used his means for a noble end, but today his means has *become* the end. Today's politicians can think of nothing more than their own terms of offices, and they are willing to do anything in order to succeed. Why should I support them in inflaming religious and ethnic sentiments? Do you think I want to encourage bigotry of any sort? Never!

"Unfortunately, the vast majority of human beings are sheep. Long ago I too used to be in that flock of sheep. But then I ran away, and now that I have dedicated my life to staying away from that flock of sheep why would I want to return to it? Why do you think I refuse to vote?"

"Would participating in the democratic process ship you back to the flock?"

"*What* democratic process? If we had informed voters voting that would be one thing. But the majority of our voters are illiterate and, as in most democracies, they vote for whomever promises them the most. I'm sorry, but we got our independence very cheaply. If we had had to fight for it, like the Vietnamese did, I think we would value it much more.

"Do you mean that maybe it would be better for Nature *not* to continue to help India intercept enemy tanks, planes and submarines, just to teach your fellow countrymen to value their freedom?"

"No, not at all. Our brave soldiers and sailors and airmen fully deserve Nature's help. No, it will be better for the politicians to suffer. To be a politician you have to put your conscience on the shelf. Why should I support people who have no conscience, even if I only support them by stating my preference for them?"

"I do try to support those politicians who are decent people, but decent politicians will never get very far, because they are not willing to stab their grandmothers in the back. And how many decent politicians are there, especially today? Look at our current crop of Indian politicians! All that they know how to do is to try to extort support from others by courting arrest. And where did they learn this tactic from? From Gandhi! By creating things like the 'Fill the Jail' agitation *Gandhiji* encouraged ambitious people to think that the only qualification to hold public office that they really require is to have been a jailbird."

"So what was *Gandhiji*'s potentially justifiable means has become an unjustifiable political end," I reflected. "How well this supports your thesis."

"In my life I have found two touchstones. One was Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the second was Gandhiji. Everyone who came in contact with Ramakrishna Paramahansa became truly spiritual, and everyone who came in contact with Gandhiji became truly materialistic, greedy for fame or money or both. And still people worship Gandhiji as a saint! It's amazing. I once knew an old Muslim fakir who used to say, *Gandhi teri aandhi duniya ko paye mal, magar teri bhut pujayegi*."

"I don't quite follow that." He was exaggerating for emphasis, as Indians tend to do, but the karmic implications intrigued me.

"Gandhi, your storm will wreak havoc on the world, but your statues will be worshipped. And they are. India is a most unique country."

"You will at least admit that Gandhiji was brave."

"Yes, I'll grant you that. He stood up to the British and wouldn't give up until he got his way. But he was also very lucky that he was fighting the British, who at least showed some decency. If the Germans or the Japanese had been ruling India then how long do you think Gandhi would have lasted? Not very long! As soon as he stood up and made some noise they would have simply shot him dead."

"So India's independence is partly due to the British?"

"Think about this for a moment: Suppose the minds of some key Britishers became perverted and they decided that the best course of action was to give India its freedom without resisting much. Then Gandhi looks less like the man who caused it all and more like the instrument through which someone else caused it."

"Hmm."

"I tell you one thing today: this is exactly what will happen to communism. One of these days, and it will be sooner than you think, the minds of the top communists are going to be perverted. Without anyone else's help they themselves will destroy everything that their commissars have built atop all those mountains of corpses. And that will make me very, very happy."

I thought this prediction daft then, but of course it was merely prescient. Within a few short years of his death communism had begun its inevitable collapse.

Here Vimalananda stubbed out his cigarette and paused before continuing: "No matter how pure your motives are your ass can still be fired even if you keep your nose clean." While the Hindi phrase "to fire someone's ass" literally means to violate that person anally, in Bombay argot it suggests giving that someone a very hard time.

"You know, Chotu used to spend plenty of time with a sadhu named Chaitanyananda. Chaitanyananda was a good man, with a good knowledge of

Ayurveda. People would come to him all the time for treatment because he could cure many serious diseases, including the first stage of cancer. He would make whoever came to him stay for about a month. The first day he would tend to that person carefully to create a false sense of security. Then he would go out into the jungle and collect a certain plant. He would extract its juice, which he called *Ram-rasam* ('Rama's Juice'), and then administer it to the patient. Anyone who took Ram-rasam would purge and vomit. My God, how they would purge and vomit! Go on, purging and vomiting! Once the patient's insides were cleaned out Chaitanyananda would serve him *khichadi* (rice and split mung beans cooked together) into which a little *bhasma* (Ayurvedic metallic oxide medicine) had been added. Chaitanyananda would vary the type of bhasma according to the nature of the disease. The poor fellow would take this diet alone for two weeks or a month or whatever, and would leave cured."

"So he really fired their asses, literally, didn't he?"

"Yes, but it was for their own good. They were so ill that their bodies required that kind of severe discipline to be cured. Chaitanyananda was a very disciplined man. Every morning he would get up and tend to his patients. Then he would sit down in the lotus position and go into a samadhi during which he would not move all day long. This kind of samadhi is really not all that useful, though; it is just like being dead. Your mind is so concentrated on one object that it does not move, but it cannot go anywhere else either.

"Chaitanyananda had a good life, but when it came time for him to die Death told him, 'So, you have made so many people purge? Then you too will purge!' And he did purge, for days together, before getting release. And why? Because of the Law of Karma. Even though he cured many people his method of cure produced karma for him because he self-identified with it."

"Even his samadhi didn't save him from those karmas."

"Not at all! Some people to whom I tell this story complain to me that this does not seem fair. They say that the end that this old man was pursuing—the end of healing the sick—should justify the means he was using to obtain it. But I tell you again, there is no end so desirable that it will exempt you from enjoying the effects of the karmas you performed to achieve it. I am a perfect example of this. For years on end I have performed *basti* with hot water."

*Basti*, which means "enema," is performed by different means in Ayurveda and in Hatha Yoga. Vimalananda used the yogic method, using his abdominal muscles to suck water into his colon and swirl it around there before expelling it.

"One reason I do *basti* is to keep my insides clean. It is my internal bath, which helps to keep my awareness clear. Another reason I do *basti* is to pre-

vent my food from going to form prostate fluid or sperms. Basti with hot water helps to send the food's juices to form ojas without any delay. The brain is a truly marvelous structure; it is a lake, a lake that is jellylike and full of ojas. In fact, the brain is your own personal Lake Manasarovara. Every brain cell is itself a lake of Amrita, with a mountain of knowledge—a Mount Kailash—contained within it."

"Right," I said. By combining basti with other spiritual practices he was able to obtain a maximum of ojas from a minimum of semen. Just as in the outer world Lord Shiva lives on Mount Kailash, which sits in Tibet just near Lake Manasarovara, even so in the inner world your personal Shiva—your consciousness—inhabits the mountain of knowledge within the lake of the brain's juices.

"I have done lots of basti," Vimalananda went on, "to keep my insides pure and to nourish my brain, and what is the result? The hot water has so thoroughly burned the lining of my intestine that it interferes with the assimilation of my food. So now when I really need good assimilation to regain my strength I find that my own purificatory practice is firing my ass."

"Hahaha," I responded—a good pun deserves a little compassionate laughter even when it hits close to home. I should have stayed silent, though, for it was my own ass which was next fired, thanks to my first interview on Indian TV. The interview, which was the outgrowth of a conference held in Bombay by the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine, was held in *Marathi*, a language that I understand adequately but speak haltingly. I took the precaution, as I did for my second Marathi TV interview five years later, to have a script created and translated into grammatical Marathi. I then memorized it and delivered it with verve in a decent accent. The result was sufficiently successful that people still stop me on the street in Maharashtra to ask me if they have seen me on TV. When I admit that it was I they saw they then expect me to speak with them in fluent colloquial Marathi. There is no escape from the Law of Karma.

When the first interview was first screened I sat to watch it with Vimalananda and a couple of his 'children.' After the opening credits had rolled the interviewer asked me about the people who had most influenced my Ayurvedic studies. I responded by mentioning K. Narayana Baba of Hyderabad, who was instrumental in getting me admitted into the college; Dr. Vasant Lad, who helped me survive the college; and Vaidya B.P. Nanal, Poona's doyen of Ayurveda. When Vimalananda did not hear his name he asked me sharply, "Have you forgotten me?"

"Not at all," I shot back boldly. "But I don't want any new people coming to bother you with questions or ask for favors when you are not well."

"So what! Your acknowledgements were incomplete. This show does not deserve to be seen!" Then, without any warning, the TV's screen went blank. At first I thought he had vandalized our set, but the next day's *Times of India* reported that at the precise moment of Vimalananda's comment the power supply to Bombay TV's transmitter was mysteriously, inexplicably lost, interrupting broadcasts to the whole of Bombay for the rest of the evening. After Vimalananda read that story he exultantly had me read it myself, and taunted me with, "Now you see what happens when you fail to acknowledge your mentor!"

"All I wanted to do was to keep you from having any more trouble!" I retorted with cautious exasperation. "In the future I will always acknowledge you, if that's the way you want it, and you can go right ahead and live with the consequences. But there's nothing I can do about this interview. It's already in the can, and I don't quite know how I would explain to the producer that if he doesn't tape one more acknowledgement my mentor will continue to fire the ass of the TV station's power supply so that our program will never be seen!"

Vimalananda now began to laugh, and replied, "All right, my boy, all right, I won't interfere again—but don't forget the next time ..." One month later we watched the interview in its entirety. Since that day I have never neglected to give him credit where credit is due him.



One evening during the fortnight of my life as a groom I was walking slowly toward the ocean pondering a death under hooves when Param Singh drove by and offered me a lift as far as the Opera House. I thought that he must have some ulterior motive, but he only wanted to chat and to find out how Vimalananda was doing. I satisfied him by briefly outlining Vimalananda's physical condition. How could I explain to Param Singh, or to anyone else at the racecourse, that Vimalananda was growing more and more aloofly philosophical about life under the combined influences of two Sade Satis, multiple devotee shenanigans, and his Junior Guru Maharaj's whimsies?

Mamrabahen was also doing her best to make Vimalananda's life hell and it was beginning to show. "Mamrabahen is goading me to kill her," he would say, "but I'm not going to do so. She can kill me, if necessary, or be the cause of my death, but this curse is going to end this time around." When one day I cavilled about having to endure Mamrabahen's venom as well he retorted, "Don't you think you must be tangled up in this curse too, somehow? Otherwise why would she hate you so much? She hated you as soon as you two met."

"I keep asking you what I should do about this, and you never tell me to do anything."

"What you should do is to continue trying to remain calm. Eventually, if you are patient enough, your portion of the curse will dwindle. You may even be able to turn it into a blessing."

"What?"

"Why shouldn't it be possible to change a curse into a blessing? After all, both are forms of shakti. In fact, you can turn almost any curse into a blessing; the only question is how to do it."

"Well?"

"You can use one of the specific methods, if you know them. If you don't then the best thing to do is to find out who cursed you and patiently serve that individual. Do good service in a spirit of devotion. Don't even think about how long it might take. Just resolve to continue to serve for as long as necessary. There will come a time when the heart of your ill-wisher will be so overcome with love that it will melt. In that moment the change can be made."

"How am I going to find out who gave me this curse?"

"If you need to know you'll find it out."

In May of 1983 Vimalananda was feeling well enough to go to Poona to visit his horses. This time we carried with us Cawas Bilimoria, our long-time heart-patient friend from Bombay. After spending a couple of days at the stables Vimalananda and I drove out of Poona with Arzoo and Cawas to pay a social call on Mr. Chabhu Ranbuke, who had been Vimalananda's wrestling protégé toward the end of Vimalananda's career as a professional wrestler. Chabhu welcomed Vimalananda like a long-lost father and fed us the best mango juice that I have feasted on until today. After lunch we went on to a nearby town where lived an aged Muslim fakir whose skin had become so thin that the blood could be seen flowing through his vessels. Though the verbal conversation between Vimalananda and this holy man was unremarkable a diffuse sense of disturbance began to swirl within me as we departed. We drove past a favorite Ganesha shrine without stopping. When I turned to suggest that we halt there briefly Vimalananda pulled me up sharply and told me to keep my opinions to myself.

This was not like him at all, which further magnified my unrest. As we continued towards home my disquiet began to crystallize around the driving skills of the boy who sat behind the wheel of the car. Farokh, the 16-year-old son of Pesi and Fanny Sodabottliwala, was driving their car forward while turning his head backward to speak with Vimalananda. It was twilight. Forty-two kilometers from Poona, and five minutes after I reminded Farokh that most automobile accidents happen at twilight, he rammed us into the

back end of a parked truck. So stunned that for a moment I could not speak, I pulled myself together sufficiently to turn and look at Vimalananda and Arzoo in the back seat. Great pain creased Vimalananda's face. Suddenly Cawas, who had been sitting next to me in the front seat, emerged from the wreck and lay down on the ground. Around him gathered a crowd of curious villagers, who started to shout, "He's dead! He's dead!"

"Go see if it's true!" commanded Vimalananda from behind me. "I promised his parents that I would take good care of him. What face will I have to show them if I have to tell them that he died because some young idiot was not watching the road in front of him?"

I would have loved to investigate Cawas's condition, but I was too firmly wedged into the front seat by the collapsed dashboard. I slowly dislodged myself, only to find that extensive bruises to my knees made it almost impossible to move. By the time I could clamber out of the car Cawas was on his feet again and was shuffling back to see what had happened to the rest of us. We were all alive, though shaken and bruised. Vimalananda was worst off, with a couple of cracked bones and a severely strained heart, which, he said "felt as though it were about to explode." We flagged down a couple of cars to take us to Poona, and fell exhausted into bed on arrival.

Some days later when we were alone Vimalananda told me: "I was not too keen on going out that morning. Something just seemed wrong about the day. After Farokh showed up with the car, I realized that the force of our mutual karmas had gained too much momentum to easily stop. What to do? I decided that the best thing to do would be to go along with the ride that fate had prepared for us. Do you remember what I've always told you, Robby, about my attitude toward my fate?"

"You've always said that if you knew that you were fated to fall into a ditch one day and break your leg you would not wait for that day to come but would go out and find the ditch and jump into it straightaway to get the karma over with. Are you trying to tell me that you did that on this occasion, the only difference being that instead of jumping into a ditch you rammed a truck?"

"At first, when we met Chabhu, I thought that we'd be able to avoid trouble. But after we met that fakir I knew something bad was going to happen. I could tell that he had some shakti, and that he was going to interfere with our plans."

"Do you mean he cursed us? Or that his words or thoughts had the effect of a curse whether he wanted them to or not?"

Vimalananda shrugged his shoulders in assent. "What if he did? If he did it deliberately he'll have to pay for it, eventually. But how will that help us now?"

A meteor of annoyance flashed through the vault of my mind: "Did he do this to us because you challenged him somehow, like you usually do? Was that necessary?" I was all at once so agitated that I began to feel like relinquishing my power of speech.

"What did you expect me to do? Lie down and ask him to walk all over me?"

"But you didn't have to irritate him!" I sighed to myself, deeply. "Anyway, why did you refuse us a stop at the Ganesha temple?"

"By then I knew an accident was inevitable and didn't want poor Ganesha to be blamed. Have you forgotten that Arzoo, Cawas, and Farokh are all Parsis? Fine, all three of them have faith in our Indian deities. But what about their Parsi relatives? Few people are more bigoted than a bigoted Parsi. If we had had our accident just after we stopped at a temple some of these Parsi bigots would have been able to make a lot of noise about how impotent the Hindu gods are. They would have said that our gods couldn't even protect us after we asked them to. I didn't want that."

"So what was this whole drama? Was it just a matter of karmic abatement for all of us?"

"Let me be blunt: Farokh was destined to have died in an accident right about this time. When his parents have done so much for me shouldn't I do a little something for them? Do you have any idea of the pain of losing a child? I do; I've lost a son. For six months after my Ranu's death I was mad with grief, I tell you, off my head entirely. Farokh should have died, and I simply couldn't have that. I had been trying to whittle away at his karmas little by little so that the accident itself could be evaded. But his karmas were too strong and kept propelling him along. Then I decided to go along with his fate. By accompanying him I was able to manipulate some of his karmas, and some of yours too, and Cawas's and Arzoo's. It so happened that the fakir wanted to act as fate's instrument, which is fine with me. Let him deal with the majority of the karmas; why not? The main thing is that we were going to have the accident—and we did—but we all survived it. Isn't that good news for us all? The danger has passed for Farokh, for now, and he's been given such a good scare that he'll drive like a normal human being again for quite a while."

"But, dammit, you almost killed yourself!"

"I can't help that. What mother will not sacrifice herself for her children?"

The very next day came a phone call from Vimalananda's daughter announcing her impending marriage. After hanging up the phone Vimalananda turned to me and said, "I have seen this coming for months now. There is a peculiar astrological period going on right at the moment that I knew would make her fall in love and decide to marry. Look at her fate—she's only known this fellow for a week! She's going to get married; I can't avert it. But

the marriage is not going to last." We made it back to Bombay in time for his daughter to call again to tell him it would be a closed wedding, for family only, and that I was not invited. I was happy not to go, but Vimalananda's physical condition would not permit him to travel alone in a taxi the twenty miles to the wedding's venue in North Bombay. He told her to either send a car for him or to have someone come down to South Bombay and bring him north in a taxi. It seemed to me an eminently reasonable request, but she hung up without comment. We did not hear from her again until the evening after the marriage, when she arrived unwillingly with her groom to request her father's blessings. After they left I asked Vimalananda suspiciously, "You didn't just create this accident to prevent yourself from being able to attend the ceremony, did you?"

He was silent for a moment before he said, "Well, not exactly, but it did give me a good excuse."

"Not exactly! Are you crazy!? I know you better than that. What was the big deal that made you break your bones just so you wouldn't have to attend her wedding?"

"I told you before, I saw this coming. We have just met this man for the first time and he looks very noble and refined, doesn't he?" I had to agree. "But I have known for a long time that my daughter is doomed to marry someone who will mistreat her. I want her to be able to escape that marriage whenever she needs to do so. When I go to weddings I always bring a coconut and have the bride and groom hold it together while I recite a mantra. After that procedure that marriage cannot be broken no matter how hard you may try to break it. What kind of father would I be if I did that for her and imprisoned her in a life of abuse? Would you have wanted that for her?"

No, certainly not; I recalled how effectively that mantra had worked for Shernaz and Behram. Indeed, Vimalananda's daughter left with her husband for his home on her wedding day. Eight months later—one month after Vimalananda's death—she hurried back home where she has remained ever since. Her husband, who had seemed so sweet on his surface, had begun to beat her almost as soon as the honeymoon ended and continued to beat her until she fled.

The combination of the physical trauma of the accident and the mental trauma of the wedding caused Vimalananda's health to take a pronounced downward turn, and in early June 1983 he was hospitalized for a month, to force him to rest. He was a great hit with doctors and fellow patients, all of whom were sorry to see him go when Roshni (now back from abroad) transported him back home.

By August he was healthy enough to make brief jaunts to Poona. In September 1983, as we stood near the northern end of the Poona racecourse in

the brilliant afternoon sun, Vimalananda predicted his death by the end of the year. Facing southeast, toward the temple of Rama on the nearby Ramtekdi hill, he spoke clearly and firmly without any trace of dread or self-pity: "Immense changes are in store for the world. Lots of things that we take for granted will simply cease to exist and lots of things I have no interest in witnessing are heading our way. For example, now we have a new scourge in the world, the scourge of AIDS. Do you realize that AIDS has created thousands of Visha Kanyas, male and female, all over the world? Everyone who has AIDS is a Visha Kanya. Have unprotected sex with such a person, even once, and you may be doomed. Quite a strange fate, don't you think? Once only a few Visha Kanyas existed in the world, but now the world is going to be flooded with them.

"And this is just the beginning. Isn't it interesting that all religions have a time limit, and that the ending points of least three of these are approaching at about the same time, which happens to be now? Vallabhacharya said that his sect, which worships Lallu, the Baby Krishna, would last four hundred years; it is written that Islam will exist for only fourteen hundred years, which have just passed; and if Nostradamus' prophecies are to be believed, Christianity will be finished after two thousand years. And Buddhism and Jainism won't be spared this winnowing process either."

"Do you really pay that much attention to such prophecies?"

"No, and neither should you. In fact, you even have to be careful not to empower these prophecies when you repeat them, because that's a karma too. My point is that these prophecies agree that the world in general is deteriorating. Our job is to avoid deteriorating along with it, without making things worse in the world in general. All these people who fret about the end of the world are actually bringing the end nearer with their fretting! They would be do a lot better, for themselves and for the world, if they would spend their time remembering God instead. And they could best do that by focusing on the inevitable end of their own individual worlds: their own deaths.

"Everything has a natural time limit, including people. A human being is made of rnanubandhanas; they create our lives, and also bring them to a close. I have to be concerned about my own time limit because if I outlive my rnanubandhanas I will start creating new karmas, which will ruin me. Outliving my rnanubandhanas will force me to continue living in this body, which happens to be falling apart. I could do some rejuvenation on myself, but why? What do I have left here? One of the few things I used to look forward to was to spend some time each day with my little dog, and now she is gone."

I must have looked hurt, for he added, "I know that you love me sincerely; so does Roshni, and a few of the others. But no one has loved me like my ani-

mals have. I'm afraid that my two-legged friends have never been as loving and reliable as my four-legged friends have been. There is really nothing left for me here—and there are so many other places to play. It so happens that I already have another physical body, on this very planet; one that my mentors never wanted me to find. But I found it anyway, and I know that whenever I leave this one I will simply return to that one. It's that simple. I really have seen enough of this sort of life, and now that I am nearing the end of the set of karmas that I had to deal with when I was born it is time for me to die. I do not expect to see the beginning of 1984.

"I want you to remember one very, very important thing, Robby: Any time you try to impose your will on the universe you run the risk of creating a new karma whose repercussions may follow you for years, or for lifetimes. When you fail to live with reality, reality inevitably comes to live with you. I got back into racing just to indulge Mamrabahen. Little by little I became more involved in it. When I bred Redstone I thought that I had a Classic winner. I tried to help him along, and you saw the result. My mind was perverted when I asked that my Ranu die, and my mind was also perverted when I asked that my Redstone win."

He fell silent. I knew well that when Vimalananda's son Ranu lay dying of polio in Bombay Vimalananda had actually prayed that Ranu die, for he didn't want his sports-loving young son to live the cheerless life of a cripple. But this was the first time I was hearing that he had "helped" Redstone to win his Big Race. Now I really had no idea of what to say. When the wordlessness became too oppressive I threw out, "Maybe that race really is a hoodoo race."

"Maybe it is, and that is my point. If my mind had been perverted I would have believed that running my horse in a hoodoo race would be the best thing for him. It was just the slightest request—I'm telling you today, Robby—Redstone had just the slightest extra ethereal push, to guarantee his victory—and then everything went wrong with him because he had paid me back what he owed me before he was due to. I knew what could happen—had I not seen it with my buffaloes? But a tiny drop of preference just leaked out, and you saw the result. Let this be a lesson to you too: Never make the mistake of telling Nature what you want from Her. Let Her give you what is best from you, out of the endless bounty of Her unfathomable love."

"I will remember this. But I want to know if your mind was perverted on its own, or whether it had some help."

"All I can tell you is that Guru Maharaj doesn't want me in racing. He doesn't want me to be interested in anything except spirituality, which is as it should be, since he is my guru. But what he doesn't realize is that without something to attract my interest I am not going to be able to stay in this body.

I have other worlds to play about on, and I'll go there. But believe me, when I am gone, Guru Maharaj is going to regret it. He'll realize then what kind of toy he's lost. Mark my words, I'm going to make him cry."

On December 12, 1983, Vimalananda made us all cry.

## EPILOGUE

THE FACTS OF VIMALANANDA'S dying are as easy to recount as they were tortuous to live through. Somehow I succeeded at cremating him at Bombay's Banganga Smashan, just as eight years and three months previously he had prophesied that I would. And, just as he had promised all those years ago, his wife and children did not come to watch the pyre, for their egos still smarted from his failure to attend his daughter's wedding. As the flames devoured him the mournful tones of his last request—"Precious Lord, Take My Hand," sung by Jim Reeves—ascended toward the heavens with the smoke. I kept rewinding the tape until when it finally snapped I concluded that he had had enough. Thereafter I sat silently, dreading the moment that the fire would die down and I would have to leave Vimalananda's hands behind me for good.

When Vimalananda decided to teach a lesson he was always prepared to suffer himself to drive his lesson home. His passage and its aftermath were the final lessons he could teach. They were delivered them with all the severity he could muster. Though Guru Maharaj shed no outer tears over his disciple's end I knew that Vimalananda's stiletto had indeed hit home. I visited Guru Maharaj in his southern eyrie at least once a year thereafter and on each occasion saw him shrinking further away from interest in external reality. Despite all the efforts of his well-meaning devotees he finally became totally fed up with physical existence and left his body on June 6, 1993.

Guru Maharaj's withdrawal from the world shocked but did not really surprise me, for Vimalananda was one of the few reasons he had for living. His departure did not blindsides me, as Vimalananda's had. Though I had watched Vimalananda slowly deteriorate over the previous months I had also witnessed his sudden retreat from death's door on so many other occasions that I was certain that he would escape the noose again—or at the very least, rise again



within a few hours of depature. When he did not I was thoroughly devastated, and passed the next several months in stupefied disengagement from life.

But life goes on. Though stunned I had to deal with that event's fallout. Soon it dawned on me that Vimalananda's death was not *his* death. He had been in such a hurry to go that he had elected to exit by suffering through the karmas of one Mr. Writer, a 99-year-old Parsi who wished to live to be a hundred. Mr. Writer was the uncle of Fanny Sodabottliwala who, with her husband Pesi, had served Vimalananda diligently on Mr. Writer's behalf that he might achieve his goal. Pesi and Fanny put on an excellent show, spending money freely on Vimalananda and on me without even an insinuation that they considered the sums they contributed to be loans instead of gifts. Less than a week after Vimalananda's cremation, however, Fanny shocked me with her sobbing over how much they had spent on him. Pesi, who had apparently itemized each expenditure, was moaning over how his business had not developed as speedily as Vimalananda had promised. Though a few months after Vimalananda's demise Mr. Writer did make it to 100 and then died, the Sodabottliwalas showed not the slightest thanks for Vimalananda's largesse toward either to her uncle or to her son Farokh, munificence which he had conferred at the expense of his own life.

Miss Bambhani also popped up to claim that she had paid Vimalananda more money than she was able to extract work from him. Bashermal, meanwhile, who Vimalananda used to call "my mature, mellow wine," who had been the most "senior" of Vimalananda's spiritual "children," underwent an inflation. Having concluded that Roshni and I should now obey him in the stead of our dear departed he attempted to impress us into submission by the unskillful means of imitating Vimalananda's evening talks. As neither of us could withstand the agonizing boredom of these well-meaning chats, we were overjoyed that the simple expedient of infuriating him caused him to give up on us as hopeless cases. His parting blessing was to direct his disciple Mundromal, the lawyer who was handling Vimalananda's will, to mishandle that document in such a way that Roshni, the executor and sole heir, ended up with nothing to inherit.

Kalubhai, Doshi, Harshbhai, and some of the others continued coming round to Roshni's place for a while to pay their respects to Vimalananda's photo until Mundromal's son began to claim that he was channeling Vimalananda's spirit. He set up one of the rooms in his flat to resemble Vimalananda's room, complete with an easy chair resembling the one into which Vimalananda had used to ease himself. Most of the "spiritual children" now shifted their focus to these channeling sessions. Roshni and I were also invited to attend, but both of us were certain that Vimalananda would never

have deigned to tenant the body of such a mediocre individual. This certainty attained rock-like status when we learned that Mundromal's son had even kept a little dog, like Vimalananda's Lizoo, for the channeling sessions. But while Lizoo was a Pekinese, this canine was a Pomeranian. Vimalananda would never have sunk so low as to possess a Pom! I can hear his indignant bark now: "A Pom! What would I want with such a miserable breed of dog?"

Vimalananda's great hope, Redstone, died of equine cough in 1984. As executor Roshni then disposed of the remaining horses, keeping only Malika, Meherunnissa's daughter, racing in the name of Vimalananda's estate, for it was her desire to keep Vimalananda's colors active at the racecourse as long as she could. Ramakda went immediately to stud and produced two foals for the estate, both of which were sold. After winning a number of races, Malika was sold to a stud farm not long back, and then there were none.

Mamrabahen and Jhendu Kumar continue their interest in racing. In my capacity as Racing Agent for the Estate of the Late Mr. Vimalananda I began to accompany Roshni to the Paddock before races in which Malika was running, but I lost interest in the whole show on the afternoon that the disreputable Bapsi succeeded in rubbing suggestively against my leg as I strode through a crowd toward the Ring. Though Vimalananda had once declared that his cock would not get hard even if she jumped up and down on it, I had at one time thought she was rather cute, in a slatternly sort of way. On that day, though, I saw exactly what he meant, for when I looked into her eyes I saw naked, sticky lust, the kind of lust I had once seen in the "come hither" eyes of a debauched young male in Morocco. It was a clandestine, tawdry lust, one that smells of a rarely-aired room in which semen has been regularly and furtively ejaculated. Taking her frottage as a clear omen of what sort of circumstances lay in store for me if I continued my pilgrimages to the track I turned my energies elsewhere.

I continued for some years to make occasional tours of Bombay's stables to chew the fat with my friends there. Whenever I showed my face everyone who knew me invariably made me stop to reminisce about the days when it was a second home for me and "the old man." My visits ceased when the great doping scandal that rocked the Club to its very foundations closed those stables to casual visitors. It was a good time to escape; racing in today's India is growing hazardous to life and limb. In 1996 one famous jockey was threatened with death if he did not hook a horse and the daughter of another was kidnaped after he failed to boot home the favorite in a prestigious race. In 1997 two gunmen shot one bullet into the ground and two past the ear of Irish jockey Mark Gallagher outside the Bangalore Turf Club Gate. His ear required fifteen stitches to be made whole.



Like every individual I create my own universe among the many universes that coexist on this terrestrial globe. Like everyone else I continually find for myself the environment that my karmas require of me. The racecourse was a sizable slice of my universe for almost a decade, but when those karmas were done I left it to create a new cosmos for myself. Vimalananda remains a major part of this new universe and always will be, just as his Junior Guru Maharaj and Lord Shiva are ongoing residents therein. They are three of my constant companions on the long road of my life.

One of the daily practices Vimalananda suggested to me is contained in a verse from the *Shiva Manasa Puja* ("The Mental Worship of Shiva") that he used to recite each morning when he lived alone on Mount Girnar. In translation it goes something like this:

You are the soul, O Lord of the Mountain-Born.  
The body's pranas are Your attendants, the body Your home;  
The sequence of enjoyment of sensory objects is  
Your worship, and sleep Your samadhi.  
All my movement is Your circumnambulation,  
All praise is Your hymns;  
Whatever karmas I may perform, O Happiness-Bestower,  
I offer them all, without exception, to you as my worship.

Parvati, the "Mountain-Born," is the Kundalini Shakti, born from the range of mountains that the vertebrae form as they string together into the spine. Her Lord is Lord Shiva, the indwelling soul. Spiritual development occurs as Kundalini relinquishes her hold on the limited self and, turning her face toward her Lord, begins to act not from desire for personal gain but for the greater glory of That Which is Real. This creates true happiness. So long as I continue to realign my own Kundalini toward that soul I know that someone will correct every mistake I make and, dragging me out of whatever ditch in which I may have dropped, will return me to the path. This was the parting blessing of my friend-philosopher-guide, the token of his Aghori's love, the benediction he could bestow because he had so utterly devoted himself to offering himself to his Self. May the blessings of Shiva and Shakti attend everyone who seeks honestly to live up to the words of this verse, as Vimalananda did all the days of his extraordinary life.

And may those blessings fill them, as they filled Vimalananda, with the endless plenty of unconditional love.

## GLOSSARY

*Adya Shakti* - lit. "first, original." Used as a synonym for the Adishakti, the first or original Shakti which manifests from the absolute and is the Mother of all the worlds.

*Aghora* - lit. "non-terrifying." Aghora is the most extreme of all Indian sects, concentrating on forcible conversion of a limited human personality into a divine personality.

*Aghori* - A practitioner of Aghora

*Agni* - "Fire"; the God Fire

*Ahamkara* - "I-maker"; the ego

*Amrita* - "Immortal"; nectar

*Anjaneya* - "Descendant of Anjani"; a name of Hanuman, the monkey king, because his mother was named Anjani

*Apsaras* - A class of semi-divine females who can change their shape at will; they move between water (*ap*) and clouds (*saras*)

*Asura* - "Demon, anti-god."

*Atma(n)* - The soul, the indwelling spirit which animates a living being. The Jivatma is the individual spirit which imagines itself trapped in a physical form and subject to the limitations of embodied existence. The Paramatma is the Universal Soul, the totality of spirit in the cosmos. All Jivas or Jivatmas belong to the Paramatma.

*Avatara* - "Descent, incarnation"; usually denoting one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu: Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar), Narasimha (the man-lion), Vamana (the dwarf), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki (the future incarnation)

*Avishkara* - Possession of one's body by an alien personality, especially that of a diety or saint

*Bhakti* - Religious or spiritual devotion

*Brahmana* - A member of the priestly class of society

*Chillum* - A pipe used to smoke marijuana or hashish mixed with tobacco. It is three or four inches long and is straight, tapering with a wide bowl to a thin mouth.

*Darshana* - The act of viewing a saint or diety; also, one of India's philosophical systems

*Dattatreya* - Name of a sage, son of Atri and Anasuya who was worshipped as a deity in the form of the triad Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva

*Deepaka* - Name of a Raga (musical melody): the Kindling or Igniting Melody

*Deva* - "Deity, celestial being"

*Dvapara Yuga* - "Eon of one-half"; name of the third Yuga in the series of four, in which one-half of the dharma or righteousness of Satya Yuga remains. In Dvapara Yuga the primary sadhana and means of achieving desires is austerities (*tapas*).

*Ganesha* - The elephant-headed god, son of Shiva and Uma (*gana* + *isha*, lord of attendants)

*Gati* - "Gait, mode"; there are 108 gatis of sound (*nada*). Numerologically 108 adds up to 9, the number of chakras in the body, according to Aghora. Which gati of nada one hears depends upon past karmas, present tendencies, ancestry, etc.

*Gotra* - 1) System of Vedic lineage ancestry, deriving from "protection of cows"; 2) "Protection for the senses"

*Guna* - lit. "qualities" or "attributes." The Three Gunas are the three fundamental attributes of conditional or limited existence: *Sattva* (equilibrium), *Rajas* (activity), and *Tamas* (inertia). In its purest state the mind is pure Sattva, and the two chief mental disturbances are Rajas (overactivity) and Tamas (inactivity).

*Guru Droha* - An offense or act of treachery against the guru

*Guru Purnima* - The full moon of the Indian month of Ashadha (usually in mid-July), during which the guru is worshipped

*Halahala* - The world-threatening poison drunk by Shiva that turned his throat blue

*Hanuman* - The mighty monkey of the *Ramayana* who is the archetype of the selfless devotee

*Hiranyakashipu* - A great demon king, father of Prahlada (q.v.), was eviscerated by Narasimha, the man-lion avatara of Vishnu

*Hiranyaksha* - A demon king, elder brother of Hiranyakashipu (q.v.), was killed by Varaha, the boar avatara of Vishnu

*Homa* - General term for any ritual in which offering into a consecrated fire is the primary action

*Jiva* - The individual personality which undergoes rebirth, because the karmas stored in the causal body need a physical body to permit their expression. (see *Atma*).

*Jnana* - Transcendent wisdom. Knowledge (*Vidya*) is an outward projection or objectivization of this innate, living wisdom

*Jnani* - One who has attained ordinary spiritual knowledge

*Kali Yuga* - The fourth of the four ages through which the cosmos passes in cycles of 4,320,000 years. Kali Yuga is supposed to last 432,000 years, and is characterized by lack of interest in spirituality among the populace, which leads to materialism, atheism, and the perpetuation of various cruelties by stronger beings onto weaker ones.

*Kaula* - Followers of Tantra who perform the practice of Rasa Vidya in order to turn Kundalini into Kula Kundalini (freed kundalini)

*Kedara* - Name of a Raga, the "Field Melody", sung to attract Krishna

*Krida* - "Play"; particularly unconscious play, such as *rati krida* ("love play"). Krida is controlled by someone or something other than the being who is playing. In love play, the glands and the genitals do the controlling, not the two people who romance each other.

*Kshatriya* - "Warrior"; a member of the warrior castes

*Kundalini* - Cosmic energy that manifests along the spine and within the chakras; the source and force of all experience

*Lila* - "Cosmic play"; distinct from Krida (q.v.). The divine play of Rishis and deities, especially Krishna and Rama, is called Lila, cosmic pastimes in which they are always in control.

*Mahabharata* - One of India's two great epic poems (the other being the *Ramayana*)

*Mahakala* - The God of Death

*Mahalakshmi* - The goddess of wealth and prosperity; the Bombay Racecourse is called "Mahalakshmi" in honor of a nearby temple of that goddess

*Mahapurusha* - "Great Soul"; refers to any being who has become immortal as a result of sadhana (q.v.). Rishis (q.v.), Munis (q.v.), Nathas and Siddhas are all Mahapurushas.

*Maharaj* - "Great King"; also a common designation of a saint, who has

achieved dominion over the spiritual world

*Maha Shiva Ratri* - "Great Night", otherwise called Maha Ratri, occurring on the night before the new moon during the lunar month of *Magha* (February or early March)

*Maya* - "Illusion"; usually indicates cosmic illusion

*Megha* - "Cloud"; name of a raga. If one wants rain, one plays Megha in a certain way and rain will come.

*Moksha* - Liberation

*Mudra* - A positioning of the hand or body in a particular way to channel and thus cultivate one's prana and consciousness

*Muni* - An advanced being (yet lower than a Rishi [q.v.]), who communicates telepathically or through the eyes

*Nara Bali* - Human (*nara*) sacrifice (*bali*)

*Narasimha* - "Man-lion", the name of this avatara of Vishnu

*Narayana* - A name of God, esp. of Vishnu

*Nath* - "Lord"; a highly advanced being, an Aghori

*Niyama* - The second limb of yoga, internal discipline

*Ojas* - That essence of physical energy which produces the aura as well as immunity (Ayurveda)

*Paan* - A common digestive consisting of areca nut and other ingredients wrapped in the highly astringent betel leaf

*Para Vani* - "Beyond"; the fourth and highest level of speech, purely telepathic. Only Rishis can access Para.

*Parashurama* - "Rama with the axe"; the sixth Avatara of Vishnu

*Pitri Tarpana* - A ritual performed for a deceased human, usually a father or mother or other progenitor, to satisfy any lingering cravings that individual might have had. Properly performed, this assures the individual an auspicious rebirth and enables him or her to maintain their spiritual progression.

*Prahlada* - Son of the demon king Hiranyakashipu (q.v.), was a devotee of Vishnu

*Prakriti* - Nature, the field in which manifestation arises. In the limited human sense prakriti is one's 'first action' (*pra + kriti*), the choice of action which one naturally, instinctively makes when confronted by a situation that requires action.

*Prana* - "Breath life force." The five major breaths are: *prana* (the process of breathing as well as the breath that regulates the organs in the head), *apana* (the downward moving breath that regulates evacuation),

*samana* (the evenly distributing breath that regulates digestion), *vyana* (the all-pervasive breath that provides movement of the limbs and joints), and *udana* (the upward moving breath through which the spirit departs at death).

*Prasada* - Any substance, usually food, which has been offered to a deity or saint, or to the image of a deity or saint, which is then partaken of by a disciple or devotee. Prasada is supposed to contain a tiny amount of the deity's or saint's *shakti*, which can exert a spiritualizing effect on the partaker.

*Purusha* - Absolute Reality

*Rasa* - "Flavor, emotion"

*Rasa Vidya* - "Knowledge of flavor"; Tantric alchemy

*Ravana* - Name of the demon king who abducted Rama's wife Sita, later killed by Rama

*Rishi* - lit. "Seer." Anything a Rishi sees or perceives becomes reality, because a Rishi is an ethereal being of the highest class, one who is almost totally unlimited, who can travel anywhere in the cosmos and can do anything. The Rishis "speak" the hymns of the Vedas, from which all the knowledge of ancient India is derived.

*Rnanubandhana* - The bondage of karmic debt

*Roti* - Generic name for Indian bread, usually indicating a chappati.

*Rudra* - lit. "the Crier," or "He Who makes others cry." Rudra is the ancient name for Shiva, the god of death, and is so called because he makes everyone cry who comes into contact with Him, because he separates them from their limited existence, to which they are tightly attached.

*Sadhaka* - One who practices a sadhana

*Sadhana* - Any spiritual practice. Aghora Sadhana is designed to replace the Aghori's personality with his deity's personality by creation of the deity's form in the Aghori's subtle body.

*Sadhu* - "A good person"; a wandering religious mendicant

*Samadhi* - A state of profound or one-pointed consciousness; trance

*Samsara* - The cycle of birth and death, ensnarement in the web of worldly existence

*Samskara* - Personality characteristic

*Sannyasa* - "Coma"; renunciation of the world

*Shudra* - "Laborer"; member of the hereditary castes of laborers

*Siddha* - An "accomplished one"; anyone who has obtained a Siddhi, or

supernatural accomplishment is a Siddhi. Vimalananda restricted his use of the word Siddhi to indicate those beings who have achieved immortality.

*Siddhi* - "Perfection, accomplishment"; especially success at sadhana

*Six Tastes* - An Ayurvedic category: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent or spicy, and astringent

*Smashan* - A charnal ground; an area in which dead bodies are burned or buried. This word is derived from "ashmashana," or "place where rocks lie," which suggests that burial was once more common in India than it now is.

*Svabhava* - One's innate nature, the thing that determines how one relates to one's surroundings. Roughly speaking, *prakriti* represents the root and *svabhava* the fruit of human awareness.

*Vajroli* - A yogic practice in which fluid is sucked into the penis or vagina by muscular force. During the sex act, Vajroli can be used to suck up the partner's secretions for both physical and spiritual benefit.

*Vamana* - The dwarf incarnation of Vishnu who rescued the world from the designs of the demon king Bali

*Varaha* - The boar Avatara of Vishnu

*Vidya* - "Knowledge"

*Vijnana* - Practical spiritual knowledge, higher than jnana. In vijnana one becomes a Siddha (q.v.), an immortal, because the ego has become absolutely purified.

*Vijnani* - One who possesses Vijnana

*Vimalananda* - "Stainless bliss"; a proper name

*Visha* - "Poison"

*Visha Kanya* - "poison damsel" (*visha* = poison); her touch means death

*Wah* - An exclamation of amazement, surprise or revelation

*Yajna* - Vedic fire ritual. In yajna, deities in ethereal worlds are invoked, then fed with the fragrance of smoke from the various burnt offerings.

*Yantra* - A diagram which acts as a receptacle for the power of a mantra. Tantra is the ritual by which the Yantra is empowered by the mantra. Any substance can be used for a Yantra, but Vimalananda averred that the best of all possible Yantras is the human body.

