

Ordinary Ecstasy: Before the Journey Begins

I remember my mother's shock. I walked in on her, when I was four years old. She was drying off from a 'quick bath.' I got down from my high and princely chair and went looking for the woman who saw me as the light of her life. The light went out of her eyes, as she turned to see my beaming face aglow with the wonder of her nakedness. Not in her house. Not on your life. She raged at my little artist eyes and convinced me, for many years thereafter, that naked women were only sinfully observed. Nothing was farther from my heart, and I knew it. But innate knowledge in a four year old is soon glossed or muddied over.

I wrote a story about a small boy who discovered his mother naked, and I went to bed. The phone rang at 3AM. It was the next day in China, where Linda was just getting off work. She was the personnel manager of a hotel on the Yellow Sea, in Qingdao, Peoples' Republic of China.

"Are you there? I'm calling from China. Are you there, sweetheart?"

I rolled across the bed we shared for two years, dropped to the floor, crawled out of the cozy bedroom of the small apartment, and grabbed the receiver.

"I'm here."

The machine squealed. I punched the tiny buttons in the dark, until the machine was silent.

"OK, that's better. I got it. I can talk now. I'm still asleep. Hi, baby, how are you? I love you."

"Hi, Bone. I just got off work, and I miss you. I'm exhausted. This place is crazy."

"What's going on?"

"The manager's a madman. He's a pushy, alcoholic German. He's my father, all over again. He yells at everybody. I wish I was in Pune, in the ashram. Can we go there first?"

“Sure. That’s fine with me. But you can go there, right now, if you want. I won’t be done here for another month, but you could go there first. Could you do that?”

“I can’t. I’ve got a two-month contract. There’s no way I can get out of it. It’s just awful here. I was OK, when I was teaching, but this job is insane.”

She’s been teaching Chinese teachers a new method of learning American English. I’m supposed to be a part of the program in February, and then again in August. It’s a potential income source to finance our travels in the East.

“I hate it here. I only feel safe in my room. I sit here, and I watch CNN, and sometimes I dance a little, but . . . I don’t know what to do. I miss you so much.”

I felt anger rise in my chest. The trip to the Orient was her idea. She’s the world traveler. She’s the one who professes to be free when she’s traveling. She loves to find work in foreign countries. She did it in Nigeria, when she was in her twenties. Then it was Italy, Spain, Nepal, China.

My anger came from a feeling of abandonment. She left in early August, and I stayed, to close up shop and earn enough money so I could join her. During that whole time, I tried to get clear whether I was taking the trip for her or for myself.

“I don’t know what to say. I’d tell you to get to a meeting, if there were any meetings to get to. Maybe the ashram is the best idea.”

I wanted to say I missed her, too, but I was to see her in a month, and things were going well for me in Seattle. I painted houses, went to recovery meetings whenever I wanted, and often, late at night, I painted in the kitchen, converted to an art studio since she left.

It added to my confusion. Why, exactly, was I about to leave the city, the country, my work, my friends, and the recovery community I was a part of, to go off to Asia, which didn’t particularly appeal to me in the first place? On the other hand, I wanted to travel, and Linda was opening the door for me. I was grateful to her for her energy and her experience.

“I miss you too,” I say, suddenly. “I’m sorry, baby. I haven’t been in my heart, lately. I’ve been working, and Willy’s been a real asshole.”

Wilhelm was my partner. He and Linda were both members of the same loose-knit society of seekers who spent time in the ashram in India. They were both meditators whose master is called Osho. He was the same master who was so notorious as the Baghwan Shree Rajneesh.

Linda's name in the ashram is Suryo, but she didn't use it in business in China. The Chinese loved American names. All the teachers she taught, and all the staff workers at the hotel, were given American names. So Suryo was Linda in China. When I first met Linda, it took me weeks to get used to calling her Suryo.

When I first met her and found out she was an orange person, a Rajneeshie, I almost ended the relationship, until I paid a little more attention and discovered the difference between the reality of her experience and the bad press. The more I heard, the more I read, the more I saw that the outrageous guru from India said what I'd been feeling all my life. I felt an affinity for Osho Rajneesh, despite my hesitancy.

Then I compared Linda's experience with Osho with my experience as a recovering alcoholic. I was also a member of a loose-knit, worldwide, spiritual movement that many saw as a cult of heretics. In the early '70's, I ran an art gallery in my hometown in Illinois, and I called it **The American Heretic**. Heretical thinking was nothing new. Linda was less heretical than I was. I was, after all, a poet/artist, and she was a therapist/ teacher, working as a manager in a four-star hotel.

"Bone, I don't know how much longer I can do this. I'm going nuts. Everybody here is so repressed. The energy is crazy."

"Pray," I said, like I just remembered the combination to the safe.

"What?"

"Pray. Get down on your knees in your tiny, little room, and . . ."

"It's not so tiny. It's a pretty nice room, actually. That's one good thing."

"OK. Get down on your knees in your terrific little room . . . I mean, your terrific big room."

"It's not **that** big."

“And pray. Ask God, or the Universe, or Existence, to help you know what to do.” I paused, and I added, “Are you meditating?”

“Not enough. It’s hard to meditate in a place like this.”

She worked in a hardnosed Capitalist hotel in a hardnosed Communist country.

I had a conflict in my comparisons between prayer and meditation, between God and Existence, between people who say there is a god, and people who say there is no god, and then go ahead and act as if there is, anyway.

“All I know is, I miss you when I’m in my heart, but it feels good to miss you. I like missing you. You! I like missing you!” I said.

“Me, too, Bone, but it feels like you’re a million miles away. I hated that last letter you sent, the one about getting nude models. It sounded like you were having a great time, and you sure didn’t miss me.”

“Well, the truth is, most of the time I don’t miss you. I love you, and I’m coming to see you, but, most of the time, I don’t miss you.”

“Are you coming? Are you really coming?”

“Yes. I’m coming,” I said, and my tone was different.

Suddenly, it fell into place. It was what had been missing. It’d been two months since she left, and there was another month to go before my November departure. It took all of these two months for me to begin the journey. The idea of following her to Asia was finally replaced with the feeling of going on my own journey.

“I’m coming, baby, I can feel it. I just felt it in my heart. I know I’m coming. I was afraid for a while that it might not happen. I even thought you were going to say you were coming back here.”

“No, I want to stay. I just wish you were here, too.”

“Me, too. Me, too. Hey, I checked about the ferry from Seoul to Qingdao, and I think it’s crazy. If I’m going to be in Qingdao in February, then I

don't need to come there first. Let's just meet in Hong Kong and go from there."

"I want to go to Pune, first? Is that OK?"

"Sure. I'd like to find out what that place is like. See if it's full of loonies like you."

"Like me? You're the lunatic."

"I miss you."

"I miss you."

"I miss your skin. I miss your body. I miss your face."

"I thought you didn't miss me."

"I miss you when I miss you. Otherwise, I don't."

"Just get here, OK?"

"You're so close, and I can't touch you. I want to feel you against me."

"I miss you, Bone of my heart."

"I love it when you call me Bone."

"I've got to go. My secretary is knocking on the door. So I'll see you in Hong Kong. OK? Fax me the details."

"I'll fax you. I'll fax your details." I was getting horny and corny. It was my defense against goodbyes.

"Goodbye, sweetheart," she said, genuinely. I had no defense against love.

"Goodbye, baby. I love you. Take care of yourself."

"I can't wait for Hong Kong."

"Yes, you can."

“Yes, I can. Just be there. OK?”

“I’ll be there. I’m there, right now. But, I’ve got to come back here and go to sleep. I’ve got work in the morning.”

“Be nice to Willy. He’s not so bad.”

“I know, he reminds me of myself, twenty years ago.”

“He’s that bad, huh?”

“OK, goodbye.”

“OK, goodbye.”

“Goodnight, sweetheart.”

“Goodnight, sweetheart.”

I hung up the phone and looked around the darkened apartment. It looked like an art gallery. There was hardly any trace of her. Her belongings were already in storage. I loved my life, but it was true. There was a gnawing absence near my heart. My heart was full of love, but it was even fuller when I was able to love her. She was a woman I loved from the first. It wasn’t crazy love. It was quiet love.

I coined a word for it, one night, when we’re sitting together, not-watching TV, simply feeling each other’s presence. On that night, I felt the love passing back and forth between us like electrical current, like two little kids holding hands, like smiles without words, like sex without fucking, like being without doing, like doing without trying. I called it ordinary ecstasy.

I sat in my apartment, in Seattle, in the dark, and I felt the contentment that was growing in my life.

“I’m coming,” I said, quietly.

I meant to be with her in Asia, to be with her in love.

With Steady Resolve

(11/5) TUESDAY

The day before I flew to Asia, I had two dreams. In one, a stunningly beautiful, sensual, and seductive woman gave herself to me, passionately and completely, and I received her.

"Bite me," she said, as she held her exposed breast out to me. I bit the tight nipple of her firm, round breast. She turned to me, fully naked, and came over me, like a wave.

In the other dream, a large dog with a long snout held the flesh of my right arm between its sharp teeth. It was patient, and it was ready to rip the flesh from my arm. I spoke to the dog's mind.

"I don't want you to do that."

I spoke clearly and firmly, with steady resolve, equal to that of the dog. The dog released its grip, moved away, and sat, still powerful and calm, nearby.

Those are the images I hold for what lies ahead. I'm on my way to meet my lover, to see the other side of the world, to experience what's called the Buddhafield, and to embrace my freedom. The dreams make me feel good about my journey. Now matter how intimidating the journey is, the dreams aren't timid. I'm ready.

Bound for the Farther Shore

I sat, halfway back, halfway forward, on the United 747, halfway between continents, drifting, bouncing from Seattle to Hong Kong. **DEPRESSION - ILLNESS - DRUG SIDE EFFECTS** the three screens ahead of me said. The man next to me was reading Saul Bellow's **Henderson the Rain King**. I was reading 'a rollicking good adventure' about a man without scruples, in the city called Fragrant Harbor. Hong Kong.

I avoided the movies, **Soap Dish** and **Backdraft** and read the novel, listened to classic rock, classic country, and finally, classic classical. I looked at my watch. It was a pink Swatch, without straps, that I found, one Saturday morning, on the soccer field. I took the tiny watch face out of my pocket and realized, at seven hours into the flight, I was midpoint in the Pacific.

I was intently bound for the farther shore. In the tiny lavatory, I discovered what I feared for days. A small patch of herpes had broken out on my penis. I was seven hours from reunion with my lover.

We love each other, we're sexually passionate, and eager for reunion. In two years, these three months apart have been our longest separation. I was hurtling, no longer drifting, toward sexual bliss with Suryo Linda, and I had an outbreak of herpes.

It's not surprising. This journey calls up a bevy of fears, anxieties, and uncertainties. Herpes is the calling card of such feelings, unrelated to sexual activity. I had to admit, after days of tingling, that herpes was truly upon me. My first reaction was anger, then disappointment, and then concern. Then I had a feeling of acceptance, relatively new in my life, and I began to look forward to the holding, kissing, and caressing made possible, and enforced, by circumstances. Being close is ultimately the most desired condition of lovemaking I've ever experience.

The non-frantic, leisurely enjoyment of our lovemaking comes down to the love in our hearts. It's love that isn't in a hurry or a fever, even when our fevered rush is at a high pitch. I stood in the narrow lavatory, in the middle of the sky, in the middle of the ocean, holding my scalded flesh, and I remembered the ordinary ecstasy of our lovemaking. My cock will have its day, maybe when we get to the ashram in Pune. The Osho Commune is a

popular physical and spiritual retreat, and Rajneesh is called "the love guru."

I become restless, as the flight nudged toward my new life. An hour into the new world, nearing 10PM, it was brilliant sun. It remained daytime, until I land in Kowloon, tomorrow, this afternoon, at dusk. How strange. I left home after lunch, and I arrive at suppertime, a day later, on the other side of the world, in fourteen hours.

I pray that all my fear be taken away, so I can "move joyfully amidst the sorrows of the world." Why not?

Into the Heart of Lightness

The three and a half days in Hong Kong were full of surprises. Suryo told me about having sex with an Italian in China, and she declared she was an alcoholic. We went to separate meetings on Victoria Peak, above Hong Kong. On the steep steps, walking back down to the Star Ferry, she stopped to tell me about the Italian.

The three months she spent in China gave her the time to reawaken the Linda of her past, take it on, and realize it was a bad fit.

I wasn't surprised, even though she surprised me. I spent three months playing with my own thoughts of sex. Maybe the herpes was intuitive. When we tried to make love, Thursday night, I couldn't do it all the way, and she couldn't quite get there.

On Friday night, she made her admission, and on Saturday night, I was asked to be the speaker at a meeting. I talked about living in and accepting the paradoxical nature of life. There was a change in her, and I changed toward her. I discovered she has feet of clay. I can stop thinking of her as different, simply because she's a woman.

On Saturday, the herpes magically dried up and disappeared.

Four days later, I'm in the air above India. I listen to 'Cream' by Prince and watch **Naked Gun 2 & 1/2**. We're twenty minutes from arrival in Bombay. It's the leg of my journey that's taking me into the Heart of Lightness. I think so, anyway. I'm giddy with anticipation.

I think of India and the ashram in Pune as a spiritual world that doesn't threaten me. I hope it will support me and support the play of my heart and spirit in my body and mind. We'll see.

The Moment of My Passage

The trip from the Bombay airport to the ashram became a journey into darkness. We landed at 2AM, and thirty minutes after thinking our bags had been lost, they were found. The airport was like a run-down bus station in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1938.

After two hours drinking coffee in a nearby luxury hotel built like a raja's palace, with a fellow from Chile, by way of Holland, then California, a Harpo Marx look-alike in rainbow clothes, we took a tiny taxi into the dark city, jammed full with the three of us, the driver, and all our bags.

The goal was Victoria Station for a 6AM train. It was a journey that will remain in my mind, heart, guts, nostrils, eyes, and spirit, a terrifying, beautiful dream, a rite of passage.

Suryo went through the rite of her passage to India, many years ago, and so did Harpo, presumably. The two of them negotiated the taxi fare and the purchase of the train tickets.

Bombay looked like a great disaster. I thought, "No one will ever want to conquer Bombay, it's so far beyond poverty. The visible despair is so absolute, the people are numb to it. It's like a concentration camp in which the walking captives have become oblivious. They're like zombies, like late-stage derelict drug addicts."

From 4:15 to 6:01AM, when the train pulled out of the station, I passed through an unimagined and unimaginable devastation. My mind couldn't encompass what I saw. My mind, used to trying to solve whatever problems it might encounter, was so utterly incapable of comprehension, I was forced to give it up.

For forty-five minutes, on the drive to the train station, at a rapid pace through the streets of what seemed like hell here on earth, populated with the emaciated, the bundled, the half-naked, the ragged, the sleeping, wandering, walking, same-faced denizens of Bombay, I witnessed the dark side of human civilization.

The entire city is pungent with the nearness of death, an eternal, almost sweet, decay of lifeless death, of deathless life. We passed mile after mile

after mile of seemingly identical buildings, not one in good repair, not one clean, not one showing a single sign of hope, until we arrived at the station.

At 5:00 in the morning, the place was packed with thousands of people, hundreds of families, not waiting for a train, but living in the train station.

Our companion, whose ashram name is Prem Dayo, joked with the taxi driver about his demands for more money. Finally, our bags were piled on a hand cart, and a porter in unwashed clothing, liked wrappings falling loosely from a mummy, led us into the vast sea of sleeping, standing, swirling humanity, within the circle of purgatory at the center of Bombay's pale hell.

Suryo and Harpo went to buy tickets and left me to guard the cart, piled high with our bags. It was my moment alone. I stood, with my left hand on top of the loaded cart, and I looked across the scene. I couldn't fathom the experience I was in. I didn't know how to be in that extraordinary place.

I prayed. "Fill me with your spirit," I said, silently, "fill me, so I can be here and be safe."

I allowed the prayer to become my whole awareness. I felt my body, for so long vulnerable to the cold emptiness of fear, fill with love. I become aware of the feeling of love. For several minutes, I stood in awe at the surprise of love. I felt love, in the most unexpected place I've ever been, other than the hell of my own drunkenness.

It startled me, to go from fear to love, so totally. I wanted to shout above the dull murmur, of life in death, to the thousands of souls in the train station, "**I love you!**"

It was the moment of my passage. It was the closest I've come to an awareness of death in life, except for the times of death in my own life, when alcohol nearly killed me. The human capacity for remaining alive without hope is astounding. I was astounded. But I was able to throw open the window and let love through, in the middle of a scene that would otherwise mean insanity to my mind.

On the train to Pune, I listened as Harpo talked to a rich, young Indian. He was rich because he wasn't poor and he knew it. He was curious about the Osho Commune and about the beliefs of its members. Did Harpo believe in God?

“Not as a person,” he said, “God is everywhere, in everything.” After a while, I heard him say, “Love is not something you can control. Your heart loves, when it loves. You can’t make it love someone over here, and then make it not love someone over there.”

I speak to God, somehow, as if to a loving grandfather, and I ask God to fill my heart. My heart is filled with spirit, and the spirit is love. It amazes me, every time. It always does.

An Instance of God

An AIDS test is required for entry to the ashram. There's a large sign above the entrance to the local hospital, where the testing takes place.

**Every Patient is an Instance of God.
To Serve Him is to Serve God.**

Going back to the clinic on this afternoon of our first day in Pune, I wanted Suryo Linda to admit she had put me at risk by sleeping with the Italian in China.

"We took precautions," she said.

"When you sleep with someone else, you put your partner at risk."

"You're right. I put you at risk."

"Thank you. Thank you for that."

It's strange. I feel closer to her than ever. I need her, in the most extreme adventure of my life into the unknown world. There's nothing for my mind to compare it with. I'm at a loss to conjure up my own feeling of security. I need her as much as I need God. She had an affair with someone else, and here I am, holding her hand and feeling easily and completely connected.

I'm able to feel the thrill of coming together with a woman, in what I call instant intimacy, but what I want, instead, is a common bond of simple love, acceptance, that spreads out like warm water across dry land. I'm feeling that acceptance, like a man, like a child, like any old being on any old planet where love is supreme.

Tuesday will be our first full day in the ashram, where light is the order of the day, after my dark Sunday in Bombay. One moment, I was on a British Airways 747, eating, watching movies, napping across three seats, across several countries, listening to music, and just as automatically, I dropped into the dark end of the spectrum of life on earth, and now I'm among robed angels of light.

I'm living a life of contrasts, paradoxes, and incomprehensible opposites. One of my favorite poets, John Keats, said that the greatest challenge to a

man is “. . . to live in mystery, uncertainty, and doubt, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.”

The Buddhafield

"Everyone in America is so into misery."

Vidya's enlightened scorn, for her image of recovery, edges into the conversation. Suryo told her old friend about her experience in China and Hong Kong. The three of us sat, after lunch, in an open-air cafe, like nearly every other part of the ashram, in a sea of maroon-robed, apparently happy people, who are apparently not into misery.

"Does recovery ever end?" she asked me.

"The idea of recovery is to get out of misery, not to stay in it," I said.

I felt like an interloper between Vidya and Suryo. The women who seem to be the most covetous of Suryo's attention, I think, are envious of her gentleness, her softness, her femininity. When she isn't padded and covered over, she's naturally innocent and open. She carries extra weight like others carry cunning, as a kind of armor. The cunning woman seeks the company of the gentle woman. Vidya wasn't sure about me, the interloper.

Vidya told the story of her compulsive codependence, her need for a man. Some man. One in particular, at the moment. But, she's **learning** to be alone, just now.

"Is that the solution then?" I asked. "Is being alone the path?"

"God, I hope not," she said, looking to the sky.

The Ph.D. group leader, dressed in black, (the group leaders are called penguins) is between drinks. She's only waiting for the next one.

"Addiction is no respecter of wisdom," I think.

"Osho teaches that you must let go of the sands and hold onto the pearl," she said. "We don't deal with addictions here. Not as such."

By the end of the day, in evening meditation, I was ready to kill, or leave, or shout **Bullshit!** in the middle of the great marble hall, filled with white-robed thousands. I didn't want to do anything that all the others were

doing. I got a few glimpses of nakedness in the changing rooms where the lockers were, and that was nice, but the day seems filled with far too many people with whom I feel no connection whatsoever.

I stayed in my alienation and apartness as the music in the great hall led more and more sannyasins to dance. I sat. I stood and moved a bit. I sat. They shouted. I was silent. Then, in the video of Osho, from ten years past, Rajneesh, as he was called then, said that if men were truly superior to women, as they believe, they would leave their homes and families, travel to the world of the woman, and learn to be a part of the woman's world.

"No man has ever done that," he says.

I began to feel better. I left my home and my community, traveled halfway around the world, to be in the world of my woman. I feel good about that. I didn't do it to please her, as I was afraid I might. I'm doing it because I want to, to learn what I don't know in my own world.

I began to relax, again. I saw newcomers to recovery look around the rooms of that Buddhafield and not see, not hear, not feel what was truly happening. The old-timers smile, knowing their own experiences as newcomers. Here, I'm a newcomer. I can't see, I can't hear, I can't feel. Everything looks like an imitation of what's familiar to me. I have to let go of my own world, even though it's a good one.

During the afternoon, I saw a sign on a bulletin board. **SOC CER at Don Bosco**. Then we ran into Sudesh, a woman Suryo and I know a little from Seattle, and she's interested in recovery. We made tentative plans to start a small group in the ashram.

"This is the only place like it in the world," I remember Vidya saying.

"There are places like this all over the world," I thought.

I have an eighty-page booklet, listing the places. But it's true. There's no place like this one. It is **Club Med**-itation. It is the Wonderful World of Osho. It's a constant, continual, daily gathering of several thousands who want to be free.

During dinner, while we were having pizza Indian style, after the evening meditation and video, I scoffed at everyone and everything.

"I think everyone's full of shit, except you and me, and I'm not so sure about you."

At our hotel, we made love, and Suryo was young in my eyes. I said to her, "If you've always associated sex with alcohol," as she realizes she has, since her episode in China, "when you finally make the split from booze, you go back to the age you were when you first made love sober."

"I'm about sixteen," she said.

"I like you at sixteen," I said. "I'm a kid, too."

Our lovemaking felt like the first time.

"Your pussy can't remember how many times you've screwed. My cock can't remember, either."

We looked in each other's eyes like two happy kids. Was it the insidious effect of the Buddhafield?

Secret Beauty

We made love, again. I wanted to. Suryo wanted to. It was fun. I took delight in her new, old innocence. We met Sudesh for coffee and talked about the apartment we looked at, in the Nirmal Building, next to the Akshay Complex.

On Tuesday, I was so ungrounded I literally couldn't imagine living in the apartment we looked at. The hotel seemed safer. But, I said to Suryo, confiding in her, as we stood on the open-air roof, moving apart from Sudesh and the guy who was showing the apartment to us, "If you want to move in here, I will trust you." I had to.

Over coffee, in the German Bakery, the new apartment was a tiny part of the discussion. Mostly, the three of us talked about addiction. We're conspirators of recovery in a cafe of addicts, in a community of divinity. The German Bakery, a simple, side-of-the-road cafe, is where the fringe people hang out. It's perfect for our discussion. At one time, and maybe still, it's where the commune alcoholics and addicts gathered. The pot smokers, the acidheads, the juicers and dopers. The coffee sluggers. The sugar freaks. The three of us were right at home.

We went to meet Shivananda, the thin, beautiful, dark Indian, who's renting us the apartment. He's fifty, going on twenty, going on eternity. He's serene, sensitive, smiling, and perhaps, he seems to imply, dying. He has an old spinal injury that he says is very painful.

On Tuesday, I was put off by his soft embraces and his spontaneously told life story. I felt invaded by such insistence. A rape of love. It seems to me that everyone here is copping a spiritual feel, eyeballing each other intensely, embracing, holding hands, sharing souls, like group sex among casual acquaintances, without the sex.

This morning, I felt open, and being with Shivananda felt like an official welcome from the heart of the commune. Shivananda has been with Osho for many years, after giving up medical school, after leaving the family business, after being "... strong like you," he said to me.

Suryo and I took care of the last of the business we had to do, as newcomers. We changed money, got a safety envelope for valuables, paid rent, got lockers. Suryo started to let go of her Linda business mind. She

went inside in her feelings, and I made plans to join the art studio and play soccer.

She began to feel vulnerable and judgmental, just as I began to feel happy and accepting. We ran into Vidya, who I didn't like when I first met her. After getting advice from Vidya, Suryo said she didn't like her at all. I said I thought she was just fine.

"I want to thank her for helping me go through my initial rejection of this place so soon."

I like the changing rooms. The sight of softly naked women pleases me. An older woman, nearby, revealed small, pretty breasts.

"I love the idea of secret beauty," I told Suryo. "I like to imagine couples who seem plain to the outside world, who know the secret beauty of the other, that no one else knows."

I knew I was also talking about us. She admitted she's been falling in love with lots of people, since coming back to Pune.

"It's wonderful play, that you don't have to take any further," she said.

A part of what she said bothered me. It's a habit of mine to fall in soulful love, all day long. I questioned her wonderful play, and I judged myself for questioning it.

"Why should I fall in love, when I can love, truly love?" I asked, somewhat rhetorically, believing it, but feeling defensive about it.

"It's just play," Suryo said.

"But when I love someone truly, it's also playful," I said.

It's been my experience in recovery to not fall in love with others in the circle. I watch and listen, and people reveal themselves, and I love them. I don't **fall** in love. I love, and there is true play, after that.

"I was playing with you when we made love, last night," I said.

"That was passion," she protested.

“Passion is play. Playing with people is nice, but it’s limited.”

I feel as if I’m watching a lot of people pretend to love, pretend to be free. I’m still feeling judgmental.

“Oh, well,” I thought, “there’s plenty of people sucking on the recovery tit. I suppose there must be people sucking on the commune tit. They leave here, their lives turn to shit, and they rush back here to get their freedom fix.”

I played soccer with a bunch of sannyasin men who were just like the guys I play with on Saturday mornings in Seattle. Our opponents were Indian teenagers. The white guys, older and slower, won. I played better than I thought I would. Soccer in the Buddhafield.

Across the road, under a bridge, on the other side of the iron fence that fronts Don Bosco, the dilapidated prep school that’s now a Catholic community center, are hundreds of lower-caste Indians, living in cloth, cardboard, scrap wood, metal, mud, and stick houses, in squalor.

The amazing thing is the absence of despair and violence that I so readily anticipate, given my experience in the richest nation on earth. “In the United States, these people would be murdering each other and killing themselves,” I thought.

“The US is a brutal society. Does the rest of the world know how hard it is to live in the US?” I asked Suryo.

She told me about the Argentinean who worked at the hotel in Qingdao.

“Do you want to go to the US?” she asked him.

“Never,” he said. Too many members of his family were treated like dirt in the States.

In India, vast numbers live in squalor, but I see an acceptance of life as it is, that precludes despair and violence. As I left the soccer field, beautiful children came up to me and said hello. They smiled. I thought they might be begging. They weren’t. I smiled, looked in their eyes, and said hello. It was a warm greeting, on both sides. Time and again, I’m being made to feel welcome.

We went out for dinner. We walked, after dinner. After the walk, we made love. I began to think about staying in India. For a while, anyway.

City Surfing

I put my arm around her from behind, as she bent over the sink.

“Want to be my best friend?” I asked her, feeling more at ease than before.

“I already am,” she said.

The best people, the sexiest, the most attractive, the most beautiful are the ones who are alive, truly alive. It cuts through everything. Everything else is decoration or imitation. It's Suryo's aliveness that draws me to her, more than anything else.

We took our bags down to the lobby of the Hotel Kapila and checked out. There were no rickshaws on the street. Rickshaws are the tiny, three-wheeled, motor-transporters that fly around the city like flocks of ducks. Their horns honk like ducks. The taxis sound like geese. The big trucks sound like trumpeting elephants.

The rickshaws are on strike. The drivers are protesting the bite the Rickshaw Authority takes out of their metered fares. Fortunately, our apartment is only two blocks from the hotel, where Dholi Patil Road turns into Boat Club Road. We were going to walk, but the manager of the Kapila recommended we call a taxi. The taxi driver helped us drop off our stuff and then took us to the German Bakery, where we met Sudesh. It was fix-up-the-apartment day. No commute. We got a taxi to MG Road (named for Mahatma Gandhi) one of the busiest main drags in town.

From shop to shop, we shopped. MG Road is picturesque and bustling. I was surprised. I had the picture in my mind, that, outside the commune, Pune was like my memory of Bombay. Wrong. Pune was the choice of the British to set up colonial controls, and well-off Indians come to Pune on vacation. It's also known as the Oxford/Cambridge of India, because of the large number of schools and universities. It's a busy, prosperous city.

In a tiny sundries shop, narrow and crammed from ceiling to floor with all manner of incidentals, we found the plastic hangers we were looking for, and the owner offered to bring us tea. He ordered chai to be brought in from somewhere. Chai is the spicy, milky, ubiquitous Indian tea of common welcome. Over a two-dollar purchase, he toasted our well-being.

We told the owner we needed blankets. He walked us five stores up the street, where the dry-goods owner piled blanket upon blanket at our feet. We sat on low stools in the back of the narrow shop, sipping another round of chai. We bargained him down to his absolute financial ruin, he said, on two silk and cotton blankets. He said he'd find a ride for us, since there were no rickshaws or taxis.

For a man who'd just claimed to lose a fortune, he treated us with remarkable courtesy and charm. The only ride available was a rickshaw transport truck, called a tempo, a three-wheeler with a long trailer, with iron guardrails, five feet high on the sides. Sudesh got back from a motorbike ride with a friendly young man, to get the apartment keys copied, and the three of us got in back with our purchases.

The man and boy driving the private tempo, which Govindar, the blanket merchant, had gone to get on his motorbike, rode inside, upfront, while Suryo, Sudesh, and I stood in back. The boy waved at us to sit down, but we refused, and the boy laughed. The toy truck took off down the busy late afternoon street, and suddenly, my heart surged.

The whole afternoon had been great fun, and suddenly, it was magical. It felt like a homecoming parade. Suryo and I felt like king and queen with a lady-in-waiting. People honked and waved, grinned and shouted. We could see half a mile ahead, on a crowded street of pedestrians, cars, bicycles, carts, cattle, a few dogs, and goats.

It was twilight, warm, pungent, volatile, embracing, and stimulating. The traffic was a surging, eddying, rapidly changing river of rafts and fishes. We rode past old English colonial hotels and government houses, amidst a mixture of shops, houses, shacks, and high-rises.

I stood with my hands on both sides of the tempo. "City surfing," I laughed, and Sudesh grinned.

Suryo was a queen of attention. Dozens of men and boys grinned and waved at her. Young women, in beautiful, multi-colored saris, stared in amused wonder. One woman, in an old BMW, honked her car horn like a claxon that wailed in waves. Back at the apartment, we jumped out, negotiated and paid 45 rupees. About a buck and a half.

"That ride was worth the price of admission," I said, and I meant the entire price of giving up my home in the US, of uprooting myself, of traveling

into the unknown, of coming to the Third World, which, in my experience, could easily be the Tenth World, it's so removed from the familiar.

We scrubbed our apartment clean, outfitting it, minimalistically, with mattresses, sheets and blankets, hangers and light bulbs. Each one of us has his or her own room. When we cleaned it, we became three sun baked, naked workers. It was good clean fun. Sudesh is a nice woman, but I'm not sexually attracted to her. It's funny how that goes. Here were two good-looking naked women, and I find one pleasant, and the other one matters.

Later, when I finished setting up my bed, I lay down on it and counted my money. Only \$140 American. 4200 rupees. Suddenly, Suryo was beside me. It startled me. She looked distressed.

"Could you come in my room?" she asked.

"Sure," I said. I went with her, and we lay down together. She said she was scared and lonely.

"Jeez," I said, "I don't have much sympathy for you. This is what you wanted. I didn't want separate rooms. I'm just adapting to it."

"It feels like you went away."

"I had to. You pushed me away. If you want to have your own room, you've got to be lonely. It's what happens to people who live alone."

"But you were so close, yesterday."

"Yeah, well, I live right now, this minute. Yesterday was yesterday. We were in the same bed, then. Now, we're in different rooms."

She admitted she was feeling insecure about all the changes that have been happening. Then, she admitted her real fear.

"I'm afraid you'll leave. I've never known a man who stayed."

"I've never known a woman who stayed, either. Listen, just because I'm in another room, doesn't mean I've stopped loving you."

"I want to make love to you."

I immediately took off my clothes. She began to touch me, to kiss me, to caress me and hold me.

The Outlines of Life

I lay down on my thin mattress, above a straw mat, between new sheets, under a beautiful red silk blanket, under the steady ceiling fan, and I slept. When I woke up, it was still dark. I checked my watch. It was 2:20AM. I had slept three and a half hours. My body was sore and stiff. I shifted this way and that.

I got up and went to Suryo's bed. I lay down and got up. I went back to my bed and slept. I woke up at four. I wrote in my journal. Remembering the lovemaking in the hotel, I got an erection. I decide to chance Suryo's desire.

I got into her bed and began making love to her. She responded. I entered her, and then it changed. I realized I needed to hold her and be held by her. She happily agreed.

Sex is changeable, like weather. I realize there's still some shit in my way regarding sex. Whenever Suryo becomes assertive and aggressive, when she comes over me, when she's the one with the dominant desire, I feel an old memory wave of revulsion. I've chosen women with whom I'm safely the aggressor. Whenever the energy shifts in the other direction, I'm pleased, then unsure, then sometimes put off.

I don't know why I still feel that way, but my experience teaches me that some incident or some relationship, in the past, is rearing its head. The only way to lop off its head is to hold its head in my hands and kiss it.

In the meantime, the two of us held each other. It's what we both wanted and needed. After a fitful night, we wandered out of our new apartment after noon. At the commune, Suryo wanted to visit Osho's ashes in his Samadi. I didn't have the white socks required for entry. I waited outside. Sudesh came up and told me a story.

She went to the orientation meeting, and when the guide asked everyone to speak a little about themselves, she said she was in recovery, and she needed to contact others who are also in recovery.

The guide said to speak to him after the meeting. When they were alone, he told her there's an inner-circle sannyasin who's been in recovery for ten years, and that she's always wanted to start something in the commune. He said he'll set something up for Saturday morning, and maybe he'll come,

since, whenever he's in the States, he hooks up with recovery meetings, himself.

Later, outside the German Bakery, a well-dressed, older Indian gentleman approached me, pointing to my paper and easel, and said he, too, was interested in art. He's a rare book collector. He had a gentle sense of humor, and, I'm certain, a fondness for portraits of Indira Ghandi on black velvet. But, maybe not. At 2PM, I took my art supplies to the art studio area and began to paint.

It was delightful to be painting. I went at it with a vengeance. I overheard someone talk about painting from anger. I looked at the intense blasts of color on my canvas and wondered if it was anger that propelled me. I couldn't feel that, but there was certainly a passion in my body, my eyes, my hands. I worked steadily for an hour and a half on one canvas, all color, no design, but gradually a kind of landscape emerged.

A young Indian in street clothes entered. He talked to the English woman who's in charge. He was a doctor. A PhD, I guessed. And a painter. I guessed he was a professor of painting.

He came by where I was working and said, "Very good, but it would be better if you didn't use outlines."

I didn't think I was using outlines. I thought I was using darker colors to fill and accent. Something like that.

"I don't think when I paint," I said.

"These colors are good," the man said. He was at least twenty years younger than I was.

"But it would be good if you didn't use outlines."

"The painting isn't finished," I said, "It'll go through many changes before it's finished."

I asked the doctor if he'd be painting here also.

"Yes," he said and went away.

I flicked the fly of his opinion off the canvas and got back to work. Or play. Painting is physical work/play that takes me to a sense of deeply engaged peacefulness, full of feeling and passion, and empty as a clear blue sky.

When I finished, it was done. I dropped the piece of bamboo I'd been using as a pallet knife and sat still. For a long time, I watched an Indian worker putting plaster on a high wall. I felt tuned to his motion.

The danger of painting comes later. My mind always tries to match the strength and clarity of the spirit, and there's a pitfall in arrogance, whenever my mind poses as the creator. I got pissed at the professor, and later, when I joined Suryo for coffee at the German Bakery, I was annoyed at the conversation around me. But, it felt good to have found a corner of a new and bizarre environment where I can do what I'm familiar with.

I went with Suryo to the Blue Diamond Hotel, to meet with her and her old friend, Premada. For five hours, the three of us sat together, while Suryo and Premada talked, and I heard about the inner workings of the enlightenment business. Premada is a counselor and group leader, another penguin. He's been in Pune for years. Finally, the most interesting part was the way different people find different ways to relate to the commune, since its leader has 'left his body.'

Osho chose to put his center in Pune, in the middle of a busy commercial city, because he wanted his people to learn to meditate in the middle of life. Swami Muktananda's center is high in the hills, away from everything.

There's an older enlightened master in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in the North, a man named Poonjaji, who many sannyasins are gravitating toward, even after Osho said to them, in his final days, "Now, it is up to you. You must carry yourselves into the world and put to use what you have learned here."

Apparently, the man in Lucknow is amused by all the sannyasins from Pune, but they keep coming. And, there are charismatic white guys who are picking up followers in the States after achieving enlightenment by the short course, practicing a kind of mastery that Osho felt was harmful and dangerous.

It seems people fill their needs however they wish, never mind the clear words of their original master. It isn't surprising to me, but I enjoy finding

at least one sannyasin who talks about the pathway that runs through the commune, despite the carnival around it.

Carnival is Suryo's word for it. It's a constant celebration. And why not? And good for it. While most people in the world plunge drearily through life, with heavy boots on their hearts, it's good to see at least one place where people seem to celebrate their existence, even if it does degenerate into silliness, here and there. A little silliness is not so bad, either.

I don't believe in outlines, either, but I believe in contrasts and contraries. They can be annoying, but they keep everything from blending into sameness.

At the end of the day, I long for my bed on the floor. Still, with no rickshaws, the walk home has purpose and a sweet destiny.

The Empty Chair

I hurried to the commune without coffee and without breakfast, in the hopes of a meeting I could feel safe in, but the hoped-for rendezvous with the woman who wanted to start a recovery meeting never happened. The man who was looking for her, couldn't find her. I decided to join Suryo in the weekly ceremony for new sannyasins.

I watched, as maroon-robed initiates, many openly in tears, waited to be welcomed into the sannyas world by small groups of older sannyasins in white. Two by two, the group of thirty or more were called to the front of Buddha Hall, next to the raised marble platform where, until his death, Osho delivered his evening discourses.

Since then, his discourses have been on video in the same hall. Each night, a meditation with music is followed by a simple ceremony and then, a filmed discourse. Each evening includes the ceremonial display of Osho's empty chair. I imagined an empty chair on a chain as a symbol of Osho's brotherhood, as the empty cross is the symbol of Jesus' flock.

I have a hard time with all the ceremony, the ritual, the trappings of traditional religion, that seem welcome to the followers of one who scorned religion. However, the short audiotape, before the initiation ceremony, was of Osho saying the path of a sannyasin is to accept Existence, to allow Existence to provide, to trust that Existence will care for us as Existence cares for every living creature. The message is one I have for myself.

Even so, as the ritual continued, I became increasingly agitated. Finally, I bolted and ran. I tried to be discreet in my exit, but I felt like a bull in a china shop. I left in a panic. I tried to look accepting, but I couldn't. I didn't feel safe. I don't feel safe anywhere in the commune, a very large area in which not to feel safe, and it's a place where people like me presumably feel safer than anywhere else in the world, a place where traditional religious forms are routinely decried.

I changed out of my robe, put on street clothes, and walked briskly down the road to the German Bakery. I bought a cheap tablet from a shop next door to the cafe, went back, and tried to write out my feelings. I felt a panic I've felt before. I wondered if I wasn't, in a previous life, the leader of an abusive cult. I seem to have been born with a keen sense of spiritual abuse.

Maybe it's innate. Maybe it's only the life force, the spirit, honestly unable to accept domination, of others, and by others. Maybe it's my ego refusing to merge with the group. My experience in recovery has reached the point where immersion of my voice in the group voice feels good.

For a long time, whenever reciting a common prayer, I spoke slightly ahead, slightly behind, in a different rhythm, a different tone, so as not to be lost in the group, but recently, I found myself doing just that, getting lost in the group, with pleasure and ease. I like being one among many. It's a comfort, and the feeling of my voice submerged in the voice of the many touches my heart.

The old panic has returned in the commune of the Baghwan Shree Rajneesh, a.k.a. Osho. I've always been on a solitary path, until alcohol cut me down, and I discovered a path I could share. I went back to the commune to give it another try. I put my maroon robe back on and walked about.

I tried to paint. No go. I looked for Suryo. She was a no show. I tried to eat a little. Too early. I prayed. I thought about prayer. I realized that the god I pray to can be anywhere, even in a spiritual commune, where everybody dresses the same, even though their leader tells them to find their own way to acceptance and union with Existence.

"I need a meeting!" I said.

It's a statement I used a lot, back in the States. In Seattle, I could go to a meeting, feel safe, feel the shared commitment, meditate and pray, talk out my concerns, focus on solutions, feel the peace and relief, and enjoy the company of others. Then, in the midst of a great mass of people who seem similar, I felt entirely alone.

I walked to the beautiful park, designed by Osho, that runs the length of the back of the commune. Once a wasteland, with an open sewer running through it, it reminded me of the beauty of the Arboretum and the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. It was lovely and peaceful. I walked and walked. I felt better.

Leaving the park, after sitting for a few minutes, with a peacock nearby, I suddenly said to myself, "I must be nuts. I'm crazy. What am I doing here? I didn't come here because my life was empty and painful. I was engaged

in my work, and spiritually connected. I was alive! My life was good! My life wasn't miserable. What am I doing here?"

I jumped. I laughed. I felt my body open up.

"Steve is back," I said.

I could feel it. I relaxed. I looked around.

"I'm OK. Steve is alive and well."

I found myself in my own life. I just happen to be in India, among all these people. Whenever I'm content within myself, whatever anybody else does, or is, is fine with me. I got lunch and sat in the sea of maroon in the large cafe. I bounced on the sea. I floated. I swam. I soaked. I felt fine.

"I'm here to be with Suryo. This is where I get to see her better. She'll reveal herself here, and I get to be with her," I thought.

When she first told me of her life, I was amazed. She'd gone all over the world and done amazing things, but she told it as if she only went down to the corner for a newspaper.

I ran into her and told her everything that happened. We walked to the Bakery for juice and coffee. The menu lists cappuccino, but we wanted ones that were larger and had more espresso in them than the ones we saw listed, so the young Indian behind the counter nods, turned to the boys in the back, and shouted, **BEEG-UH ES-STRONG-UH CAPA-CHEENO!**

"Two," I said.

TWO BEEG-UH ES-STRONG-UH CAPA-CHEENO! he sang out.

Suryo told me, "I think your job here is to play."

She's right. It's true. It's what I'd finally been feeling, and she saw me. My challenge is to see her.

But Suryo doesn't know what she's doing. We walked down to the river, where Osho's cremation took place. The burning ghats are above the river where all Pune Hindus, whose religious beliefs call for burning, are cremated. The river is wide and lazy. Untamed. There are water buffalo,

cattle, dogs, pigs, goats, and birds. It's rough and uncivilized, closer to natural than rivers in the West, at least the rivers that run through cities.

I was better able to see Suryo. I listened, while she tried to sort out her life. She was feeling lost. She doesn't know her passion. She's not drawn to the healing groups. She's already done everything, or so it seems to her. She loves Osho. His presence saved her life, years ago, she said. He's gone now, but his words continue to love her and instruct her. Still, she doesn't know her own direction.

"I don't think you love me," she said, simply. "You say you don't know me, so how can you love me?"

"I don't know," I said, "I feel it. I feel the connection. It's there."

We talked about the possibility of meeting new people in the ashram. Every man she's been with, in this context, left her for someone else.

"I want to find out what's on the other side of staying," I said. "It's easy to leave. It's easy to start up with someone new. But then, how do you ever find out what happens when you stay?"

"Yeah," she said, "It's addictive to start new relationships, all the time. It's a rush, and then, it's over."

In the nightly discourse, Osho told about his family. He was born an extraordinary child, brilliant and clear, gifted and wise, and his family knew it and honored it. They loved him and supported him, totally, absolutely, unconditionally, without question, without end. He attracted thousands upon thousands who didn't get that unconditional love. He gave it to them, but it was still difficult for them to feel it in themselves.

"It's such a hard thing to transplant. We have to do it for ourselves," I think. One hand up to God and one hand down to the scared little kid inside.

"And one hand out to you," I said to Suryo, "I need three hands."

The Good God Noname

Sunday, the day of rest. Everyday, the day of rest. There was a sign on one bulletin board, **Today is Sunday**. Otherwise, how would anyone know?

The ayah showed up. She's a lower caste Indian who cleans and does washing. The only word she seems to know in English is **supermarket**. We figured out she needed things from the store. I walked her down, and the storeowner translated. She needed two brushes, one for the clothes and one for the floors, along with clothesline and soap. She left the shop ahead of me and climbed over the iron fence, avoiding the front gate.

"Why does she do that?" I asked the owner, but he didn't answer.

"You must always watch her," the man said.

"Yes," I said.

I'd already been warned about stealing. It's difficult to accept the cultural norms of another society that seems blatantly racist, sexist, classist, in a word, abusive, but the tiny woman didn't seem the least bit unhappy at her lot in life. Discontent began to seem a Western concept.

In the West, discontent is held up as the great motivating virtue of all art, commerce, exploration, invention, growth, of all life, it seems. In fact, inside my own experience as an artist, the opposite has proven more true. Absolute contentment is the fount of creativity. Discontent produces only the evidence of discontent, however creative it may be.

The ayah scrubbed and beat all the dirty clothes on the shower floor and then hung them wet on the line she strung across the low balcony, outside Suryo's room. She said she'd be back at ten, on Monday, to finish the wash.

The strike is over. Suryo and I took a rickshaw to the ashram. The ducks are back. For six rupees, we could ride inside, instead of going on a twenty-minute walk. At thirty rupees to the dollar, the ride costs twenty cents. What a deal. There's room for two or three people, too. I love the rickshaws. I want to get one of my own.

We had coffee in the German Bakery. It's like a halfway house between the ashram and the world at large. At the ashram, we changed into our maroon

robes. When we were leaving the changing room, I sat down on a bench, just outside the entrance, on one of the gravel paths that thread across the ashram. Suryo sat beside me, and we talked.

I felt like a poet. I looked at the shadows among the pebbles on the path. She mocked me for turning everything into a poem.

“That’s a commonly held misconception,” I said.

“Poems are just the shit in you head on paper,” she said.

“Yes, and workshops are just the shit in your head, in a group. And discourses are just the shit in Osho’s head, out loud. I don’t go around trying to make poems out of everything. Poems come out of being. They don’t come out of thinking about being. Poems are a way of being.”

I felt passively content and actively alive. She hated everything, especially the sannyasins in black. She was wearing all black. Everyone in black is a group leader. She wants to be a group leader and be recognized by the group leaders as an equal. I asked her what she really wanted from them, from the world, from her family, from herself. She tried several answers, and then her voice changed.

“. . . to be seen as a goddess,” she said.

I saw a change take place.

“That’s true, isn’t it? You’ve always felt that way, ever since you were a child, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” she said.

She became a child, a goddess, a child goddess, not egotistically, not as a pompous, vengeful, self-important goddess, but as a goddess people feel good to be around.

“We’re all good gods in the beginning,” I thought.

She went off to find out about groups, and I went to paint. I painted a face. It didn’t become real for a long time. It went through several changes. Finally, it emerged. I thought I was painting the face of India, and then it looked like Suryo, and then it looked like me, but it was probably some of

all three. A Japanese woman climbed up on a pile of stacked chairs and then on top of a freestanding closet, to hang a painting of hers from the top of the curtained wall.

“Would you hang mine, too?” I said.

She did. I assisted her, keeping the closet from falling over. When she climbed down, she jumped in my arms. I was startled and pleased. She only spoke a little English. She went back to her painting with enthusiasm and focus. I liked her presence.

Another sannyasin came running in. He had sold one of his paintings for four thousand rupees. I remembered reading a quote from Osho in the latest issue of Osho Times, “Art has to be only for art’s sake. Then it is meditation. No motive should be allowed to enter into it. Don’t just do something, sit there.”

Later, Suryo, Sudesh, and I talked to an older sannyasin about the Twelve Steps.

“This place is the Thirteenth Step,” the woman said. “Osho said you could find all twelve steps here.”

“But, when I’m in my addiction,” Sudesh said, “I want to die, and I don’t care where I am.”

“So you’re afraid to live,” the woman said, smiling. “We need to find out why you’re afraid to live.”

After a while, Sudesh dropped her hippie bliss grin, and she told us, “I’ve been such a nice girl all my life. I think there’s a lot of anger behind it.”

She looks better without her goofy grin.

Suryo approached the woman she most admires and said she wanted to assist her. The woman said it was a possibility, and another leader asked her to join her group as an assistant. She told me the big opportunity for her is to participate in a ten-day isolation group, to get at the root causes of family of origin problems.

“Would you be OK, if I disappear for ten days,” she asked me.

“Yeah, I think so,” I said. “If you told me that a few days ago, I’d have gone into a panic, but now I’m just fine.”

It’s ironic. We’re in Suryo’s heaven, and she’s crazy, her back went out, she needs to get involved, she doesn’t know herself, and she doesn’t know her direction. And I’m fine. More than fine. I feel like I’m in the Thirteenth Step. I tell another of her old friends that my meditation name is **Noname**.

“I can sit here,” I said, “I can do that.”

My plan is to be still, to sit, to do nothing, to play. It feels right. It’s a tremendous relief to my concerned mind to be told it doesn’t have to be like Suryo, or anyone else. My heart comes out when my mind is given the day off.

The Gap and the Bliss Grin

The ayah didn't come back. It rained. I strung the clothesline in my room and hung up all the clothes. My robe was still wet, so I bought a new one. I bargained for it. I took a rickshaw, by myself.

I'm becoming comfortable in India. The people are beautiful, and their spirits are light and playful. By comparison, Americans are heavy and harsh. I'm in India to get a clearer picture of the country I left behind.

The woman in charge of the painting studio, Gyanbodhi, crossed off twenty rupees from my voucher card, and we talked. She praised my paintings. I thought she couldn't be a real sannyasin. It seems to me that most sannyasins are so preoccupied in themselves, the recognition of others comes only in the practice of their self-love.

For a while, my daughter worked in a Seattle restaurant frequented by sannyasins. The waitresses competed with each other to avoid waiting on them, thanks to their reputation for rudeness, discourtesy, and no tipping.

At lunch, before I went to paint, I was struck by the rudeness I saw. The dining hall was packed, and everyone seemed bent on getting their own, never mind anyone else. It reminded me of Chinese women, in San Francisco, getting on the bus like charging bulls, with twin shopping bags for horns.

Everywhere I stepped, some sannyasin jammed in ahead of me. While I was waiting in line to pay, a woman, standing with her back to me, jabbering with her friend, shoved obliviously past me, and when I put my tray between her and the woman I was next to, she turned to me and said, "Well, now, that just won't work."

"I was in line, and you shoved ahead of me," I said.

She harrumphed.

"It's true," I said.

I smiled.

It's amazing how people, who are courageous enough to begin saving their own lives, against considerable odds, can so easily disregard the lives of those around them. Like people in a sinking boat, fighting over the too-few life preservers.

The woman in the art studio is an odd one. She takes an interest in others. It turns out she's married to a man she loves, and they have eight children. He's a writer and a sports lover. We talked about the surprises that come when you stay in a relationship. We agreed that the bottom line is being in a relationship where each partner truly loves the other. It isn't something you can create with willpower.

Later, over big strong cappuccinos, Suryo and I talked with Varesha, a tall blond from Australia, whose pain and loss are easily felt, as she talked about choosing lovers who leave, time and time again. Real love between two human beings is a doorway to enormous possibility. Before that door opens, it looks like the door to a prison. That's my fear. It's my hope and unsubstantiated belief, that there's a world beyond that door.

I couldn't find a woman who wanted to walk through the door with me. Then I found Suryo. Introduced by a mutual friend, it seemed as if we hadn't found each other at all. But it seemed that we were ready to meet.

In the discourse, Osho talked about poets, mystics, and masters. He revealed the method to his madness. He uses devices to reveal the true inner moment that's hidden to most people. It reminds me of my poetry.

An old friend told me my poetry stops time. Osho said that when he stops talking in mid-sentence, the gap is enough for some people to taste eternity. The meditative moment of silence is the moment of true creativity.

"Everyone talks about the moment, but no one does anything about it," I say.

I remember two experiences. Both were experiences of the moment. In the first experience, I was in despair. My great romantic love had left me. I was drinking heavily. I was walking, heartbroken, back to our empty apartment. Suddenly, the moment opened up. For a time, I stood in the moment. It was silent and empty. It was a vacuum of the soul. There was nothingness, around which I felt only fear. It was death. I was in terror, without recourse.

Years later, I got another gift. In the middle of another day, after years of sobriety and healing, I felt the moment once more. It was the holy moment. It opened up, again, and the empty space was filled with light, around which everything lay, within easy reach, a world of delight. I was inside life. It was the creative center that Osho spoke about.

My creative life is always a part of me. It's a true thing. There's no going after it. I don't have to shove other people out of the way to get to it. It's mine. It's a given. Such a gift necessarily makes me humble. How can it be otherwise? When one is given a gift, the clearest awareness is that it's a gift.

What fascinates me is the possibility other than meditation, and that's relationship that leads to ordinary ecstasy. It's the state of being with another, on the far side of the open door, through which Suryo and I have begun to walk. We have moments of ordinary ecstasy with each other. There seems to be a possibility ahead of connecting moment to moment to create a chain of timeless time, into a life of ordinary ecstasy.

After discourse, we walked to the Blue Diamond for dinner. I told her how much I identified with Osho's words about poets, mystics and masters.

"I knew you were thinking about that, when I heard him say those things."

"You know, Suryo, I love you because I'm self-centered. In the end, I only care about myself, and you see me and respect me for who I am."

"I know," she said.

After discourse, we waited for a few minutes, for another sannyasin, who showed up to say she couldn't keep her appointment with Suryo. So we walked and talked.

"I want to tell you what I see in you," I said. "I do see a goddess. I see light and innocence and beauty. I see a clear spirit. I see someone small, with joy in her heart and sparkle in her eyes. I see the child, before the storm began. And I see your outsides coming to match your insides."

"I hate it that I'm so fat. No, I don't. I had to be this way."

It doesn't matter. The two of us danced up the road.

The night before, when we made love, she had a bad back, and I was distant. I finally realized that her plan for spending ten days in isolation was affecting me. I withdrew from her, automatically. For three months, we were apart. When we came together, Suryo revealed her fling in China. It was like a last drunk before any real recovery could begin. I thought we were becoming closer. Then the idea of ten days in isolation made me question her.

Would she go away, just as we were coming to the door? Does she still have another drunk in her? Do I? If she goes into a ten-day isolation, it could be a perfect opportunity for me to have an affair of my own. The ashram is full of attractive women. All I have to do is put out my energy, and someone will be sure to pick up on it.

During the discourse, I watched my feelings about the attractive woman next to me. I let my mind have its way and observe my reactions. I was content with her beauty. There was no desire for more. In my life, I've had many affairs. Many times, I got drunk on romance. My mind can conjure the images of lust and pleasure from those days, but my heart feels at peace.

"This night with you is the happiest night I've ever had," I told Suryo.

It seemed an odd thing to say. Nothing spectacular was happening. We were only together. We were only being together. It was ecstasy of a very ordinary nature.

Back at the apartment, Sudesh said she'd met a big Swede. She was infatuated. She didn't care about taking sessions. She didn't care about her anger, anymore. Her inner course was closed off. Oh, well. Sudesh has her own path. So does Annie McWilliams, Sudesh's other self. One of them is headed straight for a big Swede. Maybe both. Her bliss grin is back.

Relax

Back Home Again, In India, Annie. The day started well. I felt at home in my body. Pleasures abound, when the spirit is at home in the body.

I was home alone. The shower felt like a tropical rain forest. The ayah showed up, did a little washing, and disappeared. At the ashram, after a big, strong cappuccino, I found a quiet spot in the garden behind Buddha Hall, and read *The Osho Times* that focused on creativity.

In the German Bakery on Wednesday, I sat across from an older English poet. Wilden Byers is heading back to the fog, after ten days on an impulse into India. Byers told me about the pristine jungle an hour from Pune. There's a lot to see and learn. The jungle in the ashram is tame and easily accessible.

At lunch, there were no hassles, and the Greek food was tasty. In the art studio, I was tested. Two Germans sat in the center of the area set aside for afternoon sessions, and talked, in assertive German, for forty-five minutes. I wanted to go up to them and say, "I hope my painting isn't disturbing your conversation."

It was a racket, even though it seemed like a pleasant conversation. I left for a walk. I came back. I wrote on the canvas, "I'm painting flowers and two cats are fighting nearby." I didn't know what to do. Should I confront them, ignore them, absorb them, or thank them?

Later, I read Osho words, "But remember one thing; creativity has two possibilities. One is that it arises out of your silence, love, understanding, your clarity of vision, your intimate friendliness with existence - then creativity is healthy. But if it does not arise out of meditation, out of silence and peace and understanding, then there is danger. It may be arising out of your confused mind. It may be arising out of your insanity."

I often think that most of the art of the Twentieth Century is great therapy and little else.

Painting during the catfight, even though the cats were happy, was a question. I painted flowers suffused with black, until the background was all black, bright flowers in a vase on a yellow table. Finally, the flowers,

and especially the table, made me laugh. Whenever a spontaneous laugh comes out of my painting, I'm satisfied.

Suryo came by, from her tantra session. It's working on her. The energy is breaking new paths in her body. We went to Kundalini meditation together.

There are a half-dozen, hour-long, different, well-led meditations available daily in Buddha Hall. Kundalini meditation consists of fifteen minutes of standing and shaking, (Satchel Paige said, "Always jiggle a little as you walk. It keeps the juices flowing.") followed by fifteen minutes of dancing, fifteen minutes of sitting, and fifteen minutes of lying prone.

At the end, I felt peaceful. Suryo was still feeling judgmental. She's come from three months of bad juju. In her tantra group, the instructor said that her female self is hungry. She's spiritually hungry. We went for a cup of chai after the shaking, baking, stewing, and cooking. In Mariam Canteen, the largest of the four outdoor cafes, I jabbered about everything, including how good the food is.

I wanted to go to an AA meeting. I have a list of local meetings from the International Directory. There was a meeting across town at 7:30. We made a deal with an English-speaking rickshaw driver named Relax. He's 25, happy to take us and practice his English. For thirty rupees, about a dollar, he drove us into India for the Indians. It was a beautiful night, full of road pollution, traffic, hustle and bustle. I loved every minute of it.

We found the members gathered in a schoolyard, about to go in. Inside, there were twenty men and a half-dozen women, seated on opposite sides of the small, basement room, with a blackboard, raised podium, and rows of school desks. The meeting was in Murati, the local language. The group leader told me there are 28 separate languages in India. Some of the meetings are in English. Many Indians speak three languages. English is the commercial tongue, Hindi is the national language, and everyone has their own distinct local language.

The meeting was a discussion of the money traditions of AA. Little English was spoken. The meeting went on and on, for nearly two hours, with one chai break. It reminded me of the American Indian tradition, where all discussion continued, sometimes for years, until there's a consensus, that is, until everyone agrees. We were both called on to speak. We both said a few words and sat down. All the others spoke at length, some as long as

twenty or thirty minutes. Even so, the tone of the meeting was familiar and reassuring.

I was in love with the night. Sitting on the narrow bench, with my big American legs cramped beneath me, I watched the faces, listened to the music of the voices, stared at the stone floor, drank the small cup of hot chai, and basked in the presence of a roomful of life, on the other side of the planet, so different and so much the same.

We were given lists of other meetings, two in English. Suryo found out that the women were present only in support of their alcoholic husbands. When she spoke, she said she was an alcoholic and a food addict. The beautiful woman sitting next to her was surprised.

“There are no women alcoholics in India,” she said, with complete assurance. “Only men are alcoholics.”

Then she said, “How can you be addicted to food? Food is good.”

Suryo was silenced by the social rules that are assumed and taken for granted.

One man recognized his alcoholic pattern. He’s sober for three and a half months, and then he’s drunk for three and a half months. He accepts his pattern. It didn’t matter to me that some of what I was hearing was nonsense, the meeting was what I wanted, a place to reconnect to the spirit in a familiar way. I held up my six-year coin like a proud schoolboy.

After the meeting, Relax was waiting for us. It’d been a night for him, too. He’s a young man from Bombay, not used to that part of town. He hung out and waited, smoking cigarettes and talking to the sidewalk strollers. He drove us back to our flat and promised to give us a complete tour of the city, someday soon.

He said there are thirty thousand rickshaws in Pune and fifty thousand drivers. A rickshaw costs sixty thousand rupees, or about two thousand dollars. Relax doesn’t own his own rickshaw. He shares it with a friend. He spent nearly three hours with us for sixty rupees. Only a few thousand similar trips, and he’ll have enough for a down payment.

We stopped in at Zamu's, the restaurant next door to the Dipti Grocery, on the first floor of the Nirmal Building. It felt different from the other cafes in the area. There's a kind of middle-class affluence about it.

I joked that it's run by the Mafia. There's no spiritual air in the place, unlike most of the rest of India. The food is good, but the place reminds me of parts of LA. It seems to be frequented by dope dealers or slick business types who want to appear sophisticated.

Suryo was watching herself eat. She let herself eat and watch where the feelings came from and went to. She thought she located a spot in her body that food was supposed to touch, an empty place that food is meant to fill, but doesn't.

I watched her all evening, not as overweight Suryo, but as thin Suryo, and not as someone who loses weight, but as someone who is naturally petite. Right-sized. That's the joy of going to an AA meeting in the hinterlands. It made me feel right-sized.

That's Osho's message, as well.

"Life-sized is perfect. To be exactly life-size, to be just ordinary, is perfectly as it should be. But, **live** that ordinariness, in an extraordinary way."

We were ordinary, among ordinary Indians, at an ordinary meeting, and all I could feel is how extraordinary life truly is. I like the extraordinary people from all over the world in the Osho Commune learning to be ordinary from an extraordinary man, and I love the ordinary people learning to be ordinary in an extraordinary way, in small, bare rooms all over the world.

Nature Perfect

It was nature perfect. The guy who made all the noise in the art studio on Tuesday was the leader of the life-drawing group, the next morning. Perfect.

Suryo said it's what happens in the Buddhafield. Whatever your issue is, whatever you need, whatever is going on for you, will show up almost immediately. I believe it's the true state of life in the natural world. The ashram is the natural world. So are AA meetings.

Most of the rest of the world, the so-called real world, is unnatural. Here, in the Buddhafield, is life close to natural. It isn't magic. It's natural for life to provide us with exactly what we need, as quickly, or as slowly, as we need it. The unnatural world is intent on supplying wants but not needs. When needs are met coming down the path, wants are soon forgotten. Wants are only approximations and exaggerations of needs not met.

The art class was held in the open-air studio instead of the enclosed Osho Van Gogh studio, because it was being painted. Because of the move, the model couldn't be nude, in consideration for the local workers who are everywhere within the ashram. Their customs don't allow nudity. The model was disappointed. I laughed. It was nature perfect.

For six months, I wanted to draw from the nude, and on the first opportunity, fraught with anticipation, it wasn't possible. Instead, the leader, a young German with a heavy accent and good English, led four men and four women through exercises designed to free the creative process from controls, and engage the natural, meditative, free spirit. His methods were good.

The exercises were delightful, like starting drawings and then passing them around the circle, each one adding to or changing them, like drawing without looking at the drawing paper, like drawing the music, instead of the model, while looking at the model.

I've been drawing with similar abandon for thirty years. I don't need to be taught, but whatever works, simply works, so I had a good time.

The model, who was also an artist and also German, sat for the group and then danced to music. She was good. It was what I needed. The process has begun.

After the session, I went looking for another locker. The one Suryo and I shared was tiny. I looked at hundreds of lockers in the big changing rooms, like lockers in tents, like lockers with cloth walls, like lockers in rows with walkways between, like a friendly maze. I found an empty one - two feet from the first.

It's the natural life for me. It always has been. It's the natural life for everyone, but it's the best-kept secret in the world.

I bought a small notebook that fit snugly in my new belly bag, and I went to the garden behind the big hall. It's the spot I frequent in the mornings.

My schedule was changed by the early morning art group. At 7:30, I was one of the first customers in the German Bakery, where the smooth cement floors of the early morning were wet and clean. Then, the garden outside Buddha Hall was wet with the morning watering. I found a Western-style chair with arms, in the garden jungle, and I sat.

I wrote a letter to a friend in Seattle. I've been out of America long enough to realize how brutal American life is on the heart and the spirit. In the US, I found the small oases, the gardens, the little Buddhafields of AA, and now I find the entire country of India supportive of heart and spirit.

The US treats the heart like a dramatic weakness and the spirit like a commercial commodity. India seems like Ireland. The languages are rich and lyrical, the people languid and soulful. Poet friends came back from Ireland, stunned by the treatment they got from the Irish. At the first mention of being poets, they were welcomed and recognized, appreciated and honored, without question, they couldn't buy a drink, and the switchman at the crossing spoke fondly and knowingly of poetry, in rich language of his own. They weren't asked if they were published or if they made any money from their writing.

In America, when they aren't suspected of being bums or perverts, poets are treated, at best, as beloved fools, like a cherished old family horse that no one dare ride, no one dare shoot.

I wrote four poems that Osho, a pen name for a man who loved poetry, might like. I met Suryo for lunch. She was in a state of complete attention to the inner ghosts she's exorcising in her tantra group. She's also reconnecting with the pure goddess, god-connected child she left unattended for too many years. She tried to talk a little, but it wasn't time for talking.

She went back to her group, and I went to buy mosquito netting. The mosquitoes are tiny and powerful. We both have nights interrupted by slapping, itching, sleeplessness and discomfort. I took the prettily designed, full-bed netting back to the flat and installed them over our beds. It made them look like the beds of potentates in **The Land of No Mosquitoes**.

I went to Don Bosco Community Center, hoping to play soccer. There was no notice posted, and when I got there, there were no sannyasins, only Indians. Two more sannyasins showed up, and the game was on. It was great fun. One of my opponents was a thin Indian boy, barefoot on a hard field. Before the game, I joined him tossing rocks off the field. Playing on a team of mostly Indians, against a team of all Indians, in a city of Indians, in a land of Indians, was as natural as playing is natural.

Going home from the game, I was filled with what I call love. There was so much in my heart, my spirit, my body, I could only laugh. The streets of Pune are teeming with life. I said to the rickshaw driver, "Ka-PEE-la Hotel," because it's the nearest landmark to the flat, but the driver didn't understand me.

"Oh, wait a minute," I said.

I imitated the Indian accent.

"Copy-law," I said, in a light, musical voice, and he understood.

"I'm American. American's say Ka-PEE-la," I said, in a big, broad, loud voice, and the driver laughed. "I have to learn to say copy-law."

"Yes, copy-law," the driver repeated.

I was exhausted after soccer. Running around with teenagers is exhausting in any language. On the soccer field, I talked more than in the first game. I want to be a man who's expressive, regardless of the circumstances. It was

my ideal to be Zorba the American, long before I heard of Osho's ideal man as Zorba the Buddha. I hope to be so at ease in my life, that the exuberance I believe is natural will come bubbling out, flowing out, erupting even, whenever it's felt. My insides are volcanic with joy, but my outsides are usually pacific. I'm ready to become the Hawaiian Islands of the soul.

I rickshawed over toward the ashram, even knowing the gates are closed during the evening discourse, from 6:30 until Osho stops talking, usually around 8:30.

I hung out in the German Bakery with Vihna, a Canadian sannyasin who when she was there, hated the Ranch in Oregon, can't wait to leave Pune, but is still hanging around the fringes of the communal life. She goes to Lucknow to see the enlightened man who speaks from his living room. She's been in Kathmandu. She was talking to a Dutch sannyasin who told of working in a hotel in Italy and was on his way to land he's bought on Hawaii, the Big Island.

At the front gate of the commune, I waited for Suryo and for the gate to open. Osho was being especially windy. Then, when Suryo came out, we both waited for her friend to come. She didn't come, so we went to dinner at the Golden Gourmet. It's next to the German Bakery. We tried to talk about our different days. I admitted I was jealous whenever she didn't give me all her attention. She admitted she's jealous whenever I don't give her all my attention. Then, it was easy for us to talk.

In her tantra group, she discovered a new voice. As a little girl, her charming, dynamic, alcoholic father terrorized her sisters and her mother. Her mother told her to be quiet about it and eat something. Sex, fear and food combined, under a cloud of alcohol fumes, into a deadly obsession.

Her group leader tried to facilitate openness between the men and women in the group. He guided them to explore techniques for getting closer. Suryo said she didn't feel any need for such techniques. She and her lover, Noname, are already close. There are some few habits that get in the way, from time to time, but it's natural for us to be close, and the old habits are easily disposed of, once they're admitted.

Osho and the tantra group suggest that our desire for the other is a reflection of that other-sex part of ourselves we manifest in the outside world. But with me and Suryo, there's a genuine, easy, natural bond. Some of what we're discovering in the natural world of the Buddhafield is that

we're farther down the path than we thought we were. Back at the flat, we made love, and the best part was the look in the eyes. Her beautiful skin was good, too.

Something she said reminded me of my life when I was 23, and she saw my face, the same as at 23. Then she was making love to a 23 year old. It's one more instance how complex a relationship between two people can be. It's delightful for me to be looking into the hopeful face of a six year old, or the wondering face of an 18 year old, or the knowing face of a 35 year old, all within the span of a few seconds.

We're every age we've ever been. She's been going back and reconnecting with herself at ages when her self was wounded. It's happening in a protective and natural way, and she's not being traumatized by re-encountering the original traumas.

When we first met, I watched her go from the Buddhafield of our closeness, out into the so-called real world, and take on a thicker mask, a professional face, an apparently mature, adult manner, in the work place. It disturbed me to watch that change. Now I'm watching her become her natural self.

Natural man plus natural woman in the natural world equals natural ecstasy. All the animals are laughing to witness the struggle of men and women to come to their senses and rejoin the natural order.

In Silence

At lunch, in the sprawling outdoor cafe, I sat at an empty table, and three women, all wearing buttons that read In Silence, joined me. It had an immediate effect on me. I felt a great relaxation. A sense of freedom and peace came over me, different from any other feeling of serenity I've felt.

In my life, there's been a premium on talking and being articulate. I learned to speak, when my innate tendency was more toward silence than toward speaking. From my mother and my teachers, I learned to answer questions. In college, I learned to bullshit intellectually. My best friend wanted to rush to my rescue, to save me, before realizing I'd learned to hold my own in bull sessions. A girl broke up with me because I didn't talk. I shrugged, made out with her a little more, and left.

I married a woman who demanded I talk. I learned to talk the personal gossip of relationships. As a poet, in San Francisco, I learned socio-political avant-garde talk. As a cafe bohemian, I learned to speak harsh truth. Under the influence of alcohol, I learned to speak clairvoyant truth. Then, in recovery, I learned to speak from the heart and not from the mind. I'm an articulate student of speech. I like best to speak from the heart, but language is an acquired taste, and I enjoy it.

Suddenly, I felt the absolute bliss of pure silence. I rediscovered my original quiet. I didn't want the three women to leave the table. I stayed longer than usual. I vowed to get a button of my own.

After lunch, I went to the bank. The bank is a room in the ashram where people keep their valuables in envelopes, under guard. As I was counting my money, I discovered I had half what I expected to have. Only 1600 rupees, or about \$50. Suryo touched my shoulder. She said she wanted to pay me what she owed me. It was \$300, the money I sent her when she was in China. Suddenly, I was rich!

I left her, feeling like a rich man, and went to paint. I didn't like the first painting. I scribbled it off, and a voice told me to get out of the soft chair I was using and get down on the floor. I remembered that whenever I hear a voice, thinking it's someone else's imagined judgment, it's my own voice. I decided to take the advice, not as judgment, but as a good suggestion.

I got down on the floor, and I began to apply color to a canvas, in random, intuitive spots. I remembered reading a painter/teacher say that painting is nothing more than putting one spot of color next to another spot of color. So that's what I did. It worked. When I was done, I felt good. I felt satisfied.

I left for Kundalini, after checking the Kiosk, the place where sundries and incidentals are sold. I looked for **In Silence** buttons. They were out of them. Kundalini is fast becoming one of my favorite activities. I found Suryo easily, after the meditation, because, among hundreds of shoes and sandals, ours were side by side. By accident.

"You don't need a button. You can be in silence. Everyone will respect that," she said.

"I know, but I need it. Whenever I'm around people, I feel my own expectations to talk. If I have a button, I'll remind myself I don't have to speak."

"I like being quiet with you," she said. "I like just feeling our energies."

I smiled and didn't say anything. Across the table, a female Japanese sannyasin, tiny and pretty, like a bird, nibbling on a piece of Buddha bread, chattered away to her Japanese male friend, who grunted softly, from time to time. We sat in delicious silence. I peeled my orange, and, starting to eat it, quickly held out a third of it for her. She grinned. I pointed to my hand, to the orange, to her, and smiled. She nodded.

During discourse, I was restless. The meditation exercise felt long. I chose not to go to the English speaking AA meeting across town, and a part of me was in a rickshaw, riding back and forth between the two places of interest. Osho talked about the future of his message. He believed it would succeed, not because he was right, but because the world was finally ready to listen and hear.

In all history, there's never been a generation ready to make a clean break from the accepted path of the past. Now, there is, he said. I'm not so sure. Osho said it's time for spontaneous, natural man. Everything he said is reinforcement for what I believe is true, but my faith in others to come along toward natural freedom is shaky, at best.

Jesus gave a similar message, and his message was appropriated, corrupted, perverted, and denied by those who only worship his memory

and keep him as the middle man between human beings and the true experience of being with God.

I want Jesus to say, "Be like me. Do what I have done," but the evidence, in the transcripts of his story, is that his followers preferred to believe he was one with God and they weren't.

I want Jesus to say, "I am the same as God. Now, you say it. You are the same as God."

Osho, at least, says, "Go and do as I have done. I am not your God."

But here I was, watching a hall of followers sing the praises of their leader, facing all in the same direction, some bowing down toward his empty chair. Humility is a virtue, but I never want anyone between me and my experience of God.

Osho said there was no one between Osho and God, but Osho is between these white-robed followers and their experience of God. Maybe. Maybe not. He's their master, their teacher. Maybe they're wise enough to open their own hearts to existence, without expecting Osho to be the one talking. Even so, this is a tiny minority of the world's people.

In AA, I've seen thousands of people come and go, and a few took the message all the way into their lives, into their hearts, to the spirit of their souls, and many of those, who hang around, are, in my judgment, only sucking on the AA tit. How many in the sannyas world are only sucking on the ashram tit?

That's good enough, for the time it takes to nourish the spiritual body to health and strength. But then, like all children, we move away from our mothers and take our lives for our own.

Suryo thinks I'm on a no-master path. It's true, so far. I look for a master, but none remains for me. I've had many masters, over the years, but I'm still on a path of being alone with the spirit of the universe. Not a bad deal, in the long run. Masters die. The spirit of the universe is bigger and more reliable. I believe we're all truly connected to God. Being connected to God is natural.

It seems inevitable, as Osho said, that all human souls will eventually find their way back to their natural lives, but the continual willingness of the

human animal to die an unnatural death and to avoid the sometimes difficult path back home again, make me doubt the ultimate success of Osho's vision, and of my own vision, of the simple truth to prevail.

After discourse, I showed Suryo my paintings, and she said she liked them. We had the Japanese cuisine dinner in the Osho Cafe. On the walk to the German Bakery, we kissed, we hugged, we played. Suryo told me that it's recommended she not talk about the process she's going through in her tantra group. As a result, more delicious silence followed.

She said she thinks there's a different way for us to make love, also. I don't like the hidden message, as if there's something wrong with the old way.

"Can you say it another way?" I asked.

"How about this," I said, 'I would like to bring something new to our lovemaking. I sure hope you like it.'"

She smiled and said, "I'd like to bring something new to our love-making. I sure hope you like it."

"Yeah," I said, "I sure like **that!**"

The German Bakery felt like a den of thieves, full of druggies, sickos, and bad vibes. It felt evil, dark, and corrupt. I took in the negative energy like a sponge. In the rickshaw going home, Suryo wanted me to put my arm around her. I couldn't. I didn't want to. I felt foul. I was befouled by the energy in the German Bakery.

After being open, clean, and clear, all day, I was easily befouled. I walked into the nighttime-cafe-street-scene without awareness and took it all in like a drug. Within minutes, the open, loving, trusting heart was splattered with the soil of human existence.

"I used to live like that in the world," I said, remembering cafe life in San Francisco, "We called the cafe 'the psychiatric out-patient clinic.' I used to thrive on that abuse."

Within half an hour, I was back to my natural self. How is it ever going to happen, in a world stuck in the mire of its own misery, that it could lift itself free and rediscover itself, when it's so easy for a man, bent on his own freedom, to lose it? Maybe it will just happen, and maybe I have no more to

do with it than simply being one of the monkeys. Monkey see, monkey do. Nighttime is the right time **to be the one you love.**

I went to bed and read an article written by Gyanbodhi's husband, about Henry George, once candidate for mayor of New York City. He was the sensation of Europe in the middle of the last century, because of his plans for simple economic reforms. He was one of those who understood the simple truth of the economic subjugation of the human race by those in power, by the landlords and the landowners. And who was Henry George? This is the first I've heard of him.

The truth may never disappear, but the people who know the truth, do. The best deal, for my mind and heart, is to know that the truth sets the world free, one heart at a time.

Exotic Things on the Street

While I sat in the jungle garden, ten more poems came. I felt compassion for the sannyasins around me, in their maroon robes among the green vegetation. The same feelings I have for recovering alcoholics also apply in the Osho Commune. These are people in recovery from difficult, hurtful, painful, and unworkable lives. The path is different, but it's the same.

So much of what Osho said is what Bill Wilson said. Osho pushed it farther into awareness, but the truth of the 12 Steps is identical to the truth of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. Both taught the failure of the ego, and both taught the trust in God. Osho was less forgiving of the past. Bill Wilson, writing, in 1939, for desperate people in unforgiving times, held the door open to a new life but didn't condemn the rest of the world so harshly. Osho didn't hesitate to call for a new world, and part of his method was to condemn the old world.

Alcoholics, in the last days of their disease, don't need any great push to be willing to finally hear the truth.

Religion says, "Wake up, or go to Hell."

AA says, "Wake up, or go **back** to hell."

Most people need a push, a calling, an engraved invitation, a beautiful ashram, lots of attractive faces, a clearly defined enemy, and time.

It's time for me to relax about the people around me. Like me, they're in recovery from the failed life of the human will. Perhaps they need maroon robes to separate themselves from the disease. As a late-stage alcoholic, I don't need any such techniques to identify myself as different from the norm.

I think the **In Silence** buttons might help, because I don't feel my addiction to talking as clearly as I do my addiction to alcohol, with its promise of death. A little identity button could help the awareness along. An ashram, colored robes, and rituals, are helping people identify their addiction to a society of human will, every bit as deadly as drug addiction.

The solution is the same, however, and as long as I stay clear about the solution, I'll be OK, regardless of the disease. As long as I stay in the

consciousness of my spiritual self, I'm protected from all manner of destruction. My recover isn't just staying away from alcohol, it's staying in the spirit.

Inside the Buddhafield of Recovery, there's little room for the myriad addictions that human will is prey to. What I call recovery (a cover word for spiritual awakening) Osho called meditation. The Buddhafield, by any other name, would smell as sweet.

I got down on the floor and painted two more paintings. I went for afternoon chai in Mariam Canteen. I looked around and wondered why my energy didn't lead me to Suryo in the crowded cafe. Surely, she must be right behind me. Instead, she was right in front of me, with her back turned.

She told me some of what she was feeling as a result of her tantra group. She was beginning to wonder what she'd do if she felt her energy wanting to make love to someone else.

"Oh, great," I said, "And what if I feel my energy wanting to kill that guy over there with the beard?"

"That's destructive energy."

"And fucking other people isn't?"

I thought about Enrico, her China lover. The feeling I had was shame, that I could be so wrong about her. Was I a fool to believe she's ready to go beyond having lovers, into being true to oneself with one other person? Here she was, talking, not about love, but about following her energy. I believe that's good, if you follow its course, inside, to a deeper level, or outside, to the awareness of your mind, and then to your true inner strength.

Then I thought, "Maybe I'm wrong."

My past tells me it's fun to have lots of lovers. There are endless legions of attractive women, and the ashram is teeming with them. Why shouldn't I play with them, like in the old days.

Suryo admitted she was scared to lose the relationship she has with me. Her group leader told them not to talk about what they're going through, and she was only beginning to find out what she's really feeling, anyway.

We went to M.G. Road to shop and eat dinner. After dinner, we sat, waiting for Relax to come pick us up, and we got down to some real stuff. Little Linda's father gave her the message that big, strong, attractive men were dangerous and hurtful. I'm a big, strong, attractive man.

"I want you to be able to think of me as a protector," I said, "I want you to think of me as a resource. I want you to be able to rely on me and trust me. If your father was there for you, doing the job he was meant to do, you would've trusted him, and you would've gotten the picture that big, strong, attractive men are a positive support in your life. I want you to believe I'm here. I haven't gone away from you in two years, and I don't want to go away from you now."

"I could fuck other women," I said, "but it's not what I want out of my life, anymore."

We talked about what's male and female. I have faith in my female nature to nurture me, the way I have faith in a higher power to guide me. God speaks through my heart. My human heart is female, the physical ground of my being is female. Suryo said that when she isn't supporting her female side, her male becomes bitchy and critical. When I rely on my masculinity to solve my problems, I seem to become angry and resentful. When I trust God and my female creativity, my maleness feels strong and safe.

In India, which feels like a female country, I feel masculine. I don't have to posture as a man. No Western, bullyboy, macho, stiff-necked, asshole, jerk-off, John Wayne bullshit.

She told me there are lots of men in the ashram who are feminine, but that the recent change among them is to become more male. To sit for a master is to allow oneself to be female, and that's good, but it also attracts a lot of wishy-washy men.

If you go all the way and truly trust the female, the male is supported and become stronger, not weaker. The men who don't get stronger, by trusting their inner female, are only playing at it. To trust the female is to rely on it, to act on it, to become bold and creative. My creativity has been blossoming all over the place, these last few years.

"I think that's why I chose you," Suryo said, "You're teaching me about my own creativity."

We talked about the difficulty of being a woman in a male-dominated world that doesn't trust the feminine. Suryo is an attractive, voluptuous woman, who deals with the attacking, controlling male world by covering up. She puts on weight, she wears camouflage, she puts on a uniform of attitudes and protectors.

"I thought I had to do the same thing," I said. "I'm a creative man with a female side, so I acted hard and changed my way of talking. I never wore soft clothing. I wore boots, jeans, and leather jackets. Wearing long hair was a bold move for me, and for years I got shit for it, so I can only imagine how hard it is for a woman."

Sometimes, I got a flash of it. In my imagination, I looked down the street and imagined it as if I were an ordinary woman. I saw all the men, looking at me as a woman, and I thought, "Thank god, I'm a man. I'd go nuts if I had to deal with that."

Sitting on a stone wall, after a light rain, in a spiritual and feminine country, feeling safe and free from the macho teenage bullshit of the US, we looked at how we've spent our lives dealing with it.

"You're right," she said, "I covered up. I hid myself."

"I drank. I spent years exposing my creative self, and I drank to feel safe doing it."

Neither of us has been successful in our deceptions. Trust is the way out. Neither she nor I have felt free to trust our parents or our society. What we can trust is our true nature. Both male and female. Not the superficial, human will, ego version of male and female, but the close-to-God, naturally true version of male and female.

When Relax showed up, he went over to a man by the side of the road and bought something. The man was sitting behind a large, brass tray on which there were dozens of tins and small boxes.

"What's he selling," Suryo asked Relax.

“Come. I’ll show you.”

He led us over.

“It’s OK. It’s good. You can try some, OK?”

The man dipped from several canisters. He took a leaf from one and put nuts, spices, and oils on it and then rolled it up and gave it to Suryo. She took a big bite and then offered me a bite. I refused. Relax and Suryo looked at me.

“It’s very good. No harm. All very good,” said Relax.

“You should try it,” she said, as the man created another concoction from his magic tray. It looked like something from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. I was reluctant to try this new and exotic treat. I tasted a small bite of one leaf, and it was sweet and spicy, very tasty, but I backed away.

“Are you in a hurry?” Relax said. “Do you want to go?”

“No, I’m fine. I just don’t want any. Thanks.”

Suryo was curious why I didn’t try any.

“I’ll explain, later,” I said.

At home, I felt foolish.

I told her, “I wish I had a better way of dealing with that, but I think it’s good for me to say no to exotic things on the street in India. I mean, in Thailand, you can buy narcotics at the corner store. I don’t know what’s in that stuff. One was tobacco, right? I quit smoking last year. So what am I doing? It’s not like I’m going to die from it. It’s that I don’t know what it is.”

“My addict self was eager for it, ‘Eat it. Come on. Take it.’ I wanted to gobble it all up. I thought it was good for me to say no and walk away, even if it’s all benign stuff. And some kid is telling me it’s OK, and another addict is holding it out to me. No. There’s no good way to do that. I was worried about offending Relax, but my wellbeing comes first, not his opinion of me. He doesn’t care, anyway.”

It's not so hard being true to one's self in a safe place, but the world isn't set up as a safe place. I'm gaining respect for Osho's work to create a safe place for people who have the courage to change, in a world that's fights the change at every turn.

Even in the safe places, it takes time and effort to turn away from the old ways, even if the old ways are spiritually bereft, emotionally brutal, and mentally cruel. It's especially difficult to turn away from the attractive, addictive distractions and romantic diversions that almost everyone depends on, to get by, in a fascinating, dangerous, and confusing world.

You're Beautiful When You're Beautiful

I was out of sync. When I sat to write poems, they seemed to come out of my head. At lunch, I couldn't find Suryo. When I was painting, I didn't like the work I was doing.

I took a large face from the last couple of days. It was colorful, but it felt only superficially attractive. I muddied it up, scraped it, colored it, scratched it, and finally went into a fury of rubbing the colors, as if my fingers were a big thick brush. What emerged was scary. It's an Indian face from a dark alley. It's dark, with dark yellow eyes, dark green teeth, dark red, green, and blue cheeks and forehead. I liked the guy.

"I like this guy," I said to myself. "He scares me, but I like him."

I hung the face on the string cord that other paintings are hung on. Because of the time, I couldn't go to Kundalini. I walked down the back road to Don Bosco. At four o'clock, there was no one to play with. Only small children. At 4:15, a few players came. At 4:30, there was a game. Only one other sannyasin came, and the game was short of players.

For the first time, I felt like a tired old guy. I played poorly. I played well. I played OK. I scored a goal. I missed easy passes. I was playing in my head, in my ego. I wasn't playing in the Zone, the spirit, the Buddhafield. I played like most people play when they think too much; sometimes OK, sometimes like shit. Going home, I was tired. I anticipated the warm glow of physical exhaustion as the ticket to meditative serenity. It didn't work. My typical shower was only a bunch of water in the face.

I knew the ashram was closed until after discourse at approximately 8:30. At 6:30, I decided to go to the bookstore in the Blue Diamond Hotel, get a book to read, possibly the Barbara Tuchman history book that Mike in Seattle recommended.

In the bookstore, I recognized the famous Chinese calligrapher who's visiting the ashram. He's teaching here, and I keep running into him. At lunch, a couple of days ago, we were at the same table, and Suryo conversed with him in her rudimentary Chinese.

There were two locals working in the bookstore. It's a small room, ceiling to floor with books in many languages and junk novels from America. One of the men asked the calligrapher if he's Japanese.

"No," is all he said, as he left.

I looked at several shelves of titles and kept coming back to one book, **Baghwan - The God Who Died**, by Hugh Milne, a.k.a. Shivamurti, Osho's bodyguard and an inner circle sannyasin for ten years. The book was written in '86, right after the close of Rajneeshpuram in Oregon and Osho's expulsion from the US. I smiled to see how unprophetic the title is, given the current success of Osho Commune and the worldwide spread of Osho's influence.

I thought about buying the book, and then I thought about not buying the book, but I felt compelled, so I bought it and took it into the coffee shop of the hotel. After I sat down, an older British sannyasin, the one who led us on our first day tour, came in with his wife, and I thought about hiding the book.

I read the first few chapters, and a deepening sense of rejection set in. The author continued to praise Osho's message and his gifts as a charismatic, wise, and persuasive leader, but the book raised, and then confirmed, my sense of the error of holding any one human being above all others.

As I walked toward the ashram, at 8:30, I felt alone and separate from the commune and from Suryo, who's very much at home with Osho. At least, she's not threatened by the sway he holds over his sannyasins, even in death.

Outside the gate, I listened to the roaring laughter at Osho's jokes and the shouts of **OH-SHO! OH-SHO! OH-SHO!** that rise in unison from the white-robed crowd assembled in Buddha Hall.

A German woman, young and smiling, was standing nearby, on the tree-lined road that cuts through the ashram, fronting the main gate. She raised her hand in a stiff salute, and said, lightly, jokingly, "Heil, Hitler." I smiled faintly at her.

The discourse was long. It didn't finish until 9:00. I went to my locker, next to Suryo's, and then I sat outside the dressing room, on a small bench, and waited for her to pass. I felt like a real outsider. She didn't come. I prayed

to my own higher power, which doesn't have a human name, and I asked my own inner grandfather, that part of myself I identify as a wise old Indian, what he thought of the ashram and of the god who didn't quite fail. The old man smiled in my heart and said, "Steve, it's OK. Just watch it. It's not bad. Just watch it."

I went back in the dressing room and saw Suryo's discourse chair, still resting on top of the lockers. I realized she wasn't around. I left the ashram and began to walk home. I thought she'd gone with her new friends from the tantra group, and she was fucking one of them, going deeper into her own sexual self-awareness, preparing herself so she and I could be even closer, and I felt like shit.

I knew it was only my mind talking. I knew she was in love with me, and she didn't want to leave me, so I decided to watch my mind on the way home, to see if I could learn something.

What came up was the feeling that, once again, I was alone in the world. I didn't have a heartfelt connection to Osho, his commune, his followers, or even, at the moment, to Suryo. It became an opportunity to see what I really wanted to do, on my own, in my own heart.

I wanted to go back to the States, back to my life, which was working just fine, thank you very much.

"Why am I here?" I asked myself.

There was no good answer. The image of Suryo worshiping Osho, and having lovely tantric sexual union with someone else, kept coming up. I was feeling very sad about everything.

When I was at home a couple of minutes, Suryo showed up. She looked fine. She'd had a good day. Her group dressed up all day as their other-sex half. She wore my leather jacket and changed her name to James and discovered her inner male was exactly how she's always dealt with the world. I stood mute while she told me what she did. They were all served lunch, and they ate in character, the men as their female selves and the women as their male selves. Afterwards, they went to a friend's house to watch hypnosis-training tapes and then on to dinner. She spent the evening with women. She wasn't fucking someone else.

I was not relieved of my doubting mind. We went a short ways down the street to the Madhuban (rhymes with Audubon) Restaurant, and I ate, while Suryo watched. I told her what I'd been thinking, how angry and doubting I'd been all day, about the book I started, and about my judgments about Osho and his loyal follower, Suryo. She felt attacked by my judgments, and I didn't mind that she felt attacked.

"You must have some attachment to Osho's methods if it upsets you so much," she said.

"Well," I asked, rhetorically, "are you upset that there are rapists in the world? If you are, there must be a rapist in you."

"Yes, there is. If there were no rapist in me, I'd accept that there are rapists in the world without becoming upset about it. It doesn't mean I'd like it, just because I'm not upset about it."

I knew what she was saying was true.

"Well, I am upset, and yes, it is about me. I don't trust any human being I'm supposed to look up to. In God's eyes, we're all identical. I want to look at Osho, not up to him. He's not above anyone. I can admire his power and his wisdom and his freedom and his enlightenment, but I can't worship another human being."

"I don't worship Osho. I love him. He saved my life. You didn't know me ten years ago. I was a lost, little girl. If I hadn't met Osho, I'd have died."

"Maybe not," I said.

My tone was sharp. She reacted sharply.

"You can't tell my experience."

"You're right. I just wish someone would come along with Osho's level of enlightened wisdom and Bill Wilson's humility. You know, in the beginning of AA, he wanted to call it Bill Wilson's Program, but the other alcoholics stopped him. I wish there was a spiritual leader who could tell the truth without all the tricks, trappings, and manipulations. I like Osho's awareness. It's wonderful, but I hate his guru worship trip."

We began walking home, still talking.

“What about you? Why don’t you become that kind of spiritual leader?”

“You’re right. This is about me. I’m trying to sort out what I like and what I don’t like.”

“I still feel hurt by your accusations.”

“I feel hurt, too.”

“Why didn’t you say so?”

“I thought I did.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“I said I was sad and angry.”

I paused.

“I didn’t say I was hurt.”

I paused again. We were face to face, back in the flat, standing in the bathroom door.

“I do feel hurt.”

I paused.

“I feel hurt,” I said, finally, clearly, simply.

A deep sense of shame and truth came over me. Then the shame faded, and the truth remained.

“I can hear that,” she said.

In a few moments, we were sitting on the straw mat in Suryo’s room, face to face, her legs over mine. She begins to look beautiful, again.

“You’re beautiful, when you’re beautiful,” I said.

“Oh, really? Well, that makes a lot of sense. You’re just jealous, aren’t you?”

“Yes I am. I miss you. We were so close. I want to make love every day. You go off every morning, and at night, you have to go to sleep early, so you can go off in the morning. I agree with you that sexuality is a creative energy. I’ve been creative lately. That means I’m also feeling sexual. I don’t want to run off and fuck someone else. I want to make love to you.”

“You do, huh?”

“Yeah, I do.”

We were eye-to-eye, energy-to-energy.

“I think I figured out what happened,” I said. “When we were first together, the first month, two years ago, that was tantric sex. I mean we went real deep, and then it stopped. I was trying to remember why it stopped. I think it was because you went to work. You put on your male mask, and you went off to work, and that was the end of the tantra.”

“So you want to make love, huh?”

“Yeah, I could be talked into it.”

“What do you need?”

“If you took all your clothes off, and I took off all my clothes, and we lay down on that bed, I think it might happen.”

So that’s what we did.

“You know,” I said, “You’re even more beautiful, when you’re even more beautiful.”

We made love sweetly, gently, passionately. We admitted that what really matters about sex is holding and touching. We held each other and touched each other.

“I like looking in your eyes and kissing you,” I said, “It makes all the rest even better.”

A few days before, I joked that we were making love like two hippos in heat. It changed. We made love like external manifestations of the true inner male and female, in a union of unique and individual equals. Uniquals.

I told her I'd been thinking of her in a condescending manner, as if what mattered to me didn't have to matter to her.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I want to be in a relationship with a woman who cares about the things I care about with the same passion."

After talking about what mattered to both of us, we made love that mattered. It was a paradox. It was free love, just like the Baghwan was known for. Whenever I see her for who she is, my love goes to her openly and unrestricted. Whenever I feel seen by her, I feel free to receive her love. It makes for excellent conversation and excellent sex.

"Making love to you is like making love to a hundred women," I said.

"What I like about your body . . . there are so many different parts to it . . . they're not all the same . . . I like this part, and this part, and this part . . ."

By the Threes

Sudesh and I went to an AA meeting. We had to ask several rickshaw drivers to find out which one acted like he knew where St. Patrick's Church is. On the way, our driver had to stop and ask others.

Sudesh talked about how friendly and helpful the Indians are toward each other. I said it seems as if workers in America share only anger in common, bitching and complaining about each other, about themselves, their bosses, their jobs, their wives, the local team, the federal government. In India, the people seem to laugh together.

The meeting was held in a small, upper room in a small building behind the large Catholic cathedral, more on the outskirts of town, surrounded by open fields. The possible explanation for all the wide-open spaces was the nearby armed forces garrison. One of the dozen men was an army major. All were Indian. The talk was in English. I felt even more welcome than at the Hindu meeting.

After all my stress about Osho's spiritual path and his flamboyant methods, the first thing that was read in the group was a passage about AA not having all the answers, that we ought to feel free to seek answers from any source that helps us. I immediately felt reassured that I could stay in both forms and draw from many sources.

Many years ago, in the early days of my sobriety, my objections to AA were nearly identical to my objections to Osho. Back then, I thought AA was the most pernicious kind of indoctrination, because it was so full of truth. I began to put aside my individual will, I became willing to listen, and, in time, I became even freer than when I was jealously guarding my individuality.

The men in the meeting were warm, articulate, and alive. Even though the topic under discussion was the practical principles of the program, the men spoke with genuine feeling. I heard the same spiritual understanding I was used to.

Afterwards, several of the men walked to an outdoor cafe just down the road. Sudesh and I were invited to join them. The area reminded me of the Yucatan, and I said so. The others understood about the Mayans, and I could see and hear they weren't the slightest bit narrow and provincial.

The man I was drawn to, Rashid, it turns out, has his business office in the Akshay Complex, just behind our flat on Boat Club Road.

Sudesh and I were invited to another meeting on Wednesday. I sat, in the meeting and in the cafe, like a little kid, finally feeling safe, after feeling unsafe everywhere else. It isn't that the ashram is unsafe. It's that it doesn't yet feel as protective and accepting as the circle of AA feels. In the meeting, and in the small circle at the cafe, I got it. Unconditional acceptance. It zapped me, quickly and easily. No big deal. It just is.

Sudesh jumped up, after chai and sodas, after half an hour of talk, and said, "Who wants to dance with me, to celebrate."

No one did. As she began a tame, commune style dance, a kind of swaying New Age Hippie dance, the men smiled and said, "We, in India, are not so used to that kind of thing. You will start a scandal. We are not so free as you."

"Well, let's start," she said, "and then others will see that they can be free, too. We can change the world."

One of the things I love about AA spirituality is that it isn't out to change the world. For a bunch of alcoholics, that would be a sure path to drunken fantasies. I told Rashid about the woman who told Suryo there are no women alcoholics in India.

"Yes, there are women alcoholics. There's a meeting for them. That woman was telling you the old cultural beliefs. We have plenty of women alcoholics."

"Tell me, Steve," Rashid asked, "Why is it that you don't sound like an American?"

I laughed. I told them about the rickshaw driver and how I changed my voice to make the words understandable.

"I become more musical," I said, in the lilting tonality of India, "and then I can be understood."

The others laughed. I finally did something that was an old desire, I spoke a foreign language in a foreign country. It was still English, but I stopped being only American.

Back at the ashram, I felt more at ease with the sannyasin community. The men at the meeting spoke warmly about Osho, and they said a lot of sannyasins had come to their meeting, and many had the same difficulty I've been having reconciling the differences. I thought of the old AA saying, "Take what you need and leave the rest."

I met Suryo for tea, and we decided to go back to the flat and have a lie down. Over the next few hours, we tried out a little tantra. No big deal, really. We hung out, naked, and held each other.

She said she was lying on her male side, and I was lying on my female side. It's how we slept together. I wanted to switch, when we were in Seattle, but she was adamant, as only a woman's inner male can be, and we kept to the same pattern for two years.

We changed sides, held each other, and immediately we began to feel surging hormones and tantric ripples, rising heartbeats and engorging flesh. We followed the energy, so to speak.

We went out for dinner, at the Madhuban. Waiters in white coats, pretty food, tasty and good, spicy and imaginative, arranged on separate plates, a great follow-up to the evening of lovemaking.

I'm reading about Rajneesh's life. The writer of the bio isn't angry or demeaning. It's a good story, told by someone who liked some things and disliked other things, in his ten years with the "sex guru."

When little Raja Mohan, was born, his past life reading was taken, as is the custom in India. It was determined that, 700 years in the past, he was an enlightened being. He agreed to an early death, back then, so he might come back to this life and become a great spiritual leader who unites East and West, materialism and spirituality.

"Well, no wonder," I thought. It all began to make sense. The boy, and then the man, was on a mission. Osho knew his mission. If you have a mission, so clearly defined, all you have to do is set about getting it done, no matter how you have to do it.

I haven't been so lucky. My mother expected me to be the Second Coming or a movie star, but she didn't tell me how I was to accomplish that, and besides, that was my mother's projection. It certainly wasn't the magical utterance of an oracle. Still, I felt I was on some kind of path toward some revelation and some work in the world related to it. I'm going to have to await further instructions.

Raja Mohan had the benefit of guidance from the beginning. On the other hand, I'm glad I'm not on such a clearly defined mission. No wonder Osho got so driven, so sure of himself. No wonder humility, at least the kind I like, didn't seem to be Osho's cup of chai.

Coming out of the small meeting behind the church, I had described my feeling to Sudesh.

"Whenever I get lost, it's because of my personal pride, my ego, my most harmful tendency. The only thing that helps, the only thing that brings back my peace, is humility. When I feel small and taken care of, then I'm open to being big. It's a paradox. I have to get small to feel the bigness of this life."

In AA, if you want to make the group your higher power, at least until you're ready to accept God's will, that's OK.

Osho said the same thing. "Make me your higher power, until you're ready to go deeper. Meditation is only a trick to get you to connect with God."

"There is no God. I am God. You are God. There is no God. Now, go find God."

The greatest trick to finding God is to let go of all preconceptions and open up to the truth that exists in the silence of the heart. No big deal. It's been here all the time.

I'm beginning to feel relaxed. One sannyasin said, on the first day we were in the ashram, "It takes three days for the body to arrive, three weeks for the mind, and three months for the heart." In AA, it's suggested that one go to 90 meetings in 90 days. Three months, for the heart, mind, and body.

It's only been two weeks, and I'm impatient for my heart to show up. I could feel its arrival in the AA meeting, but that's universal. I could feel its arrival in myself, in my creativity, in my love for Suryo. That's accepted.

My spiritual tourist visa has run out. I'm no longer looking at India, at Pune, at The Osho International Commune, as a visitor, a newcomer. I'm beginning to be here with more than passing interest. I decided to stay until early January, the seventh birthday of my sobriety.

"And then, I'll decide to stay longer," I said.

"Or not," Suryo said, "I was thinking we could go to Katmandu for a while, and then come back later, if you really want to leave."

I looked up from my paneer tikka.

"You'd do that for me?" I was truly surprised.

"Sure," she said, "Yes, I would."

"Wow, that's wonderful," I said, "but I'm fine, here."

"Varesha told me we'd be crazy to go to Nepal. The passes will be closed. It's winter."

So it is. It's the end of November. The adventure continues. I'm feeling pretty good about the whole thing.

A Delicate Thread

And then it got worse. After a pleasant day, during which I started a new oil canvas, using different materials than the ones I've been used to, after a pleasant tea break with Suryo, after taking a shower together in the dressing room next to the Zorba Cafe, after sitting with her and showing her my new painting, after talking to a couple of other painters about where to buy frames in town, we went to Buddha Hall for discourse.

It felt good to be all in white and clean, sitting in silence, listening to the high quality musicianship of the ashram sannyasin band, and praying. I felt the atmosphere conducive to go inside and meditate, to feel the quiet, as deep and rich as one's own room, like a private island in the tropics. What came up for me, after being still for a few minutes, was an old manner of prayer.

"God, I want to talk to you the way I talk to you. I don't want to think about anyone else while I'm talking to you. I want to speak to you, and I want to listen to you."

It felt good to separate from the influence of the Master and his disciples and get back to the kind of prayer and meditation I was used to. It came to me to say something new. I've always asked God to speak **to** me and **through** me. I began to think visually.

"God, I want to **see** you. And I want others to see you in me. I want you to appear **to** me and appear **through** me."

That line of thought got me thinking visually. My belly is big and uncomfortable. I began to picture the space inside my belly. I saw a sunny patch of grass next to my grandmother's grave. A wave of sadness came over me. I asked why I had a big belly.

I felt my grandmother's presence. She was a sweet old Swede, whose presence was loving. She was the only person in my family, that, as a boy, I could feel loving toward. And she fed me. I got it, in my mind, that her kind of love, and food, were synonymous. When I eat, it reminds me of her love, on some level I wasn't aware of, before. I asked her if she'd be all right if I didn't eat so much.

"Yes," she said, it's never the food."

She loved me, regardless. I remember her, in the last few years of her life, confined to a small room in my parents' house. She was my mother's mother. Because of phlebitis, her legs were amputated just above the knees, by a doctor I learned, later, had the reputation for being the fastest knife in town, in his eagerness to operate.

When I was fifteen, it was my job to lift her to and from bed, so she could sit in her chair, read the newspaper, and watch soap operas. I remember holding her in my arms. In my vision, I lay beside her on her bed. I held her like a baby. I lifted her like a child. I loved her. My heart opened, and I embraced her. My love was safe with her.

I sobbed, sitting in the great hall, surrounded by thousands in white. I grieved her death. I grieved my love for her. I loved her. I let myself feel the sadness and the loss, the fullness and the presence, of love.

The hall filled with good, light, jazzy music, and everybody started to dance, including me. There was a period of quiet, followed by three drumbeats, and then the video began.

I hated it. I thought everyone in the place must share my opinion that it was probably the worst discourse ever. It was Rajneesh 101: Elementary Awareness for the Stupid. It was boring and annoying. Osho often said contrary things, deliberately, to stimulate reaction, like Zen koans.

"Or like asshole bullshit," a voice in my mind said.

He said that if all things come from the same source, i.e., God, there can be no right or wrong. That piece of kindergarten logic pissed me off, as if God was incapable of encompassing opposites. He then said that all moral ethics are only matters of convenience, determined by the powerful over the less powerful. He neglected to point out that his own rules over his followers were therefore equally suspect. Then he decried monogamy as a false system of controls. He praises polygamy, even to the point of suggesting that children who had several fathers are lucky.

He struck pay dirt with me. I want to believe in monogamy with Suryo, and my own children need a father, not the series of substitutes they've dealt with, in my absence, over the years. On the other hand, I believe in extended families and community over the claustrophobic and often destructive, isolated, nuclear family. That's not the critical point. I've been

reunited with my son and daughter. Osho really can't get me on that subject, but monogamy with Suryo is questionable. I felt vulnerable on the subject of monogamy.

Osho climaxed the evening on video by conducting the audience, like some TV huckster, in a kind of call and response, shaking his hands in ever increasing rapidity, stirring the applause, until he stopped and held his hands high, at which point the audience, both on video and in the hall, shouted, in unison, with raised arms, **OH-SHO!** Then again, and again, and again, **OH-SHO! OH-SHO! OH-SHO!**

I couldn't do it. Osho ended his discourse with a joke about Olga, the fat woman. It was a barroom joke, with Olga upside down and naked, her ass in the air, and her drunken husband bursting in on her.

"Olga, for Christ's sake, comb your hair and put your teeth in. You look like your mother."

Osho did his work. He pissed me off. He pushed my buttons. I left the hall, the memory of my grandmother intact, and an apparent revelation came over me.

"All of life is a joke," I thought.

I was taking the commune master/disciple nonsense far too seriously. My inner truth was real. My connections with the matters of the heart and spirit are real. All the rest was a sideshow. Osho was no more to be taken seriously than anything else in this life. This new attitude seemed to be working. I felt lighter.

I got something of value from the meditation. I went inside to the god of my understanding, I listened to and cared for my inner life, and the rest is not to be taken so seriously.

At the end of the evening in Buddha Hall, I made a tent of my shawl, in the middle of the great marble floor, with sannnyasins dancing all around me. I went inside the tent to be with my little kid self. I asked my little self how he was doing, and the kid said he was having fun playing hide and seek. So I thought I felt pretty good.

Suryo could have her life. She could fuck around if she wanted. I had my own life. I could be content and independent of the sideshow raging around me.

The last thing I thought, before leaving Buddha Hall, was, “God, get me out of this fucking daycare camp.”

Suryo and I walked, hand in hand, in silence, feeling connected, to the Blue Diamond, for dinner.

It was the last day of her tantra group, and she was feeling the strong effects from her experience. I asked her what she was feeling. She was speechless. She was in a quiet, contemplative mood. She was also beginning to come down from the high of the week’s intensity. She asked me what I thought of the discourse. My sudden and almost violent sarcasm surprised me. Suddenly, a viciousness came to the surface.

I laughed, “It was one of the most stupid, elementary, boring, annoying, unenlightened pieces of bullshit I’ve ever listened to. Any halfway decent junior college professor of philosophy could have given a better talk.”

My anger at the low-level wisdom and beginner’s history of civilization was greater than the subject warranted.

“What’s really going on? What are you really angry at?”

“I feel like a fool. I feel like I’m a fool. Another layer of illusion is coming off. I’ve had the stupid idea that I’m ready for monogamy with you, but I hear your master telling me it’s only a social convention to keep people oppressed. So, maybe, I’m just another idiot, and thank you, Osho, for exposing my stupidity.”

Suryo looked hurt by my anger.

“He didn’t say that,” she said.

“Yes, he did. Didn’t you hear him?”

“That’s only a small part of what he says on the subject of relationships.”

“Listen, if a guy talks for two days on a subject, and I only hear ten minutes of it, and in that ten minutes, he says what Osho says, then that’s what he says, and he’s an idiot.”

Idiot was one of Baghwan’s favorite words for those he didn’t like.

“He also says you should go **into** your relationships.”

“He **says** that if a man has a beautiful wife, no matter how beautiful she is, he will become bored with her, and a woman will become bored with her husband, no matter how great he is. Bored? He’s an enlightened man, and he talks about boredom? If you’re bored, it’s not your mate’s fault.”

Suryo said I was vicious. I felt vicious. Besides condemning myself and Osho, I condemned her and our relationship. It reminded me of my drinking days, when my viciousness came out, from time to time. Not a pretty sight. It’s not so much what I said, but how I said it, and I was being vicious in my tone and my look.

It went on, until we were both silent. We were silent and separate in the rickshaw going back to the flat. We went silently to our separate rooms. I considered going to bed and giving it a rest.

After a while, I knocked on her door.

“How are you feeling? Do you want to talk?”

She motioned me to join her on the mattress, on the floor inside the green mosquito net. Once inside, once sitting, once next to her, I found the voice of my feelings.

“I’m still hurt that you slept with the Italian. I still feel betrayed. Maybe I’m wrong, but that’s how I feel.”

She listened.

“I’m sorry I was vicious with you. I didn’t realize how I was still feeling. It hurt me that you slept with someone else.”

She spoke quietly, her eyes down.

“I thought you were off living your life in Seattle. I didn’t feel connected to you. I mostly only talked to Enrico. I needed someone, and you weren’t there.”

“I don’t like it that it’s my fault you slept with someone else. When I called you, I couldn’t feel you in my heart. You were gone. You were the one living your own life. You’re the one who went away. But, you’re right. I took you for granted. I thought you’d be fine, and I thought you’d be there when we got back together.”

“You told me you were looking for a nude model, and I thought that meant you wanted to have an affair.”

“I was trying to get past old ideas. I wanted to paint.”

I felt a deep embarrassment. There’s been a flood of affairs in my past. I’m at a point in my life where sexual romance is only an addictive distraction. What I really want is to be close to my true nature, to be close with another, to be creative. In my attempt to clear out the old romantic, sexual habits, I neglected to mention, to admit, that I love Suryo. I began to feel how much I was afraid to be in love with her, to go all the way into the love.

“I’ve been burned so many times. I want to believe it’ll take care of itself. I didn’t connect with you in China, but I didn’t write you any real letters. You’re right.”

Even as I talked, I felt the fear of admitting how much I really loved her. We both sat, still, in quiet, and felt the simple love we had for each other. No amount of fury, change, temptation, and outside influence could change a simple truth.

We care for each other. It’s real. It’s a delicate bond. It needs to be seen and felt as something delicate. When we’re gentle with each other, that delicate thread grows strong and begins to feel like a highway of light between our souls.

“That’s all I can do, tonight,” she said, and I got up to leave.

I leaned over her.

“I know I have an old horse face, when I lean over you like this.”

“It’s a beautiful face.”

We kissed lightly, and I went to my room to sleep.

The Thread

A new day dawned. We slept in. We moved slowly. Suryo did her washing. I helped wring out the sheets and hang them up on the string in my empty-boxcar room.

We went for breakfast at the German Bakery and then to the ashram. She wanted to hold onto my hand. She didn't want me to go away. In the middle of the afternoon, we went home, back to the flat, and I noticed the office of the man I met in the AA meeting, Rashid. After we pattered around the flat for a while, we went for a visit.

Rashid saw to it that we were served chai. Another man from the meeting was visiting, and the four of us chatted about India and America, about the differences in culture, character, history, and spirituality.

It was an engaging discussion, but the best part of it was the feeling of welcome. There was quiet warmth, like candlelight, in the conversation. After a while, we went for dinner in the garden cafe across from the Hotel Kapila, and then we walked in the neighborhood. We started down a side street, but there was a feeling of criminality in the air. I remembered a similar feeling from a certain part of Progresso, in Mexico, last year.

"We don't need that," I said.

We turned and walked back toward the flat. At home, we lie on Suryo's bed and read. After a while, we looked in each other's eyes and said goodnight.

Love is dismembered in our minds and remembered in our hearts. When a common love is missing, or feels missing, it seems impossible to remember, and then, there it is. A gentle thing needs to be treated gently. When the thread of love is broken, the world becomes ungentle. This world becomes sweet again, when the thread of love is rejoined.

Buddha with Lice

“I’m not high, I’m right here.”

As I was walking across the gravel path toward the postal window, inside the ashram, I felt it, for the first time in nearly three weeks. It’s what’s called God’s grace. It’s a warm feeling, in myself, and toward everything around me. It’s a feeling of peace. It’s fluid. It’s a kind of liquid light, with no liquid and no light.

We got up early, so Suryo could attend the first session of her bodywork group. The focus of the group was the ovaries, the reproductive system, the belly, the pelvis, to begin to clear out the feelings that had been blocked in that part of the body. I was off to attend the Life Drawing Group, this time to be held indoors, so the model could pose in the nude.

At 7:45, we were in the German Bakery having big, strong cappuccinos. At 8:05, I found the room where the art group was. It had been moved from the Van Gogh Studio. By the time I walked in, the fifteen or so painters were standing, holding hands, in a circle, around the model. I joined the group, and when it broke apart, I took a cushion in the wider circle.

For the next hour and a half, the pretty young woman, in many ways a younger version of Suryo, posed in a variety of positions for the group.

About halfway through, a video crew came in, led by Maresha, one of Osho’s longtime intimates, and they filmed the class in the fervor of creativity. At one point, the camera focused on me as I worked.

After two hours, the young German group leader had us all choose our favorite drawings and display them in an adjoining foyer. Two of the painters I’ve seen around the studio spent time looking at my drawing. It was one I especially liked. It came together in a flash, at the end of the few minutes allotted for that pose.

I’m always amazed to witness the creative choices that come through me. I’m often struck, while I’m painting or writing, to see something that’s remarkable take place entirely beyond my willing it. It’s a joy. There’s a kind of pride to it, a child’s pride, to be so lucky, to have something happen in my life that’s so beautiful. Like a child who discovers a bird or a small animal near him and bursts into wonder at the new thing in his life.

“Look what has happened in my life,” he seems to say.

The power of the human will to appropriate all these miracles of existence is equally amazing to witness.

“Is this your drawing?” the model said to me, looking at the drawings on display in the foyer, at the end of the session.

“Yes, it is,” I said.

I was pleased by her attention and recognition.

“May I have it?” she asked.

I was taken aback. I felt reluctant to let go of something I’d only had for such a short time. The bird, that had lit on my arm, was being claimed by another.

“Sure,” I said, “You can have it.”

It was a tough moment. I wanted her to have it. I wanted to have it, myself. But I **did** have it. It was mine more than it could ever be anyone else’s, no matter how briefly it’d been in my hands. It came through my hands, through my eyes, through my spirit. It was only the evidence of a moment I’d been wanting, for a long time.

There’s been an old idea, floating across my mind about drawing from the nude. The old idea is that some aggressive sexuality is part of it. Once again, I discover that my true experience is not the same as the one my mind makes of it. It’s not a sexual voyeurism. My witnessing, my seeing, is a constantly changing, evolving recognition of moments, of visual truth that’s often called beauty.

The model is a living being. Her energy vitalizes what the artist, another living being, recognizes. It’s an exchange, a cooperation, a partnership. It’s a kind of love that’s mistaken for its sexual imitation, desire.

In my heart, I neither love nor desire the model. What I love and desire is the moment of creative awareness and the action it gives birth to and nurtures. That moment can be engendered in the heart, but not in the mind that imagines it otherwise.

I gave her the drawing. I opened my hand, and I let the bird fly.

At 4:30, I played soccer with a sannyasin team against an Indian team. It was Tao-boys and Indians. My team, mostly Germans, was bigger and stronger, but it was a good game. What I felt as God's grace, what others call the Buddhafield, was all around me. It didn't change anything. It changed everything. It's a sense of being cared for, that things are happening beyond my control, and that my control is unnecessary.

At 7:15, back at the flat, Kingsley showed up. Suryo was home, feeling completely devastated. In her group, she'd been literally sat on and walked on, and old images of pain, fear, and abuse came to the surface - pictures of her father, drunk and violent, fucking, virtually raping, her mother, and then turning toward little Linda, her two year old heart broken, filled with fear, the fear lodging in her belly and below.

She was going through a deep cleansing process. I could see that it was painful and difficult. I could see the real Linda beginning to emerge. A Linda, true to herself, recognizable, and immensely lovable.

Along with Sudesh, Suryo and I went with Kingsley to a meeting for recovering addicts, across town. Sudesh rode with Kingsley, a small, darkly handsome, quiet and intriguing former schoolmate of Rashid's, who was to meet us at the church where the meeting is held. Kingsley drove a scooter, and Suryo and I followed in a rickshaw. We rode through dusty, dusky city traffic for miles.

The traffic is seldom organized by lights, and there are no lane markings. The flow is always to the left side, British style, but it's a convention as much honored in the breach as in the observation. There's a beauty in the flow. Thousands of vehicles and pedestrians, without accident or injury, in my three weeks of experience, moved in a torrent of tides and currents.

The capacity of human beings to fly by each other within inches, at high speed, with complex coordination and routine success, amazes me. In the States, it's the aplomb with which people hurl themselves at each other on the highways, in great machines, at extraordinary speeds. In India, it's the mind-boggling tapestry of interweaving threads, as if designed by some great genius Traffic Weaver in the Sky, weaving and unweaving in the same gesture, without end or beginning.

When we got to the meeting site, it was a small building at the back of a high school, presumably Catholic, because there was a church, made of wood, glass, and adobe, like the churches in the southwestern US and Mexico. The meeting was behind the church.

Inside the building, there were five of us. The two Indians arranged three long benches in a triangle, and we began. We were all free to talk at length. Suryo said she must be at Step Zero. She was in her addictive mind. There was no God. There was no use. She wanted to eat chocolate and say, "Fuck everything."

I felt like I was on Step Thirteen. Osho said the Commune is Step Thirteen. In AA, it meant putting the make on some poor, unsuspecting newcomer. Good joke, but perhaps Step Thirteen meant enlightenment. The ashram was dedicated to enlightenment through meditation. Osho said meditation was only a trick to help one connect with God.

I did a little Twelve Step editing, in light of the Osho Program. In Step Eleven, I sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understand God. In my edited Step Twelve, I sought to carry out my conscious contact with God in all my affairs.

"What else can there be?" I thought, "except perfect enlightenment and/or sainthood."

I was feeling more kindly toward the old man, Osho Rajneesh, since I finished reading the expose written by Hugh Milne, also called Shiva. The book ends with Rajneesh's flight from Oregon and the dissolution of his communes, both at Pune, earlier, and Rajneeshpuram, in Oregon, later. There's no epilogue to bring it up to date, or even to Osho's death, in 1989.

Shiva believed that Rajneesh had failed, by succumbing to his secretary Sheela's greed and power-tripping. It disturbed me, as I read about the machinations practiced all over the world to build an empire and amass a fortune. It's clear, even granting only a degree of veracity to Shiva, that Rajneesh must have known about Ma Anand Sheela's unethical and vengeful actions.

When asked, "Do you still love Baghwan?" Shiva answered, "Yes, I do."

I was able to reconcile the great man's fall and his subsequent rise, and to begin to accept his truth and his wisdom, by remembering my own story.

I'm a poet, as well as a painter. My poems, over the years, have a virtue that has nothing to do with my personality or my habits.

As I became a dying alcoholic, unconsciously rejecting my life and being rejected by the life around me, the voice of my poetry remained. It's **other than**.

The French poet, Arthur Rimbaud, said, "Je suis un autre." **I am an other**. The **I**, that is **other**, is the poet's voice. In my recovery, I brought myself back in tune with that voice. That voice is the voice of my true self, often called the soul.

"Isness is my business," said Rajneesh.

I think that, maybe, just maybe, Osho came back from the ashes of his own downfall, back in tune with his Buddhahood, and was able to continue the work he'd begun, work that had been sidetracked and then derailed. He came back, before the mission completely overcame the simple truth.

When Ted Koppel asked him, on **Nightline**, why, as an enlightened being, he didn't know Sheela had tapped his phone, Osho answered, "I only claim to know myself. I don't claim to know my phone is tapped."

In the meeting, Kingsley told his story. Before he got off drugs, and even after, he didn't like himself. He did the work to get to know himself better, he did the work to accept his place in the world, and he came to like himself.

What happened to me, in my first three weeks in India, was so unfamiliar and so challenging, I lost the sense of being in God's grace that I'd come to know. Wednesday afternoon, the feeling returned. I thought it was because of the kind of praying I did Monday night, when I stopped listening to the people around me, stopped gauging the spirituality of others, began to pray in my own voice, and began to admit what I was feeling.

The newness of everything created an atmosphere that, in the past, might have sent me into paroxysms of fear and made me want to drink to control the fear. The difference is that I've come to like myself. I like who I am. I told the others it's an old habit of mine to like myself for what I do, but, in India, no one knows what I do or can do. Besides, I can't even do ordinary things very well in a new country. I left the world of the familiar, and I came to the world of the unfamiliar. The changes came at me in rapid fire. I

like myself well enough to absorb the experiences without crippling panic or numbing fear.

The return to my own center happened, at least partially, because I practiced doing things that are helpful. I breathed. I prayed. I talked to others. I sought out meetings. Finally, as importantly, I let myself have my own feelings. I admitted fear, anger, hurt, and love. I spoke in my own voice, and I felt love.

I believe it's simple. I'm born into this life, a soul in a child's body. The soul is connected to God, in love itself. The spirit, the energy of the soul, loves the adventure of this world. Along the way, I become separate from that soul-in-a-child form that is my true self. Whenever I'm able to reconnect with that inner truth, I feel what I call God's grace. Osho calls it The Buddhafield.

"We are all Buddhas," Osho said.

I agree. We're separate from our Buddhahood, insofar as we lose contact with our true selves. Being a Buddha is not an achievement, gained through accomplishments, but a simple remembering. What else can there be? Is there a Thirteenth Step? It's an intriguing question.

Suryo said she was on the First Step. She was feeling truly powerless, and her life was definitely unmanageable. She thought she had lice. She asked what to get for it, and Rashid suggested a shampoo called Mediker, pronounced Medi-care. We could get it at Ruby Hall Medical Center, open 24 hours, only two blocks from our flat. The five of us stood outside the small meeting hall exchanging thanks and handshakes, and I was stunned by the visual beauty of the rich ochres, reds, the browns, blues, and yellows in the Indian night.

We took a rickshaw to Ruby Hall, but the pharmacy had no lice shampoo. A local man, standing at the window, offered to drive us to a late-nite pharmacy. We followed him to his new compact car, and he drove us to a small business district where we got the Mediker we were looking for.

We went to dinner at Status Restaurant, a rather nice middle class place, full of locals, near the pharmacy. Whenever I feel connected in myself and my higher power, my playfulness kicks in.

In Groucho Marx's voice, I said, "Well, you're a lovely couple, and I'd love to go on chatting, but it's time to play 'You Bet Your Life.' Say the secret word and divide a hundred dollars between you. It's a common word, something you find around the house, everyday."

"Lice," Suryo said.

Coming Home

I painted on a much larger canvas. After I worked the colors for a while, they began to take shape. I wanted to do a kind of painting that's like sculpture. I wanted to add layers, scrape them off, add more layers. I wanted paintings that had a history to them.

I'm capable of making drawings and paintings quickly that have an opening beauty. They're attractive and appealing, but they've become too easy, and it's not enough. I push my drawings and paintings past their opening beauty into more depth. They lose their quick beauty and become confused and unclear. They often go dark and muddy. I push past the ugly stage, the point at which it's tempting to feel disappointment and give up. It's always easier to start a new one and get that fresh burst of opening beauty, again.

I stayed with my recent paintings and pushed past the early stages until they began to have a past, a little history, and what emerges, time and time again, are paintings with a deeper beauty, with the feel of their history. I want to go bigger and stay longer. I think of my recent paintings as long poems or short stories, but I want to find out what happens to a canvas I stay with over a longer period of time.

I'm able to discover and appreciate the opening beauty of any woman I'm with, but what interests me is to stay with a woman long enough to have a history, to build layer upon layer, to go deeper, to scrape away the unwanted paint, to build back up the paint, so that the canvas has texture, and not just a quick beauty on the surface.

A couple of women were standing nearby, and one of them looked at my new canvas and said, "Oh! Kandinsky!" and laughed. It's the laugh that comes when people see something they've seen somewhere else. I felt a kinship with Kandinsky and the German Expressionists.

In bed, I read Osho say, in 'The Osho Times' that focused on jealousy,

"If sex becomes a trivial thing, your depth remains untouched . . . only through the other do you become aware of your inner being. There are two ways of discovery. One is meditation . . . another is love. The other creates a circle. And both lovers help each other. The deeper love goes, the deeper they feel they are. Their under-beings are revealed . . . Love is always

trusting. And if something happens that breaks your trust, you have to accept it . . . Trust can't be forced . . . It is there, or it is not there . . . If you love someone, and the depth speaks to the other's depth, you have a meeting in being, it is beautiful . . . Love always trusts. Or if it finds that trust is not possible, it simply moves, in a friendly way. Go on discovering love within you . . . because a loving heart . . . comes to a loving heart . . . Love is a dangerous path, and only those who have the courage can travel it. And I say to you, it is the same, just like meditation - only for those who are courageous. And there are only two ways to reach the Divine, either meditation or love. Find out which is your way, which can be your destiny."

I got out of my bed and went into Suryo's room.

"I want to say something," I said, standing on the bamboo, while she lay on her bed, inside her pale green mosquito net. She put down the International Newsweek.

"I want to say . . . I want to stay in this relationship . . . I want to go deeper . . . I want to give it lots of time . . . I trust you . . . I want to stay with you."

She smiled, "Me, too."

The Enrico episode tested my sense of trust, but I still felt it. It didn't break the trust between us. When I imagined her having an affair inside the ashram, it got me thinking about being alone, and that's not a bad feeling. I'm OK in myself, even by myself, but I want to be with her. I believe I'm on the path of love.

"In meetings, I recognize how much I feel. It's a pure love. It's my true self. When I think you might not be feeling the same, I don't change, in my true self. Years ago, when Roxan left me, I was overcome with jealousy. I thought I was ready to kill her. It was awful. Since then, I've felt the obsession of jealousy less and less. Since then, with any woman I've been with, when they took up with someone else, or when I felt the trust wasn't there, I've been able to say, 'OK, it's time to move on,' because I know I want to be with someone I can have a history with, to go deeper, to stay with them and find out about love. I still feel that way about you."

"Me, too. I want to stay with you. I love you," Suryo said, quietly.

When the love is here, all it needs is recognition. Otherwise, it's insanity. I'm on a path of some sort. I began to see it as a path of love. It's not the path of meditation, and it's not the false path of knowledge.

The azure blizzard,
of wanting to know
everything there is to know,
drowns out the innocence,
but innocence returns,
remembering nothing
of the storm.

The storm has passed. I'm grateful to Osho, the meditation master, for helping me become clearer about my path.

Love me, love me,
I cannot love.
It is a dance we do.

(One of my first poems, written in the early days of marriage.)

Love is the unwritten language of art. It's the unwritten language of life. Indeed, of all being.

We went to a meeting. Sitting outside, under the entryway to a different Catholic church, I remembered trying to become another Arthur Rimbaud. At 17, Rimbaud tried systematically to destroy his reason, his logic, his ego, his mind. He drank and took drugs to excess, became an enfant-terrible poet-genius, and then he left Paris, never to return.

I tried to do the same thing, in my own way, slowly, to destroy my self, to become a free poet, to break free from the controls and the bonds of thought and idea, of convention and reason. I failed, totally, miserably. Instead of a great burst of revolutionary wisdom, I nearly killed the creative spirit and nearly killed myself.

Nanos Valaoritis, my old Greek poet/teacher/mentor said, at one time, that there were different kinds of poets. Some burn brightly and then burn out. Some start slowly, grow in brilliance and burn long. Despite my wish to be a blazing comet, burning across the sky, I think I'm in for the longer haul. Nanos was my guru, my brief Osho. His gray beard, brightly colored clothing, his love and wisdom, and finally, his laughter and spirit, became

a home for me as a young poet, looking for my own path. It's good to have a master.

The real healing engages the righteous wrath
of those who wish to be strong, join in the healing,
pursue the demon cells out of the body, set up
an invisible city of their own, say bye-bye
to the healer, and get on with it.

On my way home, in the afternoon, leaving the ashram, I felt a new feeling. My face felt free of the adventure of new sights. I'm tired. After three weeks of incredible adventure, I felt like resting. It was a good feeling, like coming home after a journey. The journey was good.

It's good to go away from home, but it's also good to come back home. I'm home again. How amazing, to be able to be home, so far from home.

Cut to the Quick

And then it got even harder. It's as hard as I've ever worked, and all under the guise of playing in the Buddhafield. I worked on the Kandinsky canvas until it felt pretty good, not finished, but it has a life of its own. It's a feeling I can sense, in all the work I do that's fulfilling.

After a time, the work separates from me, not in a cruel way, but gently. It pulls away, like a child from its mother, and then it's capable of life on its own. It might need more care and attention, but it has a kind of independence. That's the point of parenting that gives the greatest satisfaction.

I bought another large sheet of rag paper to paint on. The rag paper is unevenly bordered. It's thick and white and full of texture. It's beautiful, all by itself. I went in a different direction with the new canvas. I call it a canvas, even though it isn't. The word 'canvas' sounds good, like 'earth' or 'time.'

I began, in simple sections of color, a landscape with a red sun in the sky. Beneath it are hills or dunes and grasses or forest. It's color. It's gold, green, and red, with undertones of yellow, violet, and black. It went well, for a while. After an hour, it seemed pleasant enough.

Then I **ruined** the effect by putting blue across the landscape, like a sea, with the horizon cut straight across the canvas, one third of the way down, and it worked. The blue horizon has a feeling of its own. A calm tension.

When I finished, **it** finished. It stopped. I stopped. I watched it for a while. The woman minding the art studio, the first non-nude model for the art group, also watched it for a while. She liked it, too. I hung it high on the wall. It was too high. The effect was better at eye level. I left it low, for the day, and put my supplies away.

Suryo asked me to wait, she said she'd come to meet me. I sat out in the patio area, beside the open-walled studio. When I saw her, I waved her toward me, to show her what I'd done. She liked it, but, clearly, she was inside her own day's work.

She wanted to walk. We left the ashram, and went to the German Bakery, but it was crowded.

“Let’s go down the road.” I said.

We stopped for sodas. Sitting outside an open-front snack shop, with two goats nearby, rubbing their noses on the new cement wall, with two small women filling and carrying bags of gravel on their heads, as they crossed in front of us, Suryo dropped the first bomb.

“I’m angry at you,” she said.

She overslept, missing half of her body work group, went to the afternoon session, and a catharsis of pain was followed by a deep release of sexual feeling, during which she felt the presence of Osho, her spiritual father, her Master, the one she trusted above all others.

“I’m afraid you won’t be able to accept Osho, and you won’t be able to go deep with me.”

I was smiling, but I was in shock. On our walk, she told me of a blissful reunion she’d had with an old friend from the ranch. The two of them embraced and looked deep into each other’s eyes, allowing their personalities to melt away. She says she wanted that with me.

I became angry. I felt attacked. We walked past the apartments called Popular Heights, past the path to the burning ghats, and stood near the beggars’ shacks, while a herd of water buffalo passed, with their sleek, hairless, charcoal hides, and their long, gracefully curved horns. A dwarf led them, guiding them with a stick. We walked on the road by the river and stopped near what seemed to be a burial ground, with a few headstones showing in the untended grass.

“This is really pissing me off,” I said, “It’s like being with a born-again Christian who’s telling me she can’t be with me, because I don’t want Jesus in bed with us. I want God’s will in all my life, but I don’t want to have to commune with other human beings while we’re making love.”

Suryo persisted in feeling that the deep connection she had with someone else is the direction she wants to go, and her fear continued that I wasn’t capable, or willing, to go with her. My head was swimming.

We walked back toward the German Bakery. We were having a scene together. We were talking, walking apart, coming together, walking apart.

A boy, nine or ten, came between us. He offered three rupees for my tiny watch face.

"I don't want to talk to you, I want to talk to her," I said.

"Aren't you my friend?" the cold-eyed, obnoxious, grinning boy asked. "If I was a sannyasin, you'd be my friend."

He tried another gambit. Looking at the medallion around my neck, he said, "That is gold? Do you want to sell it?"

We walked away, up the road. The whole of our two years came into question. Outside the German Bakery, Suryo held me and looked into my eyes, looking for that deep connection she felt with someone else, the connection she wanted with me.

My eyes locked onto hers, but the intensity of my reaction to her doubt turned my gaze cold and hard. I desperately and willfully stared into her eyes, trying to show my lack of fear, despite her cuts. I felt the rug pulled out from under the relationship.

"You know," she said, looking at me, "it was never there, or maybe I just never felt it, but I never felt an invitation from you."

Her words cut me to the quick. My legs began to drag as I walked. We turned into a private road, toward several private residences. I could hardly move. I held her words in my mind. They had the feeling of an undeniable truth.

"You're right," I said, coldly, "I can tell you're right. I never made an invitation to you."

In my mind, I meant she had called me on the truth. I never wanted to be with her. I only cared for myself and my art. I admitted it. It felt like relief, after two years of pretending I could love anyone else. We walked on, in silence.

"If you never loved me, then I'm a fool," she said. "Why did you stay with me?"

"I've been using you," I said.

I spoke with the hard voice of unfeeling honesty, "You were good for me. You accepted me. My art is the only thing I care about."

I was becoming ice cold. My heart felt empty. All my life of the recent years felt like a lie. I felt like a vampire who only takes the blood he needs and gives nothing back. I felt selfish and incapable of truly being with anyone other than myself.

Then, something in me rebelled. If what I was saying was true, then my life was one long lie, and particularly the life of love in my heart, in the spirituality of my recent years. I turned my words around.

"I think this is all bullshit," I said. "I don't think anything I've been saying is true."

Suddenly, my feelings of coldness, emptiness, and cynical truth, changed. My body filled back up with warmth. In an instant, it all changed, again. I stood still, for a few seconds.

Suryo looked shocked. "What? What are you saying? Is this all a lie?"

She believed the story of our fraudulent love. Her fraud. My fraud.

I went in the back gate of the ashram. I crossed the large facility, went to my locker, and changed my clothes. I went to the art studio, picked up my last two paintings, went back to my locker to retrieve a drawing, and I passed her as I left the locker area. I was bound for home and possibly Seattle. I thought I could do it. If I was a narcissistic artist who cared for nobody but myself, then I better get on with it and save Suryo and everyone else the trouble of my presence.

At home, I collapsed. I tried to write her a letter. All I could write came after a prayer.

"God," I said, "I'm lost. I'm confused. I don't know what to do."

A sob broke the resolve in my chest, and I wrote, "Suryo, I really love you. I'm just scared."

I lay down and slept. Whenever overwhelming fear came into my mind, I stepped back from it. I knew that fear was my addictive response to

everything that seemed to threaten me. The fear that I'm truly alone swept over me like a poison gas.

I stayed in the clean air of my spirit, even though there was no message for me. After a shower, I lay, fully clothed, on my mattress, and I slept. When I woke up, I went to the outdoor cafe of the Kapila Hotel and ate alone, in pain, and unable to conceal it. I let myself feel my separateness. I prayed.

"God, I'm powerless over love. My life of love is unmanageable." (It was a paraphrase of lines from the First Step.)

I sobbed. Sobbing like that was a break into truth in my heart. Truth in my head was without feeling and cold. And usually wrong.

"I believe you can rid me of this insanity, God."

It suddenly felt insane to think I had any power over love, either hers or mine.

"I give my love over to your care, God. Thy will, not mine, be done."

I thought, for a moment, that something different had occurred. I felt some indefinable shift in my feelings. I felt less vulnerable to fear. I ate a few of the anise seeds the waiters always provide, used a toothpick to clean the gap between two of my back teeth, and walked back to the flat. On the walk, I felt a measure of peace.

I sat on my once broken, recently repaired, wooden chair, and tried to read a little. Suryo knocked on my door. The love between us was instantly apparent in our eyes.

"Can we sit together?" she asked.

"Yes. Come in. Please."

My heart filled quickly with the love I feel more clearly when I'm honestly afraid. She came near me. I was sitting. She stood. We embraced. My face was in her belly.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I'm sorry, baby."

It's all I could say. I looked at her. We embraced again.

“Oh, sweetheart, I’m sorry, too.”

She held my head to her chest.

“I love you, Suryo.”

“I know you do.”

Our voices, our embrace, our hearts were genuine. She sat on my legs.

“Let’s see if we can break this little chair,” I said.

It didn’t break. We held each other for a long time. She told me she had a hard time when she was in Discourse. She was afraid of losing everyone, and she felt a terrible sense of loss and aloneness. She told me what she remembered from the afternoon.

“I’m vicious. I don’t know how to ask for what I want. I need to love you, not to get you to make me feel safe first. A therapist once said I was vicious. I said, ‘Who, me?’”

“Your voice is soft when you talk, no matter what you’re saying,” I said.

“I stuck the knife in. I cut you. It’s true about me. Now you see how vicious I can be.”

“We’re both capable of being vicious. That was only the surface of how bad it could get.”

“I tried to remember what started it all. I blanked when we were talking about the invitation. I was talking about when we were looking in each other’s eyes. I was comparing you to that sannyasin I ran into, from the ranch. Bone, any two sannyasins, who haven’t seen each other for a long time, can do that, for a few minutes. That’s not fair to compare you with. And you were being attacked. I attacked you. Of course, I couldn’t see any invitation in your eyes. I thought you should be open to me, after I had just attacked you.”

“I thought you were talking about when we first met. I thought if you never felt any invitation from me to love you, for us to be together, then

our whole relationship was a fraud from the beginning. But I remember the invitation. Down by the lake, when I said I was falling in love with you.”

“And you said that if I wasn’t feeling the same thing, I should tell you, right then. But I was feeling the same thing.”

We were talking in tune again.

“That first month together,” I said, “we went places I’d never, ever been before. That was incredible. We went deep. It touched places in me I didn’t know I could feel. But I did.”

Then, we began to make love. Soon, she was sitting, facing me, naked. I was naked. She put me inside her, and we sat still. She felt my male energy rise up within her. I felt her female energy surround me. We looked in each other’s eyes. She got scared. I laughed and told her it was OK.

I showed her the note. I said I was scared. She said she was scared.

She said, “We’re two very scared people from very fucked up families.”

I say we were doing pretty well, despite the odds against us.

“You’re pretty good, I’m pretty good,” I said.

I paused, “You’re good. I’m good.”

I paused again, “You’re wonderful! I’m wonderful!”

We laughed, as we rocked back and forth, my penis rising inside her, her vagina engulfing me. Our bodies disappeared together. The male and female became one, inside us, separately, inside us, together.

“You look like you’re 20,” she said.

“If I’m 20, you should be about 14, but you look 25,” I said, “and I feel about 17.”

“How do you like fucking an older woman,” she asked.

I remembered the first feelings of sexuality, in the beginning. Then, I came on top of her, and I felt 16, innocent, shaking with energy. We went for dinner at the Madhuban.

She told me about running into a mutual friend of ours from Portland, who said, "You two have been together for two years. You're not going to split up in one night."

"Now you've seen my viciousness," she said.

"Actually, you honor me by showing me who you really are. Part of yourself, anyway." I laughed. "For sure, this isn't about having other lovers. That's a smoke screen. Having other lovers is nothing. The really scary stuff is being together. We're together. We're just scared of it. We just have to let go and feel it. Amazing, huh?"

"Amazing."

A boy in a gray uniform, shorts and short sleeve shirt, with bare feet, holding a large silver bowl with a curved handle, removed all the dishes, and wiped the table clean. The waiter brought the bill, stuck ceremoniously among the anise seeds and the toothpicks.

Back home in our flat, we kissed.

"I think that's enough for one day," she said.

I turned to go to my room.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to bed. That's enough. I'll see you tomorrow."

"No, I'm not ready, yet."

She trailed after me. We kissed again.

"OK, that's enough," she said, "I'm ready now. We could use some time apart. Goodnight, sweetheart."

"Goodnight, Bubola."

Commedia-del-Arte

This morning, bright and early, I went down to the Dipti Grocery and bought two lengths of clothesline and a package of multicolored plastic clothespins. Back in the flat, I strung the line across the west wall and hung all nine of my smaller paintings. It felt great. It looked great. I was a happy boy.

At the ashram, I worked a little more on the large Kandinsky. The seascape painting was done. No doubt about it. It began to appear not as dunes with sea, beyond, but as sea, with land below the surface, one part emerging like an island. I bought a new canvas and tried out another picture I want to paint. A boat.

A red boat, with green sails, on a blue, green, and black sea, near purple land and a huge, red sun in a terra cotta sky. It wasn't done by 4PM, when the studio time is officially over, but it was solid, and I left, looking forward to trying something unknown on the horizon.

It was late. I ran to soccer. When I got there, the game was on, and it was crowded. I couldn't get in the game, right away. When I did, I discovered a contingent of Italians, playing soccer like Italians in a movie, dramatic, grimacing, gesturing, shouting, whining, showing off, prancing about and getting in fights. It's normally a friendly game, without rough stuff or histrionics. The Italians made me wonder about their awareness as sannyasins.

One man wrestled an Indian to the ground in a burst of retaliation, for some affront, real or imagined.

I shouted, **No! No! No!**

I wanted to say, "Hey, sannyasin, where's your awareness?"

The presumption that all sannyasins are clear about their egos, as least clearer than I am, went bouncing off the soccer field.

On the other hand, it was fun playing with a bunch of showy maniacs, and I took a wild dive of my own, drawing blood on one leg and knee. At the end of the game, I exchanged comedia-del-arte looks with one of my teammates, grabbed my plastic bag of clothes and headed for home.

I stopped at the Dipti, bought a small bottle of shampoo, a chocolate bar, and a bottle of water. The owner overcharged me ten rupees. I repeated the price, in a show of surprise. He changed it, quickly, and I said to myself, "He's a crook. How about that?"

Up the stairs, at the locked door, I realized I didn't have a key. My keys were gone. I checked my pockets and my memory. I remembered a small hole in the plastic bag, as it hung on a nail by the side door of the building next to the game. I thought the keys might still be back at the soccer field. If not, I was going to have to improvise, for hours.

I got up on the roof and checked the climb down to our flat. Not possible, except for Batman. If I couldn't find the keys, there was no way I could get in, until after 8:30 or 9:00, when the ashram re-opened after Evening Discourse. It was 6:30, and Suryo should have been going in to Discourse, right about then. I couldn't even guess where Sudesh was.

"Well, what d'ya know about this?" I thought.

It was amazing, and not amazing at all, to notice that I felt no panic. I rubbed the blood on my knee to see if it was dry. It was. I pulled my light blue pants on, went back down to the street, got a rickshaw, and rode back to Don Bosco. I told the driver to wait, and I went to the dark steps under the nail where I hung my clothing bag.

I walked past three boys sitting on the front verandah of the old school building. They said something to me, but I didn't make it out. I felt around for the keys, but they weren't there.

I went back to the boys and asked them, "Did anyone find some keys?"

One of them said, "Yes, I did," and he pulled my keys out of his pocket and handed them to me.

"That's great. That's great. Thank you, very much!"

I got back in the rickshaw and went home to shower and change. I took the entire episode as an adventure. I accepted the circumstances of the lost keys for what they were. It was life, that's all. No big deal, no disappointment, no triumph. There was no emotional baggage, it was one foot in front of the other, and then on to the next thing. A simple series of

ordinary steps. All through it, there was a sense of subtle joy in the background. It was another small example of the nature of ordinary ecstasy.

I ate dinner at the Blue Diamond and read the International Edition of the Herald Tribune. A memory seemed to drop into my consciousness out of the clear blue eternity.

I was standing in Vesuvio, a popular bar for artists in North Beach, San Francisco. I was drinking and joking, laughing, playing the fool, happy as a lark. Someone said something, and I repeated a line I'd used for a couple of years. I was just out of graduate school in poetry at San Francisco State, where I had played in the academic Buddhafield. It was a great time in my life, and I was in love with myself and my dumb luck, to have such a stimulating, scary, confusing, and wonderful life.

Flying on automatic pilot, I said, "I'm just a dumbfuck from Illinois."

My friend Paul said to me, "No, you're not. You're not a dumbfuck, and I'm tired of hearing you say you are. You're a smart sonofabitch, and it's stupid to pretend otherwise."

I was stunned. My game, pretending I was dumber than I was, was blown.

A year later, another poet said, "You're hiding what you know. You know more than you let on. Your poetry won't take off, until you tell what you know."

I went on a mission to carry out the instructions of my friends. I accepted their judgment that I knew more than I said. I began to tell what I knew. I trusted my wisdom, my intuition, my knowledge, and my right to speak it.

I got serious. As I began to practice truth telling, I drank more and more. As I drank more, I became bolder, until I felt compelled to speak the truths that no one else would speak, and to speak the truths that no one wanted to hear.

The frightening aspect of my mission to be the speaker of truths was its accuracy. As time went on, I saw that, though it might take years for some truth to be revealed, eventually it was. I was uncanny in my accuracy, and it was frightening. The function of telling what I knew became an obsession, particularly when I drank.

My persona was comic, light-hearted, before I become a truly serious human being. I sat in the Blue Diamond, and I laughed.

“My god, no wonder I got so serious.”

I tried it, again, “I’m just a dumbfuck from Illinois.”

It felt good. I didn’t have to know everything. I didn’t have to know anything. In high school, my favorite teacher told me three words that were the key to learning. **I don’t know**. That became my early mantra, before **I know** took its place.

A funny thing happened. A layer of seriousness fell off. Like a mantel. Like a heavy woolen cloak. Like a sword dropped by the side of the road. To become enlightened means to weigh less. I felt lighter. I carried my friends’ advice like a golden ark of the covenant, on my back, in my mind, for nearly twenty years. Walking to the ashram at 9PM, I felt the change.

Being a dumbfuck from Illinois didn’t mean I was stupid. My awareness isn’t serious. It isn’t frivolous. It just is. It’s not going to be there because I’m serious, and it isn’t going to go away if I’m playful.

I danced on the gravel path. I ran into Suryo, who was off to dinner with an old girlfriend. I kissed her and smiled like a kid.

I went to the Golden Gourmet for a bowl of wonton to top off the evening. Being on a mission of seriousness is a needless burden. Especially for a guy who likes to play. I never forgot how to play, but it was funny how I always found a way to put it off. My recovery was another extension of the serious time. My humor never stopped, but it was in relief from the seriousness.

I felt lighter. I felt freer. I thought about attributing the change to the local guru, but I couldn’t find a way to link the two. It happened like God’s will often happens, out of the blue, when I least expected it.

I got home to bed and left a note for Suryo to wake me at 7AM, Sunday, or leave the alarm clock by my bed. There was an all-day orientation for new sannyasins, or anyone else who might be interested in an introduction to the Buddhafield. I was looking forward to it. At 12:30, while I was asleep, she put the alarm clock next to my bed.

“Goodnight, sweet Bone,” she said and left me to sleep and dream, playfully and peacefully.

Three Faces of the Master

The orientation meeting was held in the same room as the life-drawing group. The floor was covered with soft mats, and pillows were laid about. There were seventy-five or so in the room. I took a pillow by one wall, so I could lean back comfortably. It was Sunday, December 1st. I've been in Poona for three weeks. The two sannyasins who welcomed us on our first day in the ashram were now the leaders of the orientation meeting. I was hoping the day ahead might help me clear up my feelings about being a sannyasin.

Several videos were shown. I kept focusing my eyes on the floor and the wall, to break the dull, hypnotic visual drone of TV. We watched videos of Osho Rajneesh, from the early days until his death. I witnessed three distinctly different versions of the same man.

In the early days, I saw a robust, strong, vibrant, simple, direct man, with fire in his belly. In the second stage, in America, he looked stoned, drugged, wasted, glazed over. In the last stage, in Poona before his death, he seemed old and gentle, perhaps clear again, but soft, like a grandfather or grandmother. I've seen older people slowly, subtly, changing sexes within themselves.

In his book, **Tantric Vision**, Rajneesh spoke about the need to recognize our dual nature as both female and male. In the videos, I saw the transformation of one man from being strongly male to being strongly female, and I felt clarity from both sides of the same person. I thought I could identify the middle stage from my own experience.

The leaders of the day's introduction to the commune were all sannyasins who had personal contact with Osho, some for many years. It was a profoundly moving and affecting experience for them. One man said it was like being near uranium. Most of the people in the room had never been in the presence of Osho the Master, and never would be.

Of the many sannyasins who came in, during the day, to discuss or demonstrate various aspects of the Commune, one mentioned the world's interest in masters who are no longer alive; Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Lao Tzu, Confucius, etc. He said it was an incredible blessing for him to be in the presence of a living master. I could recognize that, but it wasn't true

for me. I felt a different advantage, being left with the way and not the master.

As the Master said, "I only point the way."

In the morning, the group became a circle of people, familiar in my experience, telling personal experiences, relating to the Master, to the teachings, to the Commune. Someone raised the question of how one could return to the **real** world after being in Pune. Isn't the commune an escape from the real world? An old-timer said, yes, it's an escape but not an escape from, it's an escape into. He said inner peace carried over from one to the other.

I raised my hand, when I felt the familiar sense, in my heart and in my belly, something like fear, but safe fear. It's the feeling of speaking the truth from my heart.

"To me, **this** is the real world. I've felt this, here and in some other places, and to be safe and creative and alive, that's what's real. The other world is the not-real world."

I gestured, to indicate the world nearby and the world beyond, to what an older sannyasin referred to as 'the market-place.'

"My question is about becoming a sannyasin," I said, as I looked at a large photo of Osho on the opposite wall, "because I don't feel that Osho is my master. I don't feel like a disciple, even though I see him as the clearest person I've known in the world. I'm unsure about becoming a sannyasin. In the meantime, I'm thrilled to be here."

A leader said, "In India, the word master doesn't mean what it means in the West. In the West, it has the connotation of someone telling you what to do with your life. Not here. To be a swami means to be one who is in charge of his own life. Guru is a better word than master, even though it's been an abused word, because it simply means teacher."

At the tea break, an extremely tall girl from Nova Scotia told me about the sense of extended community she got from feeling connected to so many people all over the world. I told her I could appreciate what she was saying, since I had that feeling myself, being connected in my recovery, with people all over the world.

At lunch, the group was split into sixes. I went with five other men. It turned out we were all from different countries, Canada, Australia, Austria, Germany, Russia, and me, from the US. The Russian lived in Pune during all the turmoil in the Soviet Union, including the attempted coup and the breakup of the Union, and only recently had he taken a real interest in the commune. The Australian was traveling with a girlfriend who was a longtime sannyasin. The Canadian's girlfriend was also a longtime sannyasin. After he left everything behind, and after a month in Pune, the German said he was going nuts.

After lunch, one sannyasin guy explained the various meditations, and another one demonstrated them, with gusto, humor, and understanding. All of Osho's meditations offer one simple truth, to be able to pull away from the ego, to watch the mind's accumulation, and to open a space for true silence, the source of all vitality and creativity. So simple, and it works. On top of that, his meditations aren't torture.

One woman, as we were being shown the deep breathing part of the meditation called Dynamic, said, "Should I keep it up until I pass out?"

The leader said, "If you're a masochist, sure, go right ahead. No, it's not necessary to pass out. It's better to slow down, or rest a bit."

He showed everyone how to learn the meditation in a gentle, effective way, by following one's own best instincts. I was sold. Dynamic and Kundalini was Osho's favorites, and they're both active as well as passive. The group dynamic I'm used to, the circle of speaking from the heart toward spiritual freedom, is a gift I cherish, and here was another.

I thought, "The combination would be heaven on earth."

Suryo and I went for dinner at the Blue Diamond. In the rickshaw going home, we fell in love like teenagers, but with the ease of old people. At the flat, we lay together, naked, and I told her she has the most perfect breasts in the whole world.

"Well, then, why don't you write poems about my breasts?"

"Because, when I'm on national TV with my highly acclaimed book of poems, they'll say, 'Steve, we don't really care about your poems. Tell us about Suryo's breasts.'"

We laughed and goofed off.

I said, "Hey, what happened to that hot sex we were having in the rickshaw?"

We got in the tantra position, face to face, our genitals face to face, and our hands on each other. The energy came up from below like a flame. I got hard, like one of the Italians in the soccer game. She called my cock Georgio, after I told her about my book, **The Cock Poems by Georgio Vesta**.

Suryo put Georgio inside Vagina. She came a couple of times, we rolled over on our side, and I began to fuck her wildly.

"I'm a dog," I said, "I like to fuck like a dog."

She laughed. We lay back, and I began to slide in and out of her in a new way, dictated by the hard and flat surface of her mattress. It was like the gears in a well-oiled machine. We were interconnecting parts of the same mechanism. No one was doing the fucking. We were the same, together.

I came without coming. Without ejaculating. I felt some other kind of release. After a while, the energy reached its own fulfillment, and I lay apart, breathing deeply, rapidly, passionate breaths, from the depth of my lungs and belly, the kind of breathing that's orgasmic in my lungs. There are so many ways to come to life. I came to life. I came alive. She and I came together. We came to life, together.

"Osho says that, in true tantra sex, you completely forget the other, and your sex is the fulfillment of your inner male and female, coming together," I said.

"Who cares about him?" she said, looking in my eyes and seeing me, the other, and loving me.

"I want you to love my stupid self," I said, "I want you to love this guy, not just get it on cosmically with your tantric being."

"I do, I love you."

"I love you, too."

“I know.”

“Me, too.”

My Father's Boat

I dreamed my father was dying. In the dream, he was tall and robust, as I remember him when I was young and he was not old. In the dream, it was the last day of his life, and he knew it. I went to him and embraced him, I loved him. My father, not normally an affectionate man, laughed gently and embraced me.

"This is just like you," he said, "to be so much in your heart."

My father appreciated the expression of love, in the sorrow, in the recognition of his death, in the expression of his son's love.

When I was painting, the woman who works in the art studio told me how much she liked the painting of the boat, because it reminded her of her son when he was young. He painted a boat for his class at elementary school, and it took first prize.

Suryo came into the studio and spoke quietly with Gyanbodhi, who said, "You aren't going to disturb the master, are you?"

"Yes, I am," she said and came behind me and kissed me on the back of the neck.

At 3:30, I joined the follow-up group of newcomers to discuss Sunday's activities, so the sannyasins who did the organizing could learn what to keep and what to change for next time. Most people said they enjoyed the first day, especially the Dynamic Meditation demonstration and the discussion time. I sat in rapt attention as the group spoke, one by one, in various accents, of our feelings as newcomers.

When it was my turn, I said, "I still have a question. So often we're referred to as seekers. I felt like a seeker for a long time, but I don't feel like a seeker, anymore. I don't mean to sound presumptuous, but I'm finally found my spirituality, and I didn't come here looking for it. I still want to know if it's OK for me to be here, even though I don't feel like a seeker."

Three sannyasins answered, in turn, in voices of welcome. One said, "It doesn't matter why you're here. If you're only here because you like the aerobics program, then you're welcome."

After they spoke their welcome, I said, surprising myself, "I'm extremely reassured to hear your words. These words you say reassure me on some deep level, like words to a child. The child in me is wondering. He's saying, 'What's this? Are you going to put me through another thing?' and he feels a lot better, hearing you say these things."

After the meeting, a woman with a strong accent, came up to me. "I heard you, yesterday, in the meeting, and I said to myself, 'Now, there is a man who thinks for himself. I must speak with him. Are you German?'"

"I'm American."

She laughed. "Because I thought, 'THAT German speaks the best English I've ever heard from a German.'"

"For a German, I speak very good English, and for an American, I speak pretty good," I said.

Her name is Carla. She's from Majorca, and she's been alone in the ashram for a week. She was freaking out, with all the Osho worship she thought she was seeing. Her great fear was that, like early Christianity, the wheels were turning to take essential truth and turn it into a religion. The worship of a human being was too much for her.

She's Spanish, Jewish, intellectual, animated, and passionate in her talk. She loves music, but the ashram music doesn't touch her.

She thinks all the incidental nudity is disturbing, and she thinks the groups are too expensive. She's a rich lady from Spain who feels threatened. She's been meditating for seven years, after meeting a mystic. She does massage, and she says the best massage in town is at the Hotel Sagar.

She needed to talk to me, and I needed to be talked to, by someone else with misgivings about the ashram. We talked for an hour, and I got to speak, or hear, all my objections to the world forming around the teachings of Osho Rajneesh. By the end of the conversation, I reassured her that she could take what she needed and leave the rest.

She's a smoker, and I went with her to the smokers' area called The Smoking Temple. It was like going to a bar. I don't have any urge to smoke, but the attraction to the atmosphere of addiction occasionally shows up. I showed her the painting area, so she'd know where to find me, if she

wanted to say hello. She saw my paintings and commented that there were so many browns, there was a sadness in them.

I did feel some sadness, and I recognized that she was sad, too. She's seen sadness in the people of India, sadness I haven't paid any attention to. My sadness seems to be surfacing in a place that nearly approximates the Garden of Eden, that I still can't embrace, wholeheartedly. My heart is not unencumbered. There is sadness.

I dressed and went home. Suryo was home, outfitting her room with new straw mats, a new set of bamboo shelves for clothes and a new table for writing. My head was full of Carla's anxieties, so I talked to Suryo about her Master. Finally, after complaining about all the contradictions, the suspicious methods, the trappings, etc., I admitted that I'm in conflict with Osho like a competitor would be. I didn't feel like a disciple. I felt like a master, who didn't like this 'other' master's technique.

She said she didn't care whether Osho dried up and blew away, or whether his commune takes over the world or disappears completely, she got what she came for.

Surprise! I was attached to the place and the man more than she was. I realized how true her experience was, since I'd had my own awakening,

I don't care what anyone else thinks about poetry, art, or the Twelve Steps. The people who cling to The Commune, Osho, or any other way, master, form, truth, or belief, are those who haven't yet taken it all the way home, inside themselves.

Osho provokes in me a question of my own personal power, the call in me to be a public person, to preach and teach, to speak out of my own experience, to share what I know in my life, just as Raja Mohan felt compelled to do. When I feel centered in my own true self, I don't care about the choices others make in their lives.

My way of speaking my own truth doesn't match with the way of Osho Rajneesh. I need to, as Shiva says, "let baghwans be baghwans."

Suryo showed herself to be the woman I want to be with, not because she's the same as me, but because she's the same as Suryo. She lets Steve be Steve, because Suryo is only interested in being Suryo. Whenever I hear her speak from herself, I hear someone who knows how, partly from her

experiences with Rajneesh, to be true to herself. Her path is different from mine, but it works, and it works just as well.

She wore her new dress to the Madhuban. She said Vidya didn't like it. Neither did I. It was a voluminous black and white pattern dress with billowy sleeves and an open neck. In it, she felt graceful and elegant. I saw why she liked it. She moved like a happy, fat, tribal queen. She looked regal, as well. She looked good as a queen. So, I'm a guru, and Suryo's a queen. We enjoyed our roles, after admitting how we felt about playing them.

I remembered that during the first orientation meeting, I didn't feel the urge to go against Osho's power, as I thought I might. I remembered feeling that it wasn't my place. If thousands of people felt themselves to be seekers, and if they're able to grow spiritually in this place, then it's not my business to object to it.

The boat. I went to bed and read an interview with an older sannyasin who told about being caught in a rip tide and nearly drowning. For half an hour, she was lost in the Indian Ocean, until she was pulled to shore by a strong swimmer.

During her ordeal, a voice, she'd never heard before, told her to relax and give in, or she'd die. She gave in and felt an overwhelming acceptance. She was given a gift, an opening into life. She said that since then, it'd been difficult for her to stay in that awareness, despite all her experience with the Master.

I remembered the night of my last drink. Many hours into my delirium, my own drowning, I felt my spirit about to leave my body, and I said, softly, "Stay with me. Stay with me."

I said it over and over, until it was a statement and not a plea. That voice, the clear voice of my being, is here, has always been here, and will be here, until it subsides into Everything.

On a Hook in Heaven

I am the soul self. I am the one telling the story. I am the witness. For many years, Steve had the idea that his soul was somewhere else, as if it was on a hook in heaven, waiting. Then for a long time, he could feel his soul as a nearby presence, but he couldn't understand it. Then, for a time, he had the sense that his soul was within him and connected with God and the unknowable beyond. Then, one day, he began to recognize that his soul was not only within him, it was who he is. He is the soul of Steve. He's Steve, and he's soul. He is I. I am he.

He began to feel himself as soul, born into a human body, and he began to believe it was his reality to be a soul in a human body, not one or the other. It was not his reality to try to leave the body, nor was it his reality to remain only in the body. He was not a man with a soul. He was soul, as a man.

He woke up this morning, and he remembered, "I am the soul."

He imagined appearing on stage as a two-character show, as the soul of a man and as the man of the soul, able to move back and forth, between the two microphones. Whenever he imagined stepping to the microphone as soul, an overwhelming sense of joy and silence filled him. Silence is not the normal idea for a performer, but his soul self is so present at the microphone, there's no need for him/it/me/I to speak.

In his imagined theater, the man is talkative, but since he's aware of his counterpart, his speech is more playful, and takes himself less seriously. They're a good pair. They like each other. They're not trying to play one-upmanship or to become independent of each other.

Neither are they helplessly dependent on each other. They're compatible layers of the same being, like color overlays that blend together for a deeper picture.

The sense he has is that I come into his being as fully and as far as I am invited. For him, it's like playing soccer. It's better for him to be fully into the game than to be Steve watching himself play the game. As soul, it's better to be fully into the man than to be only awareness in the man. In order for soul to come fully into him, he has to do the work clearing out his character, his history, his personality, his behavior, his ego, his will.

That list of words describes a man's life when he's not clearly coming from his greater self. A man, alone in his humanity, is a desperate man. Soul is present in all humans, but human selves are seldom aware of it. The human mind is blocked, unwilling, nearly incapable of becoming conscious of the entire being, as if an arm or leg calls itself a body and is thoroughly convinced of its truth.

"I am a leg. I don't need any body."

Steve and Suryo went to the German Bakery for big strong cappuccinos, and then he came to write, and I came to speak. That is, he moved the pen, and I became his consciousness. When the writing was complete, for the day, he went to lunch.

I like these lunches. Sometimes, he forgets me and stuffs his face. Other times, he's conscious of teeth and tongue, lips and throat, nose and eyes, ears even, and he gets to digest the energy.

When he finished eating, he took his tray to the window of the kitchen where the local Indians do the washing and cleaning. Suryo tapped him on the shoulder, and he turned around. She was beaming.

"Hi, baby," he said.

"I have to tell you what's happened to me," she said.

They walked a few yards and sat down on a bench on the path between the Bodhidharma Cafe and the Mariam Canteen. She'd come from a dance meditation in Buddha Hall. It was African music and African dance, led by Ananda, a dancer she's known for many years. As she began to speak, she was filled with the moment.

"I'm a dancer," she said. "I found out that's who I am. I'm a dancer. Something happened, and I could feel it all the way through me. It made me cry. I went up to Ananda after it was over, and I told her. She looked at me, this fat old hypnotherapist, and she knew it was true, because I knew it was true. It's true."

"It's true. I said you were a dancer," Steve said.

“I had to feel it. I had to find out for myself. I hugged Ananda. I cried. I had to come and find you. I had to tell you.”

There was no doubt in his mind. He could see something was different. They sat together, and even that changed. There was a sweet relaxation that came to them. Her admission was clear enough for him to love her more fully than before, not for being a dancer, but for being more clearly who she was.

It isn't that he needs her to be an artist like he is, it's that he needs her to be who she is. As long as she's not being her true self, she's not fully present, and he has to wait. Waiting for her is a sadness, as waiting for his own self to be fully present is a sadness in him.

It made him quiet to hear her speak about her arrival back home to herself. It's what the Commune was dedicated to, bringing people home to themselves, and he felt grateful to the man around whom the Commune was created.

It was time for him to go paint, but he didn't feel like it. He felt like staying with Suryo. They moved, with cups of chai, back into the sparsely populated Mariam Canteen, and he watched her grow more and more expansive about her discovery. She began to tell the visions that come automatically to one who is in herself, in her true self, at home again.

“You better write these ideas down,” he said, “because they're going to start coming fast and furious, and they deserve to be remembered.”

One of the ideas was of a large studio with lots of windows and hardwood floors. It was an old vision of his, as well. Another vision was of living in the Southwest, New Mexico or Arizona, and that was also a vision of his.

A vision is a picture that feels good to the whole being and not just to the mind. The pictures felt good to their whole beings. That's a powerful union of energy. He kept pinching himself, in wonder. He didn't feel like painting. He felt like being with her.

So often, during their two years together, he found it hard to listen to her, but all of a sudden, it was a joy. He was witnessing the emergence of a woman who's entire being was present. It was a joy to witness the arrival of a soul all the way into the presence of a person, the arrival of a person into her own presence.

They decided to go to MG Road. He needed paint supplies. They held hands. They bought things, they ate dinner, they walked, they shopped, they talked. Suryo talked as if she might be ready to leave the ashram.

He looked up at the city of Pune, above the rooftops, at the sky, and he thought about the world beyond the garden they'd been in for nearly a month. He felt exhilarated. His spirit leapt to Nepal and around the world, to the United States and back again.

When work needs to be done at home, it's not time to be away from home. When work is all done at home, it's time to be anywhere at all.

At home, she read, and he read, and they listened to music. He began to dance. She watched him.

"I like you best when you dance," she said.

"Don't look at me," he said, "I'm not performing. I just feel like dancing."

He felt free to dance in front of the dancer. He played Ladysmith Black Mambaso, the Neville Brothers, and Bonnie Raitt. Bonnie Raitt sang one of his favorite songs, one of the all time great drunk songs.

I got some whiskey from a barroom,
got some cocaine from a friend,
and I had to keep on moving, baby,
until I was back in your arms again.
Well, I'm guilty. Honey, I'm guilty.
And I'll be guilty all the rest of my life.

It takes a whole lot of medicine, darling,
for me to pretend that I'm somebody else.

It was the true story of his drinking life. He understood how hard it was to be someone you're not. He danced in her room. He could feel her coming home to herself, and it allowed him to feel the home he'd found inside himself, even more. They were two lost children, and they had come home. They were free to play. They could be with each other, and they could be near each other, because they could be at home in themselves.

In the restaurant, earlier, he told the story of the ending of the movie, **Resurrection**. The woman, played by Ellen Burstyn, a psychotherapist and then a famous miracle healer, becomes, at the end of the movie, the anonymous operator of a gas station. A large mobile home pulls into her tiny desert gas station, and a family gets out. They have a son who is dying of leukemia. The woman gives the boy a puppy he plays with, and she holds the boy in a warm embrace.

She's a healer, and perhaps she's healing the boy, but it doesn't matter. She loves him, and he can feel her love, and he loves the puppy.

As Steve told the story, he began to cry. It surprised him. Despite seeing the movie several times, it was the first time he'd reacted so strongly.

He cried for the child in his own heart, for the child in Suryo's heart, and perhaps, for all the children. Whenever a child dies, it means a soul doesn't get to come all the way into this life. It's a sadness that so many souls are kept from this life, not only by death, but by people not being as alive as they can be.

This is not an awful life. This is not a vale of tears, except for those who forget to cry. This is not a joke, except for those who forget to laugh. This is the land of souls. Everyone is soul itself. All are children of the light. Steve danced for joy, for a moment, and that's all it takes.

This is my story. I am the soul of Steve.

A Taste of the True

I went to life drawing and Suryo went to dance. The leader of the life-drawing group was a different guy. The model was a tall man, another painter, from New York, and I recognized him as Suryo's partner in the tantra group. He moved with the music, in a slow-motion dance of changing poses. I remember thinking the model might be male. As much as I liked looking at the nude female body, I was glad for the change.

Then the model arrived, late, and she was the same one from last week. It didn't work for me. My energy dropped. I became resentful. I closed down. My drawing became perfunctory. I didn't like the girl. Her energy was shallow. She flopped about on the mat in the center of the room. She watched the drawing, as if the artists were drawing her.

It doesn't serve the art for the model to be checking constantly to see if it meets her approval. The creative process is not a process of ego, unless it gets stuck there. I was stuck. If I'm clear, I'm not as affected by the model's attitude. I can paint past her ego, but I can't get past my own, in order to make the leap.

Suryo's revelation pulled me out of myself. I spent Thursday feeling her changes. During the night, I felt more alone than I have for three weeks. It seemed like a healthy aloneness. The unconscious waiting for her had me occupied with her. As I watched her come into her own spirit, I began to feel my own spirit more clearly. It made me recognize my aloneness, and it changed my energy.

I became restless. I wanted to leave the ashram immediately and get on with my life. Back in the States, my life was energized and active, and staying in the ashram was contemplative and passive.

It was a strong creative atmosphere, and the artist in me was pleased, but the warrior in me, the doer, was on hold, in a state of quiet readiness. I was torn. I couldn't get into the painting or drawing, and I couldn't hit the road. I began to imagine beginning a new life in New Mexico.

I spent the time, in life drawing, listening to the music, moving my body, singing to myself, and ignoring the model. The leader kept calling me back to the model, but I didn't care.

After her group, Suryo said she felt just as clearly that she's a dancer, even though her group spent the time doing exercises. The exercises brought back body memories that re-confirmed her sense of being a dancer.

We went for waffles in the Bodhidharma Cafe. When people put in their names on the waffle waiting list, they often use fictitious names and not their sannyasin names. The man who made the waffles called out, **Jacqueline Kennedy . . . Nancy Reagan . . . Charles Dickens . . .**

Later, in the lunch line, standing by myself, I looked out across the hundreds of people and I tried to **see** them. I wasn't able to focus on them, either as egos or as souls. I told Suryo about it. It reminded me of my life as a poet in San Francisco. I remembered walking in the Mission District, a neighborhood teeming with vitality like the ashram.

I looked at the crowded population of a street corner, looking for the sight of soul. It wasn't hard to see the ones that were present, because most beings are stuck in their egos or their functions. Almost no one is consciously being soul, except the ones who are, and they can be identified.

In the ashram, it wasn't so easy. I thought the confusion was natural, given the spiritual challenge of the environment. Here were a thousand souls, in various stages of emergence, and a thousand egos in various stages of struggle. Egos don't like to be let go, fired, put out to pasture, or even loved to death. Egos like things just as they are. Egos love control, their own or the control of others.

Suryo was in a state of shock. Her creative self was churning and burning. She couldn't do anything without being overwhelmed with pictures from herself, the dancer. Many of her pictures were of New Mexico, of the house she saw as a place for the dancer. I skipped painting for another day. We walked out from the ashram and sat down. As she talked, I began to draw the house I imagined for myself.

It was in New Mexico. I'd only been able to imagine half of it before, and with her guidance, I finished the house. We talked about when to leave, about winter and summer, about money, and then we laughed. If we stay in our true selves, the time will always be right, and the way will be made clear.

I accompanied her home. She was raw with volcanic bursts of energy and exhaustion. She needed to take care of herself. She needed to rest. I went to

play soccer. I walked up to the boys at the soccer field, and one of those tiny moments occurred that are often overlooked but are the meat of life.

The boys were glad to see me. I could feel their spirits move warmly toward me. Then, one of the boys touched my arm. It was a gentle, brief contact, but it was a recognition. People often touch each other, but it remains body to body. I received the greeting like a deep code between spies on a busy corner.

It changed. The soccer game never happened. Too few people showed up. I played basketball barefoot on a court of large granite slabs. I cut my big toe on a piece of loose stone. The ball hit me hard on the mouth and jolted my head and neck. Going home, the rickshaw driver pretended ignorance and tried to overcharge me. It reminded me of Suryo's lunch-time trip to the tailor's with Vidya, when she saw the driver and Vidya get into a screaming argument.

It seemed to be in the air, people seemed out of sync, or Osho was speaking to us from Beyond, like a jerk who didn't want us to leave, or like a trickster, who wanted to ensure our departure by making life annoying. Suryo was tired of mosquitoes, heat, dirt, and showers that don't work, and all the other charming annoyances that make life interesting in foreign climes.

It was interesting to her to watch her friend go nuts with the rickshaw driver. It seemed that being a success in the Buddhafield didn't do much for social graces or for getting along with people. There seems to be a kind of self-righteousness in the Buddhafield. I recognize it in my own experience as righteous selfishness. Counteracting the cultural conditioning of thousands of years isn't easy, and being nice to the world doesn't seem to help the change.

I came through the minefield of finding myself, without anybody being killed, and it seems possible to be able to move in the world without so much strife. Sometimes, there's strife in the air, and it helps not to take it personally.

In the Madhuban, several Iranians, in India as students, got into an argument with someone. My inclination in such situations is not confrontational. Instead of trying to rise above it, I lower my energy and slip in under it. If you try to overcome the raucous noise of a crowd, you

end up shouting. If you lower your tone, you can come in under it and carry on a quiet conversation.

Suryo wanted none of it. We walked to the Blue Diamond, to look for something to read. All of a sudden, nothing was of interest to her. She was bored and restless in the atmosphere of the ashram. I could feel the sense of not being here myself.

I think I'm in India to be with her, to be in her world, to be with her while she comes to her true sense of self. In a way, I'm on vacation in the ashram, while she's working. It's inner work, but it isn't play. I'm here to play. Now it seemed like it was time to combine work and play into action.

I bought a translation of Aristophanes, the first great comic playwright, and she bought a spy novel. On the walk to and from, she noticed the air pollution, and I acted out different voices.

"I'm entertaining you, as we walk," I said.

"You're entertaining yourself."

"Yeah, but you like it."

"I do like it."

We told stories of the teachers in our lives. All through my life, I had good teachers for writing, but my art teachers were consistently bad. As I gave myself permission to be an artist, again, I remembered all the way back to my first childhood experiences of negative reaction. Letting go of negative memories helps release the positive energy. Throughout her life, Suryo had good dance teachers, but her father made her feel like a whore for being physical and sensual.

One of her dance exercises was to stand and move sensuously, and then imagine various people watching. When she imagined her father watching her, she remembered his scorn and his rejection. I remembered an aunt of mine claiming herself as my greatest influence, mixed with unclear sexual aggression.

It seems that it isn't society, religion, and politics that have the power in our lives, it's people. People with small power wield that power in our

lives like a broadsword. Our fear of them imprisons us as surely as if they were Hitler or Torquemada.

At home, I needed another fresh lime and soda, so I went back to the Madhuban and sat near another table of Iranians. Back in the flat, with a bottle of soda for Suryo, I said, "You know the energy in Zamu's we were feeling the other day? It isn't Mafia. It's Iranian. If I'd grown up in that country, I'd have that energy in me, too."

I went to bed and read about the glory and the ignominy in Aristophane's Athens, where it was believed that only Athenians were fully human and therefore divine, and everyone else was a foreigner and therefore not divine. It was a 'highly advanced' society.

I got the spare mattress that Sudesh used for massage. (She bought herself a new coconut mattress.) I put it under my own mattress. I settled in for a good night's sleep.

I wondered what's going to happen. Do we stay or leave? Do we go to Nepal or back to the States? I know from my own experiences, reconnecting with my true self, that the first contact is powerful, but it takes time for it to become habit. It takes time to keep from being pulled back into the familiar trap of what's called the mind, the ego, the personality, or the dysfunctional self. I know that the true self is true, and that the truth sets me free. It absolutely ruins the life of the ego to get a taste of the true.

Sitting Back in the Soul

I spent two days focused on Suryo's changes. I didn't paint for three days. I woke up feeling the strong pull back into my center. I went to the art studio early. No one else was there. It'd had been three days since I painted. There was a drawing board and a large tablet leaning against the long vertical beams that hold up the roof, where I was used to setting up shop. The beams are wood, metal, or bamboo, wrapped in cloth like mummy legs. The walls and ceiling are cloth panels.

I moved the painting papers to the side a bit, got a straw mat, retrieved a canvas from the wall where they're usually stacked. The canvasses are clipped or taped to large plywood boards or hung from lines across the walls.

I got my new paints and the old ones, too, from under the rack where the cushions are stacked, got a cushion, an apron from one of the cabinets, and a new plastic pallet and a small ceramic dish for turpentine. I created a painting environment that felt good, and began to work on the Kandinsky.

I wanted to do a canvas that went through several layers of change, and it was a pleasure to keep adding to it and changing it. Colors were piled on top of colors. Each addition changed the whole, and the colors began to feel dense and sculptural, like I wanted them to be.

The Brazilian, Lina, who took over for Gyanbodhi, showed up and asked me for my food pass, as the voucher cards are called. I said I wanted a new sheet of rag paper, as well, and we went to the supply cupboard. She charged me only forty rupees. She discovered I overpaid five rupees a day for the afternoons. The morning sessions cost more than the afternoons, so she made an adjustment and gave me the rag paper for free.

I put the paper next to my mat and went back to the painting. A man who looked German or Scandinavian, walked in and picked up my paper and examined it. I assumed he was the painter whose materials I moved, so I said, "Are those yours?"

"Hmmm. Yes," he said, clearly disturbed by the new painter.

Two days away from the studio, and I was already the new guy. The man had stacked up a couple of tables to make a chest-high painting surface for

himself, and he'd appropriated the whole corner of the studio. He busily rearranged himself, and I stayed where I was. After a few minutes getting settled, the man still seemed ill at ease, so I said, "Do you have enough room for yourself?"

"Hmm. Yes. I think so," he said, so I went back to painting.

It felt good to recognize the man's disturbance. I'm the same as he is. I need to make a space for myself to do creative work. It isn't easy to get clear, and stay clear, enough to allow for real creative work to come through. It felt good to honor that need in someone else, as well as in myself.

After a while, the Kandinsky felt good for the day, and I started a new painting using white, light greens, gray and several yellows, with some blue and brown and a little red. The other painter, at his makeshift table, flipped his canvas this way and that, like a tailor making a suit, rapidly snipping and clipping, tightening a little here, loosening a little there. From time to time, a woman asked his advice about her watercolor painting of bright leaves. He gave her efficient advice about color tones and what goes with what.

"This guy's a pro," I thought. That meant I was an amateur.

I'm glad to be an amateur, no matter how good my paintings are, and I think they're as good as any. Amateur means one who paints for the love of it, for the fun of it, for the joy of it, and I like playing and experimenting. I like the focus and the freedom of painting in the pure and simple love of it.

After time passed, Suryo came up behind me, and within a few minutes, we were changed and sitting in the German Bakery, talking to her friends and a guy from St. Louis. I liked her friends, and I liked the guy from Missouri, a fellow Midwesterner, with the gentle, innocent, unsophisticated manner I have, whenever I think of myself, kindly, as a dumbfuck from Illinois.

Then, I was angry and uncomfortable. The tiny stools in the German Bakery were uncomfortable. My butt was sore. The place was crowded. I felt imprisoned. That's the word for it. I felt trapped in India, stuck in an asylum for overfed bullshit artists, glued to a woman who couldn't make up her mind who she was, who wanted to stay in the ASS-RAM, forEVER, and shit, I felt lousy.

We left the cafe and walked home. On the walk home, I blew my nose, my ass, and my mouth. I bitched and moaned. I complained. I criticized. I told her all my fears and misgivings. I was out of whack, out of balance, out of sorts. She suggested that maybe it was time for me to go deeper and use the ashram for its intended purpose, to connect with one's own inner peace.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know all about that."

In fact, I began to see that the ashram was an interesting place when it was new and different, but it wasn't, anymore. It wasn't new, or different, or interesting. The whole facade of Club Meditation had worn off. I was done with Club Med for the Mind. What to do? What to do?

In the Madhuban for fresh lime and soda, she asked me if I could just watch my mind, if I could watch all the confusion, anger, and resentment.

"Wait a minute," I said, "What's all this watching business? Watching the mind. I don't understand. What's to watch?"

"You watch the pictures that come up in the mind."

"Yeah, well, when I have some clarity, I don't get it about this business of pictures, of the movie, of the visual. I mean, I'm visual, but I don't get all this visual business."

"There. You just did it. I saw you do it," she said.

It was her training and her ability to tell, by the position of the head and the eyes, how a person took in information or how they processed information. I looked to the right, as I mentioned having clarity.

"It's not pictures," I said, and a sudden change came over me.

I was leaning forward, practically falling out of my skin, and suddenly, I sat back, inside myself, like sitting down in an armchair and relaxing completely.

"Wow," she said, "Your face completely changed. This is the Steve I really love. This is the one I love."

I sat inside myself, and I felt it change. I came back into my true being. In the chair where the ego had tried to hold sway, the soul now sat.

“How do you feel, now?” she asked.

“I feel good. I’m fine. I don’t have to solve the problem. I don’t have to get out of prison. I’m not in prison. I can stay here. I’m fine.”

I was in a state of being that I know but don’t feel all the time.

“What happened?” she asked.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I don’t want to act like that. I got lost.”

I traced it back. I let myself feel the confusion. I let myself go back in time to the moment it began.

“It was when you came into the art studio. I got up with you, and we left, and I got lost outside myself. I have to remember to close off that time, to put some closure around it. When I paint, I’m my soul self. I’m open and creative. The space around me changes. The space between me and the canvas becomes open. There’s a transference between me and the painting. There’s no ego and no distance.”

“I have to remember you’re in a kind of meditation when you paint,” Suryo said.

“It is meditation, and I need to recognize it and not carry that openness out into the nasty world.”

There’s a way to remain in my soul self but not be so vulnerable to the raucous ego noise of the world. I sat, feeling my self as the whole being. It made me quiet, secure, and happy. It made me feel a smile in my heart, and in all of my body.

Suryo looked at me. “What does your soul think about the ashram? Is it a safe place?”

I couldn’t speak. My mind wanted to say, “Yes, it’s the Buddhafield,” and “Yes, Osho is a true Master,” and “Yes, it’s a safe place,” but my whole self couldn’t speak.

I felt a gentle sadness. My mind wanted to say “It’s a lie, it isn’t a safe place, it’s nothing special,” but I couldn’t say that, either. Finally, my true being, my whole self, my soul self, my true self, Noname, spoke.

“It’s a place. Sometimes it’s safe, and sometimes it’s not. It’s like other places. The Buddhafield is here and everywhere. If you are safe, it’s a Buddhafield.”

“But it’s set up to be safe,” Suryo said. “It’s created to be a safe place for people to know their true being.”

“Yes, and it can happen more in such places, but it can also be misleading. It can’t be assumed. It can be easier to be true to yourself in this place, but it can also be easy to act as if it’s happening, when it’s not. It’s a mistake to call it the Buddhafield, when it’s only a place where it can happen.”

Again, as always, I was amazed and amused to feel the transformation from the erratic ego confusion of the mind to the rich, full, alive peacefulness of the whole self. Wholeness is the word that best describes it.

When I’m in my ego self, I lean forward, I fall out of myself, I become whipped by the winds of the world. When I sit back, into my whole self, I feel warm and protected in my body and my being. There’s a kind of fullness of being, that in the past I imagined only exists in others. I can’t speak for others, but it’s real in me.

People Dancing On the Earth

I took a rickshaw to an AA meeting near the General Post Office, the GPO. I'd come to know the men by name, and they were always friendly. The discussion was about making decisions, and it reminded me of the changes of three years ago, when I decided to go on a long car trip, back to the Midwest, to my college reunion, to visit my parents, to see my childhood hometown in Nebraska, to visit friends in Santa Fe, to spend a week in Los Angeles and a week in San Francisco.

It was a trip I longed to take, but I was afraid. My car, a '68 Volvo, was in poor shape, and I had almost no money. I heard someone at a meeting say, "It's OK to have desires, as long as your well-being is not dependent on the outcome."

Her statement triggered my memory. I remembered being a kid in Nebraska. My mother was sitting on the couch, holding a magazine. She casually asked me if I'd be interested in going to a dude ranch that summer. My heart leaped in my throat, and my belly churned.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" my heart cried out.

"Uh. I don't know," I said. I didn't know how to tell my desires.

"Well," my mother said, "if you're not that interested, well then, never mind," and she went back to flipping pages.

I never went to a dude ranch. I never got to enjoy my desire, either. To have a desire, to want something, meant to me, at that age, that if it didn't happen, or if it went badly, or if I didn't manage to make it happen, then I was a fool, or a failure, or both.

I finally came to realize that telling my desire was a good thing, and that the outcome of my desire wasn't written in stone, and it wasn't up to me. After the good feeling of making a decision, the outcome was out of my hands. I deprive myself of the pleasure of the desire, if I'm attached to the outcome. I learned to let the outcome go and enjoy the desire.

To make a decision is to act on faith. All faith is an act of faith. When I got home from the meeting, Suryo was ready to eat. We took a rickshaw to the Blue Diamond, and we ate in the China Cafe.

I told her about the discussion of decisions, and then I proposed that we **decide** to go to New Mexico. It didn't matter what happened, after that. What mattered was making the decision.

"I commit to moving to New Mexico," I said, boldly.

"I commit to moving to New Mexico," she said, more shyly.

We made faces of fear, shock, and happiness. We started talking about doing work we could value. It wasn't the kind of talk that comes from speculation, it was the kind that wells up out of intuition.

"How are we going to do this?" she asked. "We don't have any money. We don't know what things are like in New Mexico."

"I know," I said. "I don't know. But it sure feels good."

We fell back in love. She began to get dance ideas.

"I don't know, Bone. I'm not a professional dancer. I don't want to be a dance therapist. I want to be with people who are dancing on the earth. I don't want it to be New Agey. It's like the Indians, I guess."

"I like that," I say, "People Dancing on the Earth."

"It feels right in New Mexico," she said. "I don't feel it in the Northwest, even though the Northwest is beautiful, but I feel it in New Mexico. I want to dance on the earth, that's all, like ritual, with drums, connecting with the earth."

"People Dancing on the Earth."

"Yeah."

I got to go on my car trip. There was enough money, and the old blue Volvo lasted nearly seven thousand miles. It turned into a portable Buddhafield.

Non-Love

When I got up in the morning, Suryo seemed like a stranger. I felt indifferent to her. At breakfast, as we sat near each other, in the German Bakery's tiny outdoor cafe, I liked her. I leaned my head against her head, like a toast between fine china goblets. I didn't feel in love with her, and love came. Being 'in love' drowns out the small moments of real life.

Later, when I set up to paint, when I was thinking of nothing in particular, she came in. I told her, on an impulse, to stand on the six-inch ledge that runs the perimeter of the art studio marking the wall where there is no wall. She stood on it, and we were eye to eye. I held her and sighed.

"The sannyasin sigh," I said.

I held her some more.

"Melt," she said.

She left, and I went back to my painting.

Often, when I think of nothing in particular, I'm in a state I call non-time. It's time without boundaries, time without urgency, time without expectations. It's creative time without anticipation. Non-time.

I was in non-love with Suryo. She was Suryo. I was Steve. When love declares itself, there's time and space to recognize it and act on it. Very simple and easy to miss.

Lina admired my painting. I came around the corner, I saw it fresh, as if someone else had done it, and I liked it.

"I thought it was muddy," I said, "but it isn't."

"Oh, no," she said, "It's full of light."

She thought I'd taken sannyas (initiation) in the morning. Maybe I did. There's just no name for it.

After a while, I left the studio and went walking, inside the ashram. As I walked, I felt the fullness of my whole being. I was soul. I was anonymous

being. I was at peace with myself, and I was at peace with the world around me.

As I walked, as surely as grace was with me, it vanished. It disappeared. It was gone. I was stunned. Where did complete serenity go to? I stood off to the side of the large traffic circle, the marble path that rings Buddha Hall. I thought about what was occurring. I was walking in the mid-day crowd of robed sannyasins and others, at one with my soul self, I heard music, I moved to the side, and turned, I stopped and looked up at the passing faces, and, suddenly as thunder, I felt separate from myself.

I tried to get that state of grace back, but what I got was an imitation of grace. I went back to walking. It helped. I stopped and looked at others. Instantly, I became fearful and judgmental. Why? I heard a voice in my mind telling me I couldn't feel genuinely connected to my whole being. It was a privilege reserved for the enlightened. I stopped thinking about it and walked. The spirit returned. I realized what happened.

It didn't go away. I did. I saw how easily I went out of my own spirit. I walked through the new part of Nullah Park, behind the ashram. It was peaceful and beautiful, with small grottos and cul de sacs, where I stood and felt the non-judgmental embrace of nature. I saw large sculpted heads of Eastern gods among the leaves and vines.

I went back to the art studio and began a new canvas. I decided to paint the face of my soul, my true being. Quickly, I began brushing great amounts of lemon yellow onto a large, vertical canvas. Within a few strokes, without conscious content, I drew a Buddha, like some of those I saw in the park.

I added color, color, and more color, in swipes and patches, here, there, everywhere. I blended the dozens of colors with a brush loaded with white. The face changed to the frightened ego face of an ordinary man, wide-eyed, lips open, as if to speak some fear.

I left the canvas to go to soccer. At the field, there was a game in progress. Along with a Frenchman and six Italians, I stood by while fifty Iranians played in or watched a spirited game.

"These Iranians play a surprisingly gentle game," I said to the Frenchman, "and they sit in the cafes looking like hired killers."

The French guy laughed. It was true. There was no rough stuff, no hard faces, only some pretty good soccer, nothing spectacular. At the end of one game, between red shirts and white shirts, a third team of blue shirts came on the field.

One of the Italians went on the field and talked to one of the older Iranians. After some gesticulations of protest, dismay, and resignation, the Italian came to the side and announced that the Iranians had rented the field everyday for a week. We agreed to try for 8AM, Monday. There was no other choice. The Indians we usually played with were nowhere to be seen.

Back at the ashram, I caught part of an Osho video being played on the TV in the outdoor area called the Osho Cafe.

On the tape, Osho said, "Enlightenment is nothing more than being completely at peace with who you are. You are who you've always wanted to be. You are who you always have been and who you always will be."

I felt completely at peace with that. The only problem was that sometimes I wasn't disconnected from that truth. I walked to Mariam for afternoon chai, and on the way, words came to me, and they made me laugh, they felt so true.

"I will declare myself enlightened, when I am no longer un-enlightened."

Enlightenment isn't the problem. It's the habit of being un-enlightened. I remembered the episode, from earlier, of losing the clarity of being in the body of my own soul. My mind took a quick glimpse at all the other bodies and souls, and it threw a monkey wrench in the works.

What if I stay in the body as soul? What if I let go of the familiar self, the man I think I am? What if I let go of the familiar but addictive mind? My mind tells me I'll be branded a presumptuous, arrogant fool. How dare I believe that I am a realized soul? How can I keep it up, in this world? Are too many years lost, compromising the truth?

As a sensitive and fearful young man, I pretended to be ruthless and fearless. As a poet, I pretended to be a regular guy. As a child of God, I pretended to be the child of parents. As a soul in a human body, I pretended to be a worldly human with a secret soul. As a drunk, I pretended to be sober. When I listened to the still, small voice of God, I pretended I was only making it up. Completely at peace in my being, I

pretended I was pretending. How can I let the truth all the way into every part of my conscious life?

I want to keep doing it, until it's commonplace. Ordinary ecstasy. The way to let ecstasy be ordinary is to let it be, each day, more and more, until it's commonplace in my existence. It's only the truth which lies under everything else.

"I'll declare myself enlightened, when I'm no longer unenlightened."

I laughed. When the unenlightenment is replaced by enlightenment, I'll know it. No need to push the river I swim in, or the river that flows in me. It's the same river.

I considered whether or not to go to the White Robe Brotherhood. I went home. I remembered hearing one of the older sannyasins declare to some of her friends, "The White Robe Brotherhood is the most important part of the commune."

I might want to come back for the musical performance that was to take place after the evening discourse, a performance of classical Indian music, performed by a famous virtuoso and his equally famous tabla player. I found Suryo in bed. She felt sick. Her back ached. She was bug-bitten and tired. She was looking forward to a week on the beach in Goa.

Goa is a day's bus or train ride from Pune. Along with another couple, we were thinking of taking a little trip to Goa. The State of Goa, settled by the Portuguese, is a popular seaside retreat for Indians and Westerners.

After dinner at the Blue Diamond, we walked to the ashram to check out the music. Everyone was in civilian clothes. It was the first night of Osho's birthday week. His birthday is coming up, December 11th, five days from now. The ashram was beautiful. Lights were strung along the path around Buddha Hall, and the glow from the lights gave a luminous depth to the jungle vegetation. The hall was only a third full. A large stage was set for the musicians. There were bouquets and great standing arrangements of flowers, on a stage carpeted with reds, purples and greens, with golden pillows, here and there.

I remarked to Suryo how surprisingly small the crowd was, just as the musicians passed us, on their way into the hall. The hall is the size of a

football field, with a cantilevered roof and open walls hung with white mosquito netting. It's called "the largest in the world."

The musicians were described with great praise, and the sannyasin crowd, complemented by many locals, was 'lovingly reminded' not to applaud until the end of each piece. The musicians turned out to be the equally famous sons of the expected stars, who were unable to attend.

When the music began, Suryo sat with her back against the raised dais where Osho's chair is usually placed, and I stood by the side, against the mosquito netting but near the speakers.

Suryo listened with her eyes shut, and I listened with mine open. I watched the musicians. I saw their art moving in them.

Before the music began, in a short introductory videotape, Osho spoke of the need to let oneself go into the music, in order to fully experience its 'language without meaning'. The pieces were long, the first nearly forty-five minutes, long enough to create a passage of feeling in the space of time.

During the second piece, someone left a chair near the front, and I took it. After the second piece, Suryo came and sat in front of me, and we snuggled. The woman next to us left her chair, and she took it.

"Your art buddy is right behind you," Suryo said. I turned around to see Lina smiling. During the third piece, Suryo and I whispered to each other.

"I like the tabla player," she said.

"I like the guy playing the dead cow with the copper kettle around it's neck," I said.

The swans in the pond by the entrance to Osho's Samadi, honked loudly, in response to the sarangi's wail.

"I bet that swan is going crazy trying to figure out who's making all the noise," I said.

We left in the middle of the third piece. As I was putting my shoes on, I noticed Suryo standing in the roped-off area where Osho, when he was

alive, got out of his Rolls-Royce to enter the hall for his nightly discourse. She was in a quiet, reverential mood.

I came up behind her, hugged her and sang softly, "Heeeeeere's Osho!" like Ed McMahon introducing Johnny Carson. She turned to me.

"You're so irreverent."

"Me? I'm irreverent? How can I be irreverent with the Master of Irreverence? Osho is the Groucho Marx of spiritual leaders. The guy you're being reverent toward tells fuck jokes to his congregation."

Referring to Osho as Groucho was, for me, high praise. I felt generous of spirit. But, apparently, not generous of rupees. In the rickshaw, going home, the driver said, "Fifteen rupees."

"Fifteen rupees?" I said, "Never fifteen rupees. Five rupees in the daytime, ten at night."

"OK, thirteen rupees," the driver said, "It's very late. I can't make any money."

"Ten rupees," I said. "I'll tell you what. You drive ten rupees worth, and we'll get out and walk the rest of the way."

The driver was quiet. He drove to the Nirmal Apartments. I gave him twelve rupees.

"Here's twelve rupees. You're a lucky man," I said, smiling.

"I'm a lucky man," the driver said, halfheartedly, doubtfully.

"A good man or a lucky man," I said.

"You're in a wild mood," Suryo said.

"Yeah, I know. I think it has to do with the feeling I have, wanting to be out in the world."

At dinner, earlier in the evening, we talked about our female and male energies. Her male had been out in the world, making life difficult for her female, back home in her heart. My female had been out representing me,

somehow, while my male had been doing the artwork. It was confusing, sometimes, all this male and female stuff. There were so many layers to it. I've been getting more female in my painting and noticing it. Even though it's the female energy that underlies all my creativity, I began to see how both were tied up in the creating, and the male was interested in the outside world.

Suryo was letting her little girl dance, and her woman was the one who wanted to go out in the world.

"Well, you're a woman, and I'm a man," I said, "It only makes sense."

"You're so brilliant," she said, "How do you come up with all these awarenesses?"

"It's simple. I listen to you, and I repeat back what you say," I said, ensuring a place in her heart for at least another few hours.

A Fierce Tranquility

I did the laundry. I've been doing laundry every other day. I like it. It means filling a bucket with warm water and soap and putting whatever clothes are dirty into the bucket, giving them a good workout, and then rinsing them. Rinsing is more effort than washing. It's impossible to know when all the soap is out. One method is to use very little soap, but then, there's the chance the clothes aren't clean. But it's not a thorough cleaning, anyway.

After rinsing, comes wringing out, which I do in two stages. The first is a general wringing, done in the shower room, onto the floor, which drains into a hole in the corner. There are three faucets in the wall, and the entire room is designed like a basin for bathing, washing, and toilet use.

In my long bedroom, I've strung clothesline from one end to the other. The second wringing comes just before the hanging. Maybe it's all that drowning, wringing, and hanging I enjoy so much. If the laundry has any ego left, by the time I'm through with it, it's hung out to dry.

It's fun to wring out great splashes of water onto the floor of my room. It isn't anything I could do, as a kid or as a responsible adult. Doing the laundry, I get to be a kid while I'm being responsible. I get to sit on the toilet seat, naked, with my balls hanging down, and mash the laundry into a blue bucket.

I slap it on the floor if I want. I make wads out of our clothes, and I splash water on the bedroom floor. It's not a new career, but it's fun. We let the ayah go. What's the point, when I have ayah in my blood?

After seeing Suryo off to her first all-day dance group, I hired a rickshaw to take me out to St. Patrick's Cathedral, next to the race track. It's a thirty-rupee ride. I tried to get it down to twenty-five, but no luck. I dealt with a rickshaw boss, who negotiated for his drivers.

It was a beautiful, sunny morning, and the sun felt good, out in the wide-open spaces by the edge of the city. In the heart of Pune, the sun seems to add to the pervasive, subtly oppressive combination of sub-tropical climate and pollution.

I was early for the meeting, so I walked beyond the cathedral, down a path, past a big open sports field, where scattered bands of boys played what looked like a blend of cricket and baseball, a kind of stickball, past a bunch of young kids squatting by a fence, playing a game in the dirt. The Indian dirt seems ancient, like dirt beaten clean of its character, dirt without nutrients, dirt without life, like the dust of bones left in the sun for centuries.

I watched the children play with the same energy as children everywhere. I expected them to notice me, the foreigner, but they paid me no mind. There was a bridge across a narrow stream that must be a torrent in the rainy season, because the bridge is high and long. A man was being given a shave on a path a hundred yards away. He sat shirtless, while another man did the shaving. A family of goats, coming in my direction, passed the man and a crowd of children.

I wanted to see more green. Everything looked worn out. The people looked worn smooth. Indians don't seem to have any rough edges. They're easy going, even, as Rashid said, docile.

America is a new country. The earliest Americans lived in a virgin land compared to India. I imagine the first settlers, a polite word for invaders, in absolute awe of the land. Most came from a Europe that was already old and tired. America must have seemed like El Dorado, like the Garden of Eden. Except for those pesky ancient Americans they called Indians. The American natives seemed docile, at first. In time, they were worn down, beaten down.

There's a smoothness in the American Indians, as well, and an equally remarkable peacefulness. It's different, but I'm stirred to think of the potential for all humans, to be at peace with themselves, to live in acceptance, to have a reverence for all of life and not just a few selected parts of it.

It reminds me of the Mayans in the Yucatan. Among the Mayans a couple of times in recent years, I saw a fierce tranquility. I saw people who lived on the earth and dealt with their natural beings, day by day, in a world of necessity and deep connection, to their souls, to each other, to the land, and to a god they felt in their daily existence. The combination, of hard reality and a sense of belonging, gave them, I thought, a fierce tranquility. Not angry, not docile, but naturally fierce and naturally tranquil.

It's the sense I have of the ancient Americans, the true ancestors of America, whether anyone, other than the natives, knows it or not. There's a deep, ancient power buried in the consciousness of America, untapped and unrecognized. Most Americans come from somewhere else, and they lack the deep connection with the land they call home.

It's the beginning of a lesson I'm learning, far from my native land. Most of the world is ancient. America is a baby, in the way it thinks of itself, the way it acts. Beneath its feet, however, is a land of vitality and forgiveness. It's easy to ignore the natural world, when the natural world is abundant and giving. It's easy to ignore the wisdom of ancestors, when they've been abandoned to a few pages in a history book.

I sat in the small meeting with half a dozen men, and I was one of the boys. When I talked, I wasn't a visitor. I was one more person who was there to be at peace with himself and his fellows. I want only to belong, on the simplest level, to the human race.

To be enlightened is a lovely and frightening miracle. To be at peace with others in a small room is a simple, rich reality. I want to be all I am, and when I feel the common bond of sharing a quiet hour with others, it touches me deeper than I can express.

What bothers me about the ashram isn't the wisdom of the people trying to live in its truth but the dimensions of the place. The ashram is big, showy, and grandiose. It seems to have great pretensions for such simple truth.

We are who we are. We're alive. We're connected to the spirit of the universe. Our minds get in our way. We put ourselves out of touch with the inherent truth of our lives. We let our minds guide us, when in truth, our minds need guidance. Our minds need to rest and take instruction from our hearts. Our fullness is in our silence. God is all around us. God lives in silence. God is love.

My human nature is in conflict with all the claptrap, all the paraphernalia, all the business, of the ashram. If I can feel my whole being at peace, in a tiny room with a few people and a small cup for expenses, what's all the fuss? If changing the world means people coming home to their true nature, why all the commotion?

There is a secret to human struggle. We create it ourselves. We are the victims of our own best intentions. We decide to solve our problems by using the same methods that create the problems in the first place.

The human mind is such a beautiful cart that we put in front of the horse. When the horse becomes crippled by the cart we redesign the cart so it can carry the poor horse, as well. Before I left the States, I worked, painting houses. I teamed up with a young, clever, funny, skillful, hardworking sannyasin. It was a marriage of convenience, with dreams of love. It became a kind of hell. I couldn't understand how a student of Osho could be such a hard-ass, so concerned about people's opinions, hard driving and then lazy, deceitful and then generous, a nit-picking supervisor and a fuck-off worker, when he wasn't driven and ambitious.

We had it out, finally. I confronted him about his judgmental opinions.

"I thought I was working with a regular guy," he said, "I didn't know I was working with some sensitive sannyasin woman!"

I jumped.

"Yes! Yes! That's EXACTLY who you're working with," I said.

I painted houses for fifteen years, and in the previous six months, I had begun to paint as an artist, as a whole being, free and at peace in the world. I told my clients that I might not seem normal in my work patterns. I gave them **The Zen of Housepainting**, as an introduction to the sort of person they were hiring to paint their house. Those who hired me seemed delighted with my way of working. It was nothing more than working as a healthy being and not as a traditional commercial house painter, full of push and pull.

"You can't do that in the world," Willy said, "When I'm in Pune, I'm as easy-going and in my heart as the next guy, but out in the world, you have to operate under different rules."

He was convinced that the two ways of living were not compatible. At least not then, not there, not under those circumstances.

"They are compatible," I said. "Look. I'm sorry. I owe you an apology. I didn't tell you, very clearly, who I am. I forgot what I'm doing, with you, but I believe it's possible to be in your heart and still make a living. It

doesn't seem like it's possible, because nobody does it. And nobody does it, because they don't think it's possible. I know that making a living and being a whole human being are compatible. Nobody does it, because nobody does it. That's all. There's no more to it than that. If people start doing it, then it can be done."

It's what bothers me in the Buddhafield. There seems to be an inherent negativity in creating a place, apart from the rest of life, in which to become real. Osho didn't say that. He said he wanted his followers to take their meditation into the world. He said he put his commune in Pune, so it wouldn't be removed from the marketplace. But it feels removed. Even that's OK, if it's only a retreat, a place to prepare for re-entry.

It's the same judgment I have about treatment centers for alcoholics. Alcoholism is a disease of separation. The solution for the disease of separation is to reach out from the depth of isolation, to try to connect with others, to begin to recognize what we have in common with the rest of the human race. It's true, however, that my first connection in real recovery was with others who were in the same boat.

At night, the two of us sat on my narrow mattress, under my mosquito net, because Suryo was fumigating her room. She told me about her first full day as a dancer. It was wonderful. Everything resonated for her. Then, she told me she wished I could join some groups in the ashram, and get what she was getting from them.

"I have an idea," I said. "I would like you to understand what an incredible time I'm having here in Pune. It's been absolutely great, and I have you to thank for it."

"Why me?"

"Because I wouldn't have come here, if it wasn't for you."

"Oh, yeah."

"I want to make a deal. How about I let you have your time here, and you let me have my time here. We can both have our own experiences."

"That's a good idea. I just wish you were in the group. I miss you, that's all."

When I helped her put her bed back together, I said, "You're just like me. I think everyone should have the same experiences I'm having. Because they work so well for me, I think they must work just as well for everyone else."

When I let go of her life, and she lets go of mine, we become more attractive to each other. We began to kiss and fondle.

"Let's make love. I want to make love," I said, "I like it when you sit on my lap and put my cock inside you."

"I like it, too."

"Let's do that. I feel real connected to you. It would really be great."

"No, I can't," she said, "I have to get up at 5:30 for Dynamic."

"OK. I'm a man. I can take it. I can walk away. Watch this."

I walked toward my bedroom and came back. We kissed some more, and our bodies kissed. My bare chest kissed her bare chest, her breasts, her soft breasts.

"No," she said, smiling. I smiled.

"OK," I said, softly, and went to my room. She followed me.

"You love this, don't you?" I said.

"Yes, I do."

"I love these breasts. They're so soft."

"They're supposed to be soft."

"Sometimes they're hard. But not tonight."

"Goodnight."

"OK. Right. Goodnight. I can do this. I can go to bed. I can go to bed and savor this."

She left. I savored it. Until I was all savored out.

The Residue of Rejection

Invisible Lion. When I got up, Suryo was still in bed. It was my new soccer day. I put my soccer clothes on, traded a fifty-rupee note for what we call small money, from her stash, and went down the stairs. Next to the second floor apartment of Pandurang S. Tarwade, our neighbor, a man was pouring fresh milk from a large stainless steel container into a smaller one. I waited while the milkman finished his delivery, and then I moved past him into the large parking area under the building at ground level.

I saw the mother dog that wakes me up some mornings at 8AM. The milkman passed to another apartment, and the dog cranked up her barking another level. It solved a mystery. The dog didn't like the milkman. The milkman came every other day, or every third day, and the dog barked, until the milkman finished his rounds, waking me and Suryo, not to mention god knows how many other people.

On the street, at 7:45, it was relatively still and peaceful. As I passed the well-kept small park next to the Nirmal Apartments, I saw a man lying in the street. Several people were around him, and without my glasses, it looked like there was a sandal stuck between the man's teeth. He might have been epileptic. He was motionless, as if he was dead, but there was no urgency in any of those attending him. A young boy watched the man on the ground with wide, dispassionate eyes.

At the corner, I caught a rickshaw. At the field, there were three Indians and an Indian sannyasin. Slowly, more came. Finally, there were six Indians, including their coach, five Italians, a Frenchman, and me. A seventh Indian came later.

I played defense, because the Indian sannyasin suggested it, like a coach does. The Italians wouldn't play defense. Except for goalie. Goalie is a showboat position. The Italian goalie caught one shot on goal with a cigarette dangling from his lips. He was the picture of nonchalance. I played badly, until I realized I resented it that I wasn't playing offense.

"Start where you are," I said to myself.

I imagined being a prisoner on Alcatraz. I advised myself, "Don't spend your time dreaming about escape. Be the best prisoner in the whole damn prison."

It got better. The second hour flew by. At the end of the game, I imagined the Italians wouldn't be friendly, wouldn't want me around, but when I went over to them, they all smiled and said the next game was on Friday.

The Indian sannyasin said, "Good game."

I played well in spurts and halfheartedly at other times.

"It's OK to be invisible," I told myself. "Sometimes, it's good to just be one of the players." Something was bothering me, but there was no evidence in the way things were going.

There was a bold, pretty, lively, strong, little, even tiny Indian girl, who lived in the shacks under the bridge, and I watched her. She's a born leader. She has two or three boys following her wherever she goes.

I wanted to help her, somehow. I wanted to tell her to come see me in America, when she's older, to give her some incentive to get free from her poverty. But she seemed capable of making her life for herself, entirely on her own.

She flipped her dirty skirt this way and that. I caught sight of her thighs. She seemed to have been beaten, as if in repeated sexual abuse, and I thought about the negative incentives that drive children to become powerful. The girl seemed out of the ordinary. She seemed driven by an inner strength. I thought about the ways people are driven to become driven.

At home, I showered, did laundry, re-hung my paintings, ironed a robe, and prepared some writing to be Xeroxed at the Xerox store by the corner. The Xerox stores are many, and they consist of a single copy machine and a clerk to run the machine, one sheet at a time.

I left the apartment feeling faint, tired, and weak. I wondered if I was ill. Maybe it was finally my time to be sick in a foreign country. The tiredness makes me move slowly, and that felt good.

I moved through the day at a snail's pace. I decided the painting I was working on, the face of my soul, was a free painting. It was one I could botch. It didn't have to be any good. It went from a beautiful, yellow Buddha, to dozens of colors, to an ordinary face, to a smeared mess, and

then I rubbed all the color off. I washed the entire thing down with turpentine.

It became a green face. One German woman looked at it and said, in gentle appraisal, "Oh. Green. Innocence."

I felt like a bad painter. I expected the other painters to think ill of me and my work. I thought the turpentine was offending everyone. I took the canvas outside, along the wall at the back of the studio.

The Japanese woman I met the first day I was in the studio, was working nearby. I was sure she'd say something negative. It was strange. Nobody said anything negative. Gyanbodhi hugged me and called me the Buddha painting a Buddha. The German watercolor pro nodded pleasantly at me. Why was I feeling rejected, when nobody was rejecting me? The evidence blatantly contradicted my feelings.

I met Suryo after Kundalini, and we walked together to early dinner. I saw a sannyasin couple hugging each other, holding the embrace for a long time, and I thought, "Suryo, if you want to feel that kind of heart embrace with someone else, please go ahead."

It seemed there was a delicious freedom in having a deep sense of heart to heart connection with someone with whom you weren't entangled in any way. Sannyasins can embrace and walk away. Suryo and I were connected on so many levels, it wasn't the same. But, after Kundalini, we did just that. We embraced and held the embrace, gently, for a long time. We stood in the crowded walkway and held each other.

At dinner, there was a sweet feeling between us. Then Varesha showed up and then Neehar, and the four of us talked about going to Goa together. Suryo told me about the feelings she got in her second full day of dance, and then we laughed and joked about going to the beach.

A fat peacock flew up to the tree, high above us. It was like a hundred pound canary, like a turkey with colored feathers. We told elephant jokes.

The conversation went from the Christians in Goa, to the Early Christians, to the Inquisition and the Conquistadors, to Columbus in America, to the Pilgrims, to the Native Americans, and I enjoyed the sudden burst of interest in things that interested to me.

Varesha and I discovered we had feelings in common about the native people of America and Australia, and for a brief moment, there was a feeling of love for her in my heart. Neehar said a few things, and Suryo was quiet. Eventually, we all realized we'd talked past the time for Evening Discourse, and the gates were locked. We were alone in the large open cafe.

We got out the back gate and decided to take a rickshaw home. There was no way to get to our street clothes, until 9PM. After that, there was the possibility of waltzing in the Buddhafield. It was Waltz Night in Buddha Hall. On the way back from the back gate to the main road, Suryo said she felt ignored by me. She sensed my energy toward Varesha.

"It is, after all, the way of all sannyasins, to follow the energy in their hearts," I said, and then I add, "It's the way of all humans, except that I'm Suryally monogamous."

Then I said, "It thrilled me to talk to someone about things that matter to me. It felt like one time, hanging out with you in the ashram, when I was being paid attention to. I'm sorry if I neglected you."

"It's just how I was feeling," she said, "I guess I want all your attention."

At home, we got into bed and talked some more. She asked me what I was feeling, and I couldn't find the feeling. I talked about leaving Seattle and how I was getting some perspective on the true direction my life was taking, and she asked me what I was really feeling. And I couldn't get a feeling.

"It's funny. I'm trying to get down to what I'm feeling right now, and I can't seem to find any feeling. I have all these ideas in my head."

I did a thing that's familiar to me. I could feel myself leaning forward, into my mind. I tried to lean back into my soul self. Even flat on my back, I could feel it.

I prayed, "God, show me what I'm feeling."

"I feel rejected," I said. "Last night, when we were getting ready for bed, I felt so happy. I felt so much love."

"What did you want to happen?"

"I wanted to keep feeling what I was feeling. It wasn't just fucking. Even fucking would only have been more of the feeling. I was feeling happy and sensual."

"I wanted to go to bed."

"So you could go to Dynamic. And you didn't go. That's what happened. All day long, I anticipated rejection. I expected rejection from the soccer players, the rickshaw drivers, the painters in the ashram, I thought everybody was going to reject me, even though they didn't. Like you. I thought you were rejecting me, even though you weren't. It was my mind, doing what it does. My mind thinks rejection, even when I know better."

"How are you feeling now?"

"Great. How are you feeling?"

"Very attracted to you."

"Yeah, well, I'm not interested. Sorry."

I said it lightly, not feeling sexual, but beginning to think about it, beginning to not-think about it. She cuddled up against me. I acted cool. She started to roar a little, like a stirring lioness.

"She told us, today, in dance, about roaring like a lion. I think you're a lion," she said.

"I feel like a wimp. I feel like a guy who can't get his woman to fuck him when he wants."

"You can't have everything your way."

"Oh, yeah? Where I come from, in my jungle, the real lions take whatever they want."

"Oh, they do?"

"Except, right now, I'm not interested."

She kept teasing. I tried to give her more time and rope.

“You could apologize to me,” I offered.

“For what?” she retorted.

“For rejecting me.”

“I didn’t reject you. I felt rejected when you were talking to Varesha.”

“Yeah. That was true. It’s like I was saying, ‘See, somebody else thinks I’m interesting.’”

“I think you’re a beautiful lion.”

“Hey, lets sit in the tantra pose. I like that.”

She sat, facing me, her legs over mine, my legs around her. We were eye to eye. Our arms were around each other. We embraced, we kissed, we caressed each other. I became aroused. She put me inside her. We moved together, rocking. The energy was good. Our eyes were open and free of fear, free of lust, and full of happiness. Ordinary ecstasy. We rocked back and forth. I lifted her hips in my hands.

Then, in one brief moment, the motion hurt her, and her face changed dramatically. She wanted to lie on her side. I began to want to fuck. Just fuck. I felt a surge of sexual lust and a fear of the sex ending. I looked in her face. She had a different face. She was soft and young, and her face became pained and dark.

“You look different. Your face has changed,” I said.

We stopped intercourse. I withdrew from her, and we lay beside each other. I looked in her eyes.

“What happened? Was it when you felt hurt?”

“Yes. It was Ronny Hanson, my old boyfriend, my first serious relationship. I remember him fucking me. We used to fuck like crazy people. It was so rough. I thought that was what sex was all about. It’s different with you. I used to think that sex with you wasn’t good enough, because it wasn’t rough enough. I don’t want to go back to that. All my life I’ve been acting like someone I’m not.”

She talked about her dance group and about Osho. Osho said that the body is only an external manifestation of our inner self. She'd been feeling fat and wondering what deep, dark psychosis it was covering up.

"I'm much more sensitive than I ever thought I was. It was only when I was at the ranch, or in Pune, or around Osho, that I felt my true gentleness," she said, "except that, on the ranch, I was just a fat little butter ball of bliss."

"That's a great description," I said.

"But then, after that, the last five years, I got hard again. Hard and heavy. That's not who I am."

"I pretended all my life I was someone I'm not," I said, "and now that's over. I can't do that, anymore."

"That's probably why you think you're a wimp. You're not. You've never been a wimp. You're so male, you ooze maleness. Poets are supposed to be soft and wimpy. But you're not. You're a lion. A gentle lion. Lions don't have to throw their weight around. They know they're lions."

"Your weight is a cover. You're trying to protect your dancer, your true, vulnerable, sensitive being. You're not covering up some deep, dark secret. You're covering up your light. You need it for protection. The thing is, to figure out how to protect it and still be it. It feels OK here, but how do you keep being who you are, out in the world?"

"I think I have to keep up my support systems and pay attention to my heart."

"I can't trust Existence, like Osho says. It's too vague. I need to call it God. I need to bring it a little closer to home."

"I feel God when I'm out in real nature."

"Yeah, me, too. Even my place in the jungle behind Buddha Hall. And I like mountains."

We were really cooking. We were talking about being true to ourselves, and in the process, we saw each other, more clearly. Our lovemaking was

interrupted by her pain, and then, briefly, by a kind of grieving, for all the years of suffered abuse.

“I’m beginning to see how I abused myself, allowing men to fuck me, harshly, and then masturbating myself just as hard.”

“I’m glad we’re talking like this. This feels good. We can drift away from this, but we won’t be able to lose it.”

Start slowly. Slow down. Stop.
Now you’re getting somewhere.

I remembered the story of an old baseball manager whose life was an endless series of small joys. Early in his life, it was the World Series and the All-Star Game, but it evolved into a lifetime of minuscule events, like the sun on a wall, a leaf, a smile, a sound, a hunk of bread. I was 33 when I read that, and I thought, “That’s my future. That’s what I want.”

“Oh, Bone, I think we’re just beginning. We’re just starting to find out what’s possible. And, you know, this is true about me . . . whenever I start planning trips, like I was the other day . . . I forget. What was it . . . that trip?”

“Lucknow, the Taj Mahal . . .”

“Nepal, Tibet, Beijing . . . that’s me being afraid of what I’m feeling. When I’m afraid of what’s on the inside, I start planning trips, like you think about drinking.”

“You’re a geographoholic.”

“I don’t know what we’re going to do next. Maybe we’ll stay here a while longer. I don’t know.”

“You should stay here, until you’re done doing whatever you need to do here. I don’t know if I’m done here, either. This has been good for me, too. Sometimes, I think I left my life in Seattle, but that’s my mind talking. I didn’t leave anything. I’m right here, and I’m glad we came here. I keep thinking I should be a newcomer, but I can’t erase everything I’ve already done. I can’t pretend I’m new to this. I see Osho manipulating people and then he admits he’s doing it on purpose. I hear him say he’s only trying to wake people up, and I get resentful, because I’m not asleep. But he’s not

talking to me. All the young people who come here for a master, they want a master. I only get screwed up when I think I have to act like someone else.”

We were sensitive beings, who tried to change ourselves to fit in an insensitive world. By being true to ourselves, we found each other. By seeing the other and respecting the other, we began to feel safer and freer.

“When we were making love, and I was biting your nipple, I felt, for the first time in my life, that a woman was giving her breast to me, really, not like sucking someone’s tit, but a real sweet connection between you and me, real deep. On some basic level, I felt connected. I felt a feeling between us that was real.”

“I did, too,” she said, “It felt good to me, too. I like it when you kiss me like that.”

The child in our hearts was back. The softness returned to our faces. We made plans for breakfast. We held each other. We were in love. We were in the love that resides in our own hearts, and we came together in the moment of that love.

As a young poet, I wrote a poem about love toward another woman, one who didn’t return love in the way I wanted. I believed that love was a meeting place, neither in one or the other, but in-between, a joined energy that existed in itself, somewhere beyond both - a third being. In the poem, I said that sometimes I was lost outside my bones, and I thought I could find myself in the other, but,

If I alone ghost the space between us,
I will succeed only in vacating myself.

There was truth in the poem, but it didn’t heal me. I needed to find myself inside my own bones. I didn’t need to vacate myself, in the false hope of being made whole by someone else. My wish for love from the outside came out of my separation from myself. I looked in the wrong direction for the source of being loved. The poem was wiser than I was, but it couldn’t bring me home again.

Wandering in a desert of mirages, the one thing that was real was my own being. By turning inside, I discovered a deep well, and, after a time of healing, I turned back out, and the desert became a garden.

And then I saw Suryo, emerging from her own oasis. We moved toward each other, with the recognition of one lion for another.

Going to See Papaji

I spent two more months in Pune. During December, Suryo and I, along with Varesha and Neehar, the couple from Australia, went to Goa for a week. In January, Suryo helped lead a workshop of dance and hypnosis. She worked side by side with Ananda, the woman whose dance group was the scene of her re-emergence as a dancer.

With Suryo deeply engaged in dance/trance, I decided it was time to go to Lucknow to see Poonjaji. On January 28th, I boarded a train to cross India to the north. Lucknow is a large, dense, dirty, commercial city, whose singular attraction was Papaji, as he was called, affectionately. It was my adventure alone in India, to go find my own connection with a master.

Osho is Suryo's connection. Osho is gone. Poonjaji is 80 and very much alive. In the last two weeks before I took the train north, I met older sannyasins who went to Lucknow. Not only did I like what they told me about their experience, I liked who they were. It was a pleasant surprise to find out I was compatible with seasoned veterans of the commune, those who'd come out the other side, with humanity, strength, quiet awareness, and humor.

One day, a sannyasin woman in her 60's shows me a picture of Poonjaji, and I liked his face. He didn't look like a guru. He reminded me of an AA old-timer, like an ex-prize fighter or an old truck driver. It turned out he lived his life as an engineer, long past his awakening, until he retired and devoted his life to teaching.

With eager anticipation, I sought out Papaji. Nothing prepared me for what happened. Only 'nothing' prepared me. Only a lifetime of not knowing and not finding prepared me to realize my own final recognition of the never lost self.

What follows is not a further narration of events. Events don't explain what lies beneath all events.

For the sake of narration, Suryo came to Lucknow, to pick me up and go to Nepal. She came on my birthday, and we stayed for another month, when we continued to Katmandu.

During my seven weeks with Papaji, I came to myself in a way we all hope for, in the way countless wise men describe it. It's told in the many ways that we humans try to describe the indescribable.

At the heart of this story is love, the most misunderstood and abused word in all the languages. Love is a word for the wordless, an idea about that which is beyond ideas, a feeling for what transcends feeling, the description of a relationship between the heart and itself.

This eternal, simple, inescapable love is the guiding energy behind the ordinary ecstasy of all existence, for me, for Suryo, and for everyone else.