

## The Goddess in the Marketplace

I stood on the street. In the street. In India, the street is a maelstrom. I was in the eye of the maelstrom. I was standing on the street in Pune. I'd been in India for two months, in and out of the Osho International Commune, the ashram of Osho Rajneesh. I wasn't a member, a sannyasin, or a follower of that particular teacher. I'd been writing, painting, playing soccer, meditating, eating, sleeping, and being with my companion, who was a longtime sannyasin. I enjoyed the life of India in the streets and among the Indians I met.

I was standing in the maelstrom of an Indian street in the busiest part of central Pune. A hundred yards away, I saw a woman running, lightly, wildly, madly, through the crowded street. She was a beautiful Indian woman in torn clothing. Her left breast was exposed. No one was paying her any attention. It seemed I was the only one paying attention. I saw her as if the street was vacant but for her and me. In a few seconds, she was running toward me, then up against me, then away from me, running like water through watercolors, leaving a streak of blank paper in my mind.

The woman might be running from abuse, running for her life, her body beaten, her clothing torn by a husband or angry lover, her cries unwelcome and ignored in a male-dominant society, but, in that moment, in my mind, she was a kind of goddess, a female bhakti, a passionate devotee of the divine, alive in the busy street, in the maelstrom, running to warn, to proclaim, to invite me to my freedom, to my heart, to my love of the divine, to the awareness in my deepest self. It was the most startling image of my first months in India. It gave me a message I couldn't decipher. The indecipherable message is the one that resonates in the heart.

## The Train Across India

On the train going across India to the northeast, toward Lucknow, in Uttar Pradesh, near Nepal, near the Taj Mahal, near the spiritual cities of Varanasi and Benares, I was

going to see the man called Papaji. A few weeks earlier, in the ashram in Pune, I'd seen a picture of Sri H.W.L. Poonja (Poonjaji, with the honorific *-ji*, also called Papaji, because he was a big bear of a papa figure). I liked his face. It wasn't the face of a special man, not the face of a guru, but the face of a man, like the face of an old prizefighter or a truck driver, a real face.

I heard the name Poonjaji the first few days I was in Pune. Since the resident master had *left his body*, many older sannyasins had gone to see this other man. I heard that he gave sat-sang in his living room, not in an ashram. I was unhappy with the pomp and circumstance in the Osho International Commune.

I liked the way of the man in Lucknow. I decided to go see him. I was in India. I'd gotten all I could from the ashram. I'd never been in the presence of an enlightened master. As much as I appreciated the books and videos of Osho Rajneesh, I thought it wasn't the same as sitting in the presence of a living master. The older sannyasins I met in the ashram told of the happiness of their own experience sitting with Osho when he was in his body.

An older woman who'd been in Lucknow showed me a picture of Poonjaji. I liked the big, smiling face. I decided to take the train to Lucknow to see this man, face to face. My companion was busy leading groups in familiar surroundings. She wasn't interested in *another* master. She had her master. She was happy to stay where she was. I was free to go alone.

Standing in the train station in Pune, ticket in hand, the station was as busy as all of India seemed to be. Three other sannyasins were going to Lucknow at the same time. All women, one was French, she'd been living in Lucknow. Another was an American girl, 26, young by sannyasin standards. Most sannyasins were in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. Her name was Dipti, the same name as the grocery store in the apartment complex where we lived, in Pune. The third woman was quiet and withdrawn.

The trains were as crowded as the streets, but I didn't feel crowded in the crowds. I saw a documentary of a beehive, years later, and the crowding seemed similar, without resentment or aggression, without possessiveness of the space, unlike the crowding in the West, which seemed like a battle for ownership.

I heard that, in India, any man could call any place his home. If a man claimed the side of the road for his home, no one could dispute it. Ownership was fluid and communal. I also heard that new money had been changing the old rules.

## Pouring Out Toward Itself

I sat in the entryway of the train car as the train rolled slowly across India. Forty miles an hour is a good speed for an observer. The brain can still recognize everything at that speed. I sat in the step-well of the train car. It felt like I could step off the train into the heart of India. Riding across India, sitting, watching, breathing, my blood pulsing, with the rolling, rumbling, rattling train and the passing countryside, I felt as if I could step into the farms and villages, as easy as breathing.

The spiritual life of the air is my medium, my master. On the street, amidst the crowd, in the traffic that flowed like currents and cross-currents, my vision saw the life become translucent, like small green insects are translucent, like leaves of young plants are translucent. I stood on the street in India, and its density became translucent like the face of all being - as it's said that all of life is illusion. I loved the illusion and its transparent forms.

After I'd been in Lucknow for two weeks, I wrote a note to Papaji, which he read aloud in sat-sang. In the letter, I wrote about *the exquisite transiency* of life. Along with recognition of the presence of Being Itself, this transiency was exquisitely beautiful to me. I was in love with the reality of life, including its appearance and disappearance.

I saw the countryside pass by the door of the train, as the train passed through the countryside. All of life was passing toward and away from itself, within itself, and my heart was full of its own beating and beauty. As the train approached Lucknow, I got a toothache. In the first two weeks of two months in Lucknow, I was nearly struck down by the toothache. The German acupuncturist for Papaji said my toothache had come to say that I was not the body. I knew the truth of the toothache. The exquisite transiency of a toothache is hard to ignore.

An Indian man said to Papaji, "I am happy to be here, but I have bad problems with my back, it is very hard for me to sit here. What can I do? I like to be with you, here in sat-sang, but my back is causing me great pain."

Papaji looked at the man and said, sympathetically, "It's very hard to meditate when there is pain. There are doctors who deal with such pain. You should go to a doctor and take care of that pain, and then come and see me."

Besides the toothache, I found another distraction on the train. It was the young American, Dipti. When we all arrive in Lucknow, we stayed at the same hotel. On the first night, I stood with the French woman in the room she shared with Dipti, as Dipti changed her clothes before going out to find something to eat. I was caught, in my own mind, looking at Dipti's half-naked body. It was a brief look, but the blood in my body beat a little stronger. I knew I was looking at her. I was with a woman for the first three months in India. Then I was alone, without a companion. I looked at the women around me, but something was more compelling than the attraction I felt toward those women.

In the first day I spent with Papaji, I saw something I'd never seen before. I saw a man, not only speaking to others about the reality of their true nature; I saw Being speaking to Being and not merely someone speaking about Being to others. I saw Papaji speaking to the people in the large open room of a suburban house, sometimes speaking as one person to another, and I saw a new thing I hadn't seen before. I saw Being speaking to Being. I saw love pouring out toward itself.

The Being of one man spoke to the Being of all those in the room. It became clear that enlightenment, as it might be practiced, was nothing neither more nor less than the continuous, endless outpouring of this fundamental love and recognition. In that instant, I felt the abrupt absence of doubt. In its absence, I saw that doubt had lingered in my mind, no matter how clearly I knew there was no reason for doubt.

That doubt may have been the inherent doubt of being a conscious, thinking, human being, common to us all. This is the doubt, in any human, that says, "I can't be free. I can't know who or what I am, not in the essence of my being. I can't be right. I must be wrong."

But in the air of that moment, in the moment of being in the presence of Being which recognizes being as itself, there is no error and no doubt. Doubt evaporated in that moment, as if it had never existed. It was simply gone.

After a month in Lucknow, as I was walking in the Botanical Gardens, I became aware of my own self as being itself, simply recognized, and in that moment, I didn't feel more spiritual but more real. In that moment, a dull gray presence slipped out of my consciousness, slipped down, slid down, drained out of me, into the ground beneath my feet and was gone.

## Nights in Hazratganj

Suddenly, without thought, I jumped to my feet. I'd been sitting back, lounging with my friends. I made friends easily in Lucknow, unlike with those I met in Pune. In the first weeks in Lucknow, I hung out with a man from Ireland, and coincidentally, another from Seattle. We had dinner together on Hazrat Marg in downtown Lucknow. The streets in Lucknow were wide avenues or Margs. I stayed in a former British residence called the Avadh Lodge, a block off Ashok Marg, half a mile from the Hotel Carlton, a relic of grander times, where many of those who came to see Papaji stayed.

Others lived in houses near the house that was rented for daily sat-sang (except on Sundays). Two connecting rooms were cleared out every morning by the people who lived in the house. It was a large, L-shaped space, with a small, raised platform at the corner for Papaji to speak from. Every morning, the rooms were cleared of furniture, and rows of pillows were arranged for the 150-200 people who came every day for sat-sang.

Every morning I rose in a small room at the Avadh Lodge, walked to Ashok Marg, and took a jitney to the crossroads, where I transferred to another jitney that carried me and others to within a few blocks of the sat-sang house. Papaji's neighborhood, Indra Nagar, was near the zoo park, near the canal, near transportation. At lunch, I walked a short ways down the road to one of two houses where a local family served lunch for a

nominal fee. Lunch patrons gathered in the front yards of the houses and chatted. Early on, I sat with Dipti, Udyana, and Moumin.

An Israeli woman, Sagar (Ocean) was attracted to me, and I was attracted to her. One night, in the Carlton, she invited me to her room for a drink. I didn't go. I was aware of the temptation. Sagar was beautiful and energetic, but I'd become overwhelmed and preoccupied by the presence of the moment. Sagar loaned me a fable she'd been reading. It influenced me to write a fable, which I read, a few days later, to a group on the lawn of the Carlton Hotel. I wanted Sagar nearby as I read, but by that time, she was flirting with another man. Sagar asked me to join her on a trip to the Taj Majal, but I declined the invitation. Her energy was erratic and demanding, like the energy of desire itself. A woman friend of hers said I was wise to be cautious.

Sagar had a terrible time in Agra, and, at dinner one night, in the penthouse dining room of the Hotel Clarks Avadh, a man pulled a gun on another man, and Sagar shouted, "NO!" in such a commanding voice, the dispute was resolved peaceably. Sagar was the kind of woman I was easily attracted to, but the awareness of the presence of Being in the moment of Being Itself was too great to be sublimated.

Even though I was a writer, I didn't write anything about my experience while I was in Lucknow. In that moment of being, there was nothing to say. It was years before I could speak of the experience. I wanted to describe the indescribable. Papaji said, one day, that no one had ever been able to describe what he alluded to.

"But, don't stop trying," he said to me. "You're a writer. From now on, no more barriers. From now on, write from the source." He didn't mean for me to be inspired by the source but to be the source speaking.

"Can you do this?" Papaji said.

He looked at me. "Yes," I said.

"When you go to your hotel tonight, I want you to write from the source and give it to me, tomorrow. Can you do that?"

Two days later, I hear Papaji read what I had written. He read it during sat-sang. He read it to a woman who was struggling to be clear in her own realization. He read it as example.

“Listen to this,” he said to the woman, “Maybe this will help. This is what I’ve been trying to say.” Before he read what I had written, he said, “I don’t know who wrote this. It was written by *Anonymous*. I found it on my bed, this morning. Whoever wrote this, please come and see me after sat-sang.” And then he read the words I wrote, words that had my name on them, the name he had given me. Two days before, I handed the paper to him, and I said, “Here’s the writing you asked for.”

When I heard the words he read, I recognized them. “I’m happy,” I thought, “I don’t care about being named. I’ll go see him after sat-sang.” Some time passed, while Papaji continued to speak with the woman. I was sitting in the back of the room with my new friends, a French guy and the acupuncturist who’d been a police officer in Germany. I marveled at Papaji’s brilliance. I wasn’t inclined to argue with his ways or his words. Until that moment.

## Be As You Are

I paid \$7 a day for a room at the Avadh Lodge that had its own side entrance. The hotel had a curved driveway that lead to the covered entry with a semi-circular lawn inside the curve. The main door opened to an office and a lounge, then to stairs to the second floor and passages to rooms on the ground floor. The men who worked at the Avadh Lodge spoke English. English was the business language of India. I didn’t have to learn Hindi or any of the many dialects of India. I didn’t have to learn the Indian names for menu items, since they were commonly translated in English.

Next to my room was a garage for repairing the old British sedans used as taxis. They were more costly and not nearly as much fun as the bicycle rickshaws that filled the roads, or the motorized rickshaws and jitneys that carried the bulk of local traffic. Just about everything was cheap by Western standards. I could have breakfast brought to my room for less than a dollar, including eggs, bacon, toast, jam, and coffee. I could leave laundry at the desk and pick it up later, cleaned and ironed, for next to nothing, or so it seemed.

Each day and night, in my room, I was alone. There was no radio or TV. I was in a state of mind that in my experience was close to what I might call fear. It wasn't fear, even though it resembled fear in the body. It's a state of constant presence, attention, awakeness, a state of mind without attachment to thought. Thoughts come and go, but there's no feeling that any thought warrants being held. I could call it an acute numbness, an intense feeling of non-feeling. The state of non-mind came, not as the result of being taught, or by some practice, or by any influence. I wasn't in a trance, or fear, or compulsion. I wasn't doing the bidding of any directive, internal or external. There was no form directing this formlessness.

I found a bookstore that carried English language books. One book was *Be As You Are*, the book of Poonjaji's teacher, Ramana Maharshi. Another was a collection of cowboy stories. Another was a detective novel. Another was the writings of Paul Gauguin. Ramana was the grandfather of my spiritual sense, as Papaji was the father. I had always embraced surrender as a path to everything. Ramana spoke of surrender as one of the two paths to freedom. The other he called self-enquiry.

In a handwritten letter, one day in sat-sang, I asked Papaji to speak about the path of surrender, but before he could read my letter, I raised my hand to speak. When he spoke to me, my voice stopped in my throat. I pointed to the note and Papaji laughed. Referring to my question about surrender, he gestured toward me and said, "Well, this is it, isn't it? There is no more. You wrote these words with your heart and not with your mind, didn't you?"

I nodded. I asked if he could give me a hug, and he invited me to come. I sat beside him on the small podium. He embraced me. I embraced him. I watched myself make the hug an embrace of equals, not like a disciple with his master. While I was hugging him, my face was buried in his neck. Papaji was eighty years old, only slightly older than my father, but his skin reminded me of the grandmother I loved unconditionally during her long life. I turned to look, with an open heart, at all the people in sat-sang.

Papaji said, "Don't be afraid. They won't hurt you."

"I'm not afraid. I love them," I said.

I was beaming at a roomful of faces. I meant to say that I loved them all in the heart of the love that is the nature of all beings, the same love I saw in Papaji from the first day, pouring from him into the room like a flood, like sunlight.

In my room, I looked at the walls, at the ceiling, high above, at the occasional cockroach, at the line I strung for clothes, at the smell of water in the shower. I looked in the air. I looked at nothing in particular. I looked at the particular in nothing. I lay on a narrow bed, in love with nothing in particular, not even in love with everything. I lay on the bed, reading, not reading, thinking, not thinking, sleeping, not sleeping, in the essence of the ocean, where all the qualities of the ocean are of no interest to the ocean itself.

The room had two recessed windows beside the door, two wicker and wood chairs, an enameled white wooden table, a bed, a light hanging from a cord, and a shower that was nearly as large as the room. The hot water for showers was available once a day, variably in the mornings before eight. The isolation of the room was betrayed by the absence of isolation in my heart.

## The Heart's Attachments

When I got to Lucknow, I ran into Dipalm, the older woman who showed me the photo of Papaji that convinced me to go to Lucknow. She was a sweet, soft, gushy woman who had left disappointed, confused, and angry family behind in Baltimore. She lived in an apartment near the sat-sang house. I welcomed her friendship. She tried to take me under her wing. One day, we met and walked to the zoo-park near her apartment on the edge of Indra Nagar.

Returning to her apartment, she asked me to lie with her. I didn't like the idea, but her kindness, her gentleness, her sweet protestations, convinced me that rejection would be unkind. I lay at her side on the bed. She moaned softly, without aggression, repeating my name as a lament, a dirge, a lullaby, a song of love. Then she turned to snuggle against my body. I feel the warmth of another body, but I was unhappy in that bedded solicitude. I waited for a long enough time and I stood. Soon, I was on the street and breathing a

particular air of freedom, not the freedom of the heart itself, but the freedom from the heart's attachments to anyone not of one's choosing.

## Swami Steve's New Name

If you think death is an empty void without human warmth or joy, if you think death is the end of everything you care about, go there, right now, with all the courage you have. Go there, now, alone, abandoned, friendless, loveless, unable to think or feel, unable to know, or to be. I had learned, before I went to India, not to run from fear, but to run to its core. In the center of my peaceful being, I saw and still see, all the thoughts of fear crowding in, the fears that are the armies of the mind, the fears that maintain, protect, and extend the hegemony of thought over the stillness of one's being.

In the days before I left the Osho International Commune, I paid for a horoscope reading from a woman I didn't know. She had been Osho's astrologer, during his last years. She told me I needed to write a book of the imagination, a book that could be read by people all over the world. The other thing she said was that I had been imprisoned many times, over many lifetimes, for my spiritual beliefs. I had no memory of past lives and no belief in the truth of reincarnation, but I had always carried a sense of the threat of abuse, the kind that can come to one who lives a spiritual life. I had a sense of abusing, or being abused by, the power of spiritual beliefs.

After a week in sat-sang, I wrote my first sat-sang letter to Papaji. I asked him how to deal with the fear of being killed for speaking as he spoke. He asked me if the fear was inside or outside. I say it was outside. He said that when these fears came, I should feel the energy in the center of the heart, as Ramana had said, just to the right of one's sternum, not the left, where the physical heart is. As soon as Papaji spoke those words, the fear disappeared. Since the fear was no longer a concern, neither was the remedy.

In the same letter, I asked him if he would give me a name, in the tradition of the other sannyasins I was surrounded by. He paused for a moment and said the name *Abhaya*, which means *fearless*. He wrote it down and had it passed back to me so I

wouldn't be mistaken about it. It seemed ironic to me at the time, after telling him my greatest fear, to give me the name *Fearless*.

After six months in India and Nepal, on the plane from Katmandu to Hong Kong, I slept, and nearly asleep, I dreamed, and nearly dreaming, I became aware of a natural truth, as it moved from knowledge into simple reality. I came awake to realize that love is real, and fear is not real.

These were not new thoughts, but the reality dropped in, with certainty and effortlessly, conclusively, like food transforms the body from starvation. I realized an immutable reality. To be fearless is to be without fear. My new name meant *without fear*. I was freed from the unreal. When I heard him say my new name, I wasn't sure what I was hearing. It was the first time I'd spoken to him, the first time he spoke to me. I was in a state of mindlessness. The name was less important than the moment it swam in.

The name *Abhaya* was awkward on my American tongue. At first, I think it might be Ab-HAY. There was a man from Peru who had the name Abhay. Dipalm called me, "A-BYE". "Ohhh, A-BYE!" she said, drawing it out, like a mournful wail in a lamentation. A Hindi in his bookstore said *Abhaya* was a good name. He sounded impressed or at least knowledgeable. He said the final *a* was silent, as in *uh-bye*, but I became known as *uh-bye-uh*. He said *Abhaya* was a prince, the brother of the man who gave Buddha his first ashram. In Buddhism, the name meant, "One on the verge of perfect enlightenment."

## Are You Still Here?

One of the difficulties and one of the freedoms I had to confront, let go of, and enjoy, was Papaji's distracting habit of paying no attention to personalities but to the essence of being in everyone. He spoke with enveloping love and distracting detachment. He had a blistering intelligence, a compendious memory, and a mind as vacant as the space that contains the Universe, as empty as the self before the first thought. He looked at one man, smiled warmly, and said, "Are you still here?"

Acceptance makes no favorite of anyone, and the effect of that in Papaji was his wanting no gathering of followers. Still, I longed for the embrace that would single me out. I longed to be called to Papaji's side, to be relieved of making a life of my own, to be directed by another, who I could trust absolutely, to have a master or a god of infinite love, while keeping a semblance of my self intact.

It was not to be. When I spoke to Papaji, that first time, there was no thought of self to hold onto. I couldn't hold the thought of *I* in the moment of being. But the thought of *I* continually seeks to regain the ground that disappears from beneath its feet. Fear of death is a way for the mind to regain the lost illusion of the ground beneath the feet of *I*. Without the thoughts that flesh-out that fear, the search for ground is left behind in the flight of Being Itself.

## The Beach in Thailand

In cities, people gather without exclusivity. The city is inclusive, with exits to the farthest regions of the visible universe. Roads lead in and out. In India, I felt freest and most welcome in the open air of Mumbai, Pune, and Lucknow. Lucknow is a city of Hindi, Urdu, and English. It's the ancient home of the Nawabs. No one is certain of the origin of the name Lucknow.

'You are in luck now,' Papaji said and laughed.

One woman told him a tale of woe. A wealthy New Yorker, free to explore her artistry and her spirituality, she'd come to India many times. Sitting with Papaji, she called his name, and when he saw her, she began to tell a long tale of tragedy, misfortune, strife, torment, misery, unhappiness, death and illness, of broken family and broken hearts. As long as she spoke, everyone listened. At the center of the attention she received was Papaji, not far from her, holding her story in the bowl of his gaze. Eventually, she wound down and fell silent. He continued to hold her in his attention. She looked to him. In the rich silence of the room, in a gentle, curious, and genuine voice, he said, "And now?"

She listened. She had nothing to say. And then she laughed. Lightly, surprisingly, then heartily, she laughed. In the moment of now, her grief, sadness, hurt, anger, pain, distress, loss, confusion, and longing were over. Her need was over. Her search was over. And she laughed. Laughter was a common response to Papaji's lead. Again and again, he lead people to the end of their own search by pointing to the simple fact of their own being, in the moment of their being, stripped of the thought of past and future, within themselves.

People came for relief from pain and struggle, and he relieved them of their hold on pain and struggle and their search for pain and struggle. Someone might say, "I'm struggling," and he might say, "Yes, this struggle is very beautiful. It is a beautiful lover. You say to your lover, 'Oh, Struggle, please come closer. Please don't leave me. Oh, Struggle, you are the most beautiful, so lovely. I love you so much. Please don't go away from me. I love you, oh Struggle, let me kiss you.'"

And they might say, "What? I don't love struggle."

And Papaji might say, "Then why are you holding onto your struggle with such a tight grip. Let your struggle go free. There are plenty of others who can love struggle in your place. Struggle doesn't need you. Let it go."

Or words to that effect. It's no use trying to quote Papaji. The truth is not in the words. All of life, especially the talk of sat-sang, is only an excuse for separate selves to abandon their differences and enter the reality that no one has ever left. Papaji spoke of the waves in the ocean who demand to be separate, until they are pulled back into the ocean they have never left.

A young woman told him of her friend who was brutally murdered, the year before. She said she loved her friend. She thought to stop grieving was disloyal and disgraceful, that it would insult the memory of her friend. Papaji listened and sympathized. He didn't rush past the recognition of the young woman's sadness. He talked about the pain of losing loved ones in this life, of those who die and those left behind, all over the world, every year, every day. Then he began to ask about the now.

“How is your friend now? Your friend may have been born again in a new life. She may be happy and laughing. She may be a new baby in her mother’s arms. And still you cry.”

He said, “And you do not know what kind of agreement was made between your friend and the man who killed her. None of us can know this. None of this can be known. And you’re still holding onto the death, terror, pain. Why is this death being re-lived, over and over, in you? You love your friend, and you can let her go. The love between you and her is not lost. You can be true to that love and not to the pain.”

The girl was not relieved. She didn’t let go of her friend or her friend’s death. Soon, she was gone from sat-sang. I did not agree with the image of her friend having some agreement with her killer or with her being reborn, but it was in keeping with the question.

I thought everyone in sat-sang must be experiencing the same no-mind, shapeless, formless, limitless recognition of being itself. Everyday, two hundred people, more or less, crowded into a house to hear Papaji speak. Everyday, in the morning, in the street outside the house, a long, wide line built up, to the front and side gates. I was amazed to see line-cutters, wall-climbers, and crowders, pushing, shoving, running to claim the coveted cushions closest to the front, closest to the master, who was only love itself in a human form.

Gangaji, an American woman, chosen by Papaji to teach as he taught, said to me, “You think everyone is having the same experience you are, but they aren’t. Most people who come to see Papaji are thrilled to be in the company of the Master for a while. They go back home. They have lovely memories of the time they spent here. They go on with their lives the same as before.” A man I knew in Pune, a British sannyasin, came to Lucknow and his reaction was, “I’ve heard this all before.”

A tall, handsome young German, with his beautiful blond girlfriend, raised his hand to ask a question, “Papaji, I love to be here with you, but I want to know if it is all right with you, for me to go somewhere else. I don’t want to go away, but my friend and I have plans to go to the beach in Thailand. I want to ask you if it is all right for us to go there.”

Papaji laughed, "Yes, of course, go to the beach in Thailand. This you can always have. This moment is always with you. You can wait to embrace this moment. You can wait a hundred lifetimes. It will always be here for you. Go to the beach in Thailand. It's very beautiful there. Have a good time."

"Thank you, Papaji, thank you," the relieved young man said, gratefully.

"The Beach in Thailand" seemed like a perfect expression of all of this life that is *not* in the recognition of innate being. Everyday, someone raised his or her hands and said that he or she was leaving to go somewhere else. "Leaving?" Papaji said, "Where can you go and not be here?"

## Golden Boy

The train to Lucknow was crowded. The jitneys were crowded. The streets were teeming with people, including beggars of all descriptions. Sat-sang was shoulder to shoulder. The adjoining room was occupied, and the stairway in the hall, out of sight of Papaji, became additional seating for rapt listeners, and yet, in all that, I felt peacefully alone and contentedly a part of the whole, invisible, even when I was the center of attention.

In my time with Papaji, I became what someone called a *golden boy*, someone to whom the master paid particular attention. In fact, it was what he asked of everyone, to see themselves as the golden center of their existence. *Lucky* was a word he used to describe those who came to the realization of the moment in themselves. Humans were the luckiest creatures. The ones who came to sat-sang from all over the world, ready, conscious, free to recognize the truth, were the luckiest of all. And still, one man disparaged himself.

"I can't understand," he said.

"Oh," Papaji interjected, "Now you have shit in your mother's lap," Some people gasped at his graphic allusion. "Don't worry. It's all right," he continued, "your mother

still loves you. She'll wash you off and hug you and kiss you. Your mother never stops loving you."

"But I don't understand."

"You did it again. Once again, you shit in your mother's lap."

He laughed. It seemed almost impossible to convince the most lucky beings that their state of being was blessed. To Papaji, humans were like the lion raised among sheep who didn't recognize he or she was a lion. I was willing to shed my sheep's clothing. Papaji told Suryo, when she and I were at his house, "Sometimes, one, or two, or three *young boys*, like this one, come to see me, and I am happy to see them."

Of course, many people came to see Papaji, both men and women, but perhaps Gangaji was right, perhaps the challenge Papaji faced was true, that so few were ready to let go of their self-denial and speak as their true self. Many of those who came had been in spiritual practices for many years. One man said he's been meditating for twenty years. Papaji congratulated him on his efforts. Then he said, "This is enough. Now you can let go of this effort."

When he said I was one of the *young boys* who came to see him, I was fifty. The habits of being human are millions of years old, and the spirit is ageless. Papaji himself was an old man with ailments. He had worked and raised a family. Upon retirement from his life as an engineer, he was a teacher. By that time, he had taught for twenty years, refusing any more than a few followers, traveling in India and around the world, refusing offers of money and property. When Osho left his body, many sannyasins came to see Papaji, until he allowed a community to form around him, but he didn't like the idea of an ashram.

"Ashram... means business... means money," he said simply. "My ashram is the sky and the earth. My ashram has no walls."

As long as I was in his presence, I thought I needed to become as he had become. But it was an uneasy desire, until I was walking to lunch, down the middle of a dirt road, one day, and the thought occurred to me, "I want to be like Kabir and Rumi."

The thought occurred. I smiled. It was a true thought. It was a thought that hadn't come from the habit of thinking. It was a thought that didn't chase after, or come from,

other thoughts. When the thought occurred, I wasn't sure who Kabir and Rumi were. Even though I was a well-read poet, I hadn't read Kabir or Rumi, except perhaps in passing. Nine months after being back in Seattle, I came across a collection of Kabir, It worked as a trigger for my writing. I wrote three hundred new poems. I read Kabir and Rumi like brothers, common voices of the same heart. Kabir and Rumi wrote like *young boys*, like eternity, like the gasp and roar of the moment of recognition, like laughter.

Suryo came with me to Papaji's house, on the day he said I should come for a visit. She quietly demanded that Papaji see her for who she was. A *goddess*, she said. He told her she had the energy of one of only six people on the planet. As we left the meeting, she became angry. She emptied her cache of venom as we walked along the canal that fed into the River Gompti that runs through the center of the city of Lucknow. She had described to him how her father had stolen her spirit with his drunken belligerence and sexual aggression. I got to see the legacy of her father's fight to remain in control, so she couldn't be free of it. I saw a bewildering barrage, as we walked past where the buzzards cleaned the carcasses of dead, abandoned cattle.

The atmosphere of sat-sang, of being in the presence of a master, seemed to bring out the best and the worst in people. Whatever their attachments were, they were revealed to be abandoned, or to reclaim their control. It's not surprising to witness the death throes of ego attachments when they're illuminated by awareness. The habits of a lifetime and the habits of human history, do not go gently when they sense they are being shown the door.

I wanted to be elevated to successor, even as I recognized the throne I was already sitting on. I sat on the stairs in the hall, out of sight, wanting to be seen and wanting to be invisible. It is the habit and skill of the mind to appropriate everything that is, even if it's the realm of its origin, the realm where the mind cannot go and remain the same mind. Papaji enticed the mind to enter its own demise, its birth, its origin, all to its own greater fulfillment, despite what it might otherwise believe.

Papaji asked those who came to him to ask themselves, "Who am I?" and trace the question back to its source. This is a true magician's trick, one that works, even with all its secrets revealed, even as it's being performed without any tricks at all. He invited the

mind to think its way to its own disappearance. This surrender, called self-enquiry, is perfect for the minds of most people who cherish their mental capacities and will not abandon their thinking easily.

The mind is the keeper of the flame of thought. Only by calling it to the sun of its own rays, is it enticed to let go of its intent on illumination. The mind wants to search the world for truth that it can only find by abandoning the search and returning home, within its own origins. But the mind won't quit the search by being told to quit searching. Papaji enlisted the minds of those who came searching, to retrace their own steps, to discover their own origin, to re-enter the mind's own source. The moment of that occurrence often erupted in laughter.

All around the center of perfect surrender, the particles of thought regroup and reform themselves to regain their hegemony. The throne of human consciousness, the crown of thought, seeks, by its very nature, to establish sovereignty at the center of Being Itself. It even tries to define itself as sovereign in the greater reality that engulfs and dissolves its very existence.

I wanted someone to choose me, when I was already the chooser and the chosen. I wanted to know what had no teacher and no student. I wanted to go where there's nothing to be taught and nothing to learn. I wanted to learn to roar, when I was already the king of the beasts. I wanted gifts of gold, when I was already sitting on blocks of bullion. I wanted to learn the path to the heart, when I was the heart, laying a path to itself. I wanted to be the center of attention, when I was already the one who sees, and I wanted to tell everyone what's true for everyone.

## The Begging Bowl

Standing on the top of a tourist attraction, one of the great palaces of the Maharajas of ancient India, I saw, on the flatland below, a sea of dark gray, a coating of soot and grime. It was a city within the city. It was the home of the poorest of the poor, with roofs of black, like a pile of garbage bags, like gamblers' chips, like a tent city erected after a

catastrophe that never ended. It was the shock of Sidhartha's eyes, to turn one's gaze from the splendor of astounding wealth to the desolation of abject poverty.

On Hazrat Marg, every night, going to and from dinner at one of several clean and attentive restaurants, I was surrounded by the ebb and flow of the poorest Indians, the crippled, blind, and deformed, the children of the poor, the old. One legless man nearly flew across the wide avenue, through the traffic, on his scooter-stool, with a wide grin, to my side, asking for baksheesh, alms, rupees. I wasn't remotely wealthy, except by contrast. Unable to resolve the debate about giving or not giving to the legion of beggars, I began to deal with them by recognizing them, smiling, nodding, greeting them and moving on to my destination.

In return, I saw no recrimination, no hostility, no anger. There was some agreement between the beggars and me that, for one moment, the relationship was about being human and alive in the same moment and not about money. I wasn't happy with the disparity, but, in the simple fact of our mutual being, I was the same.

After Suryo came to Lucknow, we were swarmed by children, showing their practiced, sorrowful faces. They held their hand out, palms open, to touch the cloth of our thighs and waists. I picked up and carried one small boy. I attempted to break through his mask of misery. The boy smiled. Water flooded the dry riverbed. We bought ice cream for the boy and his sister. They were happy and grateful without saying so. They rejoined their group of beggars, returning to the work that was their lives.

Papaji said, "You are like the king who takes up the begging bowl. You are the king. What is the need?" The poverty of India was shocking to my Western eyes. Still, I wanted to see the vital center that lives everywhere, in everyone, in whatever form it masquerades. The greatest sustainer of poverty is to look away.

## Learning to Dance

I can't look away from my vital center. This sort of attention first occurred when I was a teenager. The unforeseen attention to the center of my reality had revealed, then as

it always does, the unreality of everything that's defined in thought. Everything that comes and goes is revealed in the light of what's always true. The moment of paying attention to *now* can seem intricate and intellectual. It can seem obtuse and obscure. But *being in the awareness of one's innate reality* is only being inside what is and paying attention to it.

A boy in his room in his bed, just before sleep, as if being playful in his imagination, looks into the darkness of his closed eyes at night, in the region of sleep, and his attachment to thought drops away. He holds no thought. He drops memories of the day just gone, and he drops thoughts of the day to come. He remained conscious, in a state like dreamless sleep. He isn't trying to do anything. It occurs. It is the curtain pulled back, before the stage has been set. It's the moment everyone is in; simple, common, and ordinary. It has no characteristics to distinguish it. It is the single moment that belongs to all beings. The boy sees his reality unattached to any thought, undefined by any apparent reality, and in that moment, the boy is the *I* that has no form.

*I* is the boy, and *I* is the man, and the glimpse of his true nature becomes the recurring recognition of the true self. When I sat in sat-sang with Papaji, I saw and heard another man who spoke the same recognition. I saw another man whose recognition dissolved the doubt that had been with me ever since I was the boy who was at peace in his mind in the dark and discovered the awareness of his being, unbounded by thought.

In my teenage mind, thoughts crowded around the empty awareness of being. These thoughts warned me and redirected me to not think that way, that such thoughts were in error, or perhaps, even, blasphemous. It occurred to me, as a boy, that I was playing God and I'd be better off if I didn't mention such thoughts to anyone. I told the story to Papaji in a two-page letter. I told him the story of the boy who discovered the true nature of his awareness and the thinking that tried to explain it away.

To the boy, his consciousness implied that he was the same as God. That implication was not acceptable in the '50s, in a medium-size city in the United States, in the boy's family, school, church, or community. The boy had no one to speak to about such an occurrence, and everyone to speak to about everything else. In the mind of the boy, the thoughts that crowded in around the silent, still opening, had no alternative and

no antidote. As a boy, everything crowds into the open self, like into a proverbial black hole.

As a man, he became a poet. Poets live at the doorway to the open self, but they continue to practice interpretations of the world. I heard Osho say that poets were the luckiest people, because they have, at the moment of the creation of the poem, the opportunity to turn and look and see the source. The problem, Osho said, was that almost nobody does it, because our attention is caught up in the wonder of the thing created.

When I saw Papaji in the open door of the source, speaking in and from the source, in the nature of the source, I saw with the same sight as the boy saw in his bed at night. Recognition dissolves time and doubt.

To be in the world, but not of the world, doesn't relieve anyone of the pervasive influence of the world. To be in the presence of one who is in the world, but not of the world has the effect of letting doubt disappear. As a shadow can't hold its own existence in the light, doubt is gone. It no longer exists. Doubt isn't put on a shelf to be taken down later. Doubt is not soothed like an injury that returns, under stress. Doubt no longer exists.

This doubt is not merely the self-doubt of personality, which persists as long as thoughts occur in a mind in a body. Doubt attaches to humanity. To be human is to doubt. To be human is to create stories of doubt. The limitations of being human, to become ill and to die, to suffer pain and fear, validates the doubt that humans have in the eternity of their being.

We have created stories of eternity, as a separate reality to be feared and desired, and we've allowed ourselves to live in doubt and shame. Papaji said, "Do you doubt you exist? What is this existence, that you cannot deny, that you cannot seek, that you cannot lose?"

As a grown man, a friend invited me to a dance club. That night, I participated, as a hundred people learned a dance, being taught by a skilled and amiable teacher. I had difficulty learning the steps until I realized I was trying to learn a dance step I'd been doing since I was fourteen. As I sat with Papaji in sat-sang, it became increasingly clear that I was dancing what I'd always been dancing. When that is true, there's nothing to do, but dance.

## No Booming Voice in the Sky

Parents, society, peer groups, nuclear families, extended families, role models, even our ideals, impel us to invent or establish ourselves and then to match or surpass our examples. I felt the impact of recognition. I felt responsible. I wanted to respond, but there was no prescription for my response. There was no plan, no requirement, no booming voice in the sky, no book of rules and examples, and no connection to the religious doctrines that abound in the world.

Form occurs in the midst of formlessness. In echo of the origin of the universe from the formless void, there occurs, in us, a sense of the birth of form in our awareness. We feel compelled to be responsible, to be full, in the moment of emptiness. When we stop following the thinking that seems to go on and on in the mind, and we look at our being, before another thought occurs, two things happen. We're afraid, and we feel intensely and immediately lost. It's the edge of doom, the edge of existence, where the personal self is insignificant, vulnerable, an illusion, weak, absent, dead, empty. The other sense is that we're the form and the fulfillment of this profound, eternal, and limitless totality.

How can so inadequate a form fulfill such an unfathomable, indefinable presence? The answer occurs in the moment of recognition. How can this form take form out of its formless being? It does. How does it occur? It occurs. As we witness the occurrence of being, the miracle becomes known. Knowing doesn't produce it. It produces the knowing.

The response in the mind and the heart devises religion and art to proclaim what proclaims itself by its very existence. As one turns to face the source, the source is the only occurrence. The source is the only presence. As one turns toward the world, a human being, acting in the form of the source, one's consciousness becomes its fulfillment. This is the name of the new world of thought, feeling, action, and doing.

Papaji saw that all thoughts go out from the center. We follow our thoughts to their destination, away from the source, as if they will help us find who we are, when the only thing that works is to follow our thoughts back to their source. At the source of any

thought, one is witness to the moment of origin in being. This opportunity belongs to all human beings.

Someone asked Papaji about living in the world. How can it be done? He answered, "If you are driving your car, drive your car. If you are working at your desk, work at your desk."

"Be as you are," Ramana said. How hard can it be? In my thoughts, it was impossible to know what to do. How could I do justice to the extraordinary reach of existence in my particular life? The dirt on the streets of Lucknow was ancient dirt. In Lucknow, a buffalo cow, walking across the road, stopped the frantic traffic. The cow was sacred, but no one fell to the ground in worship of the cow. Still, the traffic stopped, every day, all day. Wherever the cow walked, the traffic stopped, and the dung of the cow was shaped into bricks for houses.

## Come Here

Papaji came through a door, stepped up onto a small raised podium, two feet above the floor of the room, namasted to the people nearby, sat cross-legged, closed his eyes, and was silent for twenty minutes. Then he looked up, said a few words of peace and welcome, and smiled. He began speaking, or he read from the pile of notes and letters placed at his side, or he answered an insistent question from someone. After two or three hours, he spoke words of peace and love and left the room through the same door he entered.

The adjoining room was where he greeted whoever was leaving Lucknow each day. There, he chatted amiably about hometowns, the cities of the world, many of which he had visited. Behind him, during sat-sang, was a large picture of his teacher, Ramana Maharshi. Each day, the front cushions were reserved for newcomers and those leaving that day. At the back of the room there were chairs for those with back problems. Dipalm petitioned for a chair but didn't get one. A few people, mostly men, formed the group that took care of chores, like driving the van and making announcements and appointments.

One man was a sannyasin from Pune. He was a man known in Seattle as a leader of groups, who, when he first came to Lucknow, faxed the Osho ashram, announcing his enlightenment, and called for Osho's Rolls Royce to be brought to meet him at the train, in preparation for his succession to the chair of the Master. In my time in Lucknow, he was in charge of making copies of tapes of daily sat-sang for anyone who requested them. Several of those who came to be with Papaji became teachers around the world. One of them said that Papaji was a corrupt master. It was an accusation that betrayed, in a fundamental cultural way, one's relationship with a master. Papaji frowned and didn't respond to the mention of the man's name.

One of Papaji's students was Gangaji. Her return to Lucknow was greeted by Papaji and by the gathering with open arms. During one week, she gave sat-sang in the afternoons on the lawn of the Carlton, after Papaji's morning sat-sang. I sat at the fringe of Gangaji's sat-sang. He was sun to her moon, but I heard her when she said that, in order to be free, one must give up all relationships.

As she spoke, I remembered the form of my prayers. I prayed to God, a God who had no name and no form. I prayed until I became the prayer, until I became the answer to the prayer, until the prayer disappeared into the answer. I realized I still had a relationship with God, even if the God of my prayers was nameless and formless. I once spoke of God as a focal point in eternity. In the moment of realization, the relationship was gone. In the moment of it being gone, it opened.

In February, in Lucknow, it was the dry winter of the sub-tropics. The rainy season, the monsoons, were several months ahead and many months behind. The ground was dry. The grass of the Carlton's lawn was more brown than green. The moneychanger came to a small booth at the corner of the covered walkway on the ground floor of the Carlton, a once grand hotel with a ballroom, wide verandahs, large rooms with ceiling fans, wooden carved wardrobes, tile floors, and wicker furniture. The hotel had a restaurant and a long drive for cars, taxis, and rickshaws.

The first moneychanger I met in Lucknow was on the street outside sat-sang. I was slightly uncomfortable meeting the moneychanger, even though I'd met with them in Pune, but there was always an air of illegality about it. The moneychanger, in front of sat-

sang, was bold. He stood in the middle of the road near the intersection, near the chai servers who came to do business before and after sat-sang.

The moneychanger outside sat-sang was Papaji's son. A man in his fifties, he was affable and businesslike. He gave a fair price. As always, the price was below the bank's price. The practice of changing foreign money for rupees was common and ignored by the authorities. At the Carlton Hotel, the practice was for one to walk casually to the small jewelry stand during certain hours and state your business. Money was changed, and after a while, the moneychanger returned the space to the vendor.

Gangaji was an American woman. Her husband, a seeker in earnest, came to Lucknow, and Papaji asked him, "Where is your wife? Please go and get her and bring her to see me." She came the next day. Papaji seemed to intuit her arrival. She was overwhelmed. Papaji invited her to herself. *Come here*. That was the message I imagined Papaji speaking by the nature of his presence. The *presence* of sat-sang, the *presence* of Papaji, the *presence* of the moment, said to all those who were near, *come here*.

Papaji said *come here* from within the open heart. He said *come here* to those in the room. He said *come here* to the universal *I*. There was no relationship in the invitation. As some teachers seem to say, "Come to me," Papaji said, "Come here." Here, in this moment between thoughts. Here, in this center of the heart. Here, in the center of the truth. *Come here*. It was an open invitation, without cost, made from the source to the source, made from being to being, made from *I* to *I*.

## With Suhas in Aminabad

On my birthday, I found a pocket watch for sale in a small shop on Hazrat Marg. I negotiated the price down to about what I would pay for a similar watch, years later, in Seattle. Still, it was the watch I wanted, with an engraved portrait of a ship, the U.S.S. Constitution, on the case. It made me smile. My birthday felt like any other day in Lucknow, where every day felt like a birthday. Time has a curious quality in the awareness of the moment. Everything has an intensity about it. And within it, is calm. To

be at peace in the heart, and to be free of the illusion of control, opens up the heightened awareness that seems equivalent to the physical life of plants and animals, of quarks and nebulae.

In the minds of locals, the Botanical Gardens may have seemed a nice and rather ordinary place, but, to me, it was a Garden of Eden. The same could be said of the corner of Ashok Marg and the road that ran between the Avadh Lodge and the Carlton, the same as the incredibly busy hub of traffic at the crossroads to Indra Nagar where dozens of jitneys changed drivers, riders, and routes. the same as the crowded stalls in the narrow shopping quarter just off the traffic circle in front of the GPO. the same as the rooms of the houses that sold lunch after sat-sang, the same as the skin of the heart of God.

I was inclined by nature to be thrilled by the actuality of everything. Anything is the particular of everything. To love the sun is to have no particular ray of the sun as a favorite. To love a ray of the sun is to love the sun itself. The world wants choices to be made. If gold is everywhere, what's the price of gold? How can anyone, who can't distinguish between this love and that love, turn a profit from love?

I was committed to one woman. Osho disparaged marriage, and in the same breath, he extolled the genuine love of another as a true path to freedom. The question of relationship was crucial. "You must let go of all relationships," Gangaji said, and I knew it was true.

The question and the answer are about letting go. Holding on is the problem. The problem is not in relationships themselves. This world creates relationships. All of everything exists in relationship. Papaji directed attention away from the habit of living in a world of subject/object. As in *I love you*. But in the nature of love itself, there is no *I* and no *you*. In people, the relationship of *I* and *you* can override the love that is the heart of every relationship. In my first month in Lucknow, Suryo, the *you* of my relationship stayed in Pune, and other women appeared in the relationship world.

The intensity of original love overwhelms relationship. I loved Papaji, but he wasn't playing that game. He acted as love itself. I loved anyone who paid attention to me, but in awareness itself, there is no other to see or to be seen by. One woman, Suhas, from San Francisco, became my friend. She invited me to visit a family she knew in Aminabad, a

shopping district in Lucknow. She was a woman who, when Papaji called on her to answer her own question began laughing and kept laughing, to the delight of everyone, including Papaji.

She and I took a rickshaw to Aminabad. At the home we were invited to, I saw a domestic drama that belied India's reputation for spirituality. After a few minutes of greeting and welcome, the man of the house, in his forties, began shouting about his father, a man in his seventies. For years, the two hadn't spoken directly to each other. The woman of the house hid behind a closed door. In the course of the visit, most of the time was spent in conflict. The son and father screamed about being courteous to their visitors. Each one was certain the other was being a bad host. Given the protective buffer of Suhas, the visit was almost as delightful as everything else was.

After a week in Lucknow, my toothache went away and nothing seemed to be in the way of any particular joy becoming joy itself, or of joy itself appearing as a million particular joys. If joy is the constant, then the recognition of joy is the only true desire. The holding of joy is as ridiculous as the holding of love.

## Nothing Bad is Happening

In other times, I had repeated a few words to remind myself to feel better. "Nothing bad is happening," I said. One evening, I decided to take a rickshaw to a 7PM AA meeting listed in the International Directory. The rickshaw driver had no difficulty finding it. In Pune, I attended meetings of men in AA, and it became a group of friends, of Indians of all walks of life, and all ages. One trio discovered they were former high-school classmates, a Muslim, a Hindu, and a Christian, together again in AA. I was happy in the company of academics, military men, businessmen, students, workers, the unemployed.

In Lucknow, I didn't attend any meetings. AA seemed unnecessary and inappropriate. AA speaks of a *higher power* and the necessity for dependency on others. Papaji called for the letting go of all dependencies. Even so, the traditional function of a

guru is one of higher power and benign dependency. Papaji wasn't traditional, in that way, but he came out of that tradition.

One afternoon, a new hotel was dedicated, with a party thrown by the new owners. Sri Harilal Poonjaji was invited to bless the opening. He appeared in full Hindi dress and performed a traditional ceremony. Papaji's uncle was a Hindu saint, well known and revered. At the dedication of the new hotel, I saw the form of his early training. When the young H.W.L. Poonja went to see Ramana Maharshi, he was a practicing Hindu of considerable experience.

Someone asked Papaji about his love of Krishna. He was brought to tears, as he began to speak of his love for the God of his faith. That was many years after Ramana asked him, "Why do you concern yourself with things that come and go?" (as his ongoing visions of Krishna did) "Why not pay attention to what does not come and go, but is always present?"

Papaji's self-recognition had taken him to the root of his worship, but it hadn't taken the love in his heart away from him. He was a man of love. The bedrock of his existence didn't diminish his love of others, including his love of Krishna. I decided to go to an AA meeting. In dropping the relationship between myself and God, between myself and the *other*, I lost nothing, including my affection for the circle of drunks I had been a part of for seven years.

It was a city-warm and cool night's evening as the rickshaw pulled up to the arched entrance of a courtyard. In the dirt and grass entryway, large enough for a car to turn around, I saw a few buildings that formed a complex of some sort. I stood looking, for a while, until a man appeared. The man asked me what I was looking for. I said I was looking for an AA meeting scheduled for that night. The man became animated and asked me to wait. He brought me a metal folding chair. I sat in the courtyard, off the busy street, and waited. After a while, the man returned and begged me to wait a little longer. He said someone was coming. After a while, another man appeared and took me to a private room in the nearest building. It was a row of rooms like a dormitory. He told me he was a patient and an alcoholic, but the meeting I was looking for was no longer held there.

I became wary. The man didn't close his door, but I was in a situation I couldn't control. He said others might come. I wasn't clear what he meant. I wasn't clear about the nature of the facility or about the status of the man who was a patient and an alcoholic. I wasn't sure of the mental stability of the first man, who stood near the door, while I stood farther into the room, near the bed. I realized I was in a room, in a building, in a facility, in a part of Lucknow, in India, and no one knew I was there.

I stood to leave. I moved to the door. I stepped outside. The man asked again that I stay. And again, he said others might come. What others? A third man appeared. The new man apologized for the absence of a meeting and asked if I'd like to speak with some men in the facility. I began to understand that it was a psychiatric hospital, in which some patients were alcoholics, and they were not there by their own choice.

I wondered if it was a good idea to venture deeper into the facility, perhaps not to emerge, to disappear into a locked psychiatric hospital, off the street in an unfamiliar district of a city on the other side of the world. The man entreated me to come in and speak to the men. At first, it seemed as if the two men thought I was an alcoholic who was seeking treatment, but as we spoke, they seemed to understand I was a veteran of recovery. It seems I was being asked to share my "experience, strength, and hope", the time-honored custom in AA.

A prayer appeared in my thoughts, "This is all yours. I'll trust this to be a good thing. I'll jump off this cliff. I'll do as I have done before. I'll trust that what I do for the good of AA, will be for my good, too."

I followed the second man through door after door. Doors that locked behind as we went. They weren't barred doors, but wooden doors between rooms, like in a colonial villa that had been converted to a hospital. I was introduced to a room of men lying in their beds, sitting on their beds, some fully dressed, some in robes. I spoke to the gathered patients about the experience of recovery from addiction.

I didn't use the language of sat-sang, but I didn't speak contrary to it, either. I meant to be in *the presence of truth among others*, like sat-sang, like AA. The forms weren't entirely dissimilar. More men came into the room, until it was a group. Then, an official of some sort entered and said, "What is this man doing here?"

My host answered him and asked that I be allowed to stay. The official wasn't happy. He relented, after walking in and out of the room a couple of times, and I continued talking for another few minutes. The man who brought me into the room thanked me, and the men in the room showed signs of appreciation, nodding heads and half smiles. Dry alcoholics were familiar to me, and the men seemed positive without being demonstrative. That too is typical of sober alcoholics. I was led out of the hospital, through door after door, until, once again, I was in the courtyard, shaking enthusiastic hands, then in the street, and then in a rickshaw, headed back toward the Avadh Lodge, through the movie district, where huge billboards crowded the narrow streets like a scene in a surreal movie.

At the Avadh Lodge, there had been an electrical failure, and the hotel was dark. The Indian night was black. I found my room and lit a candle. I walked back out into the dark night and stood, until the stars appeared in my eyes. The electricity returned to the Avadh Lodge. Someone cheered, and someone applauded. It was a beautiful night.

## Twenty Questions

As a man, I walked easily in the Indian streets. One night, I took a rickshaw to the Clarks Avadh, a large, western-style hotel, and spent some money on a nice dinner. I read the International Herald Tribune, and enjoyed the subdued nightlife of the hotel dining room. I decided to walk back the mile or so to my room. Along the road that paralleled the River Gompti, I became invisible in the dark, and I felt the fear of being in a strange land among strangers. And I felt the exhilaration of being alive without any attachment whatsoever.

I walked past the open fields where I had seen cricket games, past the Mogul temple, past Indians on foot and bicycle, inside and outside their homes. I walked past the intersection to the Carlton, along the border of the Botanical Gardens, past the driveways of the middle-class homes, where guards sat on chairs, paid to sit all night as a deterrent to thieves.

In all the months in India, I was never robbed, assaulted, threatened, or bothered. One afternoon in Goa, I saw two men arguing. It was the only time I saw angry words between Indians in public, and the argument subsided as quickly as it began. I knew there were professional thieves and a caste of bandits, but I didn't feel threatened. Western women were not so safe. I saw two teenage boys on a bicycle swing their arms at two women walking, hitting them like boys hit animals with a stick, just to show how brave they are, showing how afraid they are, in the same gesture.

Men in India were free to piss, even shit, beside the road, wherever they were. Boys, waiting for the school bus, pissed against the nearest wall, oblivious. Women and girls were prohibited from pissing and shitting in public. A couple of Western women did so anyway, pissing, at risk of condemnation.

Dress was proscribed for women. Western women who exposed the wrong parts of their bodies were condemned, taken for whores and ridiculed, in the same mixed shock of lust and disgust. At the same time, and in the same way, women were generally not aggressed upon and were treated with deference. One woman gushed at Papaji, pouring forth a begging, praising desire to give herself up to him, as a devotee. He laughed happily at the tumult of her submission and then turned the woman's words to her own self, prompting her to love herself with as much devotion, to become her own passion, to fall at the feet of her own being.

She begged him to embrace her. He recommended she embrace the source of her own being. A man wrote a plea, in grandiose prose, dripping with eagerness to become Papaji's devoted servant. Papaji turned his worship inside out. Or outside in. He feigned confusion over the words in the man's letter. He read as if he didn't understand the fawning adoration the man offered.

"What is this word?" Papaji asked a man sitting nearby. "What does this mean?" he asked, about something else the man has written. Finally, confused and at a loss, the man listened, as Papaji returned to the truth of the man himself, in the heart of the man, in the moment, in the work of self-enquiry. He deflected all worship and praise back upon the speaker. One man asks for clarification of yesterday's sat-sang. "I thought about what you said all night long. Can you help me understand?"

“Understand?” Papaji said, “I didn’t ask you to understand. This is not about understanding. This is not about thinking. Please, do not try to understand what I am saying.”

Or words to that effect. I wasn’t in Lucknow to record or to learn Papaji’s words, to become a devotee of the master, to practice a form of faith, to understand a teacher, or to find out what to do. Neither was I in India to become Indian.

My mind tried to make sense of everything. That’s the nature of the mind. I listened to Papaji, and my mind tried to understand and to predict what he would say, but in all my time in sat-sang, I never saw him thinking. The thinking of most people is so predicated on the forms of thought, it’s almost as visible as the motions of the body. But Papaji’s mind seemed to function the way original thought functions. Unattached thinking, the example of a mind no longer addicted to thought. To witness a mind that had sobered up from this life of thought-drunkenness, in a world stinking drunk on habitual thinking, was inspirational to any mind that’s ready to let go of its own obsessiveness.

Toward the end of my drinking, a young woman, a lawyer in training, showed my friend and me a pamphlet from AA. Twenty questions asked the effect of drinking on one’s life. My friend changed *drinking* to *thinking*, and we laughed at the result.

Has your *thinking* ever caused you difficulty in your relationships?

Has your *thinking* ever caused you conflict in your family?

Has your *thinking* ever caused you problems at work?

Does your *thinking* seem out of control?

Is your *thinking* getting in the way of your happiness?

We answered yes to all the questions. The young woman frustrated in her attempt to draw my attention to my addiction to alcohol, but she was unwittingly successful in pointing out the deeper addiction.

Seven years from the awakening that freed me from addiction to alcohol, I experienced the awakening that freed my addiction to thinking. It wasn’t the end of

thought. Thoughts come and go. I'm free to embrace the underlying reality that does not come and go. In this freedom, thought is unattached, cut loose, made free.

This is the way of my life making poems. Being with Papaji opened the recognition of the source more clearly. Being sober doesn't free anyone from addiction. Freedom is not in the addiction. Freedom is in the freedom.

## Miracles in Prison

Occasionally, Papaji told stories of his life. The telling was passionate and poignant, as if he was amazed at the simple miracle of life itself. Still, some stories were miraculous. I wasn't taken with the miraculous lives of saints. The truth is true in all beings. The truth doesn't belong only to the great ones. The miraculous isn't needed to validate the truth. It does however seem useful in getting people to listen to the truth-tellers. I would like this not to be so. The stories that were told about Papaji, and the stories he told of his own life, that inspired me, were the ones that would be true for anyone and everyone.

When I came to see Papaji, I didn't know any stories of his life. I knew that people came to be with him in a house, and that he asked no money. Papaji asked nothing, demanded nothing, offered nothing. No secrets were withheld for the few. No one was elevated in his company. He asked people why they were still in sat-sang after they'd been there for a while. The stories and miracles in his life were good stories, but I wanted the day to be here when the middleman is gone in the love of what we call God and Mankind, Being and Being Itself, One and Oneness, the Self and Eternity.

Still, miracles occur. I wasn't unfamiliar with them. In my awareness, everything is miraculous, and miracles don't indicate that the miraculous is anything but commonplace. Miracles occur at the moment of readiness. The absence of miracles is an indication that readiness is obscured by will and fear. In willfulness and fearfulness, there's no room to become conscious of the natural reality. Living inside willfulness and fearfulness, the natural reality is called miraculous.

In awareness, I have no bone to pick with anyone. Will and fear are symptoms of the life of separation in which most people live, in the separation from what's called God, in separation from the true self, in separation from the innate and natural truth of all beings, from love itself, from peace and joy. Separation is the umbrella under which human struggle exists in all its tragedy and glory. In awareness, the eternal tends toward itself. Never leaving itself, what is true remains true to itself.

Miracles are indications of the eternal, in the midst of the willful, in the midst of fearful denial, in the midst of separation, even as the illusion of separation dominates the world. In the human mind, the habit of seeing everything as a model of separation is an error of human thought. It's a paranoid delusion, that sells souvenirs, feeds on itself, and supplies the world with engagement, entertainment and self-justification.

Most of those who speak of God, truth, the eternal oneness, are in cahoots with separation. They offer hope for the antidote that they can then promote. They hold out the promise of freedom from a jail that only exists in temporal reality that only exists because everyone believes it exists. The jailers are those who promise parole, escape, and pardon. Miracles are the stories told in prison. They are the stories of the lives of those who are not living in prison. Until it's realized that no prison exists, these tortures, confinements, freedoms and flights from prison, will be very popular in history, sociology, literature, art, religion, emotion, and thought.

Papaji spoke of there being no prison to those who believed in the concepts of free and not free. He said we are neither free nor not free. We are. You are. This is the truth. You are. Even the question of freedom and prison misses the point. *I am*. You are the same as *I am*.

But, sometimes he told stories of freedom. The stories appealed to the least free. At other times, he told the simplest truth. The unvarnished truth rings true in the ears of those who are the closest to it. What's true resonates in the hearts of the ready. Papaji's teacher, Ramana Maharshi, was assaulted by followers who wanted to know what they must do to be free.

"Your freedom is already within you," Ramana said.

“Yes,” they say, “but what must we do to be free? What foods should we eat? What prayers should we say?”

“Say this,” Ramana said and stopped speaking for twenty years. (That’s a story I just made up, a little miracle invented out of the possible and the probable. It’s true, but only if you forget the story.)

## I Can’t Help You, Goodbye!

When I was new in AA, I heard the story of its beginnings. It became my sense of the essential reality of all spiritual transformation. In the 1930s, a man named Roland, the drunkard son of a wealthy family from Vermont, was sent to the most famous and best-respected psychiatrist in the world. Carl Jung, in Zurich, Switzerland, treated Roland for a year and then he admitted defeat.

“I made a mistake with you,” he said, “I thought I could help you, but I can’t. You’re addicted to alcohol. I can’t help you.”

Roland was stunned.

“What can I do?” he asked.

Jung told Roland he had few choices. “You can hire someone to watch you 24 hours a day, but you’ll probably figure a way to drink, anyway. You can have yourself committed to a sanitarium and remain there for the rest of your life, or you will drink and die, or you will drink and lose your mind.”

That was not good news for Roland. “Isn’t there anything I can do?” he asked.

“Once in a while,” Jung said, “very rarely, someone like you will experience a spontaneous spiritual transformation and lose the desire to drink.”

“How can I get that?” Roland said, his spirits lifted. “Should I go to church? Would that help?”

“It might. It might not. There’s no way of knowing.”

Having told Roland his only cure was a spontaneous spiritual experience, he said good-bye, and Roland left. He sailed back to the United States. When he got off the boat,

he was sober. When he got home to Vermont, he was sober. His parents were amazed and grateful. He visited a friend in jail. The friend, an inveterate drunk, got sober. The friend visited another friend in New York, another incorrigible drunk. That man, Bill Wilson, got sober, after having a white-light spiritual experience in his hospital room.

Bill W. decided to tell his story to other alcoholics and thus, AA was born. Roland was ready, Ebbe was ready, and Bill was ready. I believe that the crux of this story is the moment when Jung told Roland what he needed and then said good-bye. Jung could not and did not provide the awakening. He did not offer any method for it to occur. Nothing. Only the possibility. He told Roland that his freedom from addiction was in his spirit, and only he could access it.

Papaji told the story of Prince Sidhartha, who, after leaving his luxurious life, after six years of determined and diligent spiritual practices as an ascetic among other other serious spiritual devotees, was at a loss to be free. One day he fell asleep under a tree, exhausted.

“Something happened,” Papaji said, “and nobody knows what.”

When Sidhartha awakened, he was transformed. His awakening occurred, and the Buddha was born. Papaji went on to say that the true story of Buddha’s awakening isn’t told, because you can’t make a religion out of it. You can’t make a religion out of the most fundamental spiritual experience a human being can have. So that’s what we do.

Buddha’s awakening occurred. There was nothing to build a social system on, but Buddha did it, anyway. He went back to his ascetic friends and laid out a path for awakening, a path that didn’t explain the spontaneity of his own awakening, even if the path he described made for a good life. When one is ready, awakening occurs.

It happens, and nobody knows what. One of the common elements in these stories is that both men were at a loss. They had nowhere else to turn. Their best efforts had gained them nothing. And, their readiness was no longer obscured by their attachments.

If I were a teacher, that would be the teaching; “Readiness is all. Transformation is within. There’s nothing to do, and no one to do it. Be still. Be as you are. Pay attention.”

When I was a young poet in San Francisco, during a time of peace and quiet, during a time of stress and upheaval, I dreamed, and in the dream, I was sitting at a table

in a white room. Across the room was a white-bearded old man, sitting with some others. The old man gestured toward me and said, "Can't anyone see that man is in distress." It came as a surprise to me. I didn't think it was true, or at least, not so obviously true.

Then the old man said to me, "You do your best work when you're exhausted." For many years, I tried to decipher the dream. I tried to become exhausted. At the end of my drinking, exhausted and empty, I experienced an awakening that filled my being with light and relieved me of the obsession.

Roland and Sidhartha were exhausted and in distress, in different ways, but fundamentally the same. Both were seeking relief from a world of pain and suffering. Both were disinclined to believe in the ways of the world. Their transformation occurred when they least expected it. Transformation did not come out of their efforts or their expectations.

Religion says, "Be free or go to Hell." AA says, "Be free or go *back* to Hell." Late-stage alcoholics don't need much convincing. A key to readiness is to become exhausted with effort. To become exhausted in the ways of the world. But still, there is no formula, no program, no way for transformation to occur. Sometimes, it occurs in the least likely person. Regardless of the apparent randomness of readiness, *to be ready to be ready* is better than being stuck in unreadiness. Roland was told to be ready, after at least a year of effort. Sidhartha was ready, after six years of effort.

The thrill in the pit of one's stomach occurs in the moment that has no precedent. The thrill is in the realization that nothing can be done to enter this moment. It's not so easy to get to this *nothing doing*. Everything else conspires against it. In AA, it's said that someone can be too smart for God. As long as the mind is addicted to thought, the presence of being is called by a name and remains unrecognized and unrecognizable for what it actually is.

The truth is unrecognizable, when it appears in any form whatsoever, including in the form of a wonderful teacher in India.

## The Eyes of the Tiger

Suryo came to Lucknow the day after my birthday. We moved into a large suite on the second floor of the Avadh Lodge. A large room was divided into two rooms by a false wall. In the front room, I hung my paintings from Pune. We made the rooms homey and settled in. She asked herself why she came to sit at the feet of *another* master. She had her own master. She was happy with that relationship. Even so, listening to Gangaji on the lawn of the Carlton was inspirational to her. Here was an American woman, a contemporary who spoke the truth. She was glad she'd come.

I wrote a two-page letter that Papaji read. I was sitting near the back when Papaji said, "This is a long letter, but I want to read it all, so I will end sat-sang with this letter." I was stunned to hear my letter read. At the end of the reading, Papaji asked where *Abhaya* was. I raised my hand, and he spoke to me. He told me to be careful. He said that after Buddha was awakened, he was visited in his dreams by dancing girls.

"You're vulnerable right now. You'll be tempted. Be watchful."

I nodded, without any sense of what he was warning. He invited me to come up, to sit with him. As I sat beside him on the podium, he introduced me to Gangaji, who was sitting at his feet.

"I want to speak with you," Papaji said.

"I want to speak with you," I said, and I saw how I had, once again, acted as his equal.

"Can you come to my house?" he asked. I said yes. He turned to a man at his side and said, "Write down the name of the hotel he is staying at."

"The Avadh Lodge," I said.

That day, when Suryo and I returned to the hotel, there were others moving into our room. The manager politely explained to me that I was told the room was only available until that day. I vaguely remembered his warning and vaguely remembered thinking there was a lot of time to solve the problem. But now, there was no time. The new renters were Papaji people who'd been away. Our room had been their room.

On that day of amazement, I was still amazed. I stood in the hotel lobby, and I watched my own dismay and confusion. I watched my own thinking try to come to terms with the abrupt change in circumstances from beloved invitee to homeless rejectee. I was unable to make sense of anything. All our belongings were packed and loaded onto a bicycle rickshaw for the short trip to the Carlton in hopes of finding new quarters. Space was found, not in the main building, but in a house behind it on the hotel grounds. It was a three-room apartment, half a duplex, nicer than our large room at the Avadh Lodge.

Days later, Suryo and I went to Papaji's house at the appointed hour for my meeting with him. I'm not sure how she accompanied me, but I was happy in her company. I had no sense of her being an intrusion. As it turns out, a journalist has been with Papaji, and that kept him from his usual nap. It was early afternoon. We joined him at his dining room table. There was a cake on the table. Two other men were present. One was Danish, the other German. One had brought fruit for Papaji and offered him a professional massage. He didn't respond to the gifts and the offers, but he treated the men with courtesy and respect. One man complained about the Papaji student who was teaching all over the world and speaking ill of his teacher. Papaji didn't say anything in response.

Eventually, the two men left, and he turned to me. During the chatting and the cake eating, he seemed like a loving grandfather, talking casually, eating bits of cake and drinking tea. He turned to me, sitting as close as two men can sit. His eyes were the milky eyes of an old man.

"Did you do what I asked you to do?" he asked me. I looked into his eyes and didn't say anything. No words came to me.

"I asked you to go deeper," he said.

I had no answer.

"Did you go deeper?"

I had no answer. I hadn't heard his words as instructions. The odd thing, given my history, was that I didn't feel like explaining or apologizing. It felt as if my eyes were full of non-verbal responses, with no thoughts attached to them.

Then his eyes changed. The milky eyes of an old man changed. I saw something like broken pieces of glass, like jewels, like amber shards. They were no longer an old man's eyes.

"He showed you the eye of the tiger," Gangaji said, later, when I told her about it in our correspondence. Yes, it's true, I suppose, in some sense, but those eyes were crystalline, jeweled. We continued to speak.

"What is the secret?" Papaji asked. "Do you know the secret?"

"There is no secret," I said, without thinking.

Nothing I said came from any previous thought. The words seemed to occur in my voice.

"You're a writer," he said, "From now on, no more barriers. From now on, speak from the source. Tonight, in your hotel room, I want you to write something and give it to me, tomorrow. Can you do that?"

"Yes," I said, and the answer had no thought to it.

Then, everything changed, again. Papaji became a smiling, congenial old man, like a grandfather, like a neighbor, like an old friend. Suryo wanted him to pay attention to her in the way her father never did. She wanted to be recognized. She wanted to be seen. Papaji laughed and told her she had the energy of only six people in the world. He stood, as he spoke. He stood behind me. He put his hands on my shoulders.

"Sometimes, one or two or three young men, like this man, come to see me, and I am very happy to see them."

When we left the house, I was also very happy. I walked in a state of mindlessness, like dreamless sleep, awake, in what's called happiness or bliss. In fact, it's a current of being that runs beneath the meaning of these words. The presence of being itself is not emotional or mental. In the mind, it's called peace, and in the emotional heart, it's called joy. It is the state, in this life, when what is, *is*, without any attachment to thought or feeling.

Suryo was angry. Later, I don't remember what she was angry about. In speaking to Papaji, she told about her father, and perhaps that pain is what she was carrying. By the time we reached the main road, the argument was gone.

## Ways of Respect

One night, on Ashok Marg, walking back toward our room at the Carlton, we saw something coming toward us. The city streets were dimly lit and often pitch dark. Bulbs burned here and there, a lighted sign, a yard light, an open doorway. There was almost no traffic at night, with a few bicycle rickshaws appearing and disappearing in the shadows. Something loomed on the wide hard-packed dirt street.

Almost suddenly, out of the pitch, came an elephant. Fifteen feet high, it seemed thirty. A mahout was riding the elephant like a cowboy on a horse. We stepped to the side of the road as the great, gray beast moved past, almost silently, like a ship at sea, like an apparition, like an elephant on the street.

Another night, the street behind the Carlton was a carnival. It was a wedding. The bride, groom, and wedding guests seemed to be as brightly lit and decorated as the wedding scene, with a lot of good-natured drinking and bright splashes of color, as the celebration continued past midnight.

One afternoon, the hotel sent a man to our rooms to clean. He hadn't brought a dustpan for his broom. He swept the rooms with wispy fronds, until there was a pile in one corner of the front room. He lifted the refuse, the dirt and dust, with his hands. His skill was wonderful to see. He was graceful and precise. He cleaned the floor with his fingers and disappeared with a bow. He elevated a mundane task to its beauty. It undefined him from caste or caricature. He was a man in whom grace occurred. It lifted me to wonder. A photograph of it would have seemed picturesque or telling of another culture.

Another day, there was a message from a young woman who said she wished to speak with me. An Indian girl of sixteen, she came to pay her respects. She'd seen me in sat-sang, and she spoke in a manner I tried to deflect. I wondered why she had sought me out. She was calm, clear, and determined, courteous and deferential. I spoke to her at a table on the lawn of the Carlton. The honor she showed me was unfamiliar to me and mildly disconcerting.

Another day, I got a message that a young man wanted to speak with me. A boy of seventeen, a painter, he brought some drawings for me to appraise. He admired the paintings I had hanging on the walls. I praised the boy's paintings. "Oh, no, I am not a painter," the boy said, "You are a painter."

These incidents of honor in a foreign country were touching. I was used to my work being appreciated, but in India, it seemed to be praise for me as an artist, as a being, by nature. It seemed not to be praise for what I'd done, as much as it was praise for who I was. That kind of praise is outside of pride. No one can take credit for being as one is. Even the attention of Papaji didn't come as praise for me but for another incidence of Being Itself.

Flattery seeks some advantage. Praise tells the truth. A proud and vulnerable man would like to be flattered and be given advantage. The self blossoms in the sun of self-recognition. Lesser considerations are consumed in that nurturing flame. The personal flickerings of the self are like candlelight to the sun. It was my habit to expect bad to follow good, but when the man is not identified by his form, there's nothing to block the light, nothing to make him a shadow of himself.

One day, I realized my tourist visa was about to expire. I needed to take the visa to the government offices on Ashok Marg and have it renewed. When I got to the building, a half-finished modern high-rise, the electricity has failed, and water, from somewhere, has flooded the building, running the halls, the stairs, from floor to floor, now in near darkness, at the height of the day.

The office, on the third floor, was two rooms piled floor to ceiling with papers. The man in charge, apparently a lawyer, didn't seem to want to do anything about my application any time soon. He laughed and joked from behind his paper-strewn desk. He was already with a visitor, a man from Africa. I began to think a bribe might be necessary to speed things along, or to get them accomplished at all. The lawyer seemed to say that tomorrow would be a good day to work, or the next day. I didn't know how to offer a bribe or how to guess at its amount.

The lawyer told stories in Hindi and laughed. He looked at me and laughed. He looked at the African and laughed. After twenty minutes of inexplicable delay and

indecision, he picked up my passport and stamped it. He handed it to me and laughed. I paid the man the amount I thought was the fee. I thanked the lawyer and shook his hand. I shook hands with the African and re-entered the flooded labyrinth. I walked back down the stairs and back out into the sunny street.

### The Masquerade Ball

Papaji spoke from the source, but he was engaged by people who spoke from their temporal reality. The temporal is a stage language, invented from the reality of the stage. The problems proposed and solved on stage are stage problems. Occasionally, some actors allude to the fact of their illusion, and some wonder what life is like off-stage. Papaji spoke in his natural tongue, in the language of his native reality, the same language and the same native reality as everyone else's. People came to him who had forgotten or barely remembered their native tongue. They wanted him to translate his language into the familiar jargon of their theatre. He responded by speaking from the heart.

He was awake in the middle of the same dream that others were having. He spoke in the same language as everyone else, but from the perspective of what's always true, while those who came to him spoke from what's only true sometimes, a world of relative reality. There's an aching in *sometimes* to be *always*. There's a gravity in *always* that draws *sometimes* to it. He didn't have to convince anyone that what he said was true. The difficulty came in its apparent incomprehensibility. The Self lives in the self-recognized truth. Self doesn't have a problem. Self is not lost and confused. Self is not in denial. Self is not practicing a delusion. The delusion is the stage-work of egos and personalities.

In sat-sang, there's a simple peace and a quiet joy celebrated in Self. All of sat-sang, all of life, is the experience of that celebration. Emotions, thoughts and actions are but a dance of the Self, also called Soul. When people speak to each other, it's a way for spirit to be in communion, and to celebrate. Most speech, thought, feeling, and action are caught up in themselves and don't recognize the constant love-fest of souls and soul, but it occurs, nonetheless. As people of similar attachments are drawn to each other, even with

their eyes closed and their backs turned, the reality of what we call soul is the undercurrent, or as Papaji called it, the *substratum*.

I fell in easy love with Papaji. It was love recognizing love, speaking its native tongue. Because Papaji didn't masquerade as a personality, his love could be seen for what it was. Because he didn't return the infatuation of devotees, it was difficult for their love to continue on that level.

Someone might say, "Papaji, I love you!"

He might answer, "Yes, you are love itself."

It's confusing to a mind conditioned to think of love as a word spoken between subject and object, between you and me. Papaji simply saw and told the truth about love. Love is the common reality. People want to believe that the wetness in the ocean is something given and taken between waves. Papaji laughed. Where can one go naked in the ocean and not be wet? The identification that occurs in the world is in the mind that divides up the indivisible. The mind of man is clever. The mind is a creative marketer of believable illusions. The ability to believe illusions is one of the mind's greatest talents.

Papaji wasn't buying any of it. A young man had come to him and complained, "Papaji, I'm angry all the time. I can't get rid of my anger. I can't seem to let go of it. I don't know what to do. What should I do?"

Papaji, a former military man and mining engineer, a big man, plunged his fist into the man's belly. The young man was bent from the blow. He staggered, righted himself, and his eyes lit up. The anger was gone. "Thank you, Papaji," he said, "thank you." He was all smiles.

Papaji said everyone was a lion who believed he was a sheep. "If you are a lion, you must roar like a lion. Roar!" he said to one man. The man didn't know what to do. "Roar!" Papaji said, "Roar, for all of us to hear that you are a lion."

"Rrrrr," the man said, weakly.

"No," Papaji said, "Don't squeak like a mouse. You are a lion. Roar like the lion you are."

"Rrrrrr!" the man said, louder, like an imitation of a shout.

"Roar!" Papaji said.

“Rrrrrrrr,” the man roared, like a lion cub. Papaji laughed.

## The Flickering Light on the Trees

When I hugged Papaji in sat-sang, my face was buried in his neck. I remembered the warm, soft, wrinkled skin of my grandmother, an old woman I lifted from her bed to her chair, then from her chair to her bed. She was a gentle woman I loved. It was a memory of love in a moment of love.

I heard Papaji say that memory acts like a computer that scans the experiences of a lifetime to match whatever is happening in the present moment. The mind wants to find a similar instance of experience, so it will know what to do, so it will know how to handle the situation. And, so it will be in control and protected.

In most of my experience with Papaji, no memories can be found. Nothing matches the experience of no experience. But, in this instance, there was a difference. When he embraced me, there was the sense of a meeting between men, between generations, between a man and all men. I felt embraced by a father, a grandfather, an elder, a wise man, by wisdom itself. I was embracing all those things, yet my memory could find only the image of my grandmother.

Memory is not a call to return to the past but for the past to be as useful as it can in teaching the present. In the moment of awareness, there is no past to compare it with, no instruction to guide it, no association to warn it about. This is the terror and the freedom of the moment of self-recognition. There is no self in it to be recognized. There is no other within the all. Being itself cannot be recalled in snippets or pieces. It has no memory bank of incidents, episodes, events, or circumstances.

A man and woman meet and fall in love by a tree, on a boat, by water, in sunlight, at night, in winter, in spring, in a town, in the country, on a corner, at a party, under a lamp, at school. Whether the love affair is successful or not, these images become the icons of that love, when they have nothing to do with its occurrence, reality, and recognition.

Papaji meant nothing to the love I felt surging in the heart. I meant nothing to the love he revealed blazing in the heart. These catalysts of love are only catalysts of it being recognized. If love appears in the heart, and the occasion for it passes, where does love go? Does love come and go?

Papaji spoke in the language of love that doesn't come and go. Human language is devoted to the love that rarely comes and almost always goes. Even more, our language is devoted to the absence of love and the consequences of its absence. Papaji often employed the language of romantic love to demonstrate how ludicrous it is.

"Oh, pain, please don't leave me. You are all I think about. You are my whole life. I love you more than anything. You are the most beautiful. Oh, pain, my sweet, beautiful pain. Oh pain, please stay with me always."

Romantic love, the loves of desire, all the loves of the mind and the body, are committed to attachments, no matter how great the pain, no matter how impossible the achievements. In the temporal world, heartbreak and the pain of loss are proof of love. When love is the inherent nature of the heart, what can be broken? Attachments are made and broken in the mind. The emotions of the mind are not the love of the heart.

I heard this man say that certain desire is good. If one has a burning desire to be free, nothing else matters as much. The need to let go of all attachments, the ability to tell what's real from what's not real, even the need to clean one's house, all are subordinate to a burning desire to be free. The sun burns at night, obscured only as the earth turns to its other side. In the heart of the heart, the center of one's being, the sun of life burns. The sun is the burning desire that seeks itself. Within the heart of every being is the burning desire to be what it already is.

As Papaji spoke in the steady roar of sunlight, those who basked in this light were reminded of the roar within. His was an open invitation to recognize the source. For most of those who left his basking in the sun, the glow would fade, and the light of their memories would be attributed to Papaji. Many might wish to return to sat-sang. For some, when they are gone from Papaji, and when Papaji is gone from this life, they may claim to have sat in his sun, and the memories of Lucknow may be held tight.

The sun burns hot and the skin grows cool, searching somewhere else for what's within. Papaji seemed to say, "I am in the fire. You are here as well." Some come into the fire of their own being, and some are content to count the logs and stare at the flickering light on the trees.

## Between Nano-Seconds

For the first month of my two months in Lucknow, I was alone. In the second month, Suryo came and we were together. The aloneness of the first month was sweet. Every step I took was within the awareness of the self. A toothache was the only demand that obscured my awareness. When she came, she wasn't an attachment that demanded attention. She was content to be in her own consciousness.

One day, she sat with Papaji in sat-sang in attention to the moment between thoughts. Papaji employed a way of questioning to draw the mind to self-recognition. He asked that one let go of the last thought and not pick up the next thought, to take the smallest amount of time, a half of a half of a half of a second, a nano-second, half a nano-second, to come into the moment between moments. It was a mechanical, mental, scientific exercise, within a pool of acceptance, to direct the mind away from its activities and into the heart of its inherent nature.

Many of those who came to Papaji were meditators who had practiced for many years, honing the attention of their consciousness. Osho had spoken to many of them about the state of "no-mind". Many were at ease calling themselves the watcher. Suryo asked, rhetorically, "Who's watching the watcher?" Papaji tried to direct the watcher to look within himself, within herself.

Sitting in front of Papaji, face to face, Suryo could not come into the moment of self-realization. She told me later all that occurred was a feeling of blackness in her spirit. The opening to one's essential self is obscured by the attachments of the emotional and mental body. An intense burning desire, from either side of that doorway, can burn away the attachments, but it seems rare. It seems the unlikely path of a saint. For most people,

some effort must occur to keep the opening clear, or it's like a shutter that blinks open to give brief glimpses of truth, like snapshots of heaven.

Everyone has glimpses of their innate truth, in moments of love, in moments of beauty, in times of shock, in times of great exertion, when the life of the mind and body are momentarily transcended. But attachments soon crowd the doorway. The sight of the truth is defined by the details of remembered circumstances. No circumstance is responsible for the recognition of one's innate being, but the surrounding circumstances are clearly the stuff that blocks it.

I saw, among the seekers in Pune and Lucknow, as I did in my own life, a tendency to believe one can leap past the attachments of a lifetime in a glorious instance of enlightenment, to become free to live an ecstatic spiritual life.

As long as Suryo was in the ashram in Pune, her attachments seemed to be put aside. In the desire to be free with Papaji, her most tenacious attachments were exposed. In the entrance to her self, she saw nothing but darkness. She couldn't step freely through it. After ten years with Osho, after a lifetime in reaction to hurt and separation, after the dedication of her heart and her intelligence, she exposed, at the entrance to her self, the lingering ghost of its denial.

For a day she sat in black, in mourning, grief, pain, anger, and sorrow. By the next day, the dark cloud had lifted, but even years later, she revealed that she was bound to this world, and determined to live in its three dimensions, even as she continued to practice the healing of her heart.

I wanted to be with her in identical awareness, but it didn't occur. Outside sat-sang, toward the end of our stay in Lucknow, I stood with her, and Papaji grinned.

"She's good for you. Her fighting is good for you," he said.

At the time, I didn't know how to absorb this information. She and I were together in India, but I was shown, in every way possible, that the source of love is not to be found in the other. Papaji showed me he wasn't the source of love, either.

When I was a young poet, a friend told me I was a poet of love lost. Over and over again, I've been forced to enter the loss of love, to discover the love that is never lost, and, therefore, never found. I stopped looking, to see what *is*. When I came to India, I was not

looking. I didn't come to as a seeker. I said, "I'm in India. Papaji is in Lucknow. I will go see Papaji."

## Fearless in Lucknow

On the train to Lucknow, in my room at the Avadh Lodge, walking in the morning mist toward Ashok Marg, watching the launderers in the Gompti River dipping, lifting, and slamming the cloth against the worn rocks, standing at the junction waiting for a jitney, seeing the faces of the others on the jitney, at the storefronts, at the shacks of small businesses, watching the cattle that cross the road, standing beside the tables covered with Indian dishes in the houses where lunch was sold, sitting in the yard of the lunch house, chatting with Dipti, Moumin, and Udyana, aware or unaware, I was living in eternity.

There was a commotion in the street outside one of the lunch houses. A man was entertaining a small crowd with a trained monkey on a leash. The man spoke harshly to get the monkey to do what he wanted. The gathered Westerners were unhappy with the abuse, and the man was run off by the owner of the lunch house. I wasn't pleased by the harshness of the householder, who, in every way, tried to please the Papaji people.

I saw the vultures circle in the air above a cow's carcass on the tributary to the Gompti that ran in a long cut near Papaji's house in Indra Nagar. I walked in the arboretum looking at the variety of trees, flowers, and the ruins of an ancient wall. I walked among the rows of flowers, in the bower, by the concert shell. I walked on back roads, off the commercial streets, I passed children playing by the ditch, beside the road, running with human and animal waste, by the small, roadside shrines to Ganesh, by the poor sleeping against walls, by the shops packed tight in the narrow alleys, by a swaybacked horse, pulling a cart.

I was in a time of love. I loved the places and the people. I loved the many simple joys of life. I lived in a body, in a time, in a place of such overwhelming presence that only surrender could embrace it. In surrender, I found myself to be whole. It was the

temptation of the mind to account for this unlimited love. I walked back and forth between this and that, and nothing could explain this loveless love that was greater than any love. No one, nothing, intervened to claim it. There was nothing in me to explain its presence. I was neither its giver nor its receiver. The senses in the body, in the mind, in thought and feeling, are chronicled to explain the presence of this presence and the way it occurs.

Surrender is the only word I could find to suit the way of it, but who is it that surrenders? Who is the surrenderer, or is this another language-come-lately? All thought is after-thought to this being. All thought is after-thought to the awareness of being. In this being here, a moment occurs in which surrender is given and received, in such a way that nothing happens, and the awareness of everything is transformed from limited to whole.

How does this happen? It happens. I concluded that *thank you* was the only prayer, but who is it that prays? Who thanks, and who is thanked? The words in my mouth come from a source not of my direction or control. Even the words of control are beyond control. Who's controlling the controller? I sit in a chair, and I noticed that no one is sitting in the chair where I sit.

The appearance of the visual and the feel of the physical are unchanged by recognition. I don't look with visual eyes, but with the eyes that see what's always true. This so-called *truth* lives in-between moments of thought, in-between molecules. This is the presence where nothing seems to be. In the surrender to the presence of being, with no held thought of self, the unthought self is embraced. In the boundless pool of self where there is no pool, whatever occurs where nothing occurs, in all its wonder and beauty, like name tags for parts of eternity, for parts of air, for parts of love, we are.

## No Longer Anonymous

And it all came crashing down. And up. And out. And in. After I was at Papaji's house, after I wrote what he asked for, after I handed it to him, the next morning, I was lounging in sat-sang with my friends, drifting on a sea of love, basking in acceptance,

inside, outside, no side, sitting at the back, listening and looking at nothing, seeing the edges of the self edgeless, knowing without questioning, knowing without knowledge.

I felt at peace. I let peace become a feeling in the body and the mind. It's not that I felt peaceful. It's more that peace wasn't overlaid or undercut by other feelings. When the feelings that obscure innate peace are not held, peace is the constant.

The mind says, "I am peaceful," but the thought is laughable, as the wave that discovers and proudly proclaims, "I am ocean." It's true, but as soon as *I* is spoken, the truth is misrepresented. The truth of innate reality has no separation in it to become *I* and *not-I*. The ocean has no separation to call itself wave. The wave has no separation to call itself ocean. The tiger in the zoo is called *tiger*. The tiger that breaks free is called *wild tiger*. The tiger in the jungle has no name. At one point, I told Papaji I thought my name should be Noname, not Abhaya.

I heard him speaking to a woman. She was struggling to stop struggling. He worked with her in his workless way, by continuing to be nothing other than what he was. She wasn't ready, but she was willing.

"Here, perhaps this will help you," Papaji said, "I want to read something to you. This is what I have been trying to say. I don't know who wrote this. I found it on my bed, this morning. It was written by Anonymous. Whoever wrote this, please come see me, after sat-sang."

I heard familiar words. I was happy to hear my words read by the Master. It seemed curious to hear him say that what he read was written by Anonymous and that he found it on his bed. It wasn't true. I thought of going to see Papaji after sat-sang. The words were present and far away. They were words given to the woman. He read them, and then he continued to speak. Then, he was quiet. It was quiet in sat-sang. Without premeditation, I stood up, in the rows, in the back, in sat-sang, in the crowded room, among two hundred.

"Papaji!" I said.

"Yes," he said, "Who is speaking?"

"I'm not Anonymous," I said, "I wrote what you read. You asked me to write it. It has my name on it."

The words came out of me, even as I listened to them come. As I said those words, they seemed strange to me. I'd been in AA for seven years, where being anonymous was the accepted way. I was standing and declaring something contrary to the words of the Master, contrary to my experience, thought, or expectation.

"What is your name?" Papaji said, in a voice, both open and certain.

"Abhaya," I said.

"Come here," he said, and I began to make my way across the rows of sitting people, finding a path forward, watching for feet and hands, putting my hands on people's shoulders. As I made my way to the front, he asked questions as if he didn't know who I was or what I was saying. "Who are you?" "What is your name?" "Where are you from?" "What country?" "What city?" As I answered his questions, I was confused and perplexed. He responded to each answer.

"Lucky country." "Lucky city." "Lucky man," he said, in a pleasant, disinterested voice. "Here are all your friends," he said, motioning to the group.

I passed the row where Suryo was sitting, and I looked at her, with a shrug of happy confusion, as if to say, "I don't know what's happening."

As I got closer to him, he asked more questions, now lost to memory. Then, when I was near him, he said, pointedly, "Do you think you can do my job better than I can?"

It was an astounding question. I didn't know how answer.

"No," I said, "I can only point to the same moon."

I sat in front of him and look up at him. He looked stern and serious.

"I need a sign from you," he said, "I need you to give me some kind of sign."

I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to say. I had no thought, no idea, no understanding. I namasted. I put my hands together, I closed my eyes, and I bowed my head.

"This is a good sign," he said.

He put his hand on top of my head, and I looked up. He was grinning. He reached for his glasses just as I reached for my glasses. Both pairs had been put aside on the edge of the podium. Papaji picked up my glasses and put them on his face. I picked up his

glasses. He discovered the error, and he and I exchanged glasses. He was amused by the confusion.

“You can go back to your seat, now,” he said.

I got up from kneeling. I made my way back. As I passed Suryo, she saw my innocent grin. She said, later, that in that moment I look ten years younger. After sat-sang, I didn't go see Papaji. I was no longer Anonymous. For the next two weeks, my last days in sat-sang, I didn't speak. I thought it must be clear to all that I had been a fool. Apparently, however, few understood what occurred between him and me. Most thought it was another lovely moment between Papaji and Abhaya.

“Do you think you can do my job better than I can?”

I had tried to be his equal. I had to admit that I wasn't his equal in the business of being a Master. Papaji put me in my place. “This is all well and good,” I thought. I wrote Gangaji and told her about the day. I said the incident convinced me I had a spiritual ego that Papaji lead to the guillotine.

“Come here, little one.’ Whack! I was humbled in the exchange with Papaji. On the day we left sat-sang, I joined with Suryo and all the others who were leaving. Papaji chatted with everyone, asking his or her name and destination. When he turned to me, I could only bow and namaste. I couldn't speak. Papaji put his hand on my cheek, and laughed the light and warm laugh of a loved one, a loving one, a Papa.

## Papa Lion Roars

In the days that followed my challenge of Papaji, I felt ashamed, and I felt free. In time, I wondered about my act of defiance. It was true I would not be the same kind of master as Poonjaji was. I didn't like the slight of hand that seemed to accompany the teaching of many masters. The truth is not in dominating the student or in the submission of student to master. At the same time, I was astounded by his mastery. He was a floodgate of the acceptance and embrace of all that is within Being. His wisdom was brilliant, succinct, powerful, simple, and clear. He told the truth. His mastery took no

advantage over others. He gave of himself, hour upon hour, without demand. He refused the trappings that are common to many other masters. He took no money and elicited no obedience.

And yet, at eighty, he was a follower of the traditions of India. He was a teacher in the ancient practice of the guru. He wasn't weighted with the pomp and circumstance or the ashram and the following of other masters, but his mastery was not the same as I imagined it to be. In the moment when he seemed to act out a deception, I said no. Maybe it was a harmless deception, but I said no. It was true, as he said, that in the heart, the words were written by anonymous. Perhaps there was no deception. When I gave him the writing, in the morning, next to his van, maybe he gave it to someone else, who put it on his bed, without my name attached to it.

None of this matters. He read my words, and I claimed to be their author. I imagined myself a master. "Do you think you can do my job better than I can?" he said. "I can only point to the same moon," I said. There's no rivalry, no succession, no dominance, no submission, except in the moment of meeting. Poonjaji roared, and I bowed before him. I tried to judge this one thing that he did. I loved and accepted his mastery, except in this one instance and a couple of others. And even then, there was acceptance.

"Listen to this," the Master said, "This is what I am trying to say." He read my words. Then, for a brief moment, I roared, in the presence of the Papa Lion. "Not now," he said, and I bowed to his mastery.

## Nothing is Written

How can I speak from the source? How can *I*, as a writer, write from the source? If you are reading this, you are the *I* of this book. *I* am the author. *I* say you are the reader, but as you read, you're not a *you*, you're an *I*. This book becomes the book of the *I* who reads it. *I* is the reader. *I* is the author of all that comes within the awareness of *I*. During

the writing of this book, Papaji was no longer in his body. The title of Papaji's last book was "Nothing Ever Happened." Everything that is, is in this moment.

After leaving sat-sang, Suryo and I left Lucknow, we took the train to Gorakhpur, and we rented a jeep for the ride through the mountains to Katmandu. There were six passengers and two drivers. The drivers tried to pick up a third boy for the ride to Kathmandu, but I objected. It was getting to be a habit, then, in the hometown of Buddha. I introduced myself to the other riders, all from being in Lucknow with Papaji.

"I'm Abhaya," I said.

"Everyone knows who you are. Everybody knows Abhaya," I heard.

I felt an odd combination of pride and embarrassment. We rode a harrowing, tightrope highway through the mountains on the brink of certain death, to the capital of Nepal.

In the last week in Lucknow, I became frighteningly ill. I lost thirty pounds in India. Back home in the States, friends were concerned about my health. The illness seemed appropriate to the awareness that gained its rightful place. I am not the body, with or without a toothache, with or without diarrhea.

The challenge laid down by Papaji was, "No more barriers. From now on, speak from the source." He was the only one I witnessed who spoke from the source. Even Papaji lapsed into secondary speak. The language of human thought and discourse doesn't recognize that it has a deeper voice. When it recognizes that it can be about the source, it becomes once removed from the source. The first thought, Papaji said, is *I*.

As soon as I say I, I begin to misrepresent myself. Is there any way for the truth to be the one speaking, so human discourse doesn't lose itself in separation and deception? Is the illusion of human identity, the illusion that being human is being separate from the source, so intoxicating it can never be forsaken? Has the experience of this illusion been so fulfilling that there's no need to return to the truth?

Is Lion Heaven so pleasing to us sheep that we can't admit there's no distance between here and there? Can we shed our sheep skins and wake up as lions? We roar together the language of who we are, wherever we are. Speaking sheep language for millions of years doesn't make a lion into a lamb. Lions don't need to unlearn a language.

A language that doesn't admit the truth has filled our ears and our mouths. The clearing of the throat is to breathe the deepest breath of one's life.

Nothing you do or say can change the truth of who you are. You are the author of this book. You are the master of sat-sang. You are the source of this being here. There's nothing I can do for you. Be as you are. Namaste. Goodbye.