

of the Self. Just as his yogic experiences led him to the pitfall of pride, which he avoided through the humbling *darshan* of the Blue Person, the glory of these devotional experiences led him to another pitfall, that of settling for an incomplete understanding. What still lay before him on his *sādhana* were the understandings of the path of *jnāna* and the visionary experiences by which he represented these understandings to himself. Only through this further revelation and awareness to which we now turn would he reach the goal of full and final realization.

4 .

IMAGES OF UNDERSTANDING

The final section of the Blue Pearl narrative brings us to an outcome that is shocking, difficult, and probably not part of the religious or spiritual literature with which most of us are familiar. We are presented with an image of the end of the journey. The goal is attained; something has become real, irreversibly stable, and every prior state appears, in retrospect, to have been a pilgrim's progress through the world of becoming. All the elements of the meditative journey, intuitions of the sacred, the Other, and the Self, converge into one world view, one profoundly transformed attitude toward reality.

Images of Self-Realization

Muktananda's narrative offers us a rare glimpse of the way in which this final state can be represented within the awareness of the meditator. This concluding section of Muktananda's journey attests to the perfection of the Blue Pearl as an ever changing, expressive, and symbolic form, whose shifting appearance mirrors a shifting understanding at the deepest levels.

Now the awareness of the Self began to rise within me spontaneously. Formerly the feeling *deho'ham*—"I am the body," had always throbbed within me; but now it had all

changed, and it was the feeling *shivo'ham*—"I am Shiva," that pulsed within of its own accord. The rapture of bliss was steadily increasing. All those memories of the form of the supreme Blue Being, of His blessing, of His living within me, of my identification with Him, of "I am He"—all rang within me. I began to sway in the rapture of the sound of the *nada*, in the intensity of the love that spread through every part of my body, and in the memory of my fear of being destroyed by that divine Sphere of unmanifest light. There came more and deeper meditation, more profound experiences of the Self. Yet even then something inside me said that there was still further to go. I began to feel a lack of something, but there was nothing I could do about it. There was only one way to fill this lack: complete and unconditional surrender to the inner Shakti, who was Sri Gurudev. I went on meditating, and every day I saw that divine, radiant Sphere and the Blue Pearl inside it and heard the *nada* of the thunder. That was the state of my meditation.

Sometimes I would have fleeting visions of the all-knowing Blue Being, as quick as flashes of lightning. My meditation became deeper. Every day my conviction became stronger: "He is truly my inner Self, whose light is spread throughout the entire universe." Although I could not see it directly, I saw my inner Self as the Blue Person. Through the gift of Bhagavan Sri Nityananda's grace, I was gaining the realization that the Blue One was my own Self, the One who lives within all, pervades the entire universe and sets it in motion, who is one-without-a-second, nondual and undifferentiated, and yet is always at play, becoming many from one and one from many. He is Sri Krishna, the eternal Blue of Consciousness, the beloved life-breath of the *gopis*, and the Self of the yogis. This inner, eternal Blue of Consciousness is the *So'ham Brahma*—"I am He, the Absolute," of *jnanis*. This Blue is the adorable one chosen by *bhaktas*, who fills them with the nectar of love. This eternal Blue of Consciousness is Muktananda Swami's own beloved deity, Sri Guru Nityananda. This eternal Blue of Consciousness is the Siddha students' divine power of grace. If this is not realized, we cannot understand that the universe appears within God, the Absolute. But with the

knowledge given to us by Parashakti Kundalini as She unfolds and grows within us, we can see the universe at play in the form of the Godhead.

I began to see that He, through whose grace *maya* becomes known as the manifestation of the Lord, is my Self appearing as the Blue Pearl. I began to see that the Blue One, whose light spreads through the whole world, the One from whom I received knowledge, who is the pure transcendent Witness of all, the unchanging Being, the unchanging Truth, is my inner Self. I became firmly established in the inner knowledge that just as the sun is visible and yet cannot be seen by the blind, in the same way, even though the Blue of Consciousness, the Witness of all, is apparent, it cannot be seen without the grace of the Guru. But a cloud cannot obscure the sun forever. He who reveals Himself for a moment and hides Himself for a moment, yet is revealed even when hidden, is my Self. I began to believe that He who takes care of my yogic *sadhana*, who was known to our ancestors, and who will be known to those who are to come, by whose grace our attachment to the world disappears, was my being, my consciousness, and my bliss. A firm and steadfast belief arose within me that that Blue One—who makes light shine, and who shines also in inert matter, without knowledge of whom all knowledge is incomplete, and with whose knowledge all things are easily known—was the form of the grace of Sri Guru Nityananda. And yet, while these convictions were becoming stronger, I had a subtle feeling that there was still a little more to go. The great Kundalini continually deepened my meditation and my knowledge of the Absolute. [Pp. 177–179]

My meditation was approaching its fulfillment. The end of my *sadhana*, the completion of my spiritual journey, the complete satisfaction of my Self, was coming near. The time had come for my Gurudev's command to be fulfilled. I was to reach the summit of man's fortune, which is divine realization. Once the vehicle of a spiritual traveler's *sadhana* has reached this point, it stops there forever. There, you may see nothing and hear nothing, but at the same time all is seen and heard, for inside you is the spontaneous conviction that you have attained everything. When an aspirant has reached

there, he sits in bliss, sleeps in bliss, walks in bliss, comes and goes in bliss. He lives in an ashram in bliss, he eats in bliss; his behavior and actions are blissful. He experiences directly, "Now I have crossed the ocean of worldly existence." By virtue of this realization he is never agitated. No matter what he is doing, his heart is as calm as the ocean. All the afflictions of the mind melt away, and it becomes transmuted into Chiti. From inside comes the voice, "I am that which is dear to all, the Self of all, I am, I am." Now once again I saw Neeleshvara, the Blue Lord, whose nature is Satchidananda—Being, Consciousness, and Bliss. Seeing Him, the *sadhaka* enjoys happiness free from duality. He acquires supreme knowledge free from doubts, and knowledge of the identity of all things.

My very own, my dear Siddha students. My meditation was again as it had been earlier. From within, Bhagavan Nityananda seemed to shake me, and then the rays of the red aura lit up the 72,000 *nadis* and all the particles of blood. Immediately afterward the white flame stood before me, followed by her support, the black light, and finally my beloved Blue Pearl, the great ground of all. With the Blue Pearl my meditation immediately became more intense. My gaze turned upward. The Blue *bindu* of my two eyes became so powerful that it drew out the Blue Person hidden within the *brahmarandhra* in the middle of the upper *sahasrara* and placed Him before me. As I gazed at the tiny Blue Pearl, I saw it expand, spreading its radiance in all directions so that the whole sky and earth were illuminated by it. It was now no longer a Pearl but had become shining, blazing, infinite Light; the Light which the writers of the scriptures and those who have realized the Truth have called the divine Light of Chiti. The Light pervaded everywhere in the form of the universe. I saw the earth being born and expanding from the Light of Consciousness, just as one can see smoke rising from a fire. I could actually see the world within this conscious Light, and the Light within the world, like threads in a piece of cloth, and cloth in the threads. Just as a seed becomes a tree, with branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, so within Her own being Chiti becomes animals, birds, germs, insects, gods, demons,

men, and women. I could see this radiance of Consciousness, resplendent and utterly beautiful, silently pulsing as supreme ecstasy within me, outside me, above me, below me. I was meditating even though my eyes were open. Just as a man who is completely submerged in water can look around and say, "I am in the midst of water, I am surrounded on all sides by water; there is nothing else," so was I completely surrounded by the Light of Consciousness. In this condition the phenomenal world vanished and I saw only pure radiance. Just as one can see the infinite rays of the sun shimmering in all directions, so the Blue Light was sending out countless rays of divine radiance all about it.

I was no longer aware of the world around me. I was deep in divine feeling. And then, in the midst of the spreading blue rays, I saw Sri Gurudev, his hand raised in blessing. I saw my adored, my deity, Sri Nityananda. I looked again, and, instead, Lord Parashiva with his trident was standing there. He was so beautiful, so charming. He was made solely of blue light. Hands, feet, nails, head, hair were all pure blueness. As I watched, He changed, as Nityananda had changed, and now I could see Muktananda as I had seen him once before when I had had the vision of my own form. He too was within the Blue Light of Consciousness; his body, his shawl, his rosary of *rudraksha* seeds were all of the same blue. Then there was Shiva again, and after Shiva, Nityananda within the Blue. The Blue Light was still the same, with the sparkling luster of its rays and its wonderful blue color. How beautiful it was! Nityananda was standing in the midst of the shimmering radiance of pure Consciousness and then, as ice melts into water, as camphor evaporates into air, he merged into it. There was now just a mass of shining radiant Light with no name and form. Then all the rays bursting forth from the Blue Light contracted and returned into the Blue Pearl. The Blue Pearl was once again the size of a tiny lentil seed. The Pearl went to the place from where it had come, merging into the *sahasrara*. Merging into the *sahasrara*, Muktananda lost his consciousness, memory, distinctions of inner and outer, and the awareness of himself. Here I have not revealed a supreme secret because Gurudev does not command me to do so, God

does not wish it, and the Siddhas do not instruct me to write it.

Now I went into inner *samadhi* and some time passed in this way. Then as Witness-consciousness began to return, the Blue Light appeared, which Shankaracharya describes as *sat chit neelima*, the eternal Blue of Consciousness. My meditation became focused on it. I began to experience that I was entering into the center of the *sahasrara* and the Blue Pearl, the support of all. As I passed inside the Blue Pearl, I once again saw the universe spreading out in all directions. I looked around everywhere and saw in all men and women—young and old, high and low, in each and every one—that same Blue Pearl that I had seen in myself. I saw that this was the inner Self within everyone's *sahasrara*, and with this full realization my meditation stopped, and I returned to normal body-consciousness. I still saw the Blue Pearl with my inner mind. It drew my attention toward itself, and as I looked at it, I attained peace and equanimity. My meditation continued like this every day.

I still meditate now, but I have a deep certainty that there is nothing more for me to see. When I meditate, the certainty that I have attained full realization fills me completely. I say this because of the three kinds of visions that I saw within the Blue Pearl and because in the outer world I still see that same Light of Consciousness, whose subtle, tranquil blue rays I had seen spreading everywhere after the three visions. It has never gone away. When I shut my eyes, I still see it shimmering and shining, softer than soft, more tender than tender, finer than fine. When the eyes are open, I see the blue rays all around. Whenever I see anyone, I see first the Blue Light and then the person. Whenever I see anything, I see first the beautiful subtle rays of Consciousness, and then the thing itself. Wherever my mind happens to turn, I see the world in the midst of this shining mass of Light. The way I see things, whether large or small, demonstrates the truth of the verses of Tukaram, which I have quoted before: "My eyes have been bathed with the lotion of the Blue Light, and I have been granted divine vision." [Pp. 182–185]

Even now when I meditate, as soon as I am absorbed in meditation, I see the mass of the blue rays of the Light of Consciousness and within that the Blue Pearl. I see this soft, gleaming Consciousness pulsating so delicately and shining in all my states. Whether I am eating or drinking or bathing it comes and stands before my eyes. Even when I am sleeping it is there. Now my vision is neither dual nor nondual, because that radiance is in both. There is no longer any demarcation between space, time, and substance. The Blue Light, subtly spreading everywhere, pervades my own being as it does the whole universe. I even see what is invisible. Just as with the lotion of mantras one can see an invisible and secret treasure, so the blue lotion, applied to my eyes by the grace of Sri Gurudev and the blessing of the divine Kundalini, has granted me divine realization, so that I can see that which is too subtle to be seen. Now I really know that my Self pervades everywhere as the universe. I am completely convinced that there is no such entity as the phenomenal world, that indeed there never was such an entity. What we call the universe is nothing other than the conscious play of Chiti Shakti. I have naturally and easily understood the significance of the *sah*, "He," and *aham*, "I," which combine to form *So'ham*. That knowledge described in Vedānta as "Thou are That," whose fruit is the bliss of the Absolute, is my very own Self gently vibrating within me. To confirm this I give an aphorism from the *Pratyabhijnahridayam*, which describes the viewpoint of Shiva, the supreme Self:

*śrīmatparamaśivasya punaḥ viśvottīrṇa
viśvātmaka paramānandamaya
prakāśaikaghanasya evamvidhameva
śivādi dharanyantam akhilaṁ
abhedenaiḥ sphurati na tu vastutaḥ
anyat kiñchit grāhyam grāhakam vā;
api tu śrīparamaśivabhattachāraka eva itthaṁ
nānāvaichitryasahasraiḥ sphurati*

This means that for Lord Parashiva, whom we also call Parameshvara and Parashakti, there is no such thing as the

universe. He is true, eternal, attributeless, formless, all-pervasive, and perfect. He sees the whole universe, from Shiva to the earth—the moving and the unmoving, the manifest and the unmanifest—as supremely blissful Light, undifferentiated from Himself. There is nothing other than He; distinctions of seer and seen, subject and object, individual and universal, and matter and consciousness are not real. It is the vibrations of Lord Parashiva alone that produce the countless different forms of the universe. I see that the universe is the body of the Lord, and that Paramashiva Himself appears as the universe within His own being.

Jnaneshwar says in the last two verses of the poem that made me start writing *Chitshakti Vilas* [Play of Consciousness]:

*tayāchā makaraṇḍa svarūpa teṁ śuddha brahmādikā
bodha hāchī jhālā
jnānadeva mhaṇe nivritti prasādeṁ nijarūpa
govindeṁ janīm pāhatām*

The blissful essence of the Blue Lord which I have described here is the true nature of God. This has been the experience of all sages, from Brahma onward. My innermost form, envisioned by the favor of Sadguru Nivritinath, is truly Govinda, the supreme Lord. I see Him everywhere. [Pp. 186–187]

Students of meditation know through experience that once their meditation becomes pure it becomes free from thought. For example, when your meditation is fixed on the Blue Pearl, the mind becomes permeated by it and, in fact, becomes it. You temporarily lose consciousness of yourself; you become oblivious of the inner and outer worlds: Objects are not seen when there is no one to see them, and sounds are not heard when there is no one to hear them. In that state there is neither happiness nor sorrow nor ignorance, neither perceiver nor perceived. Only the pure Paramatma, the supreme Self, remains, pulsating in His own being. It is an unwavering, thought-free, tranquil condition. It is the goal of your meditation. A man stays in this state for a short

time, and then, when he begins to come out of meditation, he goes from *turiyatita* into the *turiya* state. Afterward, in *turiya*, no matter what happens, he will retain the realization of the transcendental state of *turiyatita*. Then, passing from *turiya* into *sushupti*, or deep sleep, he takes with him the experience of the *turiya* state. In deep sleep he still sees nothing different from himself. Leaving deep sleep and going into the dream state, he becomes his own dream world and all the objects of that state—chariots, horses, elephants, etc. He discovers that the Witness of the deep sleep state is the same as that of dreams. And then, passing from the dreaming to the waking state, he realizes that the same transcendental Being also underlies that. Thus from *turiyatita* to *turiya*, *turiya* to deep sleep, deep sleep to dreaming, dreaming to waking—and vice versa—only one Witness remains. The four states may differ from each other in various ways, but the Witness of them is the same. To become peaceful by understanding that there is one Witness of all the four states is, according to Muktananda, *sahajavastha*. [P. 265]

What is immediately apparent about the world created by Muktananda's meditations is that it is full of equals signs. One distinction after another is dissolved in favor of a more fundamental identity. "Who am I?" yields such answers as "I am Shiva," and "I am the Self." Images and qualities of the invariant reality that underlies everything emerge more and more in his meditation: the Light, the already attained Self, the unwavering joy. Variations in outer form are noted, but they do not become the basis of rigid categories. They merge. Shiva, Nityananda, and Muktananda are joined in one playful dance of appearances, and all are understood to be manifestations of the one radiant Light, the one Self.

The Direct Experience of Equality

These experiences clarify not only the world that is taking shape but also the one that is being left behind. The latter is the world of ignorance and illusion, in which we are continually being agitated by our perception of differences. In such a world, to be "different" always seems to imply either "better" or "worse." To be endlessly

aware of differences leads to agonizing over the past and worrying about the future, since judgments and portents must be scanned for their implications. We insist on conjuring up a world of discrete entities locked in some inexorable chain of causality stretching back to a cosmic explosion and forward to the moment when our sun, having become a red nova, expands and engulfs the earth. In such a cosmology, there is no room for Intelligence, nor for Joy. There is room only for the congealing, combining, and eventual destruction of matter that is joined, perhaps, by some epiphenomenal consciousness that will eventually lose its necessary material support. In such a self-portrait, we appear to be short-lived creatures trapped in the fear that derives from our concern for individual identity, uniqueness, and predominance. To anyone caught in such a world, the universe is at most a stagnant extrusion of the divine, abandoned to its lawful but otherwise meaningless gyrations through time and space.

In contrast, the structure of consciousness that develops when primacy is given to universals and equality rather than to relative differences is the very basis of the intuition of the Self. What is the basis of that sameness? What is it that appears to be immanent in all these ten thousand things?

It seems helpful to find some name—God, the One, the Self—but names can confuse the issue. By naming the immanent “the One” or “the Self” we imply that it is an object, an entity hidden within the apparent. Thus, the fissure of difference and otherness reappears, and our thoughts slide back into the familiar but inaccurate forms of representation. We want to name it, but the result is always a betrayal of the experience of seamless unity between the apparent and the real. “The light is in me” is somehow a less satisfactory rendering of the experience than “I am the Light” or “I am Shiva.” But even such equivalence statements represent a fading of the realization of identity in which the question of relationship does not even arise.

As each boundary becomes obsolete, all the energy that had been assigned to its preservation is released and made available. One unmistakable sign, therefore, of experiencing unity where previously there had been differences is the surge of relief, joy, and humor that accompanies the transformation in consciousness. The energy drain these distinctions create, and the fears that both lead to and flow from them, seem suddenly transformed into playful delight. One is on a permanent holiday from anxiety. The happiness that Muktananda

conveys, in his narrative and in his everyday dealings with people, is the best refutation of any suspicion that the state of final realization might be boring. One merely loses one's fear, constriction, and the drain of energy that are inherent in the world of differences.

The Ego and the Self

We can give a more precise name to the process that is driven by a vigilant preoccupation with differences and to the structure formed by that process: *ahamkāra*. This Sanskrit term is usually translated as “ego,” but since several quite different systems of thought employ this term, some caution is in order. As Muktananda writes, “Indian psychologists, the great sages who expounded *yoga*, understood that the mind takes four forms, each with a different function. When the mind is filled with thoughts, it is called *manas*. When it contemplates, it is called *chitta*. When it makes decisions, it is called *buddhi*, intellect. When it takes on the feeling of ‘I’-ness, it is called *ahamkāra*, ego. Together, these four functions are called the *antahkarana*, or inner psychic instrument.”¹

Within psychoanalysis as developed by Freud and his followers, “ego” connotes maturity, the reality principle, the capacity to integrate conflicting tendencies such as impulses and internalized prohibitions. The ego is the hero of the story in successful psychoanalytic treatment and successful personality development. An ego that is strong, flexible, and still growing adaptively is highly desirable. Indian psychologists and sages certainly agree with psychoanalysis in valuing the capacity for accurate reality testing and the capacity to make decisions, but they would typically trace such capacities to the *buddhi* or intellect. They would describe someone whom psychoanalysis sees as having “a healthy ego” as having “a strong mind.” They agree about this goal of human development, but they refer to it by different labels.

Finally, in popular parlance “ego” is often equated with conceit, presumptuousness, and a certain demanding childishness, as in the phrase, to have “a big ego.” The Indian use of the term *ahamkāra*, however, is broader than this. Whereas “ego” popularly refers to self-inflation or narcissism, the workings of the *ahamkāra*, the ego, lead also to a seemingly modest, self-protective assessment of one's worth, tailored to avoid provoking the jealousy and retaliation of others.

From the Indian perspective, then, the ego underlies the experience of feeling small no less than the experience of feeling superior.

To recapitulate, in the Indian tradition, when the mind takes on the feeling of "I"-ness it is called *ahamkāra* or ego. Thus, "*ahamkāra*" connotes neither maturity nor conceit. It simply refers to a tendency to ask certain primary questions of life, to a way of scanning each situation to see: "How am I doing? How can I make myself less vulnerable? What are the potential sources of my pleasure and/or my pain? How can these people or this opportunity benefit me? How do I look? How do I compare with others?" From the Indian perspective, these questions we ask of each situation betray, and deepen, our delusion. They reveal the mind's habit of viewing everything from a limited, self-referent perspective. Henceforth, I will use the term ego to mean precisely this habit.

Muktananda reports that before his final meditative experiences he was inclined to answer the self-inquiry, "Who am I?" with the ego's familiar assertion: "I am this body." The tendency to draw boundaries and then determine our identity by comparing ourselves to others is reflected equally when we say, "I am this personality." The ego is the instrument of our desire for certainty and security, which we find in our identification with body and personality and in all the judgments that we use to define ourselves. Once we have fully identified ourselves with our body or with the contents of our mind, the ego's self-limiting assumptions underlie the whole range of self-appraisals. We make self-aggrandizing comparisons one day, while on the next we indulge in a protective form of self-effacement that offers the world no offense and hopes to attract no attention whatever. Our inevitably uneven reception in the world, taken by the ego as the measure of our value, throws us from hope to despair, from mania to deflation, and back again. The experience that derives from the ego's structuring of reality resembles the roller-coaster ride with its oscillation between highs and lows.

The contrast between the experience of the ego and that of the Self can be put in structural terms. In ordinary consciousness, each new experience, each other person, and even each known god must be located first with reference to oneself. "How do I feel about it?" "Does this person like me?" "How do I and my co-religionists think about that form of God?" The structure that forms under the aegis of the ego and its preoccupations is built on a series of comparisons,

sharp edges, and well-maintained boundaries. This section of the Blue Pearl narrative shows, however, that the structure that forms from and yields the experience of the Self is sustained by a sense of commonality, identity, equality. The state of consciousness that arises from such a structure and sustains it is the state of true meditation. The meditative intuitions of oneness or of a fundamental void can replace the ego-dominated states of ordinary consciousness. The end result is called final realization, enlightenment, or sainthood. It is a state of being irrevocably beyond the ego. It is a state of adopting fully the perspective of the Self and of being totally identified with the Self. The saga of the Blue Pearl is thus the expression of a radical transformation in Muktananda's consciousness which is mirrored by successive waves of symbolic, visionary experience.

If Muktananda's earlier yogic and devotional meditations seemed utterly beyond one's own direct experiences, would it not be preposterous to search for personal parallels to his climactic moments of final realization? It might very well seem so, but then I must wonder: Did Muktananda tell his tale in order to elevate himself and deflate everyone else? What is he teaching by this narrative? Is it that he has attained the pinnacle, and I am either lost in the sleep of ignorance or else have barely begun the long upward climb? Or is it that I have surely had some inkling of true meditation, some inner opening to the Self, even if I have failed to recognize it? Clearly, the narrative presented in this chapter is intended to sustain the *jnānī's* characteristic assertion: "There is, in fact, nothing to attain. The Self is already attained!" If that is the case, the least I can do is tentatively to accept the implication of this teaching that I differ from Muktananda more in what I recognize about myself than in what I am, in my very nature. Personal modesty or negation of my experience would amount to a blunt rejection of the teaching of the Blue Pearl narrative.

Explorations in Understanding

My experience, and that of many others within widely divergent cultural contexts, suggests that the first encounter with one's teacher contains in a highly condensed form numerous glimpses of the journey that lies ahead. Remarkable realizations burst into consciousness

in those early days. More understandings than can possibly be absorbed flood the system. It seems, then and later, that one has been given a prospectus for a radically altered perception of reality which may take years to become fully operative. This rush of yogic experience, feelings of devotion, and new understandings is at once disorienting and a delicious promise of what one may come to integrate in a calmer, less frantic time.

I recall a questionnaire that I was asked to complete during Muktananda's second week in Ann Arbor. One of the questions was, "What are your main interests?" I answered, "Peace." One of my major preoccupations, then and during the ten previous years of the Vietnam era, was the anti-war movement. But my answer was also prompted by hints of an inner peace I had experienced after being around Muktananda. Even on the day I had met him, though I was crushed because I thought he hadn't seen the Blue Pearl in me, I had slipped into some layer of deep peace and soft darkness.

Although it is true that the inner tumult of thoughts and physical pain made some of my efforts at meditation seem completely fruitless, and some meditations seemed inadequate because nothing seemed to happen, other meditations were remarkable precisely because "nothing" happened. Those were the times when I reentered that layer of peace and contentedness. Still, my early inklings of the inner realm were not enough to prevent me from wondering, several years later, if my characteristic "black nothing" experience in meditation was proof that I was doing something wrong or that meditation was losing its value for me. It was during one period of such wondering that the blackness in meditation became even blacker, even more intense. The field of blackness suddenly was broken by an uneven area of red hot and white hot fire. Apparently, a small piece of the wall of a huge blast furnace had fallen away. All along, I realized, the blackness had been merely the outer covering signifying containment but not diminution of the inner process, the inner fire. There was a peaceful blackness, and there was an infinite reservoir of energy and power within the blackness, and both realities seemed to be equally valid portraits of my inner Self.

What impresses me about these early events is how many of them taught me something about the world of differences and about equality. In 1974 I would have been most likely to answer the question "Who am I?" with the then current phrase, "I am a

political person." I had been very involved in the anti-war movement: the teach-ins, door-to-door campaigns, protest marches, huge rallies, and, that year, the Indochina Peace Campaign. These efforts, and the movement for civil rights and against racism, had been central to my life for fifteen years.

My understanding of the world of differences and the possibility of attaining equal vision was deeply affected by the following events, which took place during Muktananda's stay in Ann Arbor. As the lovely autumn days went by, I found that I was spending more and more time at the ashram during Muktananda's visit. I began to tell others about the amazing world of chanting and incense and the delightful, charismatic man at the center of it all. In one of my classes, which was composed of some of the few students still involved in social change, I announced that the ashram was having a *saptah*, a dancing chant, in the basement of the Friend's Meeting House and asked if anyone wanted to attend. Most did, and we agreed to meet there and see what it was all about.

The first event was not, as I had expected, a dancing chant. Instead one of Muktananda's Indian devotees showed a few silent 8-mm reels of Muktananda in India. In the first scenes, we watched endless lines of devotees file past Muktananda's chair during his birthday celebration, each devotee adding something to the mountain of gifts. As she narrated, the Indian devotee duly noted each VIP, each minister of state, each chief justice. I didn't like what I saw, and the next scenes only made things worse. Row upon row of villagers—I called them peasants in my mind—were awaiting and then receiving gifts of food and clothing from Muktananda. My perspective became totally that of the leftist, and I judged the entire proceedings to be a classic example of feudalism. I was rapidly filling up with political rage. In China, I thought, there would be neither such wealth nor such charitable dispensations. The movie had left me completely alienated from the Indian social structure and, above all, anything to do with Muktananda. There was certainly no point in staying for the *saptah*. Nor could I imagine attending the weekend retreat only two days away. I felt embarrassed about having subjected the students to such political backwardness, and all I could think to do was leave, immediately. As the music for the *saptah* started, I dashed up the stairs, thinking, "Well, that's it. It's been interesting, but that's it."

Later that night, having gone to bed in roughly the same mood, I had an unusually vivid and memorable dream. I was standing in the huge living room of what I took to be my house, although it actually resembled the home of a senior member of my Department. Overlooking a river lined with weeping willows, the house had many glass windows, from floor to ceiling. It was getting dark, and I could see quite a few car headlights approaching. People were parking at the turnaround and walking in a steady procession up the path to the house. They seemed to be arriving for a meeting, but what meeting? What was the occasion?

As the living room began to fill up with people standing in small groups, I drifted from conversation to conversation trying to figure out who these people were and why they had come. At first, I kept hearing phrases like "school system change," and so I concluded, "Oh, these are Jean's people. They're here for a meeting of her project." My wife had been working on issues of educational change over the previous ten years and was at that time employed as a mental health consultant to the local school system. I relaxed. It was clear what was going on.

But then someone set up a movie screen at one end of the room. There was a bustle of chairs being rearranged. I circulated among the visitors again and learned that they intended to show a movie on the life of Mao. "Oh," I thought, "these must be Marilyn's people." Marilyn was a university colleague, a fellow radical, and an expert on modern China.

As the chairs and couches were being arranged into a circle around the screen, I saw my youngest son pushing the couch that would close the circle. I also noticed, as apparently he did not, that on the floor, just where the couch was to be located, sat a dark-skinned Indian man in an orange *lungi* and shawl. It was Muktananda. He seemed completely composed and relaxed. Instantly, the rage of the previous afternoon returned, and I heard myself saying clearly: "That's right, Davey, run him over."

The scene immediately vanished. I found myself sitting face-to-face with Swami Muktananda. We appeared to be in an analyst's office. He was the analyst, and I the analysand. I was recounting, slowly and carefully, the sequence that had just taken place in the living room. When I had finished with my injunction that my son run him over, I paused. It was the pause of the analysand who hopes for

some response, some interpretation, despite the overwhelming odds against getting even one word in reply. But this analyst responded: "Well, it appears that you have quite a problem about being the host."

In the dream, I reeled from the accuracy, power, and implications of Muktananda's interpretation. I was convinced that I had never received such an insightful summary not only of a dream but of my whole facilitative stance in life. I was so impressed with this swami-analyst that I decided to confront him with what seemed to be my most urgent question. I held up my hands, partially as a taunt and partially as a plea. In one hand was the bright yellow Beacon Press edition of Gandhi's autobiography; in the other was Schram's biography of Mao. In effect, I was asking, "Which one?" As I sat there with Muktananda's face framed by the two books, my arms were gradually being pressed together by an irresistible force. At last, the two books converged into one, and the result was an explosion of white light and jolts of energy coursing through my body.

As I hovered between the dream and wakefulness, I heard the Indian devotee say to me, "Well, what did you think he was, god of the radicals?" In the torrent of thoughts that followed, I realized first that all of my alienation and rage were completely gone. I also realized that yes, of course, I had hoped, assumed, demanded that he be a radical. He had to be on my team. But as devotee's voice and her film returned to my mind, it dawned on me that she had faithfully portrayed *her* Muktananda in the film. It was *her* portrait of *her* guru. My situation became quite clear. I had a choice to make. I could insist that Muktananda be a radical, like me and my gang. I could be furious that he was embroiled with status-conscious reactionaries. Or I could be thoroughly relieved that he made no invidious distinctions among people, VIPs or peasants, and was simply available to everyone. That struck me as the only way for a god, a guru, or an analyst, to be. He was not there to represent or to be monopolized by one faction or another.

Obviously, however, I was. Muktananda's interpretation, as I mulled it over, applied not only to the confused, off-balance character in the early section of the dream. It applied to me; my "problem about being the host" was so acute that I had been totally preoccupied with what my radical students were thinking about the movie. The irony of the situation was that, although I had left in a rage, the students had stayed on, having found the movie interesting and the *saptah*

wonderful. I realized, as the dream faded, that the host who is owned by his guests, or captured by his construction of what his guests are thinking, was precisely the kind of person I did not want to be any longer. In fact, I decided, if life around Muktananda was going to be anywhere near as therapeutic as that dream had been, maybe I had better go to the weekend retreat after all.

The dream was an initiation into the world beyond differences, the world of unity and fearlessness, and the great relief associated with its discovery. The political person I had become was so pre-occupied with the differences between factions, lines, "good guys" and "bad guys" and between such words as feudalism and socialism that the goal of peace, inner or outer, was becoming less and less attainable. If all perceptions of the fundamental unity of people and approaches are deemed incorrect, backward tendencies, then the mind will work mainly to defend "us" and denigrate "them." In the dream I had asked the analyst-teacher to choose between two books, two paths, and the explosive answer had been, "Understand that they are the same."

Spirituality and Politics

I am not writing a commentary on political life or on the campaigns for freedom, dignity, and justice. I know and admire scores of political people who have, as far as I can see, no need to begin exploring the issues I had to confront in those days because they are already doing so. I am writing about myself, about one person at one moment in recent history. As I reviewed my life at that time, a long-suppressed awareness could no longer be restrained. My companions and I may have been pursuing goals of peace, mutual respect, and equality on the vast canvas of national and global politics, but we were actually moving away from these goals in our immediate lives, year by year. The ways in which we first condoned and then trapped ourselves in the mounting violence of those days could no longer be ignored—nor could the disparity between the goal of genuine community and the actual fragmentation and mutual recrimination among the few remaining activists.

Our values, our ideals, and our sense that those in power were leading us in terrible directions had gotten us moving, but there

was something missing. The clearest indication of that missing element was, for me, bound up with the Blue Pearl. When Muktananda writes, "I looked around everywhere and saw in all men and women—young and old, high and low, in each and every one—that same Blue Pearl that I had seen in myself," he is describing the direct experience of equality.

I had been pursuing the goal of equality, but what was the nature of my daily experience? Did I really see with equal vision or was I trying to rearrange the world that I blamed for "forcing" me to accept its unequal arrangements and perceptions? Without a deep sense of the equality of all people, I was left with a vague, ineffectual commitment to a goal. Equality, in those days, was something granted only conditionally, only to "our side," to those with whom we empathized, or to our allies of the week or month. I sometimes wonder at the length of time it took us to realize that we were slowly yielding to all the habits of mind and temper that we thought characterized only the "bad guys": arrogance, self-indulgence, and a mounting rage at the enemy, the unconvinced, and our closest rivals, to name but a few.

It is possible, without losing for a moment the inner sense of equality, to act compassionately toward people in need and even to thwart those who plunder the lives and property of others. The direct experience of equality, symbolized for Muktananda by his vision of the Blue Pearl in everyone and expressed by him in his daily dealings with people thereafter, is the highest meditation and the fruit of the completed spiritual journey. However, the journey takes place in stages. As a start, we can turn away from blind alleys and give up destructive habits and counter-productive polarizations. My dream sequence suggested that I could, if I chose to, see the commonality between Gandhi and Mao, just as Muktananda could see the commonality between us radicals and the VIPs of traditional Indian society.

Our bravado, wildly optimistic predictions, and huddling together against the storm during all those political years had done nothing to reduce our fear. If anything, it became greater each year. And yet here was a human being living in a state of equal vision, and, among other things, he was an amazing example of fearlessness. No one can harm a person who understands death and who sees the same Self in himself and each person he greets. He cannot be hurt

by criticism, nor does he consider anyone to be of lesser value than himself, expendable, or the hated enemy. If equal vision between physical life and physical death, between the apparent me and the apparent other, and between all others is attained, the personal goal of peace and contentment is reached. It is not contingent on the structure of one's society or personal life because the understanding that underlies it leads directly to unconditional equanimity.

In contrast, the political life I had known went beyond the healthy and necessary distinction-making capacity of the mind. It went beyond the simple awareness of what is useful to the world versus what is destructive to it. It forged a thoroughgoing dualism in which the Prince of Darkness, in modern guise, reigned with an unrelenting and immense power. What was the source of this vision of reality? Might it not have been a projection of that part of our own consciousness that is anchored not in the Self but in the ego's terror-filled world of differences and mistrustful, separative relations among people? I have no doubt that there is real cruelty and injustice in the world, but this fact can become the pretext for us to activate the familiar dualisms of our own immature inner world. Thus, when we project the negative side of our good guy versus bad guy dualism onto a convenient target, we leave ourselves wide open to the experience of hatred, dehumanizing attributions of evil motivation, and undisciplined violence of thought and action. Such a world view is born of fear and vigilance and leads to more of the same. Thus, political life can become one round after another of schism, recrimination, and isolation.

The dream brought to the surface of my awareness the possibility of moving in another direction. Perhaps I could base my thoughts and actions on my own life experience, rather than on the frail, ideological commitments that had failed to block the downward spiral. Perhaps I could reorient my life around the values inherent in the moments of equanimity. But any such shift could only come gradually. I needed to see that equal vision didn't mean blurred vision—an inability to distinguish between kindness and cruelty, justice and greed. I needed to see, as eventually I did see in the person of Muktananda, that the equality revealed by the omnipresence of the Blue Pearl did not preclude the highest standards of personal and societal conduct.

I have not reached some final plateau of political awareness and effectiveness. However, I have found, from watching Muktananda and those who have learned much of what he has to teach, that it is possible to lead one's life in a state of pure love and respect for others regardless of the current political or economic arrangements of one's society. Beneath their interaction and specific gestures, I see in operation an understanding that resonates with Muktananda's experiences with the Blue Pearl.

I recall several occasions in Muktananda's large ashram in Oakland. On three successive days my wife and I had been able to attend "private *darshan*," during which about twenty people would approach Muktananda, one or two at a time, with some personal or difficult question. I sat, for most of these periods, just a few feet to the side of his chair. I could hear the questions, the translation, and his response. Each person would approach Muktananda in a state of pain and uncertainty, and he would respond with an indescribable gesture of availability and warmth. He would answer the questions as soon as they were translated, with delicacy and support, but with no tentativeness. What struck me even more was the effect his response would have on the questioners. They would seem startled, delighted, reassured, amazed, and relieved, all at the same time. And yet Muktananda seemed to be exerting no effort to size up the questioner, ponder the situation, or formulate a reply. He seemed totally engaged, sharing the questioner's sense of the importance of the moment. Still, as far as I could tell, he wasn't thinking at all, at least not in the way I understood the process. He seemed to be "on automatic," completely relaxed, content, and confident. I had never seen anything remotely like it.

I gradually concluded that the people who approached him, whether they came for advice, for blessing, for direction, or merely out of curiosity, came equipped with an inner voice that they could not hear. He could, however, and did. Somehow, not only could Muktananda hear the voice, but he was willing to let it resonate through his own voice and gesture. He seemed to just sit there, perfectly content to be the vehicle by which people might have a momentary encounter with their own inner voice, their own inner Self. Only in this way could I account for the delight, the surprise, and the relaxation of those whose brief *darshan* with him I had observed. It was as if something in Muktananda's answer conveyed

the intimacy, the knowledge of one's hidden thoughts, that one associates with being in touch with one's deepest, truest self. The impasse at which these people had arrived seemed to vanish under the impact of the primary message in his response, which was, "You are known." Suddenly, their fear and isolation and bitterness were undercut by the response of this stranger from India. However, for that to happen, the voice they were hearing had to be their own, whether or not they recognized it as such.

Every once in a while, as I sat there, I would try to view the situation from Muktananda's perspective, and I would have an inkling of his realization that the same Self, the same Blue Pearl, blazed in every person he met. There was, in that realization, no hint of separation or otherness—and no fear. He "knew" the answers that the inner voice of the person before him would give to the question or problem that had been posed. It was as if Muktananda could point each person to his own Self because some recognizable manifestation of the one Self, the Self of all, was available to him, moving through him without any effort on his part. If asked to account for what he was doing and how he was doing it, he might simply point at the picture of his guru, Nityananda, and say, "He's doing everything."

I found a point of convergence between Mao and Gandhi, between politics and spirituality, in that scene in Oakland. What more powerful way to resolve the many questions and problems that beset the world than for everyone to gain access to his own authentic, wise, and loving voice? How could the structures of consciousness that sustain, on the one hand, depression and passivity or, on the other, greed, violence, and injustice—structures, in either case, that are filled with fear—survive in either the victim or the victimizer if the voice of the inner Self were fully available to each person?

I could see in a new light why Muktananda was constantly giving food and shelter to the *adivasis*, the tribal people of his district in Maharashtra, India. Of course, he gave—food, medical care, love, understanding—whatever each person needed to survive and grow and realize the Self. However, I could also see why he gave and taught and made himself endlessly available to the wealthy and the powerful as well. His welcoming *all* people was nothing but an expression of his understanding, and that in turn was nothing but a pure distillation of his own experience of the Self in himself and

in "all men and women—young and old, high and low, in each and every one."

The Ego and the Process of Self-Inquiry

As I recall the personal experiences that seem to be connected with the path of understanding, I am struck by how often they convey a teaching about the nature of the ego. My momentary intuitions of the meditative state, the state of unity and the Self, interrupted the otherwise constant operation of my ego. Self-consciousness and self-protectiveness refer not to the experience of the Self but to my ego's limited sense of my true identity.

If, during meditation, my mind is filled with judgments about my inability to "really meditate," it is the ego at work. At such times, I wonder if some skeptical, ill-wishing, and fault-finding person has taken up residence in my self-appraisal system. It is odd that my ego's preoccupation with the quality of my meditation should manifest in the form of an inner voice that seems so alien and unsympathetic. The voice appears to be the result of internalizing the message of some other person, now far removed in space and time, someone whose own ego is expressed by the invidious comparisons at my expense. Where does that voice come from?

If my response to a movie about Swami Muktananda is being distorted by an intense concern with the opinion that my fellow radicals or my activist students will have about the movie, then it is the ego that has taken over. It is the ego that is busy anticipating future trouble, that is imagining that the others will turn on me and ask, "Do you mean that you just sat there and enjoyed that spectacle on the screen? You didn't see it as decadent feudalism?" Without the ego's characteristic concern for what others might think of me, who knows how I might have reacted to the movie? The ego manifests as voices that somehow have become internalized and powerful.

If, in my dream, strangers are crowding into my living room and out of anxiety I drift from conversation to conversation trying to figure out what is happening, is that not a portrait of the process of self-negation by which the ego is formed? I am being invaded, but I continue to play the role of the "good host." By turning myself over to these people, my ego is fearfully trying its best to avoid being left out or criticized. In the process, however, the would-be critics,

the radicals of the dream who are stand-ins for the radicals of the previous day, become the basis of the inner voice that urges my son to run over the swami with the couch. In the next part of the dream I use the swami as an analyst, and in describing the scenario I open myself up for his interpretation of my "host problem." Only then do the internalized others lose their hold on me, allowing me to turn to yet another version of the same struggle: the choice between Gandhi and Mao. The merging of the two books and the resulting explosion, the liberation of energy and the experience of freedom, are the results of moving beyond the ego's structure of introjected factions whose opinion of me I fear.

The structure that emerges from the dream, stripped now of any invidious comparisons between factions or paths, is far less dominated by the anxiety that produces and feeds the ego. The new structure is far closer to the Self in its direct experiencing of equality and the unity that underlies apparent diversity. The finale of the dream, in which the Indian devotee's voice ("Well, what did you think he was, god of the radicals?") exposes my need to make certain that Muktananda is on my side of the political fence, represents the sharpest blow at the ego. As I awoke, I realized that he wasn't on my side or on any side, and my appreciation of Muktananda's teachings on equality was expressed by a great surge of relief and happiness.

The ego is responsible for compounding our sense of bounded separateness. Through the processes of memory, identification, and internalization, we come to mistake voices from the past, our own and those of many others, for our authentic voice of the current moment. Our fearful accommodations and conformity to significant others leave behind a residue that becomes the nucleus of the ego. In order to preserve or advance the cause of this isolated, vulnerable entity that we consider ourselves to be, we perform a most peculiar act. While sharpening the differences between ourselves and the others we fear, we also store their voices, their judgmental commentaries, within us. Then we proceed to identify with these internal judgments as if they were our own. We do the same with praise, whether it is accurate and helpful or merely represents how someone wishes we were or wishes we would see ourselves.

Our difficulties begin when these voices set in motion the seesaw of unstable self-esteem and intensify our assumptions of separateness, conditional value, and vulnerability to assessment. The ego

is a system of assumptions and concerns that can become increasingly impervious to change. However, it is the collision of the ego with the experience of the divine, of the benign Other, and of the Self that yields the moment of freedom and lightness. As the structure of the ego loosens, sometimes the liberated moment can stretch into permanent transformation. What happens then?

Even if the Self is glimpsed for only a moment, two intuitions that are not easily assimilated may begin to take shape. The first takes the intuitive perception of nondifferentiation and identity straight to its obvious conclusion: "Well, then, I am God." The second finds the constants of the Self, the joy, radiance, and beauty, everywhere, always: "The world is perfect, as it is." In short, if one's intuitions of the highest states of meditation can stabilize and become permanent, the result is a mode of being in the world that I was raised to consider impossible to attain and illegitimate to claim or even desire.

As we attempt to understand these two verbal assertions, "I am God" and "The world is perfect," our attitude toward them is what is most important. If we are firmly rooted in the logic and assumptions of ordinary consciousness, then naturally we react to them in the age-old way. We don't feel that we are divine, and we don't see everything as perfect, so how can anyone else? A sentence such as "I am God" seems to imply that the speaker thinks only he is God. The speaker seems to be arrogantly disparaging the rest of us mortals. We are inclined to think of God as an object, or as the single occupant of some high office. Therefore, the only people who would assert "I am God" must be pretenders, false messiahs, or the deluded. It cannot be true. But what if this response is based on only one of many possible sets of assumptions, logic, and truths?

The assertions "I am God" and "The world is perfect" may be viewed as teachings of the path of *jnāna* or understanding that derive from a deep state of meditation.² The teacher's intention is to convey the meaning of his own experience to the seeker not through verbalizations but by actually giving the seeker the experience itself. The meditative state leads one to define a person not by contrasts but by what one can sense through intuition as the essential quality inherent in everyone. No one is disparaged, and no one is exalted as the only example of divinity, because the experience of difference has been reduced to a very minor aspect of reality. Awareness of the ground of all existence and the immanence of the divine in everything

is the fruit of a radically different attitude toward oneself and the world.

Another key to the experience of the Self in meditation is found in the Blue Pearl narrative. Up to a certain point Muktananda considered the Blue Pearl to be an object, the fourth body, the inner Other, the gift of the Goddess. Then it appeared to be the vehicle of the Blue Person, the indwelling Lord, or the sphere of unmanifest Light. However, Muktananda's feeling of incompleteness, his conviction that there was "still further to go," did not leave him until he himself entered the Blue Pearl. Only when he felt himself to be located at the center of the Blue Pearl and experienced the universe radiating out from that absolute point of reference was the journey complete. To identify oneself fully with the unmanifest Light, the void, or the matrix from which all creation arises is to have the direct experience that any verbal assertion, such as "I am God," can only approximate. Since everything is born from that Center and is filled with its radiance, it naturally follows that whatever exists is perfect and all perceptions that suggest otherwise address secondary aspects of the manifest universe.

Meditation and Self-Esteem

Muktananda uses these Blue Pearl experiences as the basis of his central teachings: "Honor yourself. Kneel to yourself. Worship yourself. Your God dwells within you as you." And, equally: "Welcome others with respect and love. See God in each other. Make this your daily worship." This twofold teaching is an invitation to meditate, to explore that inner state from which affirmations of one's true identity and one's true relationship to others flow in a perfectly natural way.

The more I have pondered these teachings, the more they have become a tantalizing kaleidoscope, shifting from one meaning to another. Sometimes the meanings seem to clash with one another. Sometimes they seem to fit into one coherent perspective. My first interpretation was that I should try to see beneath the surface of who I appear to be and recognize an Inner Self. This, I told myself, was my essence, my divinity. But was that "the" Inner Self or "my" Inner Self? In what sense could it be "mine" if it was universal or divine? The dilemma I had created for myself derived from my equation of

Self with soul, an inner spark which I "housed" but could not possibly call my own.

My second interpretation was the result of a casual conversation I had with a friend whose native language is Hindi. He pointed out that Muktananda's actual phrases could convey, for an Indian, quite a different message. It could easily be taken to mean what in English would be translated as, "Honor yourself." The phrase, *āpko vando*, could be taken to mean, "Kneel to yourself," and *āpko dhyāo*, "Meditate on yourself." What could that mean? It seemed that he was deliberately inviting us to honor ourselves and each other just as we are.

When the opportunity arose, I asked another Indian devotee why Muktananda used such an informal, colloquial manner in referring to the Self. "Why doesn't he use the term *ātman*?" I wondered. "That would seem more scriptural," I said, "because it would be translated as, 'Honor the Self.'" Her answer was immediate: "Because Baba knows that the greatest obstacle to our spiritual progress is our tendency to put ourselves down, and that is why he urges us, over and over again, to think highly of ourselves." She then reminded me that Muktananda was fond of repeating, "Never say to yourself, 'I am small. I am a sinner. I am weak.' Say instead, 'I am great. I am divine.'" "

For a long time, I could only slide back and forth between two perspectives. One suggested honoring a hidden or latent glory, the Self. The other maintained that even our current state is worthy of being honored. The ambiguity and the potential paradox turn out to be embedded in the Sanskrit language and its modern forms, including Hindi and Marathi. The word *ātman* is not used for only metaphysical discussion. Its use ranges all the way from the ineffable Brahman, the ultimate reality, to the ordinary, everyday sense of "oneself." It shares a common root with the second person pronoun (*āp*) that Muktananda uses in his teachings. The ambiguity turns out to be an essential part of the teaching. The Sanskrit language encourages a prolonged meditation on where, if anywhere, we should draw the line between sacred and profane, divine and ordinary, Self and self.

One further interpretation has overtaken my internal debate. It rejects the implicit assumption of the controversy: that what we should honor can be thought of as if it were an object. It goes beyond

the valuation of an aspect of ourselves, as object, to the location of ourselves as subject. Honoring the Inner Self and honoring ourselves as we are converge when we understand our true nature as subject, awareness, consciousness.

It is not that our ordinary self is one rather pathetic thing but our Inner Self is another quite wonderful thing. The Self is not an object. Nor is it that we should honor ourselves, just as we are, because we have nothing to learn and no growth ahead of us. Rather, it is in our status as subject, as Witness or Experiencer, that we are "the" Self, "our" Self, and "truly ourself." But the truth of the matter is that we do turn ourselves into objects. We don't identify ourselves as the Witness of our thoughts, nor as the unwavering light of consciousness, the Self. And to the extent that we do not identify ourselves as the subject of our universe, we do indeed have a long way to go. There is, however, every reason for one who has "attained the Self" to honor us, as we are *and* as the Self. The distinction between the limited form and the absolute is no longer a final one. When Muktananda reports that he sees the Blue Pearl in each person he meets, no less than in himself, he is describing the state of the self-realized being.

Our yearning to reverse the deeply ingrained habits of doubting and belittling ourselves sets in motion the process of transformation. We search for some way to abandon, if only for a moment, the structure of consciousness that breeds comparisons and self-denigrations. The experience of meditation provides us with some respite from the workings of the ego.

An incident that showed me many of the important contrasts between ego and Self, between ordinary consciousness and meditation, took place in 1975. At the beginning of a ten-day stay in the Oakland ashram I attended an Intensive. This weekend program, designed as an introduction to meditation, included several talks on the theory of meditation and *yoga*.

I was happy to be there. I was feeling an unexpected but satisfying sense of having returned home. The ashram seemed magical and beautifully arranged. But, faster than I could have imagined, the pendulum of my emotions swung in the other direction.

One of the first talks was about the esoteric Indian teaching concerning Kundalinī, the subtle body, *chakras*, and auras. I winced inside as the talk began. These esoteric topics were hardly my favorite

aspect of Siddha Yoga. I tried to maintain an attitude of interest and openmindedness, but when the speaker began to assert that auras were evidence of the subtle body, that the Kundalinī power rose higher and higher through the *chakras*, and that each *chakra* had a certain color and a certain number of petals, I lost my composure. For one thing, I kept thinking, "What if my colleagues in psychology could see me now, listening to all this mumbo-jumbo!" For another, the speaker wasn't relating most of her assertions to anything she herself had experienced. Each new detail of yogic anatomy seemed to be introduced by, "They say . . . " Who were "they?" In my mounting anger, scorn, and mistrust, I began to mumble to myself, "Does everyone have to believe all this? Do I have to? This is just dogma. Am I the only one in the room who thinks this is ridiculous?"

The crescendo of inner turmoil was reaching the breaking point when, from some previously ignored part of myself, a voice said, "Look at the state you're in right now." And the implication was, "What are you going to do about it?" In the midst of this bitterness and anger there was just enough energy to bring out of my depths what I would later call my first authentic prayer: "Help!" This unvoiced but desperate plea was aimed at Baba Muktananda, and I managed to repeat it several times. But before long I was pulled back into a morass of self-pity: "Why did I come all this way? Why did I spend all that money on air fare?" Meanwhile, the speaker was plodding through her diagrams and her "They say's."

Suddenly I noticed that there was a layer of air just below the ceiling that looked like the brownish smog that often hangs over Mexico City. As I watched this smog settling lower and lower in the room, it reached eye level, and I had to duck under it to see the speaker clearly. Eventually, it reached the floor and filled the entire room. I could barely make out the speaker in the front of the room, but, more significantly, I couldn't hear anything she was saying. I could see her mouth forming words. I could see the attentive audience. But I was enveloped by an unimaginably soft, quiet, and peaceful atmosphere. The last echoes of all my rage and rejoinder simply faded away, and in their place was nothing—nothing, that is, except first a ripple and then a tidal wave of sheer delight. I sat there feeling like the Cheshire cat, all grin and no thought. I continued to watch the speaker and the people around me but I had no reaction to any of it. After a while the speaker sat down, the people noiselessly

clapped their hands, the fog lifted, and I sat there in a state of serene wonder. My first thought was, "I guess prayers do get answered." But even that conclusion, novel though it was to me, seemed to evoke very little thought and emotion.

What does all of this have to do with the ego and meditation? Many aspects of the ego's structure of consciousness are at play here. First, I see the introjected others, the reference group of colleagues. They are in me. They are the source of that primal threat that can exist all one's life. The threat, in one form, is this: "You can associate with those people if you like, but if you do, don't think that you can come back to us, ever again. It's your decision." The ego forces choices and creates showdowns. I stand at the threshold of something new, but the threat from the old is too powerful. I don't dare jeopardize the ties to those who threaten me, and so I not only hesitate, I fall in with "their" assessment. I see through their eyes, which makes me their prisoner. In making a concession to these internalized opinions and pressures, I have reduced myself to someone who could not survive "their" rejection, scorn, and ostracism.

The ego, responsible for my internal compliance with my colleagues and my externalized scorn for the speaker, was thwarting my efforts to accomplish what I had traveled all the way to Oakland to do—to break its grip and gain access to the state of meditation. My anger at the speaker and at all the "docile" listeners betrayed a yearning to break through into a state where some unfettered self would emerge. I wanted to share not their apparent acquiescence but their playful enjoyment of this strange, esoteric lecture. Frozen though I was at the threshold, it conveyed to me the yogic teaching that I could and should step out of the way of the process of my own self-transformation. The attribution of that process to the Kundalini or to changes in the subtle body was not the primary message. The main point was that my life task was not one of courting approval but of allowing a more authentic level of myself than I had ever known to purify me and take over one aspect of my life after another. But I couldn't defy the threat. All that I could do was pray, call for help, and wait.

In retrospect, the answer to my prayer doesn't represent any model for negotiating all such ego crises. I have never again prayed for help with such desperation, nor have I found rooms filling up,

or down, with brown smog. But it did happen once, and I must say that the message had a great impact on me. It taught me the consequences of letting go of the ego, of letting its characteristic preoccupations slide by. It taught me about the welling up of joy and peace that comes from not clinging so tightly to the internalized cast of characters in my ego's web. If that contentment and centeredness, that outpouring of the Self, is available inside, how seriously can I take any conditional threat, internal or external? Placating these internalized, ghostly voices can provide occasional respite from the menace of exclusion and scorn, but nothing can compare with tapping the source of unconditional, self-born contentment.

The experience of the Self in that meditative smog remains the significant core of that event. I still do not bring many of the esoteric formulations into my ordinary professional mode of functioning. I still don't believe in *chakras* and auras in the way that the speaker seemed to, but I have had the sort of meditative experiences that underlie such intuitive formulations. Actually, these esoteric ideas are valuable to me because they are an expression of people's meditative intuitions and thus open up communication between us. I am impelled not to quarrel with them but, instead, to turn within and locate my own parallel experiences and share these in terms with which I feel comfortable.

Different readers will take different routes to explore the meaning of Muktananda's account of final realization. They will at different times conclude, "Now I have a way of thinking about how Muktananda's experiences might apply to me and my own spiritual journey." I am particularly fascinated by Muktananda's awareness of being at the center of the universe. The resulting assertion, "I am God," is the last of a series of intuitions that I can share, not through replicating the specific content of Muktananda's visionary meditations, but through exploring their implications for me. What they seem to imply for him, and what they certainly imply for me is this: "I make the universe. The universe is more than a purely physical or mental system. It is consciousness. It is a system of meaning of which I am the creator, sustainer, and destroyer." They imply to me, "I do not need to identify with the apparently fixed elements of my life, my body, my life history, my personality. I may identify with, I may recognize my unity with, the deeper process of awareness itself. Something endures in the midst of everything. It is consciousness,

and I am that. The world of differences is the play of that consciousness, and I affirm my identity with that play because from the center, where I locate myself, all meaning arises." What this implies about those around me is essentially the same: We are all epicenters of the one conscious energy, and we are each the creators of our own meaning and experience.

The Emerging Synthesis

From the vantage point of the final section of the Blue Pearl narrative, we can see more clearly than when we began the sequential phases of Muktananda's journey. First, the themes of power and purification emerged, then the fullness of devotion, and finally the understanding called the realization of the Self. The phases are distinguishably different from each other, but it is also true that each meditative vision contains elements of all three themes. The three segments point not to a set of mutually exclusive categories or spiritual paths but to a progression that is highly complex.

The sequential order of Muktananda's experiences reveals a progressively more inclusive integration of themes rather than a superceding of all previous themes by the subsequent one. The result is an evolving synthesis, and I construe Muktananda's teaching to be not that these thematic elements must emerge in the order they did for him but that they must all be fully present before the transformative process is complete.

From the beginning to the end, the complex synthesis is always being formed. Muktananda's initiation by Nityananda anticipates the whole of the journey. It brings together a guru's power to awaken the dormant spiritual energy of the seeker, a moment of intense love and tenderness, and an intrinsic understanding of the fundamental identity between God, Guru, and Self.

The separate themes crystallize only as portraits of our limited capacities. They reflect only the uneven readiness we bring to the task of realizing a truth that is indivisible, but which we grasp in partial ways. The three paths are all just approximations to the unitary path upon which all others converge in the end.

The ego and its residues are purified. An inner power wells up. The Other is established as the source of the power and as the Beloved. The relationship deepens, and with it the supreme paradox.

The Other is and is not. The Self blazes forth, forging the identity of Being between all forms of consciousness. It becomes a matter of choice whether one revels in that Oneness or delights in the apparent dualities. Every element of the synthesis is available to one who has reached the goal.