How then to describe the lived content of the phase that extended most of the way through the eighties? I will try several ways to answer that question, and I hope to convey that this was a great period in our lives.

The menacing sea was always right there, just on the other side of the dyke. Lightening was always on the horizon, always somewhere in the past, present, or future. But during the whole arc of time throughout the late seventies and the eighties there was another reality that came into our lives. It was in the roar of silence over which the discord and melodies of life could be heard. It was always there as Ground, as Field, and as deepest truth. Quietmind is one name for it. The most important thing about each day was what we courted and what we celebrated in the Guru Gita, in the evening chant, in the mantra’s emergence into awareness, and in all the spaces between the figural events. And we hardly ever talked about it. Even now, talking about it seems to threaten that the main point will be missed, even subverted. But not talking about it would cede pride of place to all the specific events and feelings and thoughts that do often seem to be what the story is all about. Perhaps we can circumambulate the main point.

Baba called the Guru Gita “the indispensable text.” Just like Ramana Maharshi walking around his sacred mountain, Arunachala, the Guru Gita circumambulates the Self and, with no sense of changing topics, the Guru. The Self and the Guru, two ways of referring to the irreducible Subject. The one without a second. As it still does, all through the eighties my day began with the Guru Gita. I've tried many times to ponder why I did that and with what result, but I always seem to come up with a different answer. So, in no particular order, let me recount some of the recurrent elements that emerge when I explore this. Jean and I both knew that the Gita was crucial as we struggled to absorb the impact of Larry's illness, and of hers. It was the safe harbor, the life raft, our home base. By the end of the hour and a quarter we devoted to a series of chants we were as ready for the day as we could hope to be. It was (and still is) beautiful, a sacred text, and the carrier of so much wisdom. And yet, when I think back to my actual experience on so
many of those mornings, it seems more as though I had been pulled into an immensely powerful whirlpool of feelings and memories. It felt like a variation on therapy in which all the unacknowledged and unbearable fragments of my inner life manifested for a limited time and in a safe environment. Far from contemplating lofty ideas and visions, I would soon find myself engaged in a ritual whose goal was purity. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of times during these years I would visualize a huge rope net containing hollow glass balls of varying hues. The glass spheres were filthy and caked with mud that I took to be anger, despair, and bitter memories. I was carrying the net down to a gently flowing river which I would walk into up to my waist. I would lower the net into the water. Slowly the water would cleanse the contents of the net and the ritual was over. I felt lighter and less encumbered by the past. I felt renewed each day. But there was more.

Verse after verse, each one a noble iteration in our collective, human effort to apprentice ourselves to the Truth. Thou art That. I am That. Guru, God, and Self. Some of the Guru Gita’s authors focused on where in the body the Self was particularly knowable: the Heart, the crown of the head. Other authors treated the Self as the unknowable vanishing point of all concepts and images, as the singularity that is always becoming our present. Still others wanted it understood that not only was the Self in all ways identical to the Guru, encountering a living guru was the most efficacious and the fullest way to know the Self. Each day one or another verse would glint in the sun, catch my eyes and change my day.

And then there was the assembled sangam, the rows of devotees creating each day such a constancy of purpose. We did not have, nor did we need to have, similar personal styles or personal histories. Here we all were, showing up to imbibe this "indispensable text" together, counting on and at the same time creating the alchemical process of our own transformation. What we all had in common was that, as best we could tell, we were heading in the right direction. Baba used to repeat the injunction, "Don't slacken now. You've come so far," and that was the general attitude of this vigorous little group.
The fruit of these great practices, for which I am eternally grateful, was a degree of equanimity we would not have thought possible. We sought out and tried so many promising would-be remedies for Larry's illness and later for Jean’s, but, looking back, what strikes me is that we tried each thing and at the same time we went on with the rest of our lives in a pretty good mood. Jean's word for what she was dedicated to, especially toward he end was her "state." The more weight she lost, the more she clung to preserving her state, and she succeeded to an amazing degree. One good measure of her equanimity was just how little bitterness or anger or self-pity filled her days. The fruit of these years of practice was that each moment, no matter how filled it was with stress and pain, had its own sufficiency.

One day recently, as I struggled to capture where these great practices had led me, my thoughts unfolded in a slightly poetic form. Perhaps it can contribute to my description of this whole decade.

* * * *

Home and the Edge

What is the feeling of being home?
And what is the feeling of being at the outer edge, riding the wave that creates both space and time?
What is the feeling of being calmly at the epicenter of the only universe you will ever know?
And what is the feeling of endless expansion?

Where, in your mind and body, does the experience of being home register?
How many thousand ways would we have to list to capture all the ways we have of coming to an inner conviction that we are home?
And where, in your mind and body, does the experience of being completely free register?
Another list that will never be completed.

The warp and the woof of the life we weave, home and freedom.
Deep security and ebullient creativity.
Each day's unique pattern, each encounter’s unique coloration,
Delightful, crushing, overwhelming, peaceful, joyous,
Always set against the basic structure of home and the edge.

I did not create my home by myself.
I did not generate my creative energy by myself.
But at times I am a most willing collaborator,
Joining, merging with, becoming, being.

I sigh with relief, warm tears roll down my cheeks,
I am so happy and so grateful.
But then too -
I am light, agile, alert, confident.
I am so happy. This will never end.

Shiva and Shakti

And what does it feel like to welcome and embody both Shiva and Shakti?
Neither aspect of the bifurcated One Reality exists partially or without the other.
Shiva exists, Shakti exists, and that which precedes both exists.
I can limit my access to Shiva. I can limit my access to Shakti.
But the closer I come to my real self, the more both are fully present to me.
They are who I am.

Home and the edge are always everywhere.

* * * * *
For us, home existed, out there and within, but so too did this great adventure in search of the Self (that was never lost). Our lives as parents and teachers moved ahead. Girija suggested that we start a Center in our home, designed mostly for students. Once a week our living room would be rearranged, we would chant and meditate a bit, and then we would have cider and cookies.

As Center leaders, we would go to the ashram in South Fallsburg for teacher training. One year, at the end of the course, the leaders of what was by now dozens of Centers assembled in a large room. Baba was there, and Malti was translating. Baba was sending us all home with a gift for our Center, and as I approached, Malti handed Baba a lovely crystal swan. Baba then handed it to me with the warmest of smiles, and I returned to my seat slightly stunned by the impact of such close contact with him. I returned to my room and thought, as I looked at the swan, that I should take a cloth and polish the crystal gift. Before I could even start, I realized that it would be far better to leave it as it was, with Baba’s fingerprints intact. Right away, my hands and arms began to vibrate as if they had just touched a live wire. I held out my hands and it seemed that some kind of light energy was streaming out of them. The phrase ‘spiritual psychometry’ went through my mind. Just touching an object he had held gave me access, I realized, to one small aspect of Baba’s aliveness and power.

In early 1982 I wrote Baba to say I would be taking a sabbatical leave, and I requested his permission to write and publish a book that focused primarily on his own evolving experiences with the Blue Pearl. Gopal replied that Baba approved of the plan but added that Baba said that I should always keep in mind that, "When the curtain goes down on psychology, the curtain comes up on Siddha Yoga." I soon completed The Light of Consciousness, including a few stories from my early days with Baba.

Baba took mahasamadhi, he left his physical body in October of 1982. In the days and weeks that followed, in the round-the-clock chanting at the ashram, I was no stranger to the acute, mournful sense of shock. Formulations of a more positive and enlightened perspective were
passed about, but my mind was too dulled and somber to take them in. However, while I may have been alienated from others’ efforts to understand what had happened to Baba, I knew right away that I still had my connection to a living guru. Baba had passed the Siddha lineage to Gurumayi. And I had already had many moments with her in which she had incorporated for me the strength and the kindness of the guru. The "transition" to Gurumayi seemed to require no thought or effort on my part.

Gurumayi and her small entourage visited Ann Arbor and stayed in our home in 1984. Jean and I bunked down with the other ashramites in our main building. Our community had not had much advance notice that Gurumayi was coming, and everyone was involved in getting things ready. A young woman on the advanced crew that came a few days before Gurumayi's scheduled arrival took one look at our bedroom and declared that its yellow color must be replaced by white. That was at least one step beyond the degree of surrender we could manage. We said we wanted it to stay as it was. I was under the impression that the question of wall color had been decided in favor of our preference, but then one morning Dharma arrived at the back door with four gallons of white paint. He announced his intention to paint what was going to be Gurumayi's bedroom, and I blocked his way past the shoe racks. He seemed ready to go back out the door. He lifted up the paint cans. Time stood still, and my situation was presented to me in visual form. I seemed to see two giant icebergs with a small but growing crack between them. I was desolate at even the prospect of being on the wrong side of that crack, and my opposition to the project dissolved.

Having Gurumayi in Ann Arbor propelled the whole community into an energetic but no less ecstatic state. Gurumayi was relaxed, attentive, and there was laughter in the air wherever she settled down and gathered people around her. An unexpectedly large audience showed up at the Michigan League to hear and meet Gurumayi. After I introduced her, she remarked that when she was in college, her plan was to become a psychologist, but, she added playfully, Baba had other plans for her. More than once she mentioned that she could feel the vibration of love coming up to her bedroom from the chanting hall directly beneath her. The years of chanting had yielded something palpable and pleasing. Very soon after Gurumayi and her group left Ann
Arbor there were ashramites and devotees sitting on the floor in our bedroom, joining us in savoring the powerful energetic residue of her presence. Within a year the two large ashram buildings were closed down. More and more ashramites were turning into householders or else moving to South Fallsburg, New York. As a result, the morning Guru Gita was shifted to our house.

Once again, I struggle to find words that capture the depth and constancy of the foundational basis for our lives. On one level, of course, the next three or four years were marked by the deteriorating health and eventual death of both Larry and Jean. But the foundational basis we reaffirmed every day in our practices and in what we read overshadowed even these harsh events. It is clear now, since this narrative invites a big picture perspective on how things were going, just how precipitously things were falling away. But from the micro-perspective, each breath that was finally caught, each act of care that reached its mark was a source of gratitude and reassurance for us both.

Feeling as though one were being carried along in the right direction, being guided in the right direction involves a subtle perception that does seem to slip away when staring at some particular, unwelcome event. But even then, it hovers in the periphery or in the borderland between waking and sleep. The sense that everything is all right, or what you might call ‘perfect,’ just overtook us. For example, to look beyond the obvious dramas of ill health, this new life entailed a new kind of risk. This degree of being out of control was clearly something our previous adaptation had steered us away from. We had moments of wistfully remembering what it was like to stay within the confines of a regular life. After a week of sleepless nights and increasing anxiety about her mental stability, even then what remained for Jean and me was an axiomatic certainty it was all part of some larger, mysterious, but primarily benevolent process that we had chosen and were continuing to choose on a daily basis. One evening, as we were relaxing in front of the fire, I visually entered a strange drama in which all I could see was that I was moving rapidly in great, erratic swoops around a flat mesa whose edge was sometimes close and sometimes far away. Extraneous as it seemed, I registered with amusement that what was
being played out was the polarity that Michael Balint had sketched out decades before. People he called acnophils prefer safety and security, while philobats prefer open spaces, the excitement of danger and the unpredictable. We are all mixtures of the two tendencies. Here I was, moving toward and away from the precipice, but then I seemed to head straight for the edge. I walked faster and faster until I found myself out beyond the edge, walking on thin air. Where the ground would be, if it had continued, now felt spongy but substantial. My mind brought up the familiar cartoon figure, The Roadrunner, and I even looked down to see if I might now plummet to earth. But instead I eventually banked, curving around like an airplane coming in for a landing until I was headed in the opposite direction and found myself back on the mesa. I remember exclaiming to myself, with delight, "Oh, they take you out there but then before you get too terrified, they bring you back again." This was an apt portrait of how my life came to contain a deep sense of trust in the midst of life's familiar mixture of pleasure and pain.

Finally, what came my way was the unaccountable, periodic arrival of contentless joy. The fast chants, the gentle singing ensemble we formed as we waited in line for meals, and often the mind-blowing ideas in talks and books and conversations. In the definitive, confident voice of the Upanishads and of Jnaneshwar’s reworking of the Bhagavad Gita. I was constantly caught off guard by how magnificent and true these poetic, scriptural verses were and by their effect on me. Suddenly I would be sailing like a seagull, with great ease and openness. No memory captures this deepening acquaintance with joy better than remembering Jean, who probably did not know that the food and water tubes had already been removed, calling out as Ned, our son, entered her hospital room for the first time. "Oh look, he's beaming love to me. He’s beaming love."