of the seeker's latent spiritual energy; the path of devotion, love and obedience in relation to the Other, whether it be the Lord, the Goddess, or the fully realized guru; and the path of unity awareness, as experienced and taught by the enlightened beings whose lives are the primary teaching of their nondualistic understanding. In the Indian tradition, a teacher who can initiate a seeker, function as guru, and communicate the full realization of all three component paths is called a Siddha guru.

The synthesis of the three paths of purification, devotion, and understanding which Muktananda calls Siddha Yoga is evident even in the segment of the narrative treated in this chapter. Although the yogic processes of purification and power dominate the imagery of the narrative thus far, there are numerous devotional references to the Other, as Goddess and as guru. The path of understanding, as well, is beginning to emerge; over the course of his experiences, Muktananda is coming to view the Blue Pearl as "mine," and even as "me." However, the tone and import of the next two segments of the narrative are in striking contrast to this first, more yogic phase of Muktananda's journey.

3.

IMAGES OF DEVOTION

The path of devotion brings to the fore the seeker's sense of relationship with the Other. How real, how present, how benign is the Other? Muktananda's threefold criterion of a true experience—that it be firsthand and not merely hearsay, that it be told or shown by the guru, and that it be supported by scriptural authority—has special bearing at this point. Muktananda was only gradually made aware of the scriptural precedents of the direct, yogic experiences reviewed in the last chapter. In contrast, the visions presented in this chapter are consonant with the Indian devotional tradition that had affected him deeply from his earliest youth.

The Direct Encounter of the Other

The Indian scriptures are filled with examples of devotees having the darshan of the Other. What Muktananda was lacking was his own direct experience of that darshan. As he put it in a later interview with an American scientist, "In India, the people believe in the reality of the personal form of the Lord. There was a time when I did not accept it. The different manifestations are given names such as Rama or Krishna or Durga. But after I had the vision of the Blue Pearl, and after I saw all the manifestations appearing within it, I accepted their reality. That is the secret of the yoga of meditation." Muktananda is frank about his position at the time of the events that occur next in
the Blue Pearl narrative. He had been sent back to his meditation hut after being told in no uncertain terms by his guru that his spiritual journey was far from over. And he did not, on the basis of his direct experience, accept fully the reality of the personal form of the Lord—not, that is, until the events that continued and extended his vision of the Blue Pearl. It is to these events and "the secret of the yoga of meditation" that we now turn:

O my dear Siddha students. Now something new happened. Listen to this with love, and don't ever forget what I am telling you. One day I was sitting in joyful meditation. As soon as I sat down, I started the great worship of Sadguru Nityananda, who is one with the Goddess Kundalini Shakti. "O Gurudev, you are on my east, you are on my west, you are to my north, you are to my south. O Sadguru, you are above me, you are below me. O Dear Sri Guru, you are in my eyes, you are in my ears, you are in my nose, you are in my mouth. O Sadgurunath, giver of grace! You are in my throat, you are in my arms, you are in my chest, you are in my back, you are in my stomach. O mother Guru! O father Guru! You are in my thighs, you are in my legs, you are in my feet. O my Baba! You are in me, I am in you. And you are in any difference there may be between my form and yours." I invoked my Guru in this way, and my meditation began with the red aura glittering before me. Then the white flame, the black light, and the Blue Pearl followed one after the other. My heart was filled with joy. Megharaja, lord of the clouds and friend of yogis, was thundering inside the sahasrara. Then a great miracle happened. I should not talk about it, but Sri Guru is urging me to do so. I do not have the strength to write about this miracle. My hand does not move. My fingers have stopped working. My eyes will not open. Only my tongue is moving. Perhaps Nityananda has come and forcibly taken possession of it. Since I do not have the right to speak, it is Bhagavan Nityananda who is speaking. My friend Yande is doing the writing. He has surrendered himself to Baba Nityananda, which is why he is writing.

The wonderfully radiant Blue Pearl, with its countless different rays shining from within, came closer to me and began to grow. It assumed the shape of an egg and continued to grow into human shape. I could see it growing with my own eyes and was lost in utmost amazement. The egg grew and grew until it had assumed the shape of a man. Suddenly divine radiance burst forth from it. For a moment I lost consciousness. What had happened to Tandraloka? Where had Sarvajnaloka gone? And what had become of the intuitive intelligence by which I had understood everything so far? Muktananda forgot himself for a few moments. Because he did not exist, everything else also disappeared. If there is no one to see, there is nothing seen. If there is no one to listen, there is no sound. If there is no one to smell, there is no smell. For a moment I was not conscious of anything. However, my state of meditation was still just as it had been. I was sitting firmly in the lotus posture, facing north. Then, I again saw a shining human form in place of the oval. As it shone, Muktananda came back to himself. Muktananda's Tandraloka returned. Intuitive intelligence came back and also Muktananda's extraordinary memory, which was always watching over and reporting his inner states.

The egg-shaped Blue Pearl stood before me in the form of a man. Its brightness lessened. I saw within it a Blue Person. What a beautiful form He had! His blueness shone and scintillated. His body was not the product of human fluids derived from the seven elements, but of the blue rays of pure Consciousness, which Mukarram Maharaj called chimney anjan—"the lotion of Consciousness that grants divine vision." His body was composed of infinite rays of Consciousness. He was a mass of Consciousness, the essence of Muktananda's inner life, the real form of Nityananda. He was the true form of my Mother, the playful, divine Kundalini. He stood before me, shimmering and resplendent in His divinity.

What a beautiful body He had! What beautiful eyes! What a fine straight nose! What attractive ears and earrings, and what beautiful hair! How fine His head! He had no beard. He wore on His head a crown set with the nine jewels. These were not inert material creations of this earth, but were
composed of pure Consciousness. What beautiful long hands, slender fingers and nails He had—all so blue. The clothes He wore were soft and fine. How long and shapely His legs, and how well formed His toes. His whole body was exquisitely beautiful. I kept gazing at Him, from head to toe, from toe to head, my eyes wide with amazement.

He came toward me, making a soft humming sound, and made some kind of gesture. “Say something,” He said. What could I say? I was completely absorbed in just looking at Him. He walked right around me and stood still. Then, looking at me, He made a sign with His eyes. Then He said, “I see with this foot, too. I can see everywhere. I have tongues everywhere. I speak not just with My tongue, but also with My hand, and with My foot. I have ears everywhere. I can hear with every part of My body.” Thus He spoke, and I listened to Him. “I move with My feet, and also with My head. I can move any way I like. I move as far as I want in an instant. I walk without feet and catch without hands. I speak without a tongue, and I see without eyes. While I am far, far away, I am very near. I become the body in all bodies, and yet I am different from the body.” Then He said a little more, which was heard by Nityananda and cannot be written here. Then he added, “This very way is the path of the Siddhas, the true way.” He lifted His hand, and made a gesture of blessing. I was utterly amazed. As I watched, the blue egg, which had grown to a height of six feet, now began to shrink. It became smaller and smaller until it was once more Neeleshwari. It became my Blue Light, the Blue Pearl.

I was completely amazed. Filled with great bliss and thinking only of the grace of Sri Gurudev Bhagavan Nityananda and of the divine Sri Chiti Kundalini, I passed into Tandaloka. I realized that this was the neela purusha, the Blue Person, who grants the realization of God with Form. He is also called the supreme unmanifest Being, by whose blessing one proceeds to the realization of the ultimate Truth. After blessing me, this Being returned into the Blue Pearl from which He had emerged; and then my meditation ceased.

How marvelous are the countless visions in the world of meditation! How great is man’s worthiness! How magnificent is the Blue Pearl! How bountiful is Dhyaneshwara, the lord of meditation! How glorious is man, how magnificent he is! O Muktananda! You are great. You are infinite. You are extraordinary. I was completely overcome with joy, giving thanks for my human birth and recalling what I had seen. Now the conviction “I am the Self,” became firmly established. I believed completely in So’ham hamsah, “He is I, I am He”— “You are God, God is you.” I began to experience the full realization of this truth.

I was convinced that this was the divine Being who had been described in the [Bhagavad] Gita (13:13–14):

sarvatah panipadam tat sarvato kshiširomukham
sarvatah śrutimalloke sarvāmaavatya tiṣṭhati

He has hands and feet everywhere. He has eyes, heads and faces on all sides. He has ears everywhere. He knows all and exists pervading all.

sarvendriya-gūˌhāsam sarvendriya-vivarjitaṃ
asakṣitaṃ sarvabhruchchaiva nirguṇam gūhaḥkore cha

He has all the qualities of the senses and yet is without any of the qualities of the senses, unattached and yet supporting all, free from the three attributes of manifestation and yet enjoying them.

He dwells in the sahasra and appears in subtle form in the powers of all the sense organs. He can be experienced by the senses and yet is far beyond them and without them. While in the body, He says, “I am Muktananda, I am, I am,” yet He is unattached to it. He is the nourisher of all. He is the sustainer of every cell within the 72,000 nadis, the One who nourishes by giving vitality to the vital fluids and richness to the blood. He is beyond the three gunas, and yet, even though He has none of the gunas, He dwells within the sahasra and experiences all gunas. If someone gives food, He eats it; if someone gives flowers, He accepts them; if someone gives clothes, He wears them; if someone bows, He accepts that...
too. The person giving all these things thinks, “I am giving them to Baba,” but it is He who accepts them:

*bahirantashcha bhūtānāmacharam charameva cha
sūkṣmatvāttādavijneyam dūrastham chāntike cha tat*

([Bhagavad] Gita 13:15)

That is without and within all beings, the unmoving and also the moving, unknowable because of its subtlety, and near and far away.

He pervades the outer and inner aspects of the movable and immovable creation—men and demons, birds and animals, insects and germs—but because He does so in His subtle form, He is not understood. People think that He lives far away, but He lives very close to you, in the middle of the sahasrāra. This supreme Being appears to be different in different people, races, actions, names, forms, countries, and times, but He is undifferentiated. He lives as human being in a human being, as bird in a bird, as cow in a cow, as horse in a horse, as man in a man, and as woman in a woman. What else can I say? He becomes all things and is yet unique. He gives His strength to all created things. Like a mother He protects and sustains them and then gathers them all into Himself. He is the supreme light of all lights; all lights take their brightness from Him. There is no darkness about Him. He knows everything about everything. If this were not so, how could Muktananda have recognized the Blue Person? What I had seen was the Blue Pearl; it was Shiva, the Blue Lord; it was blue Nityananda, who is the highest object of knowledge, who is the gift of Kundalini’s grace received in the highest states of meditation, who is apprehended only with the knowledge acquired in Sarvajaloka, and who dwells in His total fullness in the heart and in the sahasrāra. O seekers! He is within your Blue Pearl, but do not think that you have become perfect just because you have seen the Blue Pearl. That supreme unmanifest Being is extremely secret to sadhakas; He is the goal of the Siddha Path. This is not something that can ever be expressed in speech or writing, even at the end of time. It is only by His grace that divine realization will come. Siddha students will understand how this matter, which should not be written, has been written. I am compelled to speak, and dear Yade is taking it down.

But even with all this, my contentment was still incomplete. There was still something left. The stage my meditation had reached was very divine. The Blue Person I had seen is also known as the Sphere of unmanifest Light. Yogis see Him, who contains the entire world within Himself, within the Blue Pearl in meditation. I was now meditating on Him and constantly remembering Him. He had settled in the land of my mind and had taken a form. I meditated constantly and always saw the sweet, radiant Blue Pearl in its infinite variations. Its luster was more dazzling at each moment, and my enjoyment was forever growing. I was meditating in the sahasrāra and was also hearing the divine nada of thunder. As I listened to this thundering, my meditation became so joyful that the desires which remained in my mind were smashed by the thunder and just disappeared. As I listened to this sound for a while I experienced complete union with the taintless Parabrahman. [Pp. 168–173]

After my vision of the Blue Person, my meditation became stabilized in the upper space of the sahasrāra, where I saw a celestial radiance like a mist, and in the midst of this radiance, the Blue Pearl. This brightness increased day by day. It is always found around the Blue Pearl, and it is said that the radiance of the firmament within the sahasrāra comes from the splendor of the Blue Pearl. I meditated on it every day, and each day there arose the awareness, “I am the Self.” Sometimes I would also see the Blue Pearl moving in and out of the sahasrāra for short periods. If you ever have a vision of the coming of a great saint, you should understand that it is all happening through the agency of the Blue Pearl. [P. 174]

I had best preface any comments about the path of devotion and this fragment of the author’s experience of bhakti by joining Muktananda in admitting that words will not get us very far. There is at least some comfort in knowing that in this realm we will not be prone, as the Zen teachers caution, to confuse the finger pointing
THE LIGHT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

at the moon with the moon at which we are pointing. These are unspeakable moments. Perhaps, however, this very fact can turn us to a useful starting point. Muktananda writes, "I should not talk about it . . . . My hand does not move." Why not? What is holding him back?

As he recalls the visionary events, he is once again overcome by the same awe, rapture, and surrender that he felt some fifteen years earlier. His inspiration to record these events, which he knows are not usually revealed by saints or spoken of only "in veiled language in their poetry,"\(^2\) is sustained by turning the physical task of writing over to Yande, a close devotee of his, and attributing the more crucial act of narration to his guru, Nityananda, who is speaking through him. Such is the intensity and the form of the devotional relationship to the Other that emerges from this section of the narrative.

The State of Meditation

Muktananda’s meditative experience of the darshan of the Other brings us to the question, "What is meditation?" How shall we think about a process that leads to events as enduring and transformative as those recorded in the Blue Pearl narrative?

Some meditative experiences come from the deliberate practice of tuning out the world of sense impressions and somehow allowing the mind’s chatter to subside or to become peripheral. As a result, one’s awareness is dominated more and more by representations of deeper, more fundamental layers of one’s understanding or one’s being. However, the formal practice of meditation should not be confused with the goal of the practice, the state of meditation, which may be entered via many other routes. Saul, later known as Paul of Tarsus, was the only one on the road to Damascus who comprehended Jesus’ words and saw the blinding light. This was a meditative darshan experience. Its reality is not diminished by the fact that his companions did not hear or see the same thing. On the other hand, some visions, such as that of the Virgin Mary at Fatima, are shared by many people in a collective, meditative moment of darshan. What, then, is the defining characteristic of meditation?

There are many possible answers to this question, but one of them is structural. We can consider each moment’s experience as a structuring of numerous disparate elements, some of which are sense-bound, some of which are memory-bound, and others of which are the amorphous, not even necessarily verbal intuitions of our many-layered consciousness. From all these elements we form gestalts, patterns of meaning and willful, expressive action. If we ask of any moment, "What is the central organizing element that dominates the current gestalt?" we may find that sometimes it is external and sense-bound; sometimes it is a complex of memories and emotions; sometimes it is an idea that sets up meaningful categories in our mind. Sometimes, however, the best or only word for what is manifesting through the structure of our awareness is the Self.

According to Patanjali’s account, as meditation deepens, the structure of our consciousness becomes increasingly focused, until in one final movement even the last, single point of focus is gone. Ekāgratā is his term for intense concentration on one point.\(^3\) Thus, driving at high speed, threading a needle, and paying rapt attention to a movie all share something in common with the process of meditation. However, in its fullest sense, the meditative moment represents a structuring of consciousness that is centered on the Self. The more that consciousness is centered on the Self, the deeper is one’s meditation. To put it in other but equivalent terms, centering on God is meditative or contemplative prayer. Images of the Self or images of God can become the content of the meditative encounter: The light, the voice, the Blue Pearl, the Blue Person, the silence, the All. Thus, the last point of focus, in Patanjali’s analysis, reveals the sacred as the Center, while the ensuing samādhi or enstasis reveals the sacred as the seamless Whole, but both are valid and powerful images of the Self.

The contrast drawn here is between a structure of thoughts, images, and experiences centered around the Self and one that slides off-center and organizes around some lesser point of reference. In true meditation, all perceptions, thoughts, or memories stand in relation to the Self. They are open to the sacred by being connected to the Center, located in a boundaryless Whole, and seen as composed of and reducible to their Essence. As our consciousness moves back toward its ordinary and everyday form, the Center is obscured by the apparent, but in fact illusory, importance of desire-related or emotion-charged elements; before long, the familiar cycles of pain, excitement, and boredom have replaced the meditative state.
Similarly, as the apparent but illusory need to build fences, make invidious comparisons, and protect that which is near and dear come to dominate our consciousness, the meditative sense of an unbounded Wholeness yields to the fearful world of division and enmity. Finally, as the common denominator, the Essence of all the diverse elements of awareness, is overshadowed by the seeming incomparability of one thing or quality to another, we return to the chaos of a disordered multiplicity.

Muktananda’s account of seeing the Blue Person in meditation adds to our appreciation of the sacred in that it shows how the primary image of the Self can be the beloved Other, the one that blesses, teaches, and transforms from its place in the devotee’s heart. This expands the possible variants of meditative consciousness to include any awareness, including the waking state, that is open rather than closed to the possibility of darshan. The sacred as Person is a potential reference point for considering the cause, the meaning, and the resolution of any event. To function with an awareness of that sacred referent is to be in meditation. The devotional path stresses constant remembrance, a constant opening to the divine Person in a spirit of reverence and gratitude.

It may seem that an either/or has been created: either we are in a meditative state that centers around some image of the Self or we are attentive to “outer things.” The traditional injunctions to “have done with the things of this world” or to turn away from “sense pleasures” suggest that we do have to choose, and it is better to choose the “inner” as the access route to the sacred. This advice, however, is merely a reflection of how powerful is our tendency to allow outer events, and our ordinary perspective on them, to block our access to the sacred. It is not an assertion that there exists a forced choice between the two perspectives, inner and outer. It is possible, and in fact is the goal of meditation, to surmount the apparent either/or and remain fully attuned to the sacred, to the Self, while fully awake and alert to the details of the everyday world. Our attitude toward the outer world is at issue here. It is our tendency to allow desire, fear, and other such dynamisms to block meditation that is being called into question, not “the world” or the fact that we live in it. The question is how we live in it, and the path of devotion shows us the possibility of a continuous sense of darshan,

**Explorations in Devotion**

Muktananda’s meditations and his subsequent narration of their content place a difficult demand on us. As we read, the text becomes the focus of our outward-turned mind. In all probability, it evokes various mental and emotional reactions. How, then, can we avoid sliding into states that tend to block meditative structuring of our consciousness while we attempt to make sense of another person’s accounts? My solution to this problem is to allow the text to remind me that I, too, have had moments of darshan. I, too, have experienced that awe-filled, magical sense of encountering the sacred. It takes persistence to overcome some inner, carping voice that points out how puny my experiences are compared with the darshan of the Blue Person. How could merely walking in the woods and being frozen in my tracks by some cathedral-like array of sun and leaves be considered in the same domain as Muktananda’s experience? But why should I dwell on the disparity? What matters is that such experiences formed my own introduction to meditation, although the word was not yet part of my vocabulary. Such experiences serve as the basis of the gestalt which forms around one very important expression of the Self, the sense of the sacred in nature’s awesome perfection. It is in that spirit that I explore and share the sequences of darshan experiences that began to suggest to me the qualities and full context of devotion.

A brief, two-scene vignette comes to mind. Mukta

"..."
THE LIGHT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

“Oh,” came the immediate reply, “He’s like a mirror. He reflects your inner state. Maybe you’re just seeing your own remoteness.” There seemed to be no ill-will in the rejoinder. It even seemed quite plausible. Still, I swallowed hard and attempted to absorb the unexpected confrontation with myself that had developed.

The second scene took place at an Intensive, an overnight retreat, a week later. This time, as I stood watching dozens of people approach Muk坦anda for darshan and heard the rippling laughter that spread around him, I saw him as a fountain of love. He was just sitting there, pouring out warmth and tenderness, lightening each person’s heaviness by being totally at ease, totally himself. As I watched this scene the devotee’s words came back to my mind: “He’s like a mirror.” It occurred to me that, by that logic, if I were seeing him as a fountain of love, then I myself must be a fountain of love. For the next few moments I was delightfully suspended between appreciation of the scene I was watching and appreciation of who I must evidently be in order to recognize the moment for what it was.

A more complex, three-scene sequence of my encounters with the path of devotion also came to mind. The first scene took place at the same autumn retreat. I had made a great effort to meditate, but it was now the fourth hour-long period in two days. I was beginning to wonder whether meditation would ever seem easy and pleasant to me. Between the noisiness of my neighbors in the meditation hall who were experiencing intense physical kriyas and the mounting complaints from my back and knees, I was ready to quit trying altogether. The only alternative seemed to be to open my eyes. I did so, feeling somewhat naughty and defiant. There I sat in a small, darkened room full of people meditating, and there, twenty feet from me, was Baba Muk坦anda sitting in his chair. He seemed so peaceful, so self-contented. As I watched him meditate, he turned his head in my direction, our eyes met, and the space between us filled with two golden ribbons of soothing light. The sensation was not simply visual. These golden beams of light appeared to be moving in a full circuit, out of his right eye into one of mine and out of my other eye and back to him. The flow was palpable, gentle, and pleasurable. As the connection grew stronger, I felt tiny puffs of air against my cheek, and without any visual image to support the thought I concluded that the air currents were being caused by a tiny hummingbird hovering at the level of my eye. My internal voice announced, in a tone of amazement, “My goodness, I’m a feeding station for a saint.” I seemed to be a repository of some subtle nectar as well as the recipient of a caress of air from this tiny creature’s wings. The moment passed, and I was left somewhat dazed—dazed and very pleased.

The second scene took place nearly a year later. My wife and I had traveled to Arcata, California, for a month-long retreat. Muk坦anda had been sick and arrived halfway through the month. It was not as easy this time to make contact with him, both because the number of people had multiplied tenfold and because he was under doctor’s orders to rest more and talk less. Thus, with some doubt that we would be able to speak with him, we waited one foggy morning to say goodbye before returning to Michigan. He came down the stairs, turned toward his car, and then spun around to greet us. In the excitement of it all I reached out to shake hands. He extended his left hand, and before long we were standing there with all four of our hands awkwardly clasped. What soon overpowered my awareness was the unbelievable softness and gentleness of his hands and his grasp. It was, as in the autumn retreat, a moment of connection that contained at its essence an unexpected and wholly convincing gesture of undemanding affection.

The third scene in this sequence took place in the Ann Arbor ashram the following winter. Muk坦anda was in Oakland, and my sense of connection with him had weakened. I had begun to wonder if the relationship was going to endure. One morning, after we had finished chanting the Guru Gita, the director of the ashram walked over to me. As he did so, I tentatively held out my hand to shake his, but he extended his left hand. Our handshake became an exact replica of that final four-handed farewell in Arcata. This time it seemed to be an unmistakable message from Muk坦anda that all of my moping around about weakened connections was just nonsense. There was such a strong sense of the earlier scene being replicated that I was cast into a very peculiar state of mind.

I didn’t realize just how peculiar it was until after I went home, finished breakfast, and drifted into the living room. I put on a record, Schumann’s Piano Concerto in A Minor. The music seemed to grow louder and louder; it was sweeter and had more dimensions to it than any music I had ever heard. Before long I was surrounded by a misty brilliance. My breathing was deep and rapid, and my head seemed
to be expanding. Waves of pleasure and vitality washed over me, and
the familiar inner commentator pronounced, "Well, that's it. It's not
just that I am happy right now. It's not even that I am a happy person.
It's that I am happiness itself. I am an infinite reservoir of happiness.
That's who I really am." These sentences rang with truth, and I sat
there savouring them for a long time. Tears of joy accompanied the
immense relief I felt upon reaching such an understanding.

One conclusion that I draw from recalling these darshan expe-
riences is that they can best be understood in the context of our un-
derstanding of meditation. There is no question in my mind that no
one except Muktananda would have seen the two ribbons of golden
light. This does not mean that I was uniquely privileged, that I was
the only one to see what was "really there." It means that my wak-
ing but nonetheless meditative state was presenting me with a visual
image that mirrored my internal state and revealed a growing sense
that I was "connected" to this man in a way that was both startling
and enjoyable. It doesn't matter that only I would interpret that
second four-handed greeting as a message from Muktananda. The
vision and the message are mental phenomena that derive from a
numinous substructure centering on the Self. Clearly, what stands
out most vividly in these phenomena is the presence and message of
the Other. How can we understand this?

Devotion and Self-Awareness

In the moment of darshan, in the emergence of the Blue Person from
the bindu, for example, the Other says, "I exist, I am, and I am with
you." The inevitable surge of joy attests to one's condition prior to
the experience of darshan: the state of separation, of doubt, of merely
hoping that what others say is true. The cycle can be repeated again
and again; each time the moment of darshan succeeds, as no other
experience can, in giving us the reassurance that we are not hoping
in vain, that there is in fact such beauty, love, purity, contentment,
and magnificence in the world. The Other does exist, and even our
memories and doubt-ridden hopes fall short of the actuality.

We find that odd, magical thoughts survive our usually critical
self-censoring. We sing ecstatic songs of praise. Muktananda's hymn
to the glory of the Blue Person is but one of thousands of such
outpourings of devotion in his and other cultures. Praise the Lord,
"praise Him and magnify Him forever," says the Psalmist.

Not only does the Other exist, not only do I see the Other, but
I am permitted to look. And I dare to keep on looking. Or, as in
the narrative account, there sits Muktananda in meditation, beholding
the Blue Person, "eyes wide with amazement." It is a visual love
feast. What does the Other reveal about himself? What he says
goes even beyond the idealization of the one gazing at him. He
describes the Blue Person's nature as unlimited and totally free,
and the measure of this lies in his transcendence of the dualities
that still exist in Muktananda's mind. He is far and he is near, the same
as and yet completely different from such forms as bodies, existing
both in form and as unmanifest formlessness. The Other's otherness
is most fully conveyed in the paradox and the koan because the
categories of ordinary thought will not support these mind-expanding
revelations of the sacred. The coup de grace comes when the last
trace of dualism, the egic sense of identity that one thinks is certainly
different from the sacred Other, turns out to be but another guise of
the supreme Being: "While in the body, He says, 'I am Muktananda,
I am, I am,' yet He is unattached to it." The Other is not trapped
by its manifestation. It is still supremely free, but it is not radically
different from anything or anyone.

Every attribute of the darshan experience that emerges from
the Blue Pearl narrative is also an attribute of meditation. Meditation
makes all objects sacred, vivid, fully alive, and filled with meaning.
Because it centers fully on the Self, true meditation leaves nothing
untouched by the sense of sacred presence. A gradual decline in the
predominance of empirical and logical truths and a corresponding
increase in one's access to the Self, expressed through the image of
Person, are complementary aspects of meditation. Finally, meditation
alters one's mental attitude, the most important change being the shift
from perceiving the world to be "either X or Y" to asking "Why not
both X and Y?" In this context we turn to the import of darshan for
the question, What is the relationship between who I am and the
Other?

The two answers found in the Blue Pearl narrative, "We are
different" and "We are the same," seem to coexist comfortably, and
that in itself is a clue to the nature of meditative darshan and the
role of devotion in a full spiritual life. Could there be a more convincing account of what it is like to encounter the Other than that of Muktananda, who after fifteen or more years is so overcome by the memory of the miracle of *darshan* that he cannot write it down and does not feel that he has the right to describe it? What does gratitude convey but the sense of being in relation to the Other, the source of grace? Yet these expressions of “We are different” are not treated as if they negated or were negated by the statement “We are the same.”

What appears to be a polarity, identity versus difference in relation to the Other, turns out not to be a hardened either/or. The entire sequence of devotional experiences appears to be more like an upward spiral that contains both “poles” and integrates them in one cumulative learning process. In my own experiences of *darshan* and in the narrative about the Blue Person there is a direct connection between *darshan* of the magnificent Other and a significant change in self-appraisal. The text swings easily from glorification of the Other to an awareness of the greatness and the infinite, extraordinary nature of all human beings including Muktananda himself. The meditative state delivers glorious versions of the Other and of one’s own nature and then links the two: “I am the Self,” “so’ham,” or “He is I, I am He.”

In my own case the linkage seemed self-evident. The direct correlate of perceiving Muktananda as a loving, serene, content, and magnificent being was a series of intuitions about myself: “Then, I must be a fountain of love, too,” “I’m a feeding station for a saint,” and “I am happiness itself.” The moment of paying rapt attention to the Other flows into the moment of self-love, and the two categories that had seemed eternally separate, me and not-me, begin to merge as each appears in the light of the common integrating category, the Self. They begin to merge, and then they fly apart as some new moment of *darshan* propels one’s perception of the Other to higher levels of magnificence, sending the spiral upward to yet higher forms of self-affirmation and merger. The process leads to a conclusion about the sacred that recurs in many cultures: At the core of all being there is a playful, joyful dance, found in moments of apparent difference and moments of return and reunion.

---

**The Moment of Initiation**

Muktananda’s narrative of his encounter with the Other and with the Self suggests some of the ways in which the path of devotion evolves. We may, however, still wonder how it all begins. What is the origin of Muktananda’s *darshan* and the sense of his own glory that follows? Where does Muktananda begin the story?

He begins with his initiation, at the age of thirty-nine. He had already been a swami for almost twenty years and a wandering *sādhu* for even longer. Initiation thus was not his first step on the spiritual path. It did, however, mark an abrupt transition in the tempo of his evolution. It occurred on August 15, 1947. Muktananda’s description begins with these words: “What an auspicious day! How full of nectar it was! How divine! What merit and great fortune it brought with it! It was the happiest and most auspicious day of my life, the great day of many births and ages. It was truly holy; yes...yes, it was the dawn of the most auspicious of all auspicious days.”

The events of that day of initiation, that *dīvya dīkṣā* day, are recounted with a sense of reverence and gratitude that mounts steadily. Muktananda’s guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, approached him in the morning and offered him his sandals to wear, to which Muktananda replied that he would never wear them, but he would worship them all his life. Then, Muktananda writes, “He looked into my eyes once more. I watched him very attentively. A ray of light was coming from his pupils and going right inside me. Its touch was searing, red hot, and its brilliance dazzled my eyes like a high-powered bulb. As this ray flowed from Bhagavan Nityananda’s eyes into my own, the very hair on my body rose in wonder, awe, ecstasy, and fear.”

Nityananda offered him some cooked bananas, some traditional articles of worship, and a blue shawl. He instructed him in both the external practice of repeating the mantra *Om Namah Shivay* and the internal awareness of “I am Shiva” and “All is Om.” As Muktananda left, he entered a state of unity consciousness, a state of awareness of the One in the many. The entire world, inside and out, had become a mass of “tiny, scintillating, blue sparks.” And, as Muktananda writes, “Even today I can still remember that experience of oneness. I still see those tiny blue dots.”
THE LIGHT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Within days Muktananda’s guru had sent him away, to his hut in Suki, with the command to continue meditating. How did these meditative experiences of the Blue Person arise? They arose from initiation, from what Muktananda later understood to be the ancient form of transmission of grace from a saint to a disciple, the process called *shaktipāt*. What Muktananda refers to as Siddha Yoga begins with and is defined by that transmission of energy, or Shakti, and grace into a seeker.

The mind of one whose life is filling up with internal and external meditative experiences of *darshan*, with the sense of being blessed, naturally follows the trail backward in time, seeking to know how all of this happened and where it began. The trail stops when nothing before it seems to be the cause of that “most auspicious of auspicious days.” That moment is time zero. On that day one’s new life begins, and it begins with the astounding good fortune of receiving the Other’s energy, grace, and love. One is called. One is blessed. What defines the discontinuity inherent in this moment for Muktananda is his conviction that no merit or attainment on his part is in any way the condition for or the cause of this turn of events. But even if nothing one possesses or has become is responsible for the events that unfold, still there is something about the seeker at the moment of initiation that must not be overlooked.

In one sense, initiation suggests a cessation, an ending of all the planning and efforts of one’s past. There is an opening, a self-emptying that is a crucial preparatory step. It is a rebirth, but the “little death” that precedes it is part of the beauty of the whole sequence. In letting go, in abandoning all willful self-steering, the seeker is creating the space for the influx of energy and grace.

We can invoke the imagery of the path of devotion, the open heart, the surrendered devotee, and the humble spirit, to answer the fortunate devotee’s amazed question, “How can all this have happened?” The answer has a dual focus: the readiness of the seeker to be initiated and the gift of the Other. Muktananda’s sense that the Other “has done it all,” that “He is doing everything” permeates the Blue Pearl narrative. Devotion allows the maximum asymmetry to exist between the active Other and the passive seeker, the fullness of the source and the receptive emptiness of the devotee. These constructions are fully congruent with the idea that meditation is nothing one “does”; it simply happens. The emptying process that precedes the shining forth of the light of the Self in meditation is the “little death” that precedes initiation. Thus, the entire meditative process begins with and is sustained by a series of openings to the Other. There is a giving of disciple’s grace, through openness and readiness, and a corresponding receiving of grace.

The inner *darshan* of the Self follows exactly the course of the external drama between Muktananda and his guru: first, a process of becoming detached from both pleasant and aversive memories, a letting go, and then *shaktipāt*, the dawning of a state that is filled with the light of the Self. The path of devotion has the same form on the inside as on the outside, and what often follows the inner *darshan* is a radically altered answer to the question, “Who am I?” The consummation of devotion and that of meditation are one and the same: the casting aside of limitation and separation, the welling up of gratitude and love, even self-love, and a structure of consciousness in which meaning flows more and more directly from the inner Self.

Obstacles on the Path of Devotion

It might seem that a reasonable extrapolation from these scenes of increasingly intimate *darshan* would be simply more of the same, until some point of union were reached. We might imagine a gentle, rather romantic finale to the evolving relationship between the seeker and the Other. Perhaps such a sequence would fit the narratives of other seekers, but not Muktananda’s. In the next chapter we find that the transition beyond “Yes, He exists; Yes, we see each other; and Yes, He is within me” is neither gentle nor altogether pleasant. Whereas the process of *darshan* begins with a letting go and an initiation and is sustained by awe and love and gratitude, ultimately one must confront the final obstacle: fear.

Muktananda’s fear was of “being destroyed.” The Other, “the Sphere of unmanifest Light” that he was encountering, left no room, seemingly, for anything but itself. One day, in meditation, this sphere “opened up and its light was released.” Muktananda was overwhelmed by the brilliance of millions of suns. “The light was so fierce,” he writes, “that I could not stand it, and my courage broke down.” He could neither move nor resist its pull. He cried out for help, “O Goddess, O Sadgurunath, save me!” His *prana*, his life force,
seemed to be leaving his body, and he fell down as one dying, making strange noises and urinating involuntarily. It seemed to Muktananda that this was the moment of his death. Over an hour later he regained his waking consciousness and got up, laughed to himself, and said, “I just died, but now I’m alive again.” He felt “very much at peace, very happy, and very full of love” and knew that he now understood death to be nothing but this encounter with the Light. He writes that since then “the place of fear within has been destroyed. I have attained total fearlessness.”

The limit had been tested and found not to be psychic obliteration or physical death but liberation from the effects of one’s own mistrust and feeling of separation from the Other. One barrier to love, fear of the Other, had been removed. If one can untangle the lifelong tendency to compound a yearning for the Other with a terror of closeness, if the terror is confronted and defeated and the yearning is fulfilled, then one has reached that extraordinary transformation of consciousness which in the Indian tradition is called final realization.

Before we turn to Muktananda’s meditative representations of final realization, there are several significant aspects of devotion that we must examine. Muktananda’s vision of the Blue Person reflects only one facet of the evolving relationship with the Other: his awe, his love, his sense of being blessed, and his yearning for more of the same. We begin to form an image of the magnificent, tender, beautiful Other. However, there is another side of śādhana, including Muktananda’s: the drama that joins together the fiery, demanding, testing Other and the resistant, not yet fully surrendered devotee.

It would be misleading to consider only the loving moments and to ignore the equally important times when the Other seems frustratingly insensitive. The glorious periods of initiation and darshan may be followed by more difficult periods when the devotee is ignored, insulted, or sent away by the teacher. These tests are as integral as the blessings to the full relationship between the devotee and the Other.

Some of my own experiences come to mind. I recall arriving at Muktananda’s Oakland ashram feeling tired and rushed after a cross-country flight. Lunch had just ended. My wife and I were whisked past the registration desk because Muktananda was giving informal darshan to about thirty people clustered around him in the courtyard.

The people sitting on the ground made way for us, and we were ushered to a space in front of his wicker chair. His translator recalled our names and the ashram we attended. Muktananda greeted us very warmly and asked a few questions about our trip. Then we all sat quietly for a moment. Suddenly, he shifted the position of his legs in such a way that his heel hit me in the forehead right between my eyebrows. I was jolted by the hard blow, and a chorus of inner voices began to well up: angry outcries of pain, insinuations about his clumsiness and his lack of consideration. This inner, private rumble grew and grew, until the translator’s voice said clearly but softly, “That’s guru’s grace.” The anger vanished abruptly, as if commanded to do so. What replaced it was an entirely different interpretation of what had just taken place. I recalled all the stories I had heard about unlikely and seemingly harsh initiations, and I realized that the blow I had received had been utterly benign. At that point, Muktananda told someone to make sure we were given some lunch, and we left.

The event traced a pattern that would recur many times in the following years. Ambiguous situations would stir up my anger or resentment or sadness, but ultimately I would see that they had been yet another blessing and act of grace. Each frustrating, picayune ashram rule, each abrupt change in the barely familiar order of things, each flash of the teacher’s seeming anger or indifference could take me to a fork in the inner road. Down one path would emerge yet another round of my own hair-trigger responses of anger and misunderstanding. Down the other, the first stirrings of these immature reactions would, fortunately, be overtaken by a sense of acceptance. It is much easier to see that the Other is benign when everything seems beautiful and lighter than air, but when one is provoked and the ambiguity mounts, then the learning (the unlearning, really) can begin in earnest.

I could list dozens of times when I watched Muktananda blaze with reproach at one of his staff members—the man making the announcements, the chief cook, the harmonium player. Even those times when I was merely an on-looker were sufficient to bring me to the fork in the road. “Poor guy,” I would say to myself, aching with empathy for the victim of Muktananda’s tongue-lashing, “He must be so hurt (or bitter or depressed)—only to find that the victims (or at least the few I knew well enough to question later) had taken the other fork in the road and had experienced no such anger or
bitterness or depression. Somehow, they had seen only the truth of Muktananda’s reproach and only the love and concern that prompted the dressing down. Naturally, they found my empathy irrelevant and uncomprehending.

The fact of the matter is that an ordinary devotee is filled with far more than yearning and gratitude. There are innumerable ways in which a devotee’s response reveals the presence of inner resistance. One simply cannot hide it, although sometimes one tries. Actually, there is no reason to hide it. A devotee may fear that resistance will be met with rejection, but it is difficult to imagine a real teacher who hasn’t encountered a great deal of resistance and who isn’t fully aware of its positive role in the process of growth. The devotee who is least able to progress in his sādhanā is often the one who is pretending that he feels nothing but acceptance and trust. This is why the teacher continues to test him. The devotee needs to know the exact limits of his trust and obedience, not because mistrust and disobedience are wicked, but because his limits mark the perimeter of the real relationship that is developing between teacher and devotee, and no internal “pretting up” of that actuality will serve the devotee’s development.

There is widespread recognition among the world’s religions that cursing God may involve a far more productive concentration of energy in God’s direction than some bland pretense that there is nothing holding one back. I watched many people meet Muktananda for the first time, and what always struck me was that he seemed to be more attentive to, to embrace more fully, those who openly expressed their resistance or fear. When a man in the darshan line said defiantly, “I can’t bow down to anyone, and I don’t believe in God,” Muktananda, with great warmth, answered, “That’s not very important, really. What matters is being able to bow down to yourself and to believe in yourself.” Once it has surfaced, the resistance may turn out to be directed against nonexistent pressures and demands.

I recall a young woman who asked him a question with great trepidation and then burst into tears at his answer. When he asked her what was the matter, she said she thought he was making fun of her. He leaned forward and with an amazing mixture of firmness and tenderness said, “A sadhu could never do such a thing as that.” The young woman brightened up, as though in discovering that there was someone who could not possibly do such a thing she had experienced both an enormous relief and an unexpected blessing. However, it was necessary for her to express her resistance in order to break through to the darshan she eventually could recognize and accept from Muktananda.

There is something in us human beings that will passionately defend what we know to be a barren, insufficient plot of land, even while our better judgment tells us that the larger whole we resist is our only salvation. We block our own expansion, our assimilation into a more ample and balanced system. We seem to provoke the teacher’s explosions of apparent anger, as if we know that, on our own, we are incapable of simply letting down the barriers and yielding the small space we call our own.

Perhaps everything we do looks different from the outside than it looks and feels from the inside, but this seems to be especially the case on the path of devotion. If you look on from the outside, you may see either inexplicable expressions of love, acquiescence, and gratitude or equally inexplicable endurance of what seems to be abruptness and abuse. However, ask someone who is on the inside or closer to the center than yourself, and all the meanings change. What the mistrustful outsider considers to be slavish, obligatory devotion is, to the insider, an uncontrollable, almost unintentional flow of the natural love of the universe. What the critical outsider considers to be hyperbole or formulas of unfelt adoration, the insider feels to be pathetically inadequate descriptions of the Other’s beauty or glory. What the outsider considers to be masochistic endurance, a reveling in the teacher’s abuse, the insider experiences as appreciating a necessary storm that sweeps away the inner obstacles to surrender. The storm takes nothing from the insider that he wanted to keep. It takes away only the blinders and the blockages, and the result, a less encumbered devotion, enriches rather than impoverishes. But how can the outsider know that?

Muktananda’s meditative vision of the Blue Person, its awesome and entrancing beauty notwithstanding, was not the final stage of his sādhanā. His contentment was “still incomplete.” As he did from the climactic events of his purely yogic sādhanā, the attainment of liberation, Muktananda turns from the experiences that are a consumption of the path of devotion, the supreme darshan, to emphasize that the goal of sādhanā is beyond even these experiences; it involves a synthesis of all valid paths. The goal is final realization.
of the Self. Just as his yogic experiences led him to the pitfall of pride, which he aviced 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 sādhanā 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

Muktaṇāṇḍa’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 Muktaṇāṇḍa’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