



Chapter Ten

TOWARD THE ONE

I CONTINUED TO ATTEND programs and chants at the Ann Arbor meditation center, while taking my university courses and working at a campus restaurant. One weekend, my folks, who lived about forty-five minutes from the university in Ann Arbor, asked me to stay at their house to take care of their cats while they went out of town. I didn't really have any active friends in my old hometown, so spent most of the weekend at home, reading and re-reading a free but extensive magazine the ashram put out, which included articles about "Kundalini: The Divine Energy" and other aspects of Mukta-nanda's philosophy. It was filled with new and fascinating information for me, mixed with entertaining personal stories shared by some of the monks and devotees. I was hungry to understand it all.

On Saturday night, I was feeling a deeper than usual sense of inner happiness while staying all alone in the house where I'd grown up. I went into the family room to play some of the record albums stored in my old room, and put on Diana Ross's "Touch Me in the Morning." Then, I started to sing along.

But I didn't just sing along, no. I sang like I'd never sung before. I sang like I'd never even heard before. I sang with a perfection moving through me that made me step outside of myself to listen in awe. I sang it as well as Diana, hitting every note with precision, clarity, and perfect ease, vibrant and alive. Then I put on Janis Joplin singing "Peace of My Heart," and again, this beautiful singing came through and overwhelmed and entranced my mind.

I began to dance while singing, and I danced in a way that was skilled far beyond my ability to dance. It was as though I was

dancing with well-choreographed moves, but even I didn't know what the moves would be until they happened. The movements flowed perfectly as I continued to sing perfectly, effortlessly.

It may sound as though these beautiful skills were coming through without my participation, like someone who might be "channeling" an otherworld entity. But it was a deeper part of me that was suddenly free in that moment to sing and dance with such skill. I was the statue that Michelangelo saw in a block of marble, the sun that blazes behind a cloudy sky. Through these practices of meditation, teachings of ancient spiritual philosophy, and grace of being in contact with a spiritual master, I was somehow able in that moment to "get out of the way" enough to let the brilliance of skilled song and dance shine through the temple of my body, mind, and spirit.

This wasn't the first time I'd experienced having amazing skills come through me, in spite of me. As a child, there were times when everyone would leave the house, and I would go into the den and play our piano like a master, composing beautiful jazz-like melodies with confidence and skill, watching almost as a witness, without even knowing how to read music.

Having this beautiful singing come through me was an especially great treat, because I'd always wished to have a good singing voice. Both of my parents sang unpleasantly off-key; my singing voice was usually on key, but not much better in terms of timbre and tone. I'd long ago given up on ever being able to sing well. And here I was singing not just well, but gloriously.

I drove back to the New York ashram for weekend visits twice more that year. During my third visit, I attended a two-day initiation workshop with Baba Muktananda. This was another experience-filled weekend, when I received his physical touch in the space between my eyebrows.

Muktananda was a rare being who had developed the ability to touch someone and bring forth what for many who received his touch was the most powerful spiritual experience they'd ever had, perhaps ever imagined. Upon receiving my guru's touch during this meditation session, I was carried into a tender but emotionally intense feeling of being loved by the divine.

The person seated behind me was also having an intense experience, and was basically screaming her head off, right into my ear. I managed to stay fairly centered in my own inner space, even with the loud disruption. I especially didn't mind when Muktananda came back to our row to calm the woman down with another touch, because he gave me one more tap on top of my head, and brushed his wand of feathers against my back, leaving his enticing scent of heena oil on my sweater.

Back in Ann Arbor, I discovered a fascinating book, *Toward the One*, written by Sufi master, Pir Vilayat Khan. It is always great to find a book that resonates just beyond your current understanding, and this one did. With every page, this book challenged and then expanded the limits of my understanding.

Across the aeons of time, irresistibly, undauntedly, by some uncanny internal forward thrust, the consciousness of the creature in its advance through evolution strives to touch the absolute, to soar into further dimensions.

— PIR VILAYAT KHAN

I found out that this very Sufi author was going to be giving a Friday evening lecture at a church in Detroit, and wanted to go. For a moment, I wondered if it was okay to see two different spiritual teachers, but I couldn't think of a good reason why this would be a problem, and drove up for the program.

Pir was a thin man with long grey hair and beard, wearing a white woolen robe with a hood. He looked like Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings series, like one of the great wizards from medieval times.

After Pir's inspiring talk, the whole room sang a song together, with the word "Hallelujah," sung in various harmonies and melodies of what I later learned to be Pachelbel's Canon. I had never heard this tune before, and the beautiful melody and harmonies affected me strongly. I assumed that Pir or his followers had written this song, and was extremely impressed and taken with its magic. Each section of the room was given a different harmony to sing, and when it all came together, the sound was celestial. We were a choir of

angels singing the music of the spheres. My soul was lifted high by the power of this song.

As the program ended, someone announced that anyone wishing to be initiated by Pir should go to a specific location in a hallway. I wanted to at least meet this man, and waited in the designated spot, assuming that Pir and I could deal with the initiation question in person. Eventually, one of Pir Vilayat Khan's assistants escorted me into a dimly lit room behind the sanctuary — a simple space with chairs and tables stacked against the walls.

At first, the room appeared to be empty. It took a moment before I saw Pir standing there. I walked up to him, feeling surprisingly bold. Though I was in awe of this man whose writings had carried me to such elevated levels of consciousness, still I was feeling quite comfortable. Pir opened his arms and took my hands, as he greeted me with a soft smile. I looked into his eyes and proclaimed, "I want to know the Truth." I hadn't planned on saying anything like that, but this was too important a moment to waste on small talk.

Pir met my eyes and confidently pronounced, "You will." Then he smiled and asked, "Do you want to be initiated?"

I did, but I had a conflict. I knew it was important to be honest and forthcoming, especially with a great spiritual being such as Pir. I told him I would like to receive his blessing, but that I had already been initiated by Swami Muktananda. I didn't know if there was a rule about not being initiated by more than one guru.

Pir's eyes lit up with a big smile. "Muktananda is a wonderful guru! Once I saw him speaking, and in the middle of a sentence he turned into an ecstatic *dervish!* (a Sufi lover of God)." Then Pir exclaimed, "We're all one, aren't we!?!?" and led me into a short dance together. My heart was happy. What amazing turn was my life taking? Pir looked into my eyes. "You should stay with Muktananda as much as possible. Learn his teachings."

I bowed my head in gratitude for the guidance, "I will."

I drove back to Ann Arbor on cloud nine with the melody of our Hallelujah chant ringing inside my heart, and I floated on that cloud throughout the night. Even after getting back in town late, I woke up bright and early the next morning to go to the Saturday morning devotional Guru Gita chant at the meditation center.

During the hour and a half chant, I continued to hear the melody of the previous night's "Hallelujah" song playing in my mind. It became superimposed over and through the Sanskrit verses we were chanting. Even though the two melodies were quite different, still they blended together to create a new, beautifully balanced musical montage. Entranced and a bit sleepy, I stopped chanting at one point, and allowed myself to be swept away by the beauty of this intoxicating, symphonic blend of outer and inner melodies.

After the chant, I went to the meditation center's snack bar to have a cup of tea. Although I'd been going to programs there for nearly a year, I hadn't really participated in their social discourse. They seemed like interesting people; but I was in a seriously introverted phase, where words did not flow readily. However, after the amazing events with Pir Vilayat Khan and the powerful inner harmonies of that morning chant, I wasn't quite ready to head home. I wanted to stay in the energy of this place where positive and powerful spiritual practices took place all day, every day.

There was extra activity in the snack bar, because some of the fellows were installing a new stereo system. I ordered a cup of tea and sat down, taken aback by the brightness and chatter. Every now and then, I would close my eyes and touch the peaceful state inside myself, and then open my eyes to experience all the activity around me. Through these oscillations between the outer brightness and inner stillness, I continued to hear that beautiful melody of hallelujah resounding through my heart.

The stereo installers finished plugging in the last speaker and announced that they were going to check the new sound system. Out came, blaring at *full volume* from the speakers, THAT SAME MELODY!!! I nearly dropped my cup of tea.

I had no idea this was a famous piece of music. I thought Pir had composed the melody. And here, the very next morning, was a full orchestra playing of all the harmonies and melodies we had been singing the night before with Pir Vilayat Khan, at full volume!

A part of me dissolved in that moment, into somewhat of a Zen koan state, where my mind had nothing left to hold on to. Although I later found out that Pachelbel's Canon was a well-known composition, still the mind-stopping awe I experienced from this seeming miracle had already done its job on my consciousness.