

BABA MUKTANANDA

A Compilation of Articles from The Mystic's Vision

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Dedicated to the Public Domain 2-25-2020

(last revised 12-17-2023)

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1.	My Life With Baba Muktananda:	

It has been many years since the passing of Baba Muktananda in 1982; and before I join him, I would like to offer this small tribute to the man and his legacy. It is a tale I had resolved not to tell, as it had the potential to be embarrassing to both Baba and to me, and for many years I have kept it to myself. But now, at this late age, and with the prompting of the Guru, I feel that its telling might just have a beneficial effect after all. Time alone will tell:

I. From 1966 to 1972 I lived in a little cabin in the Santa Cruz mountains, where I had experienced intimate union with God in what is usually referred to as a 'mystical' experience. In 1970, I met Swami Muktananda when he was giving a lecture at

Stevenson College at the University of California at Santa Cruz. At the time, it had been my custom to pass out a little booklet containing two songs, or Psalms, in downtown Santa Cruz in front of the main bookstore. I was standing at my usual post in front of the bookstore, when a kindly-faced man stopped to read my little booklet of Psalms. I asked if he lived in Santa Cruz, and he replied, “No, I’m just passing through.” We exchanged a warm smile at the deeper meaning of his words, and he put two dollars in my little money box and then moved on. Later, I learned his name was Baba Ram Das, and he was in town to introduce Swami Muktananda, a Swami from India, at the College that night.

A young man, named Stephen, who frequently visited my cabin, brought tickets for the lecture early in the evening, and I paid for mine with the two dollars I had been given earlier by Baba Ram Das. It was a magical night; the sky was filled with stars, and I felt strangely exhilarated to be seeing this Swami from India. During the lecture, I paid less attention to his words than to his presence. I was mesmerized by his totally unexpected appearance and mannerisms. He played with the microphone cord nervously as he spoke and seemed almost bursting with joyous energy. I was in the balcony, and I kept losing his form in a blue haze into which he seemed to keep dissolving. I was totally enthralled by him.

When he was finished speaking, and left the stage, I rushed down the balcony stairs, and made my way up the aisle toward him. Baba Ram Das was leading the chanting from the stage, and Muktananda was heading down the aisle right toward me. I held both my hands out to him, and he tipped up his sunglasses, which he wore even in the relative darkness, to get a better look at me. Then he slapped my outstretched hands in greeting and went on out to his waiting car. I followed him out, and stood outside the window of his car, waving to him, intoxicated with the sight and presence of him as I had never been before with any person. And then his driver drove him away. I assumed at the time that I would never see him again.

It was several months later that a friend brought me a copy of Muktananda’s spiritual autobiography, called “Guru” (later retitled *Chitshakti Vilas*, “The Play of Consciousness”); and I read it with great amazement and awe. I learned that Swami Muktananda (1908–1982) had been a wandering *sadhu* in India since his early teens, had lived in the ashrams of various teachers and had met many saints and holy men, but he had not met his spiritual master until he was initiated by Bhagavan Nityananda in 1947. Nityananda, I learned, was a great and powerful yogi who had wandered naked most of his life, meditating for long periods of time in caves and wildernesses, and who had finally settled in Ganeshpuri, about 30 miles north of

Bombay, where a small village and the Ashram of Swami Muktananda now exists.

Nityananda had been known as an *avadhuta*, a renunciant who had no more worldly attachments, and who was free as the wind, wandering with no home, no clothes, taking food as it came to him. He was recognized as having enormous yogic powers; and prior to the time of his death in 1961, he had transmitted his immense power to Muktananda, and Muktananda carried on the tradition in the lineage of Siddhas—perfect masters. Earlier, Muktananda had been sent by his guru into a prolonged period of *sadhana*, or spiritual retreat, and after years of solitary meditation—during which time he went through many amazing and wonderful inner experiences as a result of the awakening of his *kundalini*—he eventually became Self-realized at the age of forty-nine, by the grace of God, the Guru.

It was late in the evening when I finished reading *Guru*, Baba's spiritual autobiography, and when I held it to my forehead by way of reverence, a great eye appeared before my mind's eye. It was large and as clear as anything I had ever seen; and I stared at it wonderingly for quite a while before it disappeared. I had not previously thought I was in need of a *guru*, but after reading his book, I decided that such a teacher could help me to progress in the spiritual life and learn to retain the experience of my eternal Self. And so, I wrote to him in India, to whence he had returned, asking if I could come there as his disciple. When I received his welcoming reply, I was overjoyed.

Sadly, but gratefully, I said goodbye to my wonderful cabin, where I had experienced such joy and revelation, and went off, half-way across the country, to work my way to India, as, at the time, I hadn't a dime. I met many hardships on the way; but, unexpectedly, my dear friend, Marc Savage (Dharmananda), who was the one who had given me Muktananda's book, wrote to me, asking me to come back to California, saying that he would give me the money to purchase an airline ticket to India. And that is how I made my way to the Ashram of Swami Muktananda in Ganeshpuri, India.

The Ashram was nestled on the outskirts of a small village, and as the local bus approached it, I could see a large castle-shaped building with orange flags flying from its highest pinnacles. It was breathtaking. Muktananda was unexpectedly sitting on a tree-planter at the entrance when I arrived. I removed my shoes, bowed to him clumsily, and then entered the Ashram proper, which consisted of a large courtyard paved with multi-colored stones, surrounded by several buildings, including the meditation hall, the dormitories, and Muktananda's living quarters. There were about forty other Westerners there at the time, both men and

women, from the U.S., Europe, and Australia.

The atmosphere of the place was very serene and holy, while at the same time charged with an unfamiliar electric spiritual energy. We arose at 3:30 AM for meditation, then chanting of holy scriptures from 6:30 to 8:30. Meditation was held in various places: one could sit in the space around Baba's residence, or one could go below to 'the meditation cave', a dark, unventilated, mosquito-infested place that had been enlivened by Baba's energetic presence during his early stay at this location. Having heard rumors of this austere meditation cave, I was reluctant to go there, preferring to sit in the upper part of the hall. But one morning I decided to give it a try, and so I made my way down the dark passage to the meditation cave. The moment I entered the cave doorway, everything went blue—a rich deep, effervescent blue. But it was not in the outer lighting; the blue was in my head. My inner consciousness had suddenly become imbued with blue. This experience lasted for the whole time of my first visit to the meditation cave. But I never felt comfortable in there, and I returned only a few times.

After the morning chanting session of *the Guru Gita*, we were given a breakfast of chai and chapattis or runny cereal, after which we worked in the gardens or cleaned the toilets. More chanting, lunch, more work, dinner and then the evening chants. In between, there were the frequent *darshans* (appearances) of Baba Muktananda, for which all the ashramites lived. When he sat on his little perch, just outside his quarters, all of us would gather around just to gaze on his form. Sometimes he would receive visitors; sometimes he would just sit there quietly. He appeared to be more of a god than a man. His lightly chocolate form shone more brightly than burnished gold, and his divine presence filled the courtyard with a blissful serenity.

We, the ashramites, would stand and look at him for as long as we were allowed to. He lived in a state of quietude so profound that we were drawn into deep meditation just by standing in his presence. At other times, he was quite animated, directing the many activities of the large Ashram. There was no mistaking that he was a uniquely great and noble being. I was to learn, much later, that he was flawed like all men; but he was as close to a perfected being as I have ever known.

I was aware that I was very fortunate to be a disciple of the great Kundalini master, Swami Muktananda, known by his devotees more familiarly as Baba. He was a Guru, in the true sense of the word. 'The Guru' is just another name for the Divine as He manifests within and through a perfectly surrendered individual. It is God,

the Guru, who gives grace, though it may manifest *through* an individual. In the Kashmir Shaivite tradition to which Baba belonged, this transmission of Grace is called *shaktipat*, the gift of Shakti, or divine energy. The transmission of *shaktipat* was such a common experience around Baba that nearly everyone who spent any time around him received his blessing of Grace in one manner or another.

Shakti is a subtle form of energy that manifests at several levels of the human organism: At the spiritual level, it manifests as an increase in conscious awareness and bliss and is centered at the crown of the head. At the mental level it manifests as an increase in intelligence, metaphysical understanding, and creativity and is centered between the eyebrows. At the physical level it manifests as an increase in sexual sensitivity and desire and is centered in the genitalia. It is often this baser, physical increase that is experienced most predominantly, and which must be suppressed or otherwise transcended in order to manifest and utilize the shakti at subtler levels.

Baba emanated shakti; it was palpably felt whenever he entered a room. He could direct it willfully, or project it simply by thinking of someone. He could impart his shakti by a thought, a word, a touch, or simply by his proximity. Even his clothes or items in his environment emanated that shakti. I remember once, when Baba was asked to address a Transpersonal Psychology conference in Boston, the entire auditorium full of doctors of Psychiatry and scholars was electrified with his spiritual energy, and one person in the back of the room asked him, “What are you doing to us?” and everyone knew what the questioner was talking about. Baba just smiled.

An individual, such as Baba, who embodies the Guru and who is able to transmit divine energy in this manner is extremely rare. In Muktananda’s case, this ability was imparted to him by another rare being, his Guru, Bhagavan Nityananda. Nityananda left his body in 1961, so I never met him, but I visited his old residence in 1972, and the shakti permeating the place was still palpable years after his passing. The direct transmission of shakti from Sri Nityananda to Baba Muktananda is reminiscent of that from John the Baptist to Jesus of Nazareth. John had the power of shaktipat, as did Jesus after him. You may recall that when John baptized Jesus and initiated him into the spiritual life, Jesus experienced a white dove flying into his breast. We know of this experience because Jesus later told his disciples of his inner vision at that time. Such an inner visual image sometimes accompanies the transmission of shakti from a genuine Guru. The countries and the religious traditions are different in these two cases, but the gift of divine energy

is the same. It is a divine energy accumulated by holy men through austerity, through ascetic devotion. Both John the Baptist and Nityananda were virtual *avadhuts*, souls whose lives were solely devoted to the contemplation of God, while living alone in remote locations under the most austere privations imaginable—whereby they experienced the blessing of God.

I had not realized or understood the meaning of this biblical imagery of the white dove until I experienced it myself by the Grace of God imparted to me by Baba Muktananda. Following is the story of how that transmission of Grace came about: II. After I had spent a year and a half at the ashram in Ganeshpuri, Baba notified all the Western ashramites that he had received a loan of \$25,000 from Werner Erhardt, the founder of Est, which he was planning to use that money to finance a 2nd World Tour to the U.S., and that all of us should make plans to return to our homes and prepare for his visitation. Later, it was revealed that Baba was planning to begin his World Tour at a Meditation Center at the home of one of his devotees, Don Harrison, who lived in Piedmont, California. And so, I, along with a few others, left India, and made my way to the affluent community of Piedmont, California, where I and a few other young men were pressed into service, completely repainting the exterior of Don's house, and working at the local Flea Market selling items from Don's import business to support our keep.

Finally, the day of Baba's arrival came. How wonderful it was to see him again! He was, to me and to all his disciples, the very manifestation of God. After he was able to rest and settle in for a day or so, he held a chanting session in the small meditation hall of the Meditation Center. To me, his face seemed unusually gaunt and hollow, very ethereal, as he stood at the front of the hall chanting 'Rama Raghava'. His face called up in me the image of Jesus in his suffering, as Baba intoned the baleful chant of "Rama, protect me; Rama, deliver me." I was standing at the back of the hall, directly opposite and facing him. Tears began coursing down my cheeks as I stood there, feeling so much love and compassion for him. It was clear that Baba was also aware of me, as he stared intently at me while he chanted.

When the chanting was over, and Baba had returned to his rooms upstairs, Baba's attendant, Noni, approached me, saying Baba wanted to see me in his quarters. I was shocked and surprised, but I followed Noni upstairs and into Baba's presence. He spoke to me in Hindi as he stepped out of his slippers, while Noni translated: "Take these." I could think of nothing to say, as I was keenly aware that this was precisely how the great Bhagavan Nityananda himself had originally initiated Baba. I went to my knees and placed my forehead on his sandals, as Baba

continued speaking while Noni translated: “Go back to your home and prepare for my coming,” he said. I could only manage to reply, “Ji, Baba.” And then Baba said something else as he waved me away. Later, when I was able to ask Noni what he had said, he told me that Baba was only complaining that he had only just broken in that pair of slippers, and now he would have to break in another pair.

I flew back to Indianapolis that next day. Though I did not relish the prospect of returning to my boyhood home, I was eager to do whatever Baba asked, certain that it was in my very best interests; and I was filled with wonder and anticipation for whatever was to come. I was ill prepared, however, for the tragedy that was to ensue.

Baba had put one of his recently acquired devotees in the position of overseeing and taking charge of the events of his Tour. This individual’s name was David P. He had obtained his managerial experience as the head of the department of Waste Management in Oakland, California; and Baba had entrusted this relative newcomer to manage the schedule of his appearances on the Tour as he moved from the West Coast eastward. Indianapolis was scheduled to occur right after the Chicago event. But it seems that David P. was not happy with Indianapolis being on the schedule, and he tried to cancel that appearance, but Baba insisted. It was then that David apparently hatched the plan to sabotage the Indianapolis event from his end. He sent a young Indianapolis native whom I had known in Ganeshpuri ostensibly to assist me in setting up the Indianapolis event, but in actuality he was there to act as David’s informant and saboteur.

Plans moved along, and a Civic Center appearance was scheduled along with a weekend Meditation Retreat at a picturesque Franciscan monastery on the edge of town. When Baba arrived with his entourage, Baba’s staff, under David’s supervision, took over the implementation and record-keeping of the event. Everything went smoothly, drawing moderate crowds. All in all, it was a success, and at the end of the Meditation Retreat, I had a brief moment with Baba, who told me to “Stay here.” That was the extent of his instructions. And then the circus left town. David P., acting as Baba’s manager, had made sure that I received no names of the event’s participants and was left with no means whatsoever of contacting the Retreat participants or of forming a community of devotees in Indianapolis. Nonetheless, that was exactly what Baba had expected of me.

I had the assistance of two sisters in their fifties, both of whom had attended the Meditation Retreat and met Baba. They had been devotees of Roy Eugene Davis, a

direct disciple of Yogananda Paramahansa, but were now enthusiastic to help me build a Baba Muktananda Meditation Center in Indianapolis. A dentist who owned a large house in an old section of Indianapolis was willing to sell it to me at a ridiculously low price as a residential Meditation Center. The problem was that I had no way to contact those who had already shown their interest by coming to see Baba during his visit to the city. I tried advertising in the newspaper, with no results. I wrote to Baba asking for the records of attendance from the Civic Center appearance and the Meditation Retreat. But no reply. My phone calls to the California ashram where Baba was now residing were answered only by David P. Unknown to me, he had given orders to the other ashram phone operators that he alone was to take my calls, and that all my letters were to go to him. When I called, he would say that he would talk to Baba, and get back to me. This unkind game continued on and on, for months, but I never heard from him.

There was a limit to how long my dentist friend would wait for a reply to his offer to buy the house. But without Baba's word, I could not make a move. I called Baba repeatedly, but I was never able to reach him. Whatever power of meditation I possessed also failed me; I had no idea what he intended me to do. Even the two sisters who were so supportive in the beginning were now losing faith that Baba had any interest in supporting my efforts. I held chanting sessions, but in the end, no one came. Not even my parents. I would have bought the house anyway, if Baba had told me to. But it was too late. He hadn't called; and it was time to give up my option on the house.

I was totally confused. What was Baba's lesson in all of this? Why did he put me here? To teach me how helpless I was? Was there some hidden reason for his refusal to send me some word when I had so deliberately explained in my letters the urgency of my predicament and so poignantly pleaded with him to contact me? I was at a total loss to explain his treatment of me. But I still believed in him; I was still utterly devoted to him. There was nothing left to do but return to him. That was the only way I would learn the lesson of this entire fiasco. And so, I left Indianapolis, and went back to Oakland, California where, I had heard, Baba was going to establish a new ashram. In the meantime, Baba was still on tour in Santa Monica, California.

III. The building that he had chosen for his new ashram was an old hotel that had become a whore house and was now shuttered up. It was in a previously all-black neighborhood, and there had been no buyers, though it had been on the market for some time. When I first saw it, it was ankle deep in dog feces. Two angry and emaciated Saint Bernards had been housed in the old hotel as guard dogs with a

free run of the place. It was going to take a great deal of work to transform it into Baba's ashram. But Baba had a crew of devotees— carpenters, laborers, cooks, and painters who all descended on the old hotel—I among them. And within months, a sparkling beautiful ashram with a huge, carpeted meditation hall, and freshly painted, well-appointed rooms for the ashramites awaited Baba's arrival.

When he finally came, there was a great celebration; people attended from all over. And on that first night's darshan in the meditation hall, when the lights went down, and everyone entered deep into meditation, I was intently awake to Baba's presence, with a keen hope for some indication from him as to what that whole Indianapolis adventure had been all about. It was not long before he found me in the crowd and entered into me. "Go back!" he shrieked from within me. But my heart rebelled, my emotional frustration exploded, thrusting him forcefully from his place in my heart. Months had passed since I had left Indianapolis. Couldn't he have given me that message back then? But my heart's rebellious response wasn't a reasoned one; it was my soul's response born of his "Go back!" and was entirely beyond my control.

Immediately after the meditation period, Baba left the hall, and I caught a glimpse of his infuriated glare focused on me. I regretted my instinctual response, but I could not take it back; nor did I feel that I initiated it. It had only been a natural response to the cruel degradation of a tortured soul, which had come so unexpectedly. If only he had called me aside for a chat! But I had no time to rationalize my response. Quickly, word came that Baba had suffered a stroke, and I was outside, watching, as he was taken on a gurney to the ambulance and on to the hospital.

When at last some ashramites were allowed to visit him where he was recovering, I was included among those who were first to see him. As soon as he saw me, he turned away from me, and I fell with my head on his belly while sobbing his name. When eventually he returned to the ashram, I received the same treatment: if he was out walking, and saw me, he would cross the street to be on the opposite side. Whenever I was around, he would avoid even looking at me. Only a true lover can know what this treatment did to me, how devastating it was to me to experience this rejection and contempt from one who was so beloved. And never a word of explanation.

After some time, Baba flew back to India, leaving me there in the Oakland ashram. He left instructions with the ashram director that I should be given a

position in the ashram, and I was assigned to be the Food Buyer, which required me to get up early, drive to the Farmer's Market, and purchase whatever fruits and vegetables were required by the kitchen and by the recently built Amrit snack bar. I also served as the *pujari*, performing the evening worship ceremony, and as the ashram librarian. I was still tormented, however, by the unexplained events in Indianapolis; and in early 1977 I decided to write to Baba at his ashram in Ganeshpuri to apologize for my egregious response to his command and to seek an explanation for what transpired in Indianapolis. I informed him of my inability to obtain any contact information about the attendees to the speaking engagement and the Retreat, I explained my attempts to get a reply from him while he was on the road, my dependence on his reply for the purchase of the house, and my various efforts to establish a Meditation Center in Indianapolis without benefit of any contacts or instructions. Again, I hoped for some explanation from him, but received none.

I can only infer that when Baba received that letter, he learned for the first time what had happened in Indianapolis. When he originally sent me to Indianapolis from Piedmont, it was, I am sure, out of the highest motives. He had not been responsible for any of the plotting against me and he had known nothing of it. That had been the sole doing of David P. I can only imagine the wrath Baba expressed to David when he confronted him after receiving my letter. David was apparently banished thereafter from seeing Baba and from all the ashrams. Baba then determined to make right his unfair treatment of me. It was still 1977, less than a month after I had sent my letter of explanation, when we suddenly got word that Baba was flying from India to Oakland, California, for an impromptu visit to our ashram. Though it had been unanticipated, we were all naturally excited by the prospect of his visit.

On the first night of his arrival many people came to the evening program for Baba's darshan and the celebration of his return to Oakland. And later that night, after everyone had settled into bed, I took up my usual post in the meditation hall, where I often spent the night, serving as overnight watchman while enjoying the enhanced spiritual atmosphere of the hall where Baba had earlier appeared. As was my custom, I lay with my head on Baba's slippers which had been permanently placed there before his seat as objects of worship and devotion. Sometime in the night I awoke to the sense of Baba's presence in the form of a white dove visibly perched at the portal to the kitchen where ashramites gathered daily to receive their meals. I was able to see this in spiritual vision, although that portal was separated from me by a wall. I watched as the dove left its perch, flew straight for me, and entered my

chest with a great flurry of beating wings. I knew it was Baba, but I wasn't cognizant of the meaning of this event at the time it was occurring. Only later, I realized that I had received the gift of the Guru's grace.

During the course of that year, 1977, following Baba's gracious visitation, many wonderful events came to pass. One evening, as I was making my rounds, doing puja to all of the images of the saints decorating the ashram walls, I was stunned to hear a voice from the painting of the medieval saint, Jnaneshvar as I stopped to do *puja* before it. The voice said, "You have translated the *Haripatha* of Ecknath Maharaj; why not translate my *amritanubhav*." I said, "Of course," though I hadn't even read that work at the time. But I was able to quickly translate the works of Jnaneshvar, though I know nothing of the Marathi language; and shortly thereafter I translated the *avadhut gita* in just a few days, though I had no training in Sanskrit. I then wrote to Baba, telling him that the twelve years was now up since my vow to become a Swami, and that I would like to be a part of the upcoming *sannyas* initiation. I was enabled to work part-time outside the ashram for another ashramite who managed a fruit-stand, whereby I saved enough money to afford a round-trip ticket to India in early 1978 where, to everyone else's surprise, Baba initiated me into *sannyas*, and I became thereafter one of Baba's teaching Swamis.

The Guru's grace is real. Do not doubt it. And be certain as well that it flows from the divine Source, from God Himself. The human instrument is fallible to be sure; but divine Grace is God's unfailing energy at work in you to enable you to attain all that you are destined to become in this life. If you are fortunate enough to live in the presence of such an embodiment of the Guru, by all means seek his Grace, and rely upon him. Only if he betrays the trust he has been given by God, will he fall from God's Grace, and you will have no choice but to leave his service. Sadly, however, there are very few true representatives of the Guru in these current days.

After the *sannyas* initiation, Baba gave me the name, Swami Abhayananda ("the bliss of fearlessness"), and I was sent to the New York Meditation Center and ashram to train as a teacher and ashram director. At the same time, Baba okayed the purchase of a large hotel in Fallsburg, New York in the Catskill mountains to serve as the main ashram and headquarters for his organization. Many ashramites from the New York Center and other Centers, including myself, pitched in to help transform another hotel into a gleaming and glorious ashram, where Baba was to hold many Intensives and give frequent darshans in the following few years.

In early 1979, while I was living in a New York apartment across from the ashram where I taught as a swami, I awoke in the night with the distinct sense that someone was in the bedroom with me; an invisible someone who was very angry and threatening. I sat up and sternly ordered this presence to get out of my room. By the power of my own soul-force, I forcefully commanded it to go, and it left. Shortly thereafter, I was again awakened with a call from the ashram across the street, telling me that there was a phone call for me over there. I went over, and spoke to my father on the phone, who informed me that my mother had just died. When I returned to my apartment, the thought came to me that it had been my mother who had come to me earlier, and her anger was because I had not come to be with her during her illness. Somehow, I was able to call her back to me, and a touching reconciliation occurred between mother and son, whereby I was able to assure her of my love. An additional glowing presence, whom I was sure was Baba, was also there, and I watched as he lifted her on high and guided her, now free, to her “heavenly” destination. There was a great sense of gratification that all resentment had been assuaged between us, and that she had been guided to a “higher” place. This was no small gift. To this day I am gratefully beholden to Baba for enabling this visitation with my departed mother and our loving reconciliation.

Once the renovation of the Catskill Hotel in Fallsburg, New York, was completed, it had become the Siddha Yoga Ashram and Headquarters, and many of the Swamis spent a great deal of time there close to Baba. It was there, on the evening of August 14, 1979, I waited my turn in the darshan line, and offered to Baba Muktananda the following letter of devotion:

August 14, 1979

Dearest Babaji,

Please accept this small token of my affection on the occasion of this, my 41st birthday:

Gurudev, I have been a fool all my life.

What is worthy of loving, I have hated;

What is worthy of running away from, I have sought to embrace.

I seem to have earned in my past births

Nothing more than this perverse understanding.

Having spent so many years in foolishness,

Falling prey over and over again to lust, anger and pride,

I am now celebrating the addition

Of one more year to this wasted life.
Gurudev, who could even feel pity for such a fool?
Yet you have covered me with your wings,
And cradled me in the compassion of your heart.
You have nursed me in my sorrows--
Consoled me with your loving words,
And forgiven all my unforgivable errors.
You have stood as a father beside me,
Even though I had turned my back to you.
There are no words to express your greatness,
Or to express my unworthiness of your grace;
Yet you have bent to me your ear and saved me in my distress.
Dear Lord, what can I offer you who have inspired
Even the gods to look compassionately upon me?
I have nothing worthy of offering to you.
Even this trickle of love that I am able to squeeze from this dry heart
Already belongs to you—is, in fact, your gift.
So, you see, I have nothing but myself to offer.
Worthless rag that I am, I am yours.
Please do with me as you will.
Make of me your perfect slave.
My dear Gurudev, please grant this request.

I am forever your own,
Swami Abhayananda

I then took my seat and watched as the young Swami Nityananda (still known as Subash at that time) translated the letter to Baba, and I could see that Baba was pleased.

Some months later, I was given the directorship of a small Ashram in Philadelphia, and after a year in that position, I was sent to Chicago to run the fledgling Ashram in that city. After another year, I was sent to Oklahoma City to establish an Ashram there. It was there, in June of 1981, I learned of Muktananda's long history of sexual indiscretions with some of his young female devotees, and the threats and intimidations used to silence those whom he had engaged and those who knew of these activities. Naturally, I was devastated by this revelation. With a feeling of confusion and betrayal, I immediately left Muktananda's service, feeling that I could no longer represent him in good conscience.

My life had seemed, up to that point, a perfect one. My greatest ambitions had been fulfilled: I had realized God and had become a Swami in the glorious Siddha tradition. But now, all had been discredited; I was without a home, without a tradition, and rejected as an infidel by my former companions. I had written an open letter to Baba's devotees detailing what I knew; but naturally, most refused to believe their beloved guru capable of the acts of which I had accused him. Those accusations were later proven to be true, but, at the time, I was regarded by all my old friends as a liar and an apostate. Baba never either acknowledged or denied his guilt.

I ended up in a farmhouse owned by a generous ex-devotee in Fallsburg, New York, not far from Muktananda's main Siddha Yoga Ashram, and remained in hiding, fearful for my life, until Muktananda's death in October of 1982, at the age of 74. For seven years I stayed in that isolated farmhouse, until 1988, living as a recluse, attempting to make sense of the unfortunate turn of events which had brought me to my present situation. It was there I began writing *The Supreme Self* and several other books, including *History of Mysticism*; and I published them myself under the imprint of Atma Books. If I could no longer teach, at least I could tell my story of God-realization in hopes of benefiting others. When I reflect on my life, I see that it has unfolded and is unfolding just as it was ordained by God to do: my freedom from organizational duties, though painfully acquired, allowed me to finally do what my destiny required me to do: by the grace of God and Guru, I was enabled to give all my time to speaking out in praise of God, for the benefit of all His children.

It is good to remember that the Guru and the individual who is His instrument are not the same. Baba Muktananda often made mention in my presence of his identity in a previous life as the Raja, Ramachandra, ruler of the Yadava kingdom in Maharashtra from 1271 to 1296, and one can learn some interesting facts about king Ramachandra in the book I wrote on Jnaneshvar (*Jnaneshvar: The Life and Works of The Celebrated Thirteenth Century Indian Mystic-Poet*, Olympia, Wash., Atma Books, 1989). Ramachandra's rule was coincident with the life of Jnaneshvar, and his previous life as a king explains much about his subsequent life and personality as Swami Muktananda.

The Guru remains eternally, though a man (or woman) can always go astray. After many years, I have learned to accept the fallibility of the man I had once regarded as infallible; yet I honor him still. During my years with Baba, I came to know of his godlike powers, and received his generous and amazing grace. To this day, I still

hold Swami Muktananda in the highest esteem, with great respect and love, despite his inexplicable behavior. He will be remembered by all who knew him as a great, though contradictory, soul. He was a uniquely gifted yogi and an unfathomable personality, who blessed the lives of thousands of devoted students throughout the world. His most familiar message, delivered at the end of his many lectures, was “Honor yourself, love yourself, worship yourself; for your beloved God lives within you as you.”

* * *

What Is A Swami?

It's a question that comes up from time to time, and I've learned that I cannot really say what being a Swami means for all Swamis, but I can at least try to say what it means to me. I was living in a secluded cabin in the Santa Cruz mountains when it first dawned on me that I wanted to be a Swami. I had gone to live in that cabin in my spiritual quest for enlightenment, and I had been reading many books on Indian philosophy as well as books on Western religious philosophy. I was impressed by what Sri Ramakrishna's disciple, Swami Vivekananda, said about *sannyasa*, and also by these words of Sarvepali Radhakrishnan:

“A *sannyasin* [monk, or swami] renounces all possessions, distinctions of caste, and practices of religion. As he has perfected himself, he is able to give his soul the largest scope, throw all his powers into the free movement of the world and compel its transfiguration. He does not merely formulate the conception of high living but lives it, adhering to the famous rule, ‘The world is my country; to do good my religion’. Regarding all with an equal eye he must be friendly to all living beings. And being devoted, he must not injure any living creature, human or animal, either in act, word, or thought, and renounce all attachments. A freedom and fearlessness of spirit, an immensity of courage, which no defeat or obstacle can touch, a faith in the power that works in the universe, a love that lavishes itself without demand of return and makes life a free servitude to the universal spirit, are the signs of the perfected man.” ¹

Well, who wouldn't want to be such a person? It was during this same period of time that I was given to experience a profound illumination from God, revealing the spiritual depth of my true being. And shortly thereafter, I made myself and God a promise: that I would first give myself a twelve-year period of spiritual study and

growth, then I would become a Swami. That was in 1966, and in 1978 I was able to fulfill that promise. After a paradisaical five years in my cabin in the woods, I traveled to Ganeshpuri, India and became a disciple of the famous Kundalini master, Swami Muktananda.

Muktananda (affectionately known by his disciples as “Baba”) is known by many today as a man who made a tragic mistake in his later years, just prior to his death in 1982, by inappropriately sharing his physical affections with a number of his young female disciples. Many of us will also make great mistakes in our lives, especially as we age; and it is a terrible shame that Muktananda’s great legacy of loving wisdom should be so tarnished by the memory of a few misdeeds in the latter period of his life. I was one of those who left his organization in protest and who spoke out condemning those misdeeds, and they needed to be condemned. But, because of those unfortunate events, few of the public today know of the greatness that was Swami Muktananda. His was a spiritual presence that touched the lives of hundreds, even thousands, of souls and lifted them to an experience of God in their lives through the generous gift of his own heart’s immense compassion and love. Those who sat in his presence know, as no others can, that despite his human imperfections, he was indeed a great saint, possessing immense compassion and awesome power.

In 1978, I was working in Muktananda’s Oakland ashram, when I wrote to Baba in India informing him that the 12 years of my apprenticeship had expired and that it was time for me to become a Swami. He then invited me to Ganeshpuri to take part in the *sannyasin* initiations that were to take place in May at the time of his birthday. There were about a dozen of us, both Indians and Westerners to be initiated, and an appointed *Mahamandaleshvar* (ceremonial official) named Swami Brahmananda Sarasvati of the Shringeri Math was on hand to direct the proceedings. After performing the Vedic rituals of offering rice balls to our ancestors, and after having the last remaining ‘brahmin’s tuft of hair’ shorn from our heads, signifying the transcendence of all castes, we performed the culminating ceremony of discarding our old clothes while standing waist deep in a cold raging river at midnight, and the receiving of the Swami’s ochre robes. After that, we were Swamis, monks of the prestigious Sarasvati Order.

But, of course, it is not the ritual ceremony that makes a Swami; it is the heart’s desire, the commitment to a spiritually dedicated life, and the favor of God and one’s Guru. I was to know the awesome power of Muktananda’s grace to his Swamis, a grace that enlivened the world and my soul with a brightness that

revealed God's sparkling beauty within and without. Through no merit of my own, I experienced a divine blue light that would indicate to me advanced godly souls by dancing over their heads; I would experience Muktananda's grace being emitted from my own body to sincere devotees; I was even able to experience the transference of spiritual energy to others when someone inadvertently brushed my clothes. It was all his amazing and gracious power, transmitted from him through me, even though he was not present. His loving regard of me, even from far away, was a tangible energy that drew me in awed devotion to know him as the very image of God and distributor of God's grace on this earth.

In Muktananda's organization, SYDA Yoga, Swamis were honored, not so much for their holiness, but for their position in the hierarchy of the Guru's favor. Muktananda, in the tradition of the rajas of India, ruled as king over an orange silk-robed aristocracy or nobility, who always sat in the front nearest the king when he gave audience. Further back were the members of the functional bureaucracy, and behind them the peasants, the visiting mob. The Swamis shared in the teaching role, giving authorized courses and operating the regional Meditation Centers and Ashrams. In the absence of the Guru, they were the connection with the Guru and his teachings. In a way very similar to the monks and priests of the Catholic Church, the Swamis of SYDA Yoga made up an organizational hierarchy of representatives of the Siddha line.

But just as in the Catholic Church there were, and still are to some degree, lone contemplative hermits and anchorites who live among the people, in India there are many *sannyasins* who wander freely and independently, living the worshipful and contemplative life or teaching and lecturing and living by the charity of the citizenry. One can easily see, however, that such a class of religious itinerant beggars would not be feasible in Western countries. What, then, is a Western Swami to do? How is he (or she) to carry on his or her chosen vocation?

We must understand at the outset that a Swami transcends not only all Hindu caste designations, but all sectarian religious designations as well. A Swami is not (necessarily) a Hindu. The ideal Swami is learned in *all* religious traditions, and he is familiar as well with current science and literature. He is an enlightened and learned soul, and he is solely dedicated to God and the well-being of all God's children. After I had left Muktananda's organization, I was faced with the question of how to continue my "mission" as a Swami. My immediate instinct was to share my acquired experience and understanding in the form of writing, and I went on to produce a number of books, all concerned with the "mystical experience" and the

Self-knowledge obtained thereby.

There was also, of course, the necessity of meeting the expenses of living in this world; and this I managed to do by obtaining a license as a CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) and working primarily as a Home Health Aide for elderly and infirm patients in their homes. For the twenty-five years since I left Siddha Yoga, I have written my books, seen to their publication, and daily served the many patients I was assigned to: victims of stroke, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, and senile dementia with hands-on care. I no longer parade about in orange silk robes; rather, I live a simple solitary life as a servant; I promote my books, presenting them and offering them as free downloadable ebooks at my online website: www.themysticsvision.com; and I spend a good deal of time in reflection and inward communion with God. According to our brother, Socrates:

This is that life above all others which man should live, ... holding converse with the true Beauty, simple and divine. In that communion only beholding Beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but Reality [Itself]; ...and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue, to become the friend of God and be immortal if mortal man may. Would that be an ignoble life?

— Plato, *Symposium*

* * *

I am including here three articles that were written and published just after I left Muktananda's organization. The first is my Open Letter of Resignation that was sent to Muktananda as well as to the Ashrams and Meditation Centers of Siddha Yoga; the second is the article that appeared in Co-Evolution Quarterly in 1983, entitled "The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda, by William Rodarmor," to which I appended some remarks as Stan Trout. The third article consists of some remarks which appeared on the website "Leaving Siddha Yoga" in 1999. I had been asked to write these remarks about my time with Muktananda by Pendragon, who was then director of the "Leaving Siddha Yoga" website.

3. An Open Letter of Resignation from Swami Abhayananda to Muktananda, dated June, 1981.

Dear Muktananda,

The time has come, I feel, to make a testament for you and for all my friends in Siddha Yoga: The events which led up to my leaving Siddha Yoga began in South

Fallsburg in the summer of 1980, when I was called to the nearby home of a lady devotee of yours who told me of a teenage girl who had confided to her that you, Muktananda, had called her into your apartments, had asked her to disrobe, and had taken liberties with her on the pretext of examining her virginity. I was, of course, shocked; but I thought to myself, ‘the girl must be lying! But even if she’s not, there must be some good reason behind it; He’s a Siddha—he can do whatever he likes.’ I did not investigate further; I did not talk to the girl. The incident ended.

The lady then returned to her home in Europe, and shortly after, Swami Tejomayananda mysteriously vanished. You learned from an informant that the lady was talking about the young girl’s story, and you suspected her involvement in the Swami’s disappearance. It was then that you began your campaign to discredit the lady as well as the Swami so that no one would listen to what they might say. The Swami, you told me, was a “turd” who left only because he needed a woman, and the lady, you told me, was a dope-smuggler, a spy, a sex maniac who had given birth to twins, proving that she had had sexual intercourse with a number of men consecutively.

You learned that I was on friendly terms with this lady and her family, and so, you enlisted me in your harassment and defamation campaign, calling me in Chicago [by phone] sometimes twice a week to instruct me to call this lady collect and tell her that “Baba is very powerful,” that she should be careful of what she says because you had spies everywhere who were watching her every move. You became maniacal, Muktananda, whenever you spoke of her. You pressed me to soak her for all the money I could get out of her, which I declined to do; and finally, you urged me to insult her and sever our relationship, which I did, to your apparent satisfaction.

Still, I knew too much. I also had to be made to look like an incompetent fool who could be easily discredited, should I begin to speak about these things. So, in January of this year, I was sent to live in a two-room apartment with three working girls in Oklahoma City with no explanation. Nonetheless, I went unquestioningly, established an ashram there, and kept it going despite your apparent disinterest and frequent insults. Then, on Sunday, June 7, the “rumors” finally reached me.

Two well-respected, long-time devotees of yours came to visit me at the ashram and told me some very astonishing stories which they had heard by phone from some ex-devotees of yours in Oakland, California. According to their caller, you, Muktananda, sent two men, Shreepati and Joe Don Looney, to Oakland at the time

you returned from California to New York, to harass and threaten two couples living there who had recently withdrawn from your service. These couples were told by your men to stop talking about your bedroom escapades with young girls or they would be 'taken care of.' The couples then went to the District Attorney in Oakland and filed a statement of complaint. They also hired a lawyer who informed you that if you did not cease harassing the people, a suit would be filed. The couples then received further threats of disfigurement before your two men left town.

This was the "gossip" I listened to on that Sunday in June. I told my friends that I could not believe all these accusations without proof. I requested them to arrange for their Oakland informant to contact me; I wanted to hear these rumors from their source.

The following day, I received a call from a person in Oakland whom I had known very well since our early days together in Ganeshpuri. He told me very convincingly that all these previously mentioned events had actually occurred. There were scores of stories, he said, from a number of girls, reputable and well-known to me, who reported having been led into your quarters and sexually enjoyed by You, Muktananda, in the name of Tantra initiation. He [my caller] and his friends had spoken of these things and had subsequently been visited, harassed, and threatened by your men.

I was in a quandary. What was I to do? I could not share this with anyone, and I knew what your response would be if I were to ask you about it. My only real choice seemed to be to investigate these stories for myself. So, I decided to take a vacation, go to Oakland and enquire further in an attempt to determine the truth of the matter.

I withdrew from the ashram funds the back pay and clothing allowance owed to me and bought a ticket to Oakland. I visited and stayed with the people who had supposedly been threatened. I listened to their accounts of numerous girls whom I had known over the years who had reported to them their stories of sexual service to you, and I heard for myself from one girl who described her own experience of [involuntary] sexual intercourse with you. I also heard from others who corroborated the stories of harassment and threats from your two men. After thorough questioning, I could not help feeling that their stories were true. I could not help feeling that there was too much agreement, too much outrage, and too many people saying the same to imagine that they were all making this up.

The capper to all this came when, finally, I heard from Swami Tejomayananda. He had known about your “sex leela,” as he called it, from 1977. You discovered that he knew about it, and thereafter, you relegated him to a background position from which it was apparent that he was no longer in favor. This way, he could easily be accused of ‘sour grapes’ if ever he said anything. Still, he remained—though sullenly, until he learned of your attempted seduction of his teenage daughter; then he left in the middle of the night in silent outrage.

Previously, I had found it possible to rationalize most of your behavior, Muktananda, and to simply suspend judgement on the remainder. But I could find no way to rationalize such deceit, such duplicity, as you have apparently practiced on your faithful disciples over the years. I could find no way to make it fit my conception of “human perfection.” I believe that, when a Guru begins to lose sight of moral values—whether because of senility, madness, illness, or whatever reason—, and regards others as objects to manipulate and use for his own ends, and when he begins to resort to threats of violence to hide the lie of his personal life, it is a disciple’s *duty* to leave that Guru. It is therefore with much regret and deep anguish that I feel forced to terminate my discipleship to you. May God protect you and guide you.

Sincerely,

Stan Trout

Aka Swami Abhayananda

4. Article from Co-Evolution Quarterly, 1983:

There are few things sadder than a good guru gone bad. The cynics among us may object that a "good guru" is a contradiction in terms and certainly the spectacle of corrupt and authoritarian cults in recent years has cast a pall over the role of spiritual teachers. Nevertheless, I'm willing to maintain that a significant amount of wisdom and compassionate works have proceeded from various gurus and their followers, and I resist the impulse to write off the whole bunch as charlatans and power-trippers. From all indication Swami Muktananda helped thousands of people in his day – a fact that even disillusioned ex-devotees don't dispute. However, the last few years of his life saw a proliferation of abuses which are only now coming to light William Rodarmor; a former lawyer, park ranger, wilderness trip leader and presently a graduate student at

the University of California at Berkeley journalism school has spent months interviewing former and current followers of Muktananda for this investigative article. CQ independently contacted his major sources and confirmed the authenticity of their quotes and allegations. –Jay Kinney

The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda

by William Rodarmor

Illustrated by Matthew Wuerker

"There is no deity superior to the Guru, no gain better than the Guru's grace ... no state higher than meditation on the Guru." –Muktananda

On the American consciousness circuit, Baba Muktananda was known as the "guru's guru," one of the most respected meditation masters ever to come out of India. Respected, that is, until now.

When Baba Ram Das introduced him to the U.S. in 1970, Muktananda was still largely unknown. Thanks to Muktananda's spiritual power, his Siddha meditation movement quickly took root in the fertile soil of the American growth movement. By the time he died of heart failure in October 1982, Muktananda's followers had built him 31 ashrams, or meditation centers, around the world. When crowds saw Muktananda step from a black limousine to a waiting Lear jet, it was clear that the diminutive, orange-robed Indian was an American-style success.

At various times, Jerry Brown, Werner Erhard, John Denver, Marsha Mason; James Taylor, Carry Simon, astronaut Edgar Mitchell, and Meg Christian have all been interested in Muktananda's movement. The media coordinator at the large Oakland, California, ashram is former Black Panther leader Erika Huggins.

Baba Muktananda said he was a Siddha, the representative of a centuries-old Hindu lineage. According to his official biography, he wandered across India as a young man, going from teacher to teacher, living the chaste, austere life of a monk. In Ganeshpuri, near Bombay, he became the disciple of Nityananda, a Siddha guru of awesome yogic powers. After years of meditation, Muktananda experienced enlightenment. When Nityananda died in 1960, Muktananda said the guru passed the Siddha mantle to him on his deathbed, though some of Nityananda's followers in India dispute the claim. When Muktananda himself died, a sympathetic press still saw him as a spiritual Mr. Clean, and his two successors, a brother-sister team of swamis, continue to draw thousands of people searching for higher consciousness.

To most of his followers, Muktananda was a great master. But to others, he was a

man unable to live up to the high principles of his own teachings. "When we first approach a Guru," Muktananda wrote, "we should carefully examine his qualities and his actions. He should have conquered desire and anger and banished infatuation from his heart." For many, that was a warning that was understood too late.

Some of Muktananda's most important former followers now charge that the guru repeatedly violated his vow of chastity, made millions of dollars from his followers' labors, and allowed guns and violence in his ashrams. The accusations have been denied by the swamis who took over his movement after the master died.

In the course of preparing this story, I talked with 25 present and former devotees; most of the interviews are on tape. Some people would only talk to me if promised anonymity, and some are bitter at what they feel was Muktananda's betrayal of their trust. All agree that Muktananda was a man of unusual power. They differ over the ways he used it.

"I don't have sex for the same reason you do: because it feels so good." -Muktananda

In his teachings Muktananda put a lot of emphasis on sex - most of it negative. Curbing the sex drive released the kundalini energy that led to enlightenment, he said. The swami himself claimed to be completely celibate.

Members of the guru's inner circle, however, say Muktananda regularly had sex with his female devotees. Michael Dinga, an Oakland contractor who was head of construction for the ashram and a trustee of the foundation, said the guru's sexual exploits were common knowledge in the ashram. "It was supposed to be Muktananda's big secret," said Dinga, "but since many of the girls were in their early to middle teens, it was hard to keep it secret."

A young woman I am calling "Mary" said the guru seduced her at the main American ashram at South Fallsburg, New York, in 1981. Mary was in her early twenties at the time. Muktananda was 73.

At South Fallsburg, Muktananda used to stand behind a curtain in the evening, watching the girls coming back to the dormitory. He asked Mary to come to his bedroom several times, and he gave her gifts of money and jewelry. Finally, she did. When he then told her to undress, she was shocked, but she obeyed.

"He had a special area which I assume he used for his sexual affairs. It was similar to a gynecologist's table, but without the stirrups." (To his later chagrin, Michael Dinga realized he had built the table himself.) "He didn't have an erection," Mary said, "but he inserted about as much as he could. He was standing up, and his eyes were rolled up to the ceiling. He looked as if he was in some sort of ecstasy." When the session was over, Muktananda ordered the girl to come back the next day, and added, "Don't wear underwear."

On the first night, Muktananda had tried to convince Mary she was being initiated into tantric yoga – the yoga of sex. The next night, he didn't bother. "It was like 'Okay, you're here, take off your clothes. get on the table and let's do it.' Just very straight, hard, cold sex."

Mary told two people about what had happened to her. Neither was exactly surprised.

Michael's wife Chandra was disturbed. Chandra was probably the most important American in the movement. As head of food services, she saw Muktananda daily, and knew what was going on. "Whoever was in his kitchen was in some way molested," she said. A girl I'll call "Nina" used to work for Chandra. One day, the guru remarked to her in Hindi, "Sex with Nina is very good." Nina's mother was later made a swami.

Chandra said she had rationalized the guru's having sex in the past, but she was dismayed to learn it had happened to her young friend Mary. Aware of Muktananda's power over people who were devoted to him, she saw it as a form of rape.

The other person Mary confided in was Malti, Muktananda's longtime translator. Mary said Malti wasn't surprised when she told her about being seduced by the aged guru. "She told me people had been coming to her with this for years and years," Mary said. "She was caught in the middle." Malti and her brother, who have taken the names Chidvilasananda and Nityananda, are the movement's new leaders.

Another of Muktananda's victims was a woman I'll call "Jennifer." She says Muktananda raped her at the main Indian ashram at Ganeshpuri in the spring of 1978. He ordered Jennifer to come to his bedroom late one night and told her to take her clothes off. "I was in shock," she said, "but over the years, I had learned you never say no to anything that he asked you to do...."

Muktananda had intercourse with Jennifer for an hour, she said, and was quite

proud of the fact. "He kept saying, 'Sixty minutes,'" she said. "He claimed he was using the real Indian positions, not the westernized ones used in America." While he had sex, the guru felt like conversing, but Jennifer found she couldn't say a word. "The main thing he wanted to know was how old I was when I first got my period. I answered something, and he said, 'That's good, you're a pure girl.'" Devastated by the event, Jennifer made plans to leave the ashram as soon as possible, but Muktananda continued to be interested in her. "He used to watch me getting undressed through the keyhole," she said. She would open the door and see the guru outside "I became rather scared of him, because he kept coming to my room at night."

Both women said the Ganeshpuri ashram was arranged to suit Muktananda's convenience.

"He had a secret passageway from his house to the young girls' dormitory," Mary said. "Whoever he was carrying on with, he had switched to that dorm." The guru often visited the girls' dormitory while they were undressing. "He would come up anytime he wanted to" Jennifer said, "and we would just giggle. In the early days, I never thought of him as having sexual desires. He was the guru..." Mary knew otherwise: she talked with at least eight other young girls who had sex with Muktananda. "I knew that he had girls marching in and out of his bedroom all night long," she said.

While his followers were renovating a Miami hotel in 1979, Muktananda slept on the women's floor, and ordered that the youngest be put in the rooms closest to his, and the older ones down the hall.

"You always knew who he was carrying on with," said Chandra. "They came down the next day with a new gold bracelet or a new pair of earrings." Around the ashram, said Mary, people knew that "anyone who had jewelry was going to his room a lot."

For a time, Muktananda's followers found ways to rationalize his behavior. He wasn't really penetrating his victims, they said. Or he wasn't ejaculating - an important distinction to some, since retaining the semen was supposed to be a way of conserving the kundalini energy.

Ultimately, Chandra felt it didn't make any difference. "If you're going to be celibate, and you're going to preach celibacy, you don't put it in halfway, and then pull it out. You live what you preach..."

After years of repressing their growing doubts about Muktananda, Michael and

Chandra finally drew the line when they learned he was molesting a 13-year-old girl. She had been entrusted to the ashram by her parents and was being cared for by Muktananda's laundress and chauffeur. The laundress "told me Baba was doing things to her," said Chandra. "I think he was probing around in her." The laundress suggested it was only "Baba's way of loving her," but Chandra was appalled.

Charges of sex against Muktananda continued. In 1981, one of Muktananda's swamis, Stan Trout, wrote an open letter accusing his guru of molesting little girls on the pretext of checking their virginity. The letter caused a stir, but word didn't go beyond the ashram. In a "Memo from Baba," Muktananda merely answered that "devotees should know the truth by their own experience, not by the letters that they receive... You should be happy that I'm still alive and healthy and that they haven't tried to hang me."

"Wretched is he who cannot observe discipline and restraint even in an ashram." - Muktananda

In the first of his eight years with Muktananda, Yale dropout Richard Grimes said he was "in a funny kind of grace period, where you're so involved with the beginning of inner Life that you don't really notice what is going on." But then he started seeing things that didn't jibe with his idea of a meditation retreat.

"Muktananda had a ferocious temper," said Grimes, "and would scream or yell at someone for no seeming reason." He saw the guru beating people on many occasions. "In India, if peasants were caught stealing a coconut from his ashram, Muktananda would often beat them," Grimes said. The people in the ashram thought it was a great honor to be beaten by the guru. No one asked the peasants' opinion.

Muktananda's ubiquitous valet, Noni Patel, was a regular target of his master's wrath. While on tour in Denver, Noni came down to the kitchen to be treated for a strange wound in his side. "At first, he wouldn't say how he had gotten it," Grimes' wife Lotte recalled. "Later it came out that Baba had stabbed him with a fork."

When ex-devotees talked about strong-arm tactics against devotees, the names of two people close to Muktananda kept coming up. One was David Lynn, known as Sripati, an ex-Marine Vietnam vet. The other was Joe Don Looney, an ex-football player with a reputation for troublemaking on the five NFL teams he played for, and a criminal record. They were known as the "enforcers"; Muktananda used them to keep people in line.

On the guru's orders, Sripati once picked a public fight with then-swami Stan Trout at the South Fallsburg ashram. He came down from Boston, where Muktananda was staying, and punched Trout to the ground without provocation. Long-time devotee Abed Simli saw the attack, but he figured Sripati had just flipped out. Michael Dinga knew otherwise. Muktananda had phoned him the morning before the beating, and told him Trout's ego was getting too big, and that he was sending Sripati to set him straight. Dinga, a big man, was instructed not to interfere.

In India, Dinga and a man called Peter Polivka witnessed Muktananda's valet Noni Patel give a particularly brutal beating to a young follower: A German boy in his twenties, whom Dinga described as "obviously in a disturbed state" had started flailing around during a meditation intensive. The German was hauled outside, put under a cold shower, stripped naked, and laid out on a concrete slab behind the ashram. Dinga said the German just sat in a full lotus position and tried to steel himself against what happened next.

Noni Patel took a rubber hose, a foot-and-a-half long, and beat and questioned the boy for thirty minutes while a large black man called Hanuman held him. "They were full-strength blows," said Dinga, "and they raised horrible welts on the boy's body."

There exists a long tradition in the East of masters beating their students. Tibetan and Zen Buddhist stories are full of sharp blows that stop the students' rational minds long enough for them to become enlightened. Couldn't that have been what Muktananda was doing?

"It could be seen that way," said Richard Grimes. "For years we thought that every discrepancy was because he lived outside the laws of morality. He could do anything he wanted. That in itself is the biggest danger of having a perfect master lead any kind of group - there's no safeguard."

Chandra Dinga said that as Muktananda's power grew, he ignored normal standards of behavior. "He felt he was above and beyond the law," she said. "It went from roughing people up who didn't do what he wanted, to eventually, at the end, having firearms."

Though the ashrams were meditation centers, a surprising number of people in them had guns. Chandra saw Noni's gun, Muktananda's successor Subash's gun, and the shotgun Muktananda kept in his bedroom. Others saw guns in the hands of "enforcer" Sripati and ashram manager Yogi Ram. The manager of the Indian ashram showed Richard Grimes a pistol that had been smuggled into India for his use. One devotee opened a paper bag in an ashram vehicle in Santa Monica and

found ammunition in it.

A woman who ran the ashram bakery for many years said she knew some people had guns, but that it never bothered her. The Santa Monica ashram, for example, was in a very rough neighborhood, she said, and the guns were strictly for protection.

"In an ashram, one should not fritter one's precious time in a precious place on eating and drinking, sleeping, gossiping and talking idly." -Muktananda

By all accounts, devotees in the ashrams worked hard under trying conditions. In India, they were isolated from their culture. Even in the American ashrams, close friendships were frowned on, and Muktananda strongly discouraged devotees from visiting their families. A woman I'm calling "Sally" used to get up for work at 3:30 a.m. She said her day was spent in work, chanting, meditation, and silence. "Some days, you couldn't talk to anyone all day long. I would get very lonely." Recorded chants were often played over loudspeakers. Even a woman who is still close to the movement admitted that "the long hours were a drag."

Though he was Muktananda's right-hand man for construction, Michael Dinga worked "under incredible schedules with ridiculous budgets," putting in the same hours as his crew. In the six-and-a-half years he was with the ashram, he said he had a total of two weeks off.

As time went on, Dinga came to be bothered by what he saw as exploitation: "I saw the way people were manipulated, how they would work in all sincerity and all devotion [with] no idea that they were being laughed at and taken advantage of."

"Even a penny coming as a gift should be regarded as belonging to God and religion." -Muktananda

Muktananda's movement was both a spiritual and a financial success. Once Siddha meditation caught on, said Chandra Dinga, "money poured into the ashram." Particularly lucrative were the two-day "meditation intensives" given by Muktananda, and now by his successors. Today, an intensive led by the two new gurus costs \$200. (Money orders or cashier's checks only, please. No credit cards or personal checks.) An intensive given in Oakland in May 1983 drew 1200 participants, and people had to be turned away. At \$200 a head, Chidvilasananda and Nityananda's labors earned the ashram nearly a quarter of a million dollars in a single weekend.

There was always a lot of secrecy around ashram affairs, Lotte Grimes remarked.

During Muktananda's lifetime, that secrecy applied to money matters with a vengeance.

The number of people who came to intensives, for example, was a secret even from the devotees. Simple multiplication would tell anyone how much money was coming in. And when Richard Grimes set up a restaurant at the Oakland ashram, he said Muktananda "had a fit" when he found out that Grimes had been keeping his own records of the take.

Food services head Chandra Dinga said the restaurants in the various ashrams were always big money-makers, where devotees worked long hours for free. On tour during the summer, she said, they would feed over a thousand people, and bring in three thousand dollars in cash a day. Sally said that a breakfast that sold for two dollars actually cost the ashram about three cents.

Donations further fattened the coffers. if somebody important was coming to the ashram, Chandra's job was to try and get them to give a feast and to make a large donation. \$1500 to \$3000 was considered appropriate. "There was just a constant flow of money into his pockets," said Chandra, "it let him get whatever he wanted to get and let him buy people."

Muktananda himself was said to have been very attached to money. "For years, he catered only to those who were wealthy," said Richard Grimes. "He spent all the time outside of his public performances seeing privately anyone who had a lot of money."

A parade of Mercedes-Benzes used to drive up to the Ganeshpuri ashram with rich visitors, said Grimes. In Oakland, Lotte Grimes saw Malti order a list drawn up of everybody in the ashram who had money, to arrange private interviews with Muktananda, by his orders.

Devotees, on the other hand, had to get by on small stipends, if they got anything. Chandra Dinga, despite her status as head of food services, never got more than \$100 a month. Devotees with less prestige were completely dependent on the guru's generosity. Sally once cried for two days when she broke her glasses, knowing she would have to beg Muktananda for another pair.

How much money did Muktananda amass from his efforts? Even the officers of the foundation that ostensibly ran Muktananda's affairs never knew for sure.

Michael Dinga was a foundation trustee, and he used to cosign for deposits to the ashram's Swiss bank accounts, but the amounts on the papers were always left blank. In 1977, however, he got a hint. Ron Friedland, the president of the

foundation, told Dinga that Muktananda had 1.3 million dollars in Switzerland. Three years later, Muktananda told Chandra it was more like five million. "And then he laughed, and said, 'There's more than that.'"

A woman called Amma, who was Muktananda's companion for more than twenty years, told the Dingas that all the accounts were in the names of Muktananda's eventual successors, Chidvilasananda and Nityananda.

Michael and Chandra Dinga finally quit the ashram in December 1980. They had served Muktananda for a combined total of sixteen-and-a-half years and had risen to positions of real importance. Both knew exactly how the ashram operated.

Together, they went to Muktananda to tell him why they wanted to leave. The guru wasn't pleased. To get the Dingas to stay, Muktananda called on everything he thought would stir them. He offered them a car, a house, and money. When that failed, he started to weep. "You're my blood, my family," he said. Then Muktananda abruptly changed tack. "You've come on an inauspicious day," he said. "I can't give you my blessing." Next morning, he called Chandra on the public intercom and said she could leave immediately.

After they left, the Dingas say they were denounced by the guru, and their lives threatened.

"Muktananda claimed he had thrown us out because Chandra was a whore" said Dinga, "that she was having sex with the young boys who worked in the restaurant. Later he said I had a harem. In other words, he was accusing us of all the things he was doing himself." Muktananda also claimed that none of the buildings Michael had built were any good. When one of Michael's crew stood up for him, he was threatened physically.

Leaving all their friends behind in the ashram, the Dingas moved to the San Francisco area, but Muktananda's enmity followed them. Their doorbell and telephone started ringing at odd hours, and Michael saw the "enforcers" running away from their door one night. A cruel hoax was played on Chandra. Someone followed her when she took her cat to the vet, then phoned the vet's office with a message that her husband had been in a bad accident. Chandra waited frantically at Berkeley's Alta Bates Hospital for three quarters of an hour, only to learn that Michael was at work, unhurt.

Death threats started to reach the Dingas toward the end of April 1981, six months

after they had left the ashram. On May 7, Sripati and Joe Don Looney visited Lotte Grimes at her job in Emeryville with a frightening piece of information: "Tell Chandra this is a message from Baba: Chandra only has two months to live." Another ex-follower said he got a similar message: If the Dingas didn't keep quiet, acid would be thrown in Chandra's face; Michael would be castrated. The Grimeses and the Dingas reported the threats to the police. The Dingas hired a lawyer. The threats stopped soon after Berkeley police officer Clarick Brown called on the Oakland ashram, but Chandra was badly frightened. Some ex-followers still are.

Michael and Chandra's departure sparked a small exodus from the ashram. Some of the ex-followers began to meet and compare notes on their experiences in the ashram. "We were amazed and rejuvenated," said Richard Grimes. "We got more energy from learning he was a con man than we ever did thinking he was a real person."

Just the same, the devotees who left the ashram are still dealing with the damage done to their lives. Michael and Chandra's marriage broke up, as did Sally's. Michael is only now coming out of a period of depression and emptiness. Richard and Lotte Grimes are bitter at having wasted years of their lives in the ashram. Stan Trout still considers Muktananda a great yogi, but a tragically flawed man.

Chandra Dinga has taken years to come to terms with her experience with Muktananda; "Your whole frame of reference becomes askew," she said. "What you would normally think to be right or wrong no longer has any place. The underlying premise is that everything the guru does is for your own good. The guru does no wrong. When I finally realized that everything he did was not for our own good, I had to leave."

Muktananda's two successors were at the Oakland ashram in May end I asked Swami Chidvilasananda about the accusations against her guru. To her knowledge, did Muktananda have sex with women in the ashram? "Not as far as I saw," she said carefully. What about the charge that Muktananda had sex with young girls? "Those girls never came to us," Chidvilasananda said. "And we never saw it, we only heard it when Chandra talked to everybody else."

Chidvilasananda also denied that there was a bank account in Switzerland. When asked about the ashram's finances, she said that all income was put back into facilities. "We are a break-even proposition," the new leader said.

As for the alleged beatings, she said that Americans had their own ways of doing things. She said, "You can't blame the guru, because the guru doesn't teach that."

Why then, I asked, do the other ex-devotees I talked with support the Dingas in their charges?

Chidvilasananda replied, "I'm very glad they gave you a very nice story to cover themselves up and I want to tell you I don't want to get into this story because I know their story, too, and I do not want to say anything about it." When I said, "You have a chance to tell us whether or not you think these are accurate charges, falsehoods, or delusions," Malti's answer was: "I'm not going to probe into people's minds and try to find out what the truth is."

Two swamis and a number of present followers also said the charges were not true. Others say they simply don't believe them.

On the subject of money, foundation chief Ed Oliver conceded in an October 1, 1983, interview with the **Los Angeles Times** that there is a Swiss account with 1.5 million dollars in it. And when I repeated Swami Chidvilasananda's denials about women complaining to her, Mary, the woman who says the guru seduced her in South Fallsburg, said, "Well, that's an out-and-out lie."

"The sins committed at any other place are destroyed at a holy center, but those committed at a holy center stick tenaciously - it is difficult to wash them away." - Muktananda

This is a story of serious accusations made against a spiritual leader who is still prayed to and revered by thousands. Even his detractors say Muktananda gave them a great deal in the beginning. "He put out a force field around him," said Michael Dinga. "You could palpably feel the force coming off him. It gave me the feeling I had latched onto something that would answer my questions." Former devotees say Muktananda's eyes had a kind of light; when they first met the guru, he radiated love and benevolence. He also had a way of making his devotees feel special.

"I think he liked me so much because I wasn't taken by all the visions and the sounds," said Chandra, "that I understood that having an experience of God was something much more substantial and more ordinary." Chandra still feels that spirituality is the most important thing in her life. She says the gradual unfolding of the dark side of her guru's personality chipped away at her love and respect. "When you have a loved one you never dream that he might hurt you. At the end, I was

devastated." Yet despite the unsavory conclusion to her ten years with the swami, Chandra still notes, "if I had it to do over again, I still wouldn't trade the experience for anything in the world."

In a way, the sex, the violence, and the corruption aren't the real point. Muktananda's personal shortcomings were bad enough, explained Michael Dinga, but "the worst of it was that he wasn't who he said he was."

A person can make spiritual progress under a corrupt master, just as placebos can actually make you feel better. But how far can a person really grow spiritually under a master who doesn't himself live the truth? There was a tremendous split between what Muktananda preached and what he did, and his hypocrisy only made it worse. His successors are now in a dilemma: If they admit their guru's sins, Chidvilasananda and Nityananda lose their god-figure, and weaken their claim to a lineage of perfect masters. But if they don't, people who come to them looking for truth are courting disappointment.

Stan Trout, formerly Swami Abhayananda, served Muktananda for ten years as a teacher and ashram director. He left in 1981. "My summary withdrawal from Muktananda's organization was also a withdrawal from what I had considered my fraternal family, my friends, and above all, my life's work," he wrote us. He sent this open letter after reading a draft of "The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda," in which he is quoted. - Art Kleiner

Letter From a Former Swami
by Stan Trout (Swami Abhayananda)

I'd like to add this letter, if possible, as an appendix to the article on Muktananda by William Rodarmor. It is a statement of my thoughts and opinions of Muktananda after two years of deep deliberation following my discovery of his 'secret life'.

When I left Muktananda's service, I did so because I had just learned of the threatening action he had taken against some of his long-time devotees who had recently left his service. He had sent two of his body-guards to deliver threats to two young married women who had been speaking to other women who had been speaking to others of Muktananda's sexual liaisons with a number of young girls in his ashram. It was immediately clear to me that I could not represent a guru who was not only taking sexual advantage of his female devotees but was threatening

with bodily harm those who revealed the truth about him. However, after I had left Muktananda and had made the reasons for my departure known to others still in his service, another issue came to light for me, teaching me something not only about Muktananda's [nature], but about the nature of the organization and all other such organizations in which the leader is regarded as infallible by his followers, and is therefore obeyed implicitly.

When Chandra and Michael Dinga and later I, myself, realized the truth about Muktananda and his secret sex life, there was absolutely no means available to present the evidence for a fair hearing or judgment. There was no recourse but to leave, for the guru was the sole appeal, and he was as accustomed to lying as he was to breathing. Yet his word was regarded by followers as so absolutely final that when each of us left and were branded "demons" by him, not a single soul among those who had been our brother and sister devotees for ten years questioned or objected, but unanimously rejected us outright as the demented infidels he said we were. One has only to observe the way each of us who discovered the guru's secret life were treated by our former comrades to understand the power for evil inherent in any relationship based on the infallibility of the leader and the unquestioned obedience of the subjects...

It is clear to me that not only had the girls with whom Muktananda practiced his sexual diversions committed acts to which they had given no moral or rational consent, but so had the men who were ordered to threaten them with violence, and so had I myself when I had followed Muktananda's orders to express to others opinions which I did not sincerely hold. It is a sad but perennial phenomenon: Out of a love for truth and for those who teach it and appear to embody it, we unwittingly set ourselves up for exploitation and betrayal. Our mistake is to deify another being and attribute perfection to him. From that point on everything is admissible.

I think the lesson to be learned is that we simply cannot afford to relinquish our individual sovereignty - whether it be in a socio-political setting or in a religious congregation. Those who willingly put aside their own autonomy, their own moral judgment, to obey even a Christ, a Buddha, or a Krishna, do so at risk of losing a great deal more than they can hope to gain.

About Muktananda himself I have thought a great deal. There is no doubt in my mind that he was an extraordinarily enlightened, learned, and articulate man who possessed a singular power, a dynamic personal radiance and charisma that drew people to him and inspired them to lay their lives at his feet. Surely such a power is

divine; yet there is no way to justify the way in which he used this power. If God himself were to behave in this way, we would have to find him guilty of flagrant disregard for the law of love.

Some may say, 'He did no worse than any of us have done or would do if we could.' And I would answer, 'No; he did worse than any of us have done or would have done in his place. For, though he was only human like the rest of us, he staged a deliberate campaign of deceit to convince gentle souls that he had transcended the limitations of mankind, that through realizing the eternal Self, he had attained holy "perfection." He planted and nourished false, impossible dreams in the hearts of innocent, faithful souls and sacrificed them to his sport. With malicious glee, he cunningly stole from hundreds of trusting souls their hearts and wills, their self-trust, their very sanity, their very lives. No ordinary, good person could do this, no matter how he tried; his heart and conscience would not allow it.

Like all of us, Muktananda was only human. And, like all men who worship power, he was inevitably corrupted and destroyed by it. His power could not save him from the weakness of the flesh, nor from the wickedness and depravity that servitude to it brings. He ended as a feeble-minded sadistic tyrant, luring devout little girls to his bed every night with promises of grace and self-realization.

Muktananda's claim of "perfection" (*Siddha-hood*) was based on the notion that a person who has become enlightened has thereby also become "perfect" and absolutely free of human weakness. This is nonsense; it is a myth perpetrated by dishonest men who wish to receive the reverence and adoration due God alone. There is no absolute assurance that enlightenment necessitates the moral virtue of a person. There is no guarantee against the weakness of anger, lust, and greed in the human soul. The enlightened are on an equal footing with the ignorant in the struggle against their own evil - the only difference being that the enlightened person *knows* the truth and has no excuse for betraying it.

Throughout history there have been many enlightened souls who have been thought great, who, in the pride of their perfection and freedom, have imagined themselves to be beyond the constraints of God's laws, and who have thus fallen from love and lost the glory they once had. Those glorious Babas and Bhagwans, thinking to build their kingdom here on earth upon the ruins of the young souls devoted to them, often succeed for a time in fooling many and in gathering a large and festive following, but their deeds also follow them and proclaim their truth long after the paeans of praise have been sung and wafted away on the air. "God is not mocked";

there is no freedom, no liberation, from His law of love, nor from His inescapable justice. It is indeed often those very persons who have thought themselves most perfect, most free and ungoverned, who have fallen most grievously; and their piteous fall is an occasion for great sadness and should serve as a clear reminder of caution to us all.

5. Article Appearing in “Leaving Siddha Yoga, 1999:

The first article published that exposed Muktananda's abuse was called “[The Secret Life of Swami Muktananda](#)” article by William Rodarmor, **The CoEvolution Quarterly**; Winter 1983. Swami Abhayananda AKA Stan Trout is quoted there. Here is what he has to say 16 years later.

Dear Pendragon,

Thank you for the friendly reply. I had just about determined I would not speak with you, as you seemed a bit too suspicious and combative, but now I feel a little more comfortable with speaking with you, and I will try to answer most of your questions. First, I have never thought of myself as a "former-Swami," as I was described by the editors of the 1983 Rodarmor article that appeared in the Co-Evolution Quarterly. In 1984, I published my first book, *The Supreme Self*, under the name "S. Abhayananda," and have continued to use that name as author in all subsequent books. The term "Swami" had taken on such negative connotations for so many by then that I felt it would be best to simply use "S." in my name rather than "Swami." In that first book, and in several subsequent books, I made no mention of Muktananda; I was concerned to speak of my own spiritual experience and my own knowledge and felt that no good would be served by my bringing up a lot of sordid details which would only confuse people and serve to obfuscate my message. I continued over the years to avoid mention of Muktananda--partly because I am not interested in gossip or criticism but am dedicated to sharing my spiritual knowledge in order to truly benefit others. I wished to put that tragic period of my life behind me, and to continue to do as I had originally set out to do. There was also the fact that I was committed to protecting the identity of those who had made clear to me that they did not wish to be identified. Eventually, however, due to questions that repeatedly came up, I included in my bio in the back of my books the information that I had been a disciple of Muktananda's, and had left his

organization when, "unwilling to condone what I saw as abuses of power, I left his organization in 1981."

Aside from my "Open Letter" and my contribution to Rodarmor's '83 article, that's as much as I have said publicly up to this time. It's been 18 years since I walked out on Muktananda, and I am now an old man of sixty-one. I still feel no great need to talk about the past--in fact, it's of very little interest to me; but so long as there are questions, I'm willing to answer them. I feel that enough time has passed that no one will be harmed by my speaking out at this time. So, here's a little rundown on what happened way back then:

Prior to meeting Baba, I had spent 5 years in a little isolated cabin in the forested mountains of Santa Cruz, California, seeking to know God. It was there that I experienced Unity. One night in November of 1966, I entered a deep stillness and knew my eternal Self. This experience was the highlight of my life and influenced everything that followed. At that time, I vowed to give my life to the praise of God. I would become a Swami; but I knew I needed to learn a great deal, and so I gave myself 12 years to become worthy of teaching what I had come to know. I was not looking for a guru, but one night in 1970 I met Muktananda when he spoke at the University of California at Santa Cruz. I was mesmerized by him, and when he came off the stage and down the aisle, I stood in front of him holding out my hands for him to touch me. He took my hand, and I followed him out to where his car was awaiting him. We waved goodbye to each other, and I was in an excited state of bliss. Later, when I read his book, *Guru* (which was later published as *Chitshakti Vilas*), I decided to go to him in India. I felt that he could help me to retain the state I had experienced in my cabin. I wrote to him, asking if I could come, and he said, "Come to India." I had no money, but through some miraculous circumstances, I managed to get to Ganeshpuri in 1972.

I was not disappointed. I loved the ashram, and I worshipped Baba. I was utterly convinced that he was God incarnate. Malti (Chidvilasananda) was only seventeen, and she seemed an extraordinarily pure and beautiful soul. Baba's translator was Professor Jain, a young Indian man who would later fall in love and marry in the U.S. There were young men and women from many countries: France, Italy, Spain, Australia, as well as the U.S.; and of course, a number of Indian devotees. At that time, there were only 50 or 60 Westerners staying there: these were the young men and women who were later to become the Swamis and administrators of SYDA. We worked in the garden and made quilts during the monsoon; we chanted and meditated and stood before Baba on his courtyard perch like angels before the throne of God, absorbing the beauty of his radiance, drawn into the stillness of his

peace.

I spent two very happy years in Ganeshpuri, and then returned to the U.S. to help with Muktananda's Second World Tour. In Piedmont, California we had prepared a house for him, and shortly after his arrival there, while he was leading a chant, I was filled with emotion and tears were running down my face. When the chanting was over, he called me upstairs to his room and gave me the sandals off his feet. He told me to go to Indianapolis (my hometown), and to prepare for him to visit there. I went and prepared a place for him there, and when he came, he held an intensive and darshan for a large group of people. But there was some petty jealousy from one of Baba's staff who made it impossible for me to establish a permanent center there. I was baffled by what I thought was Baba's withdrawal of support, but was unable to communicate with Baba, due to the intercession of that staff-member; and, seeing no other choice, I returned to Oakland, Calif., where Baba was to end his Tour. At the time, Baba seemed to know nothing of the enmity that had been aimed at me, for later, when he discovered it, he banned that staff-member from any connection with SYDA.

In Oakland, I helped with the renovation of the old whorehouse which became the Oakland ashram. And I remained there, living in the ashram, serving as the pujari, food-buyer, and librarian for several years. In 1978, I wrote to Baba, who had returned to India, and told him my twelve years were up, and it was time for me to become a Swami. He replied, "Come to India and take initiation." So, in May of 1978, I returned to India and took *sannyas* along with a small group of others. Thereafter, Baba sent me to the New York ashram on 86th street to train as a teacher under Swami Paramananda. Like many of the other Swamis, I experienced a great increase of Shakti as a result of Baba's grace. I began to become an instrument of his energy; pulses of blue energy would dart from my eyes into whoever was receptive, and if someone touched me, I would feel the energy flow from me into that person.

The increased energy made me a magnetic attraction for the opposite sex, and on at least one occasion I foolishly encouraged that attraction and acted on it. Baba did not rebuke me openly, but he made me know his displeasure, and I learned to restrain my affections, though I felt them often, and continued to remain celibate throughout the time I was associated with Siddha Yoga.

After my apprenticeship in New York, Baba sent me to run the Philadelphia ashram, but I was regarded as an interloper by those already established in authority there, and did not have an especially happy time there. My manager, Jim

McMahan (who later became a Swami also) and I were continually at odds; and on one occasion, I slugged him. I apologized and insisted that I should call Baba and confess this outrageous behavior; but Jim implored me not to, and it was not reported. (Much later, he himself would inform Baba that I struck him, for which offence Baba would instruct one of his henchmen, Sripati, to give me a beating.) At about this time, the South Fallsburg ashram was being bought and refurbished, and much of my time was spent there helping with the clean-up and readying of the ashram. One incident during this period that stands out in my mind was when I came down with a case of Shingles. Large red blisters developed on my coccyx region and I was in great pain. Excusing myself from the ashram programs, I remained in my room. One evening Baba came into my room--which I shared with Swami Vivekananda (now Master Charles) --and Baba was carrying a thick walking-stick with which to give me a beating. My Hindi was almost non-existent, and so Vivekananda translated to Baba that I really was afflicted. Brandishing his walking stick, Baba made me pull down my shorts to show him the blisters, and satisfied, he left. It was an experience that made me doubt the guru's omniscience as well as his understanding of me. When the time came for me to go back to Philadelphia, I told Baba I would not return there. He then sent me to Chicago to run the ashram there.

I was in Chicago during all of 1980, and I loved my time there. The ashram was always full, and the people with whom I worked were excellent. I had a very loving and compatible relationship with the ashramites there--especially with Gargi, who served as the manager, and the atmosphere in the ashram reflected that harmony. However, during that time, Baba would make phone calls to me regarding a woman devotee from Australia named Ma Yoga Shakti (Anne Hamilton-Byrne) who had begun spreading rumors about Baba's indiscretions with some of the young girls of Siddha Yoga. As he knew I was a friend of her and her family, he sought to gain information about her from me, and instructed me to give her not-so-subtle warnings that he was all-seeing and all-powerful, and that she should watch what she said. He would shout furiously over the phone, seeming like a madman, causing me much confusion and stirring in my subconscious a doubt about his benevolence. I had heard from Ma Yoga Shakti of a young Indian girl who had come to her for advice, telling of how Muktananda had fondled her and inserted his finger into her vagina, ostensibly to check "her nadis." I had been somewhat shocked, but I was so mentally programmed to reject any criticism of the guru that I dismissed it as something I just did not have the ability to understand. And so, what if the guru found some pleasure in touching girls! Who was I to find fault with him? But his fanatic, almost despotic, anger and threats eroded the unassailability of my trust and slowly undermined my love for him.

At the beginning of 1981, Muktananda called me in Chicago to tell me that "they want you in Oklahoma City." The Chicago ashram was thriving, and I could not understand his pulling me out of there to send me to a city where there was no ashram. But, of course, I went, only to find myself living in a sparsely furnished apartment with two working girls who had had no part in asking for a Swami or even a Meditation Center. To this day, I don't really know what his real motive was for sending me there. Baba had visited Oklahoma City several times, and the person he had set up as the leader of his Meditation Center had gone off on his own, rejecting Baba, and Baba told me he wanted me to take away this man's devotees and draw them back to Siddha Yoga. There was also an Indian chief there who was a rival guru whom I was instructed to intimidate and undermine. I was flabbergasted, but I made the most of an impossible situation. We rented a large house and established an ashram, and I met with these rival gurus in an attempt to infiltrate their organizations. By this time, I was feeling a little lost. I remember thinking that I'd like to maybe work in an ice-cream store or something simple like that. Nonetheless, the ashram work went on and prospered in a modest way.

Then, one Sunday afternoon, a man and wife in their fifties, who had hosted Baba in that city in the early days came to me and told me some shocking news: Several of Baba's closest long-time devotees had left the organization and had disclosed to them some disconcerting tales of Baba's sexual dalliances with a number of young females. They would not tell me who these people were who had left SYDA, but I asked to speak with them on the phone to determine for myself the truth of these accusations. But even as I was told these things about Baba, I knew in my heart that they were true. So much of what I had seen for myself and had sensed intuitively in Baba's words and behavior had now been brought to the surface of my conscious mind, and I knew that what they said was true. A phone call was arranged, and I spoke with the people who had made these accusations and had withdrawn from Baba's service. They were people whom I had known and with whom I had lived for a long time: Chandra and Michael Dinga along with Chandra's friend, Leela, and Rick and Lotte Grimes. These were people who had been extremely close to the center of Baba's organization and had held highly responsible positions in the organization. They were also in a position to know what went on in the girl's quarters and among the highly segregated female population of SYDA. I was told names and dates, and all the sordid details of Muktananda's long-time sexcapades dating back to the time I first met him. My heart sank; many curious circumstances over the years now became clear, and I realized that my devotion had veiled my mind from acknowledging what had been right before my eyes all along.

But still I was not satisfied that I had been deluded for these many years; I was determined to return to South Fallsburg and confront Baba with what I had learned and hear what he had to say. But, as I waited with my packed suitcase outside the bus station for the bus, I recalled in my mind how Baba consistently treated any hint of criticism; how he made his critics the butt of ridicule and obfuscated all rationality; how he invoked his Siddhahood when challenged in any way, and how from his bully-pulpit he reduced his adversaries to mush before his assembly of devotees. And so, I decided instead to go to California where these "apostates" were living, and to satisfy myself in their presence as to the truth of their accusations. And that's what I did. I went to Oakland and stayed with Rick and Lotte, and with Michael and Chandra, and listened to what they had to say. They had recently been visited by two of Baba's henchmen-- Shripati and Joe Don Looney-- and had been harassed and threatened with bodily harm if they continued to repeat their stories. They had been visited on their jobs, and repeatedly threatened with disfigurement and even death. They had filed a suit with the District Attorney, who had issued a restraining order against Muktananda and his people. Michael kept a loaded shotgun in his home and carried a .357 magnum revolver with him whenever he went out--even to take out the garbage. They were clearly terrified of these men who followed unquestioningly whatever orders were given to them by their guru.

During those days that I stayed with them, I heard about another Baba than the one I had thought him to be. I was told about many of the girls who, over the years, had simply disappeared overnight, and about whom I had wondered. They had been enlisted for sex, and, freaking out, had left in the middle of the night. Many were Baba's cooks--the girls he had picked to be close to his quarters; but others were naive girls of thirteen and fourteen who had surrendered themselves to him and would do whatever he asked. Both Chandra and Lotte affirmed that this had been going on since the earliest times in Ganeshpuri but had escalated in recent times. In Ganeshpuri, he had a mattress under his bed which he would pull out for sex so as not dirty his bed. At first, the girls told me, he didn't even know how to do it, and frequently sought help from his doctors for his "floppiness." But these were, of course, pre-Viagra times, and there was nothing they could do for him. At South Fallsburg, it was a nightly occurrence--with a different girl each time, and sometimes two together. It was not all hearsay; I heard the first-hand description from one girl of her own sexual exploitation by Baba and found her story to be clearly and undeniably true.

I was angry at the cowardice of the many girls who had been exploited over the years and failed to speak out. But, of course, they were frightened and confused, and simply wished to put it behind them. Still, they had perpetuated this abuse by their silence, and put other girls in jeopardy. I felt impelled to speak about it to those still under delusion, and to do what I could to warn other young women about the danger--many of whom I had been responsible for leading to Baba. We Swamis had unknowingly been his pimps; and I knew I had to speak out. In September of 1981, I wrote the "Open Letter" which you have subsequently published on your website, and I sent it to all the SYDA Meditation Centers on their published list. In May of 1982, I did another mailing of the letter, with this additional note appended at the end:

"Since that letter was written, I have talked with many people and have learned a great deal more of Muktananda's secret activities over the past years. Sad to say, he has been deceiving the sincere aspirants who believed in his holiness for many years. It seems to have begun at least as far back as 1976, and today he scarcely bothers to conceal the fact that he is having sex with many of his female devotees--most of whom are mere children in their early teens.

"It is a bitter revelation indeed to those who trusted him as a spiritual guide; and it is as much a sorrow for me to tell you these things as it is for you to hear them. Nevertheless, I feel I must warn you of what's coming so that you can begin to rebuild your bridges back to sanity. SYDA is going to collapse; the papers and magazines are going to have a field-day with stories of the atrocities this man is committing; young girls are going to sue in court, and we will all begin to wonder how on earth we could have been involved with such a madman. It will be best if you can get out quietly and begin to regain your lives. And one other warning: do not be naive; do not underestimate this man's perfidy. He is inhumanly treacherous. He is capable of anything. I would like to tell you many details, but naturally I must protect the names of those whom he has violated. But talk with your friends; you will discover much for yourselves.

"I sincerely regret that I must be the bearer of this news, and I wish like you that it could all be proven false. I have learned, and I think you will too, that although they are hard, these sad tidings are the key to a future of freedom. And though it's a frightening and lonely vista at first, the initial anger at having been deceived for so long will subside, and you will realize that life is still great, God is still kind, and you have become somehow stronger and more trusting in the innate goodness of yourself. You will suffer, as I have, the lingering ghosts of a nightmare from which

you've awakened, and, like me, you will feel very bad for some time; but every transition in this life is ordained by God's will, and at every turning He is still there, leading us infallibly to greatness.

"I send you my love and sincere regrets.

Your devoted friend,
Stan Trout"

A couple of weeks later, Baba issued a printed Bulletin, dated June 4, 1982, which stated:

MESSAGE FROM BABA

"The devotees should know the truth by their own experience, not by the letters they receive. Still, this is nothing new. It is a part of the lineage that I belong to. Mansur Mastana was hanged, Jesus was crucified, and all of Tukaram's books were thrown into the river. The lineage of people who did these things to these great beings is still with us. Just as I am established in my lineage, these people are established in their lineage. So, what is the big deal? This is just the way of the world. You should be happy that I am still alive and healthy and that they haven't tried to hang me.

"... However, the thing that surprises me the most is that you have suddenly forgotten all the experiences that you have had. You must have heard me refer to the great saint, Kabir, very often. He said, 'The elephant strides at his own gait, but the dogs do trail behind and bark. ... People write on white paper with black ink. Let them write. Kabir says, if someone wants to eat hellish things, let them do so. But you should always stay established in the Lord.

Your own,
Swami Muktananda"

He was very slick, and most of his people were mollified by this evasive and manipulative style of his. He was identified with the Christ's of the world, and those who spoke against him were "dogs."

In the winter of 1981, Anne Hamilton-Byrne (Ma Yoga Shakti), a former devotee who had bought an old resort property near the South Fallsburg ashram to be near Baba, generously offered it to me as a hideout. I had grown a beard and learned to dodge recognized ashramites in grocery stores and department stores; and, though it was less than a mile from the ashram, I managed to live in that place undiscovered until

after Baba's death, when I revealed my presence to some ashramites walking past the house. Chidvilasananda then sent several women to investigate, but I convinced them that I was harmless and was no threat to SYDA, and they left me alone. I remained in that place for the next seven years, minding the property, and walking the roads trying to understand how it was possible for someone to be both a saint and a devil at the same time, and trying to comprehend why God had perpetrated this apparent "trick" on me, first leading me to this man, and then destroying everything I had sought attain in His name. I never found an answer to the first of these questions. Muktananda remains an enigma to me. He was without doubt an extraordinarily advanced soul, with incredible powers; but he was also a demon in his abuse of that power. How is this possible? I don't know.

This period was a very unhappy one for me; but I revived, and came to realize that, however difficult, the trials God puts before us are all for our own growth; and though they lead us down roads we would not have chosen, they lead us to the fulfillment of potentials which we would not even have dreamed possible. At this time, I began writing and publishing my books, in order to share my own vision. First was *The Supreme Self*, which told of my early experiences in my solitary cabin in Santa Cruz, and my present understanding.

Next came *History of Mysticism*, a monumental study of the lives and teachings of the mystics of various Eastern and Western traditions. I believed strongly in the necessity of understanding the history of mystical thought in all its expressions in order to see with the widest possible vision the unanimity of their message. All, regardless of religious affiliation, had experienced the same eternal Self; and the weight of their combined testimony was overwhelming. I had researched this book at the library of the SUNY at New Paltz, a 30-mile ride from South Fallsburg, and also found there the books which helped me write the biography of Jnaneshvar which I appended to the translations I had earlier done of some of his written works. This was published as *Jnaneshvar: The Life and Works of The Celebrated Thirteenth Century Indian Mystic-Poet*.

Eventually I determined to forge for myself a new life, and, in 1988, I moved to Naples, Florida. Along with a woman I met there, I founded "The Vedanta Temple," and held regular services and lectures as Swami Abhayananda. I also enjoyed a rich life, combing the beaches, frolicking in the surf, and enjoying the sun. There I published a book called, *The Wisdom of Vedanta*, a collection of thirty-five of my best lectures delivered over the years. And, in 1991, I left Florida and journeyed to Washington state at the furthest diagonal point of the continent. There, I re-

established "The Vedanta Temple," and published a few more books: *Dattatreya: The Song of The Avadhut*, which consisted of a translation from the Sanskrit text of *The Avadhut Gita*, which I had done back in Oakland in 1977; *Thomas á Kempis: On The Love of God*, a revised edition of a 15th century English translation of *The Imitation of Christ*; and later, a revised edition of *History of Mysticism*, which became a selection in the Book-of-the-Month Club, and has become a textbook in half-a-dozen University graduate courses around the country. My most recent book is a celebration of Plotinus, the 3rd century Roman mystic-sage, entitled, *Plotinus: The Origin of Western Mysticism*. In addition to my publishing enterprise, I support myself by caring for elderly patients in their homes. I live a quiet existence in a lakeside cabin surrounded by pines, where I read, write, and continue to endeavor to unite my soul with God. I invite anyone interested in learning more about my books to check out my website at: www.atmabooks.com (now, in 2021: www.themysticsvision.com), or to send an enquiry to me by email at: atmabks@aol.com or abhayananda@aol.com (now, in 2021: abhayananda@bellsouth.net).

Thank you for the opportunity to tell my story.

Yours sincerely,
Swami Abhayananda

7 Oct 99

www.LeavingSiddhaYoga.net

* * *

6. Another Perspective On Baba Muktananda:

Dear readers, as many of you know, in June of 1981, I resigned and left my position as a teacher with Baba Muktananda's Siddha Yoga organization in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. And, shortly thereafter, I mailed a letter to many of my comrades in the various Ashrams and Meditation Centers of that organization, sharing with them the information that I had left my position in that organization upon discovering that our Guru, Baba Muktananda, was concealing the fact that he was having sexual relations with a number of his young female disciples, and threatening them with violence if they continued to speak of it. With the intention of warning those

vulnerable women still remaining under his influence, I told of the evidence I had uncovered, and of his threats of violence toward those who had spoken to others of his secret life.

For the next thirty years, I was regarded by those who remained in the Siddha Yoga organization as a traitor, a Judas; and I continued to lead my own private life of service to God, having heard nothing in all that time from my old friends and previous comrades in Siddha Yoga. Then, on May 5, 2011, I received an email from one of my previous brother-Swamis, Swami Shankarananda, and we had a prolonged and vigorous interchange of opposing views. Now, once again, three years later, on Friday, August 1, 2014, I received an email letter from another of my previous fellow-Swamis, Swami Dayananda (Karen Schaefer) whom I had known as Kalyani, accompanied by an article written by her. In her letter, she expressed the wish that somehow it would be possible for me to withdraw my “criticisms of Baba from the 80’s that still have such a damaging effect on people.”

She said, “People read those articles that you wrote then and lose their faith and will not even come close to anything to do with Baba. It’s very sad. But still all of us who received so much and have so many reasons to be grateful and want to repay what he gave to us, continue to attempt to help people put things into a perspective.” And in her accompanying article, she attempts to do just that.

Following is a faithful reproduction of Swami Dayananda’s article. Except for my Comments at the end, it is written entirely by Swami Dayananda (Karen Schaefer). It is a remarkable and important testament, shedding much light on the events surrounding Baba that I only vaguely understood at the time that I wrote about him in the 80’s due to the cloak of secrecy that had been cast over them. While Swami Dayananda’s article is admittedly a one-sided and somewhat rosy picture of those events, it very much deserves to be widely read and shared, not only by those who had some association with Baba Muktananda, but by every spiritual aspirant for its wonderful inspiration.

—Swami Abhayananda

Note: *This article does not represent the views of the current administration of the Siddha Yoga organization, whose official stance is that none of this ever happened:*

How An Accomplished Yogi Faces Old Age, Sickness, And Death *Observations On My Life With Baba*
by Dayananda, also known as Kalyani (Karen Schaefer).

Introduction This was one of the most inspiring aspects of my years living close to such an accomplished yogi. I was able to observe him as he aged through the years of his very arduous and wholehearted dedication to the awakening of spiritual energy in tens of thousands of people as he traveled throughout a large part of the world and the tolls that work took on his physical body. I witnessed the extraordinary ways in which he responded to physical illness and at the time was aware that this was one evident sign of his yogic power over his body and mind.

As I myself am aging and facing challenges of health, I am able to draw inspiration from his example and hope this helps to inspire others as well. When you live close to a Guru there are many methods through which he/she can teach, guide and inspire us. Those include through the discipline he may require as part of living near him; formal teachings and answering the questions put to him about the spiritual journey; and very personal situations where the Guru finds the opportunity to give very direct teaching, usually to fast-track our development in meditation and also to break through stubborn negative habits.

All of these are valuable means. But what I absorbed most directly living with Baba were his own attitudes and behaviors in living his life, day in and day out. From those examples I came to understand his ability to bring his meditative and yogic states of transcendent consciousness into daily life. The way he handled certain situations and many of the challenges that arose over the period of years I lived with him, clearly illustrated to me that his relationship with his physical body was not like that of most of us. His yogic lifestyle and practices awarded him extraordinary equanimity that enabled him to overcome conditions that are generally debilitating and overwhelming for most of us as we age.

Part One

When I met him in San Francisco in 1970 he was 60 years old. He had an extraordinary amount of life force, joyful enthusiasm and seemed tireless in approaching his work. Through the 12 years I lived with him he faced multiple health challenges from being diabetic and having an enlarged heart, heart attacks, and eventually he succumbed to a heart attack in October 1982.

Initially when I went to India in 1971 he was celebrating his 62nd birthday in the ashram. During those celebrations with thousands of people visiting him he was indefatigable, it seemed to take several young attendants through the day to keep up with him, assisting him in various activities. He was like a lion, filled with yogic vitality, joy and gusto meeting each person and situation with direct dynamic

engagement. He seemed to be much younger than his years.

I lived in the ashram with him for three years from 1971-1973, prior to his second World Tour. During the weekdays in the ashram life was relatively quiet, with the gentle flow of the daily routine he had set for all residents. There were between 20-30 westerners living there during those periods, and approximately the same amount of Indians, some young boys whom he was educating, retired Indians who came to spend their *vanaprashtha* ¹ phase of life in the ashram, and Indian and foreign people who would come and stay for periods of school breaks or work holidays.

Ashram life had a rhythm punctuated by the unique characteristics of the different seasons: monsoon rains with the glorious fragrant blossoms that came to life with the rains; the stultifying heat of summer days where the earth cracked open from dryness; and cool winter mornings where a hot cup of chai helped to warm hand and tummy.

Without fail, Baba rose early for his own meditations and visited the temple where he paid respects to his Guru by doing a full-length prostration. During the morning Guru Gita chant he generally participated, often correcting the postures and inattentiveness of the chanters with flying objects, or sharp words. Nothing seemed to escape his attention, as throughout the day he oversaw work in the kitchen, in the gardens, on-going construction projects, fed and trained his elephant Viju and played with his dogs.

Then there was the greeting of visitors who came in endless queues for his darshan—the Indians have a strong faith that just the sight or glance of one of their great saints can sanctify their lives, no matter how dismal their conditions. The poor villagers, powerful politicians, office clerks, film stars, all lined up to see Baba. Those exchanges were often very personal and engaging. Each individual departed feeling blessed through their contact. Baba in no way filled any stereotype ideal one could have about how a saint behaved. His language could at times be rough, harsh if the occasion called for it, often loving, lively and humorous and his behavior always unpredictable and spontaneous.

There was never a dull moment around him, it sometimes felt like a three-ring circus where multiple events were happening simultaneously, and he was orchestrating them all. He could take different roles as required— one minute, disciplining an errant young boy with a stick; the next caressing and blessing a

new-born brought by his parents; teasing one of the local village women who daily brought vegetables from her garden, or giving warm hearted words of encouragement and upliftment to a man who having lost his legs came into the courtyard on a wooden platform with wheels.

On Saturday afternoons, the buses from Bombay arrived, with devotees laden with baskets of food carried into the kitchen and lining up to greet Baba with colorful flower garlands and offerings of fruit.

At different times of the year daily life was enhanced with extraordinary activities: 7-day 24-hour chants, sometimes with ecstatic dancing; celebrations of Guru Purnima and Baba's Birthday and *Divya Diksha* days, where thousands of people came by the busloads. They were accommodated on the roof tops of the buildings and even in large tents. Huge *bandharas*— delicious feasts— were prepared and distributed for hours. Brahmin priests came to perform yajnas, fire pujas, often for seven days. For these occasions Baba manifested his kingly manner as he officiated and orchestrated each one of these activities with his extraordinary level of enthusiasm and vigor. Every participant was uplifted by his magnificent generosity of spirit and joyful nature.

Life as an ashramite with him in those years had several constant themes. First, a mandatory and intense level of discipline which entailed participating in every chant throughout the day and doing our *seva*—assigned work chores. Secondly, being trained in various aspects of yogic life including an ayurvedic approach to diet and living with the seasons. And individually, each ashramite received very personal on-going attention to their progress in meditation practice.

He emphasized the discipline for seemingly different reasons: firstly, it eliminated ambivalent visitors to the ashram, only the truly committed could bear the intense heat (*tapasya* as they call it in the Yoga Sutras) of the rigorous lifestyle he demanded. He would occasionally roar through the courtyard with a stick in hand, shouting in a most terrifying manner. We tended to call it his "*Rudra Bhav*".²

Later during the afternoon question and answer session which was translated for the westerners he would giggle and say, "Did you see, it worked, those hippies rolled up their sleeping bags and sneaked out the gate." Ganeshpuri ashram in those days was not a place for spiritual dilettantes or those just looking for a comfortable place to hang out. He also told us that if a serious meditator committed themselves to a daily routine, as one went on into deeper states of meditation, that routine required

much less mental effort, one did not have to think about what to do. It was evident that he himself maintained an unvarying daily routine of practices.

Regarding diet and food, he also always emphasized the health benefits of eating only what and how much the body required according to the season and one's ayurvedic constitution; and, again, it was obvious that he himself followed a very strict dietary discipline in spite of the fact that visitors were always bringing food offerings to him. In every aspect of his lifestyle Baba was an exemplary yogi—his example was truly inspiring and his energy levels were such that anyone observing him could only feel admiration and awe.

He also took great care in watching over the spiritual development of each individual who had made the commitment to live in his Guru Kula. This activity generally was centered in the meditation verandah adjacent to his room. In the center of this verandah was the locked small room which was his original residence when the land was given to him by his Guru Bhagawan Nityananda. He had lived and meditated in that room for many years before the ashram developed, and occasionally he would place a meditator in that room for a very special initiation. (A very poignant point that cannot be overlooked is that ultimately the earth below that one small room became the chamber for his samadhi shrine. Prior to his death he emphasized that room was his one sole property, everything else belonged to the trustees of the ashram.)

Ashramites and regular visitors would sit for meditation in that verandah, and Baba would come out of his room and observe people meditating. He spontaneously gave *shaktipat*, a transmission of meditative experience, in a very individual manner on those occasions. At other times, he would speak with someone in the darshan line, give them the mantra or a pat on the head or cheeks and tell them to go sit for meditation. The transmission of shaktipat, or awakening of meditation, in his tradition was informal and unstructured, according to the individual. The volumes of the Gurudevani Magazine edited by Amma (Swami Prajnananda) were filled with the accounts of the extraordinary experiences people had on such occasions.

Baba had the remarkable capacity to transmit a direct experience of the highest consciousness to individuals who were ready for it. It was then up to the student to honor and preserve that awakened energy through leading a pure lifestyle and doing sadhana practices until such time as it could be stabilized through meditation. He said that one was ready for spiritual awakening when one's positive and negative karmas had become equally balanced. One can find a description of

this experience given by Krishna to Arjuna in Chapter 12 of the Bhagavad Gita.

He said that even sometimes this transmission would occur spontaneously; he would feel a certain vibration in his heart, look around and could see by the expression on some seeker's face that they were experiencing an awakening of the powerful Kundalini energy that had flowed from him into them. He also observed our health and lifestyle habits quite carefully. He was very opposed to us taking food from outside of the ashram or loading up on sweets when we visited Bombay for any reason as such food was likely to disturb our health. If one approached him with any kind of ailment or injury one had to be brave and accept his favorite remedies, which included drinking cows' urine or peeing on a wound.

When I arrived in the ashram he wanted to know all about my previous lifestyle. I had been living a yogic lifestyle for about one year, being vegetarian and practicing the *asanas* and *shatkarmas*, cleansing practices of classical hatha yoga. One day in conversation in Amma's room he pointed out, "You must have had many boyfriends, I can see you have lost your vital fluids, your cheeks are sunken and your skin pallid." This was quite embarrassing to say the least, but I was a product of the sexual revolution of the late sixties in California!

"This girl has had eighty boyfriends," he said, pointing to another American woman from New York who was working nearby. "You will get your radiance back soon living here with this pure environment, pure food, maintaining celibacy, and chanting and meditating."

He seemed to be quite fascinated by the histories of the western girls who came there, as sexual freedom was not at all an acceptable behavior in India at that time. Women's purity was protected and preserved until the time of marriage. At that time in India, unfortunately, western women were portrayed in Indian films as being extremely promiscuous to the point of being depicted as sexual predators. It's no wonder that western women found themselves the target of sexual harassment when they traveled through India. But then they themselves were not conscious to observe the modest dress codes that were observed by Indian women. In their hot pants and halter tops, they led men to feel they were just asking for sex and [the men] were more than eager to oblige. This dichotomy between cultural attitudes towards sexual behavior provoked many misunderstandings in interactions between western women and men, including some of the spiritual teachers. 3

As part of the emphasis on discipline and health, Baba very much emphasized the

preservation of sexual energy as being the fuel for spiritual practice. It was not a question of morality generally in spite of the different cultural attitudes. In the same way that he emphasized purity in vegetarian food for the effects it had on the energies of the body and mind, he emphasized preservation of sexual fluids as essential for developing the subtle strength necessary for the more refined practices of yoga and meditation.

We were encouraged to read various texts that had been translated into English. One particularly interesting one was *Devatma Shakti*, which described the subtle and intricate process whereby the sexual fluids of a meditator are refined through pure diet, yogic lifestyle, pranayama and meditation practices. In the case of the Siddha yogis such as Baba and his Guru, who were described as *urdhvaretas*,⁴ that fluid became a conscious dynamic force that was able to be controlled by concentration and will as a vehicle for the transmission of Kundalini energy, known as shaktipat. That transmission could be given in the form of a physical touch; a word, usually a mantra whispered in the ear; or a look, whereby the force of the energy radiated out of the eyes of the master into the eyes of the ready disciple.

Baba was invited to tour the world again in 1974, invited by Werner Erhard to participate in a series of EST Presents seminars. I left earlier from India to assist with preparations and met him and his party when he arrived in Oakland. I had some trepidations about this tour, as I knew that Ganeshpuri ashram would never be the same pristine sanctuary of meditation once people met Baba and received the spiritual awakening that was so uniquely his work. I also wondered in my mind how people would understand what kind of yogi he was and what he was doing when he gave shaktipat, with such vastly different cultural conditioning.

Part Two: The Meditation Revolution

His visit seemed to correspond with a burgeoning area of research into the field of “consciousness”. Baba was recognized by many influential people in areas of science, psychology and physics as a realized master yogi of an exceptional and rare level. Each day there were lines of people coming to meet him for private meetings. Actually, [they were] not private; there would be a group of people scheduled for each morning or afternoon session, and they would discuss their concerns or interests in the company of another 10–15 people.⁵ These groups were always very lively as they included well known personalities such as Alan Ginsberg, Carlos Castaneda, Werner Erhardt, politicians, film personalities, journalists, astronauts, and physicists. Each session was filled with dynamic interactions

where Baba was influential in his efforts to get the individuals to turn within for their own experience of higher reality. Whatever people came to him with professional curiosity, or personal dissatisfaction in their lives, it was clear that Baba had one agenda: to facilitate a direct awakening of the higher consciousness within each individual.

The scientists came with their kirilian cameras, and various high-tech equipment in an effort to somehow measure or gauge Baba's heightened level of spiritual energy. He would always have a good joke with them saying, "Ultimately, these instruments are created by the human mind, and beyond that mind is the supreme universal consciousness. You should try to discover that directly."

Initially, when Baba undertook this Second World Tour, he was simply responding to the requests and invitations that came to him. He told reporters who enquired that he planned to be there about a year and then return to India. But he began to see the level of interest in spiritual awakening, alongside a very pervasive sense of dissatisfaction that people expressed about their lives. To his surprise, it seemed, in the America that he was observing, no matter how wealthy, how successful or how famous the people were, somehow genuine happiness was eluding them. As he listened to the tales of unhappiness, or lack of self-worth, and general sense of despair expressed by the people who came to meet him, he began to emphasize the practice of meditation as a source of extraordinary limitless happiness and fulfillment in life. He described meditation as being universal, like sleep— one did not need to hold any particular religious belief; [one] simply [needed] to discover their own innate consciousness or (as it was translated) the higher Self. As he responded to the needs of the people, his Meditation Revolution began to take shape.

After spending time in Oakland and Los Angeles, we set off on a tour across the USA via Route 66. It was Baba's Meditation Revolution on the road. We had several cars, a school bus which carried all the recording equipment, cooking pots and a pickup towing Baba's Kitchen in a small trailer. Baba was extremely particular about his own diet and it was essential that wherever he went he could control his food to protect his own health.

Baba would often fly from one place to the next destination, and our road crew would drive all night to arrive at the next house or retreat spot, unload, unpack, prepare the hall setup, Baba's quarters, kitchen, and then be bright and with faces

shining with joy to greet Baba as he arrived. From that time onward, our role was to assist him with his work, to offer service so that others could experience their own inner awakening.

Baba did several of the EST Present seminars which were usually packed with up to a thousand students. As Baba and his translator and organizers began to interact more with Werner's students they came up with the idea to hold meditation Intensives in which Baba could teach and transmit meditation via shaktipat to people on a large scale. These began to be scheduled across the country, with the first Intensive held in Aspen. The program included sessions of chanting *Om Namah Shivaya*, the initiation mantra that Baba gave to people on a printed card, talks by Baba about various aspects of yogic lifestyle and an experience talk by someone who had had a profound inner awakening.

During the meditation sessions Baba began to go around the room with a wand of peacock feathers and hit people on the head, tweak them above the nose, or gently kick them at the base of the spine. Sometimes the room would erupt with sounds of laughter, weeping, or rapid breathing. Clearly the awakening of the inner energy was occurring in many of the participants. Later during sharing sessions people would describe extraordinary experiences of energy moving through their bodies, spontaneous movements, feelings of ecstasy or supernatural joy.

This introduction of shaktipat on a mass scale was a very radical departure from the way it was classically given and the way in which Baba himself had always given it. Some years later he described this to some center leaders:

"I could not give shaktipat to so many people without the grace of my Guru. I never gave shaktipat like this in India. The people from India are wondering how I am doing this, and some of them are even coming to receive it in these intensives. Previously I would ask people to do austerities in the ashram for at least one year and ask them to purify themselves for a long time, before I could give the touch of shaktipat to them. That is the way it should be done. Otherwise all of their negative karmas come into me. At the time of shaktipat the sins of the seeker are burnt and at the same time all those negative effects come to me. I have to meditate and through the process of meditation I am able to burn up those negative karmas."

Working closely with Baba during these events, we could see him come out of the meditation hall. Sometimes he would say, "My whole body pains from giving shaktipat to so many people. Still I will feel the effects for maybe one day, with some fever, and [I'll] just rest and do my *japa* and meditation and it will go

away.“ This was said with his characteristic joy and good humour. Clearly this work of bringing about the awakening of so many people was a source of great joy for him, despite whatever ill effects there were on his body.

These events went on as we traveled across the southern US, through New Mexico, Colorado, Georgia, and finally ended up in New York City. An old school was rented on the upper West Side as temporary accommodation for our mobile Ashram. There we stayed for some time with daily programs of Guru Gita, chanting, seva, and the never-ending stream of visitors. Somehow the energy in Manhattan and the people seemed to be particularly heavy as we held several Intensives on the premises. I recall that at the time Baba was affected severely after the Intensives and [he] undertook a fast for some days, along with his unflagging daily meditation and practice routine, to restore his health and vitality.

An old hotel was purchased in Oakland that was to be renovated as the first American ashram. It was in a rough part of town and had been a derelict hotel filled with drug addicts and prostitutes. A dedicated crew of workers worked for months to refurbish it into a sparkling clean ashram premises fit for Baba's arrival. I had gone there early after the purchase to assist with preparations, but I was not able to stay there more than one night. I had dreadful nightmares of violence and horrific pains in my body throughout the night as I was affected by the vibrations of the place. But after the renovation work, painting, and a lot of chanting, the new Oakland Ashram had a sparkling, clean atmosphere and was suitable as an ashram. The whole process reminded me of what happens to us during the process of spiritual practice, we come with lots of scars and bruises from our mishaps in life, or wrong choices and actions, and the Guru goes to work with his crew of skillful practices: chanting, meditation, pure food, preservation of the vital energies, and one comes out sparkling clean and able to live a good, wholesome, useful life.

During the time in Oakland Baba continued meeting many distinguished visitors and maintained friendships and dialogues with interesting characters. One such was a psychologist who was a regular visitor and had many extraordinary experiences in his time meditating with Baba.

In one conversation with him Baba told him, “Only after coming to America I started touching people. Before that, my Guru Nityananda Baba was very severe. Shaktipat was given only in a certain way. The person receiving [it] had to have a bath, be pure, done much tapasya and austerities. Then only was shaktipat given. And before my Baba, Gurus were very strict about whom they would accept

food from. But my Baba used to tell us, ‘Now you should not discriminate between caste and creed and if anyone prepares food with purity and a good heart, then you can eat it.’

“Shaktipat Diksha was also given in a certain way, behind closed doors in solitude, and the Guru would touch the disciple in certain places while reciting mantras. Often the Guru would touch the base of the spine at the area of the sexual organs as a way of awaking the Kundalini energy.

“Though I am quite an old man, because of the retention of the sexual fluid inside the body I feel tremendous youth inside. In fact, I feel like a child inside. I get up at 3:00 am, and tonight because there is a lecture I won’t be returning until after midnight. And it is because of this sexual fluid that you have any vigor, energy, or radiance. So, one should conserve that. Just as you like to lay by your savings in the bank, likewise you should save your sexual fluid.”

Psychologist: “Isn’t it true that the body ejects sexual fluid every so often, to clean itself?”

Baba: “No the body won’t eject it. A yogi’s body will digest it, assimilate it. The body ejects it through a dream when we have violated dietary or lifestyle rules. If you overeat, the body will generate more sexual fluid than it needs, and the body will eject the fluids. But a meditator has to go further. The sexual fluid not only needs to be conserved, but it should be moved upwards through meditation, whereas in ordinary life it moves downwards. Through meditation it flows upwards. You can feel it move upwards and it goes into the cerebral center. From there it purifies the nerves, and this process become more and more subtle. This is the source of great joy for a meditator. I’m not saying you should not have children. All I am saying is that you should value the sexual fluid and you shouldn’t waste it. You should be aware of its great value for health and spiritual development.”

Psychologist: “Can you say something about the fear of death that all of us have at some time or another or perhaps as we grow older it becomes more intense.”

Baba: “As you move closer and closer to your inner Self through meditation, the fear of death loses its hold over you progressively. Why should you fear death when death is inevitable? If something is inevitable there is no point in fearing it. Anyone who is a pure and noble soul will be able to die peacefully; he doesn’t feel the slightest pain or hardship at the time of death. It is the fear of death which results in agony at the time of death; if you meditate that fear will dissipate.”

Psychologist: “Could you say something about your belief in after life or reincarnation?”

Baba: “Yes, birth is followed by death and death is followed by rebirth. One who is born is bound to die, and one who dies is bound to be reborn and this cycle goes on until one can become liberated from it through the grace of God. A good meditator is able to see the world of the departed and the world where he will go after his death.”

A reporter also questioned Baba on his feelings about death. Q: “Do you feel as much joy in contemplating your passage from this life as you feel in your life?”

Baba: “Once you experience the inner bliss of meditation it fills you completely. Just as when you cry and lament you feel great agony and pain inside; when there is an upsurge of bliss within you feel intoxicated on it and still this bliss is not just a brief episode, it stays with you continually and it also lasts as you leave your body. Contemplation of leaving this body is as joyful as anything else and in fact the essence of yoga is not physical exercises; the essence of yoga is conscious death. Real yoga is to experience your own death directly through meditation while you are still alive. Through this genuine yoga your sense of individuality dies and the self, the innate consciousness, survives.

“In meditation you can look at your own death with a serene mind. When a saint dies, he dies laughing. There is a photo of a great saint who was like a Guru to me (Zipruanna). He sent me to my guru. He wandered around naked everywhere, but he was a perfect celibate. We call such a being *urdhvareta*, one whose sexual fluid moves upward, not downward. He had unusual powers, If any time I would set out to visit him he would tell people around him that this boy is coming to see me. His behavior was quite strange; in this country if you were to see him you might lock him up in a mental hospital. I will describe to you how he died. There was a woman in his village who was a teacher. He would occasionally go to her place to have coffee. One morning he landed at her place around 10:00 am and said, ‘I must have a bath.’ This surprised the teacher and her family very much, but they felt delight that they were blessed with this opportunity to give this holy man a bath. Such an opportunity is cherished in our country. He had a bath, then he asked the woman to cook some noodles for him, she did so and offered it to him. He ate it, and then he said, “Zipru is leaving, you can cry to your hearts’ content.” He made a certain sound and then he passed away.

“What is the use of practicing yoga if it doesn’t give you power over your own death? Before you see the highest truth in meditation, you must see your own death. That can be a terrifying experience. But after you have survived that experience though the inner transformation of meditation, death loses its sting. Then it is nothing more than deep sleep. In the *Yoga Vashishta*, which is a great philosophical work, death is described as a profound sleep.”

Psychologist: “I have read in some philosophies that there is a world where people go after death, a kind of mental world and they are in the same state in this world, but without a body. They exist in the mind and have to overcome the craving and desires that they had in the body.”

Baba: “What happens is that you leave the body in the same casual body in which you enjoy profound sleep when you are alive, and after your death you pass into a definite world which is the world of the dead or the ancestors. Just as a seed contains the whole tree in a potential form, when the soul leaves a physical body it carries all its desires and attachments in the seed form and they don’t disappear. When one is reborn the impressions of those desires, karmas and attachments are carried forth into the next life.”

Q: “Does the mind review the life it has had?”

Baba: “For quite a while after death one remains in a state of unconsciousness and then the spirit wakes up and passes into the world of ancestors or the dead and then once it surveys its past life, and that memory seems to fade away and just a part of it remains, and then it is in that world where it is decided where the consciousness is going to be born next. There is a central nerve in this body and it is there that the Kundalini Shakti resides and there you also have the impressions of your past lives. When you are reborn those impressions are still there in a subtle form and once your inner Shakti is awakened during meditation, it is possible to see your past seven lives very clearly. I have seen that.

“There is a certain fort in a part of Maharashtra state that I used to visit in my younger days and whenever I went there I felt a strange fascination for it. I would start crying and that fort would draw me over again and again and I used to wonder why I had such a strong attachment for it, and it was after I saw my past life in meditation that I saw that once in my past life I was a king and lived in that fort. However, after full knowledge awakens within, then you don’t feel attachment for any of your past lives. Now I don’t feel any attachment for that fort. The science

of Kundalini is a great science, it is a great yoga. Most people don't understand it."

Part Three: Illness Strikes – Oakland, 1975

During his stay at the new Oakland Ashram in late July of 1975 Baba underwent his first major health challenge. During the night he began to have a series of powerful seizures. His attendants later said they were terrified themselves as they had never seen Baba in such a condition, and they did not know what was happening. As he was undergoing these terrible convulsions he was quietly and calmly directing them on what to do, and who to call.

"Don't be frightened. I am just experiencing the fruits of my own karmas...." he said, reassuring them.

Baba was taken to the hospital where he remained for some time. It seemed his blood sugar levels had gotten seriously out of balance and the seizures were connected to his diabetes. All over the world devotees began to express their concern and devotion with ongoing *Guru Gita* chanting. The doctors were intent upon Baba taking complete rest and restricted visitors. But soon Baba was himself calling people on the telephone and telling them to come see him at the hospital. The waiting room on that floor turned into a kind of reception room as people came with gifts of flowers and fruit. Clearly the hospital staff, doctors and nurses had never seen such a patient who generated such an atmosphere of caring for all around him.

He described his experiences to one visitor: "My Guru's grace is great, and I feel that the sickness has left me now. As soon as I was admitted they gave me an injection (IV) and the strokes stopped. During this time, I have had a real test of my inner state, and now I am happy. As these seizures were coming my attendants had to hold me down. The photo of my Baba was in front and I kept looking at the pictures with love and smiling. My attendant said, 'How is it that you are smiling and laughing?' I said, 'Should I cry or weep? This is my destiny— what should I do?' "

He went on: "It's not a great thing to experience such a disease but the real test is to endure it. There is not even a single saint who was not affected by some disease or another in the last phase of his life. My Baba had something similar, I saw many Siddhas with illness in their later years. Ramakrishna Paramahansa had cancer during his last years. Because of this condition, I have not lost any of my spiritual strength. I am very happy because I have realized that Guru's grace can nullify the

effects of our *parabdha karma* 6 and make it meaningless.

“After all of this trouble, I feel quite happy and joyful. Perhaps this sickness is the result of giving shaktipat to so many people in such a mass scale.”

At the retreat in Arcata, that had begun even without Baba being there, Malti told a story that was to be repeated numerous times in the coming years:

“There was a seeker by the name of Ramanuja. He received the mantra from his Guru and the Guru told him he must not reveal it or tell it to anyone. He asked the Guru, ‘What will happen to me if I do?’ The Guru replied, ‘You will go to hell.’ ‘And what will happen to the people who receive it?’, Ramanuja enquired. ‘They will go to heaven,’ was the Guru’s reply. With the greatest of intentions, Ramanuja went to the rooftop and shouted the mantra out so that all who heard it could go to heaven. ‘What does it matter if one man goes to hell for the sake of thousands of people?’ he would ask those around him.”

As Baba was speaking to his friend the Psychologist, a very lovely young woman with a bandaged head came into the room. Baba told his visitors, “The doctors used to come to me and say she was going to die. But I told them, ‘She will not die’, then I gave her the mantra and told her, ‘even if you are going to die, it is all right. At least repeat this mantra; it will protect you.’ Now she is all right.” The girl obviously had great love for Baba.

Other relatives of patients came in and asked for Baba’s blessings for their loved ones. Daily Baba made the rounds of the floor of the hospital, greeting and befriending the patients and their families. Nurses, laboratory technicians, as well as old devotees, were collecting outside of Baba’s room to experience Baba’s loving grace, even at such a time. One girl came and offered to pay Baba’s hospital bill. Baba patted her affectionately and told her, “Don’t cry now, I am quite all right. You have such a generous heart; you have offered to pay my hospital bill. Werner and others have also offered. I am thinking about it.”

I went to visit him at the hospital. After waiting outside, my turn came to go in to pay my respects. I bowed at the side of the bed where he was sitting upright greeting visitors. “Poor Baba”, was in my mind, “he’s sick.” I felt a tugging of my hair as he pulled me up to his level and looked me intently in the eyes. Powerful rays of light shone from his eyes which entered into my eyes and immediately flooded my heart. I was a little dazed as I staggered out of the room. The idea ‘poor Baba’ I realized came from my own ignorance, clearly his inner power and vast heart were

untouched by the travails of his physical body. Baba was not like an ordinary person who succumbed to fear and lamentation about his body and health.

He went on to describe the situation to his visitors, “For yogis this is our test. As the strokes were occurring I never once asked my Baba, ‘Save me. Save me.’ I kept looking at his picture. Now I am completely cured, I feel like a newly born young man and I will be able to do a lot more work than before. I can walk around the hospital and I am just waiting for the doctors to tell me I can go home so that I can be with everyone.”

After Baba was released from the hospital, he rested in his room waiting to be able to join his devotees at a month-long retreat that had already started in Arcata, [California]. Chatting with some people over the next few days he related his experiences of his illness. “The nurses used to come and ask me, ‘Aren’t you in pain?’ I said, ‘I don’t feel it.’ They said they had never seen such a patient in the hospital; some of the doctors and nurses came and asked to receive a mantra card from me. “There is great joy in the inner Self. Once established in that joy you won’t feel any pain, there is no suffering in this world. Whatever suffering you might have, you won’t feel it.”

Speaking with a group who had come from Atlanta he said, “There is no greater temple than the heart. There is no greater God than your inner Self. If you know just that...that’s enough. Be peaceful, no matter where you are. Do your work, live your life. You can’t depend on the body; you never know what will happen at what time to your body. You will never know what illness you will go through. I had such a strong body, but still this happened. But I have recovered very well, and there is no lingering effect of any disease because I had the grace of my Guru and he saved me. All the time constantly repeat Guru Om, Guru Om, don’t trust the future; you never know what will come after the next moment. Believe in the present moment which you are living in now and remember God, he is right inside of you. If you do this much, remembering Him every moment, it doesn’t matter where you are or what happens to you. Just live your life, do your work and be happy.”

He gave darshan from his bedroom window to the ashramites who assembled in the courtyard below. “The doctor keeps calling and telling me, ‘Don’t talk to people too much and don’t walk too much.’ I’m very well and very peaceful. Those seizures benefited me a lot...all the time my mind remained very quiet and all the unsteadiness of the mind has disappeared. No matter where I sit, I pass into meditation, and if I am around other people in that state, it will be good for them,

too.

“You people have given me so much love. You chanted a lot, chanted *Guru Gita* only for my sake. The doctors keep calling to check with my people, ‘Is he listening to us? Is he talking less? Is he getting good sleep?’”

Baba went on to the Arcata retreat in time for the anniversary of his initiation from his Guru, August 15th. “Still I do not have the permission of the doctors to speak, I was told to wait until the last two days of the retreat. What is the guarantee the body will last, what is the guarantee that I will be able to give you a talk later on.”

After Baba recovered more fully, he resumed his work of meeting people, and actively giving shaktipat in Intensives. The demand from people seemed to be endless. The numbers of people in the Intensives increased to several hundred people and he continued to touch each and every one with his boundless compassion, disregarding the effects on his personal health.

Part Four: Return To India, 1976

When Baba returned to India, the ashram had been enlarged to make space for the many people who would come there to spend time, participate in the Intensives, *yagnas*, chants and many activities that Baba officiated over.

In March 1977 Baba began to experience heart problems, severe angina pains. He was admitted to Nanavati Hospital in Mumbai. From there he sent messages to the ashramites in Ganeshpuri and all over the world. In Ganeshpuri a continuous *Guru Gita* Chant went on for two weeks. Through the medicine of chanting, the anxiety and concern of the devotees was transformed into one-pointed focus on him, and a deeper recognition that even he was not immune from the inevitable flow of nature.

Baba recorded a video from his hospital bed. He appeared smiling, soft and gentle. “People must be worrying what has happened to Baba. I am completely all right. You needn’t worry about me. Disease has come to the disease, not to me. “Birth and death follow everyone, you and me. Therefore, a sensible person should not worry about birth and death at all. This is not a disease, it is an experience. All over the world devotees offer flowers to my photo and read the *Guru Gita* for my sake. When they are doing this for me, what can I do? I have to experience their devotion. In the same way, I have to experience this.

“Stop worrying about my body. Instead, think about the path I have shown you. Just as you have a mundane passport, you also have a spiritual passport. When that passport expires you have to leave. Krishna said in the Bhagavad Gita, ‘Death is

inevitable for a person who has taken birth, and birth is inevitable for a person who has died.' Therefore, why worry? Now forget about my pain. I am very happy that you have chanted the *Guru Gita* so much for my sake. Perhaps I should get some small pain every now and then, just so you will chant the *Guru Gita* and be so focused.

"I am coming back to the West soon, but it may take some time. Now that I am in India, I have to do some work here also. I am grateful for all your compassion and love. There is great love between Guru and disciple; you have shown so much love to me. You perform so much practice for me, and there is nothing I can do for you. All I can say is that I love you so much. You have given so much to me, the hardship of your bodies, your wealth, your work; you have given everything to me. I don't have anything to give to you. All that I can give in return is to say, I love you, I love you, I love you."

Sometime later he gave a darshan to people who gathered on the lawns of the hospital. He sat at his window for about 10 minutes and people were happy to see him looking so well and joyful. The doctors tested Baba after the darshan to determine the effects of the darshan. They found that his condition improved and encouraged him to schedule another gathering the following week. Baba called for the ashramites to come from Ganeshpuri. On the following Sunday afternoon six busloads of devotees came from the ashram. Since it was three weeks since Baba had been away from the Ashram, they were eagerly looking forward to seeing Baba.

The group arrived at the hospital and sat quietly on the lawn chanting Om Namah Shivaya. Taxis and busloads of Bombay devotees arrived until the crowd grew to about one thousand. When Baba came to the window, he raised both hands in greeting to the shouts of "Sat Gurunath Maharaj ki Jaya". The devotees were thrilled to see he appeared as joyful as ever. He waved to people he saw in the crowd and threw garlands of fragrant mogra into the crowds. Baba sat for a half an hour. There was a television news team from Bombay there shooting him and the crowd. The hospital director came forward and placed a garland around Baba's neck. There was no doubt that Baba was in his usual humor. He called for his dog, Captain, to come forward and he dropped balloons for him as he had been doing in the ashram courtyard. Captain leaped through the crowds to burst the balloons. Baba called out that he would return soon, and then called out, "I love you, I love you, I love you." The devotees called back, "We love you Baba".

Baba left the hospital, but the doctors insisted that he spend some time resting

before returning to the Ashram. A large house was made available on Juhu Beach. The setting was idyllic; a spacious lawn bordered with colorful flowers and bougainvilleas stretched down to the beach. Towering palm trees swayed in the refreshing breeze from the ocean.

During the days Baba would rest, sitting on the beach in the early morning hours and again after sunset. After a couple of days rest, knowing that the devotees were pining for his darshan, Baba called for a silent public darshan every evening. The Bombay devotees came by the hundreds and a special chartered bus carrying ashramites came from Ganeshpuri nearly every evening. The devotees would take their seats on the grass in a semi-circle facing the ocean. Baba came at six o'clock and sat comfortably on a lawn chair. No one was allowed to go up for darshan. Offerings of fruit and sweets were cut up and distributed as Prasad and fragrant flowers were distributed amongst the ladies. Many well-known musicians and singers such as Surendra Rao, Mahendra Kapoor, and Aziz Naza came to serenade Gurudev and his devotees.

Baba enjoyed the music and often hummed to himself or laughed at the lyrics. The devotional music, the golden hues of the setting sun, and the refreshing ocean breeze provided an exquisite setting for Baba as he sat absorbed in his inner being. Observing his stillness, one's mind also became still.

He had been telling the devotees since the onset of his illness, "I am in bliss. The disease may be there, but I am not affected by it. You should be in bliss also." There was no trace of illness in Baba's countenance. On the contrary, as he sat quietly, his inner state radiated more powerfully than ever. Many devotees remarked that they had never seen Baba looking more glorious, more radiant. Observing Baba at Juhu one could clearly understand that he had, in fact, transcended the limitations of the body. He was obviously dwelling in his inner being and radiating that for all who came and silently partook of his darshan.

In the early morning hours Baba came out to sit on the beach, enjoying the fresh, cool breeze. Devotees living in the area came to know of it, as well as some ashramites who had come to stay at the beach during Baba's stay. For a few mornings Baba sat silently with the devotees as the sun rose. After a couple of days Baba suggested that we sing the *Guru Gita*. Devotees began to line up on the beach as early as 5 a.m. meditating and awaiting Baba's arrival. Baba sat quietly during the recitation, and occasionally motioned for changes in the pace or speed. One morning, reflecting on the beauty of the ocean, he told the devotees, "The scriptures say that the holy waters are the body of God. Here we are sitting on the

body of God, singing about God. This chanting purifies the heart and all the *nadis*.”

As the birthday celebrations grew nearer, Baba seemed to grow stronger, and he insisted that he should return to the ashram to officiate over the *Maha Rudra Yagna* and the *sanyasa* initiation being held for some of his older students. He promised the doctors that he would continue to rest and would not meet people, but he would not be absent for the celebrations in the Ashram.

During the evening darshan two nights before he was to depart from Bombay he called for the microphone and began to speak to the crowd. “The doctors have forbidden me to talk, so this talk is illegal, and when you do something illegal, you have to pay the penalty. The doctors in America warned me that if I didn’t take rest there would be some problems and this illness came because I broke the rules. “There is a word in the Bhagavad Gita called *dana*, which means charity, generous giving of gifts. In the *Gita* the Lord says, ‘By giving in charity to the deserving, all sorts of diseases disappear. Dana purifies all sorts of sins also. *Dana* is the staircase to heaven.’

“When I was in Nanavati hospital many heart specialists came to examine me, and prescribed treatment, without charging any fees. It was all done as charity, with good will. I welcome them all heartily. When I was discharged from the hospital the lady who owns this house gave the whole house for my use and shifted to a hotel. How kind of her.

“Nature herself has given everything to us generously, If Mother Earth did not give us all the food grains, what would we eat? If the air didn’t blow, how could we survive without oxygen? If the Lord of fire was not working within us, how could we digest our food? That is why generous giving is the most honorable deed that a man can perform.

“Sheik Nasrudin was a perfect miser. He was so miserly that his wife got absolutely fed up with his stinginess. One day a great lecturer came to their village. A sign was posted announcing he would give a discourse on charity. Nasrudin’s wife was very happy to see that notice. She insisted that Nasrudin attend the discourse and actually took him there. The speaker talked about charity, and the importance of generosity. He stated, ‘Everyone, this Earth, the ocean and the five elements God and those who have realized God are all sustained by charity. There is no greater deed than dana.’ Nasrudin listened to the lecture patiently. When it was over he told his wife, ‘You were so kind to take me to this lecture. I have learned a very good

lesson today. How important charity is. From tomorrow I will start begging for alms.' His wife was aghast. She said, 'Oh my God, this man is really impossible, I brought him here to learn the importance of giving generously, and he is speaking only of taking from people.'

"This is not charity; charity is when a man works hard for himself and after taking care of his own needs, he gives generously to others. Man should always have a generous heart. And he must not forget that God has been showing his bountiful grace on him all the time.

"When I was in the United States, I met many scientists, who had studied all the sciences, and some had even been to the moon, but now they are investigating consciousness. Similarly, you must investigate God. God is not against your worldly life, He has created this beautiful world for His own convenience, for His own sport. What I want to impress on you is just as you decorate yourself, your wife and family, you should worship and decorate the Lord who dwells in your heart. Just love God as much as you do your wife, your children, your car; and then material life and spiritual life will go hand in hand.

"I want to welcome and thank those *lakhs* (thousands) of people who recited *Guru Gita* for my recovery. Many people also made lots of offerings and sacrifices to God for my recovery. They must have done it with great sincerity since I have recovered from this illness very quickly. This should have lasted six months, but by people's good wishes, it has finished in one month.

"You should always remember that the universal consciousness which God has given is the greatest gift given to you. Don't deceive yourself in that respect. God has given the greatest gift of all. Don't forget that. God has given us everything. We must also do something in return. People wonder, 'How to love God?' He is residing in every being, so to see Him in every individual is the real worship of God, real meditation, real dharma.

"People recited the *Guru Gita* day and night for my early recovery. God has made their prayers very fruitful, so I have recovered within a month. I welcome you all." Baba returned to the ashram after having first gone to Ganeshpuri for darshan of Bade Baba. He was greeted by his elephant Viju at the gate who garlanded him with flowers, and girls waving arati trays. He walked through the courtyard and sat down. He spoke briefly: "I left the ashram with sickness, but I have come back without it. I know for certain that my rapid recovery has not been due to the

doctor's treatment, but because of so many people reciting the *Guru Gita* with best wishes for me.

“No one is free from the play of destiny; that is why the Lord has said, ‘Mysterious are the ways of karma.’ It is said that Lord Rama was Lord of the world; still he was exiled to the forest. It is said that Lord Krishna was Lord of this world, still he had to wander from Gokhul to Mathura and from Mathura to Dwarka. They were powerful beings, yet they had to undergo their destiny. This shows how inscrutable are the ways of karma. Swami Ramakrishna was a great being; still he was afflicted with cancer.

Nityananda was a born Siddha; he was even called an incarnation, still he had arthritis in his knees. So, I also had this heart trouble. But the doctors have praised me saying that usually such patients go away for six months, and I have returned after one month.

“It is through the power of the Self that I am happy. The disease may be there, but I remain beyond it. You should always remember your purpose in coming to the Ashram. Here you should be absorbed only in sadhana, in Guruseva, and devotion for the Guru. Then you will get something, you won't go away empty handed. I bless you all.”

Part Five: Heart Attack, 1977

Baba had been saying that it was important that he attend the birthday celebrations; no matter what the cost, he had to be there. His presence was vital for the success of the yajna and the yajna had important consequences for his future work. On the morning of his birthday [celebration], May 3rd, 1977, Baba warned his doctors and nurse that this was going to be a very bad day for him. Before he left for the yajna he warned them to have injections and pills ready.

“It was the most tense hour of my life,” Dr. Thakkur said later, describing some of the important episodes in Baba's illness. “First, he told me that I should watch him carefully, that anything could happen. But then he made me sit up on the yajna platform with my wife and participate in the yajna! This is what a Siddha is like. I have never been so scared! All the time I was sitting there I was listening, afraid that at any moment Baba might collapse.”

Typically, Baba had turned his own crisis into an occasion for one of his devotees to do intense sadhana. Moreover, even though many of the devotees had heard the

news that Baba was in danger, we all noticed how good he looked, how strong his voice was, how perfectly he performed all the ceremonies connected with the yajna, even when they involved physical exertion.

“He wouldn’t let us take a cardiogram that morning,” Dr. Thakkur said; “I think it was because he knew that if he let us see what was really going on we would have insisted that he rest. That evening he had some pain. The next morning, at 6:15, we went in to take his pulse and found that it was double the normal rate. The cardiogram showed that he was having a major heart attack.

“But the most serious part of the attack came later in the afternoon when all of a sudden Baba’s heartbeat slowed down to almost nothing. He remained in that state for 15 minutes, and for a while the doctors actually thought we had lost him. Then, quite suddenly Baba opened his eyes and came back to normal consciousness. He looked at us and said, “What are you doing? I went to see my Baba and he told me it is not time for me to go yet. Now go eat your lunch.

“Since then, except for minor complications his heartbeat has been stable. After the morning episode, two eminent doctors were called from Bombay. They came immediately, and have been here ever since, on call for Baba whenever he should need them. Sophisticated heart care machines have also been made available for him.

“Baba really is controlling everything,” Dr. Thakkur said. “He always knows in advance when there will be trouble, and he lets us know what the bad times will be. Today he told us that there would be a minor complication, and there was. But it was definitely minor, and easily controlled. My opinion is that Baba has arranged his heart attack for himself. He said a few weeks ago that if he had one full heart attack, that would be the end of the angina pain. It has happened just like that for the last two nights he has had pain-free sleep for the first time since all this began in February.

“Don’t think that I am taking care of Baba. Baba is taking care of me. For ten days Noni and I sat up all night in the Nanavati hospital watching the screen of the cardiogram machine. I should have been tired, but I had more energy than I’ve ever had, and people said they never saw me looking so good. I used to sit there watching the lines on the machine and feeling so much joy. Once Noni said, ‘You must be repeating your mantra in rhythm to the lines.’ I said, ‘No, I’m not repeating it, it’s going on automatically.’”

Even in his critical condition Baba continued to give instructions about the business of the Ashram. Moreover, one of his doctors said that sometimes he looks at Baba as he lies on his bed and sees that Baba keeps making gestures of blessing. It seems to him that at those times Baba is feeling the anxiety and concern of his devotees, and that he is reassuring them that really, everything is going to be fine

Part Six: Third World Tour 1980

In spite of his health problems in India, Baba undertook a Third World Tour. Because of his weakened health, there were now many people to assist with his work. There were managers to work in the different ashrams around the world, and Swamis had been initiated and trained to teach and run Intensives and courses. Baba's major work was to meet people and to continue to give shaktipat on a very large scale. During his visit to Miami, he had some heart problems, and the doctors did surgery and put in a pacemaker to assist his heart in functioning.

When we were in Los Angeles for several months, word began spreading that Baba was having sexual encounters with some of the young women students. Several long-term students were leaving the ashram with stories about hypocrisy, and breakage of vows of celibacy. At one point I mentioned to Amma, Swami Prajnananda, with whom I was working closely, [some news about] what was happening and [what was] being said. She relayed this information to Baba, and within a short time he called me into his room for a discussion.

"What are people saying?" he asked. I replied that people were saying that he was not a true celibate, though he advocated celibacy for his students but was behaving differently. There was particular concern as some of the girls in question were very young.

Baba said three things in quick succession. Each statement was like a short pithy sutra, which required a lot of commentary to become clear, or like koans which a seeker had to investigate repeatedly, using the information given to knock against the rigidity and hardness in the mind, until there was some softening of limited conceptual ideas and consequential breakthrough of genuine understanding on the highest level.

Those three statements were:

- 1) “Would I be able to give Shaktipat if I were having sex with those girls?”
- 2) “Siddha Swatantra Bhavaha (simply translated as ‘a Siddha behaves with a freedom that is beyond normal expectation’), and
- 3) “A snake charmer is not afraid of a snake.”

After those statements, to which I made very little response at the time, I was dismissed from his room.

Those statements have been a good platform for my probing [his] behaviors that from an ordinary perspective were disturbing and have sadly brought great discredit to Baba’s name via internet posting. My interpretation of them at this time is:

Would I be able to give shaktipat if I was having sex with those girls?

According to the texts it would not be possible to transmit a powerful shaktipat that gave an experience of the highest truth if the sexual fluid of a yogi was not flowing upward. This was a complicated matter, required suspension of limited understanding and an in-depth understanding of the subtleties of higher yoga tantra.

After we received sannyas initiation in 1980, Baba had a meeting with our group of newly initiated swamis and gave us instruction on how to give shaktipat. We were to be sent out to different parts of the world to do his work, giving intensives and giving shaktipat to people in that context. As he was showing us technically where and how to touch people for the best benefit, he also said, *“You must be very careful. If your practice is not strong enough, the bad karmas of the people you give shaktipat to will come in to you...and that will destroy you.”*

That warning has stayed with me, even though I did in fact give shaktipat transmission as a swami in Intensives in different parts of the world over the next two years. Each time I would pray intensely to him that I was just a conduit of his grace and feel distinctly that it was his energy flowing through me.

After his death, I did not consider for a moment that it was appropriate to give shaktipat. Over the years, however, I have observed a couple of students who did give shaktipat as a feature of their work as meditation teachers. They seemed to be imitating Baba, yet in close examination it was clear that their motivation was in fact not altruistic. There seemed to be a great deal of self-serving intention

accompanied by very little genuine practice. Two of those men I observed came down with very mysterious ailments that debilitated them, and [from which] they have been unable to recover. I doubt that they had received that warning from Baba, or if they had, they chose to ignore it. And who can say if their ailments were a result of giving shaktipat without sincere intent or practice. The ways of karma are mysterious...yet unfailing.

After the traumatic and divisive events that occurred in the Siddha Yoga community in 1985, I chose to disrobe and depart the unfolding chaos and fanatical behavior that had swept through the various ashrams, including the one in Sydney I had been directing for six years. I was also personally subjected to harassment for my support of Swami Nityananda.

Confronting my own Guru brothers and sisters and Swamis on the road to Badrinath in 1994 and feeling the force of their murderous intentions as they attempted to drive Gururji's [Swami Nityananda's] car and our buses off of the steep mountain road brought a huge reckoning into my mind and heart. If they were capable of such horrific intentions and behaviors, how could I be certain that I was immune from such extremist views? I undertook rigorous therapy and self-analysis for years following. I wanted to dissolve into anonymity and went to study within a Tibetan Buddhist community.

I also wanted to practice with Tibetan Buddhist teachers and focus on the practices that developed the heart and humanity: compassion, humility, loving kindness. I needed to know that I myself had made headway in eradicating the potential for anger, hatred and judgment within my own heart.

I spent considerable time studying and practicing in Nepal, Northern India and Bhutan over the years, choosing to ordain as a nun in Bhutan because I wanted to return to a life dedicated to sadhana and service as Baba had indicated emphatically to me that was my destiny. Naturally, because of my many years at Baba's feet, everything I took in and learned was filtered through my experience and the teachings we had received from Baba. I continually filtered out the cultural superimpositions that were meaningless to me as a Westerner and my in-depth exposure to Indian traditions and culture.

The manner in which initiation (*diksha* or transmission) is given in the Tibetan traditions acknowledges the possible negative effects that can come into the Guru giving the initiations. Students are generally required to purify themselves through

extensive preliminary practices, repetitions of hundreds of thousands of mantras. They committed to doing the practice on a daily basis, as well as recite daily a prayer for the master's long life. These precautions were intended to lessen the detrimental effects such transmissions could have on the longevity and health of the Gurus.

Understanding these dynamics, I was able to have a much deeper appreciation of the demand and risk to Baba's health through his giving shaktipat on such a mass scale. By the end of his Third World Tour the numbers in the Intensives were 700-800 and each participant expected to be touched personally by Baba. Baba was 70+, [and] had had serious health conditions related to his diabetes, a massive heart attack and a pacemaker put in place in Miami. The demand on Baba's life force and physical health was enormous. There was no question of students having purified themselves; whomever paid the price for the tiny space in the packed Intensive halls had the expectation of receiving shaktipat.

The 16th Karmapa, who had visited Baba on two occasions in India and Ann Arbor and with whom Baba had a very loving and warm relationship, was a very high-level master in the Tibetan tradition. He died in a hospital in Chicago in 1982. Prior to his death, it was reported that his body manifested symptoms of a particular life-threatening condition. The doctors would rush to try to reduce the severity of the condition and save his life, and then mysteriously the whole condition would recede. Again, shortly thereafter he would display symptoms of yet another life-threatening illness. According to the reports, this happened several times. The attending doctors and nurses were utterly mystified at this; they had never seen anything like this previously. Some of his close disciples who were attending him closely told them that His Holiness had taken on the karmas of many disciples over the years, and those conditions were manifesting themselves in his body in this manner. Yet it was also observed that the Karmapa seemed to have no concern for his own condition or welfare, but showed great concern for the attending physicians, nurses and staff. *Siddha Swatantra Bhavaha*: A Siddha is beyond the conventions of ordinary society.

Baba used to give examples of his own Guru, Bhagawan Nityananda, and of Zippruanna, and Hari Giri Baba, all of whom behaved at times in ways very difficult to understand, yet the ultimate benefit and outcome to those around them was undeniable.

In Bhutan one of the patron saints is known as Drukpa Kunley. His life stories

depict repeated episodes wherein he would interact with women spontaneously, apparently having sex with them as a vehicle of blessings and transmissions. Drukpa Kunley was one of those unorthodox and subversive tantric teachers who constantly broke the rules of convention and “everyday morals” to lead his followers in a sort of shock therapy into the spiritual dimension behind the accepted and fixed rules and religious rituals.

One Bhutanese Rinpoche told a story of this particular yogi, intending to illustrate how such masters acted spontaneously for the benefit of others. He described a scene where the master was walking through a hillside village with one of his disciples. “Wait here one moment,” he said to his student. He then jumped into the window of a nearby house and had sex with a woman inside. When he returned, he said to his student, “One of my disciples was about to incarnate into the body of a cow, and I had to save him.”

This story was told to us as an example of spontaneous compassionate action. However, the western women in the audience immediately erupted and said, “What about the woman? That was rape.” The teacher was very taken aback—consideration of the woman’s experience obviously had never entered his mind. I found consistently within those cultures it was simply assumed the women were quietly complicit and honored to be party to the yogi’s beneficial work. This highlights some of the deep cultural disparities that occur regarding gender inequality and sexual behaviors.

A snake charmer is not afraid of the snake.

As I was living with and often attending some of the tantric masters and Rinpoches of Tibet and Bhutan I observed much that helped me greatly in understanding the tantric influence inherent in the path Baba set forth: awakening of the inner energies of Kundalini. It is the sexual energy that is transmuted and utilized in such initiations, therefore the details about these have always been veiled in secrecy. Great potential for misunderstanding and abuse lay in these areas of tantric initiations and practice. I also began to observe common behaviors towards women that held beliefs that Western practitioners find basically abhorrent. Within most of the Asian cultures, including India, Tibet, Bhutan, Thailand, women are subservient to men; the slightest glint of equality is simply not even allowed to arise. Women are the property of the men, and thus utterly compliant.

Along with this was the prevailing belief that the vital energies of young women are

essential for aging masters to help restore their flagging vitality. In the Tibetan tradition, when a master began to experience health problems, even if he was a monk, he would move outside of the monastery itself, taking a young consort. There was a firm belief that this would extend his life. In time those women became recognized as great practitioners themselves through their service to their husbands.

From observing and understanding this I was able to comprehend why Baba had begun to undertake interactions with young women close to him. Technically speaking, for an *urdvareta*, or a tantric master in the Tibetan tradition as well, there should never be emission of semen. That is what constitutes celibacy for such an adept yogi. Interactions with females for the purpose of testing or strengthening the inner transmuted energy did not equate to breaking celibacy. It was in fact how the yogis would increase their stores of the powerful transmuted energy which could then be utilized in their work.

Reports that I personally heard were that Baba did not have any kind of erection, that there was no penetration, and no emission of semen. It was repeatedly described as not sex in a normal sense. Yet for young women who may have not been previously sexually active, there was simply no other way to understand Baba's behavior with them. Had Baba been able to speak English and explain to them that he was seeing them as a living manifestation of the divine shakti, Kundalini energy that he needed to increase in his own system in order to be able to give shaktipat to others, would it have made a difference? Other girls loved every moment of their encounters with Baba as filled with love, blessings and powerful spiritual energy, again describing them as not being sex in any ordinary sense. Several told me that their own sexual energy was purified and refined as a result.

It seemed apparent to all of us ex-swamis and other close disciples of Baba that he undertook these interactions in an attempt to maintain the strength of the energy needed to meet the demands of the students who were intensely craving for spiritual awakening. He was able to maintain his levels of inner energy, through the contact with the young women, transmute that through his yogic powers and continue to give shaktipat, despite the considerable weakening of his own physical condition.

Despite any ill effects to his health, Baba continued to give shaktipat. He did so with great compassion and belief that only through inner awakening would people come to experience genuine happiness. There was no question of people undergoing any

kind of preparation or purification which is known to reduce danger to the teacher's health. Whomever signed up for the Intensive received Baba's touch. There were 800 – 1,000 people in Intensives in Fallsburg the last summer.

Towards the end of the tour and the last summer in the Fallsburg ashram Baba made a shock announcement at the conclusion of his Guru Purnima address. He called Swami Nityananda forward, placed a garland around his neck and declared, "This man will be my successor." That announcement brought reverberations of surprise and recognition that Baba himself was preparing to conclude his work, and his life. As the attention of the large audience turned to Nityananda, Baba quietly walked out of the hall. As he did so he appeared tired and somewhat frail. It dawned upon us all that his life may soon be coming to an end.

Baba returned to India and continued on with preparations for the Pattabhishek, the transferring of the power to Swami Nityananda and Swami Chidvilasananda whom he designated would be co-successors. After that occasion he also began to withdraw from a lot of public interaction, sitting silently in the darshan line. He commented to those close to him, "I am happy to talk to children and the dogs. People are so unkind to each other, they just want to complain and criticize."

In the months prior to his taking mahasamadhi, Baba continued to give shaktipat. The small room in the center of the meditation room adjacent to his quarters had been demolished. Only those close to him knew he had directed this in order to prepare for his Samadhi shrine. It had been turned into a large meditation room. Somehow the word got out, though it was not public at all that Baba was giving shaktipat in that room during the *Shiva Mahimna* chant. People went in clamoring for the receipt of his grace.

I went in one evening and was overwhelmed by the level of intense emotion on the part of the people who were wanting to receive shaktipat from Baba. The room was thick with emotional fervor. Baba went around in what was a totally dark room and touched people in different ways. Some reported that he was hitting them with his foot at the base of their spine, others that he was blowing into their noses with his own breath or repeating a mantra into their ear. I actually felt a bit uncomfortable in that room. I felt I had received so much from Baba over the years, it was almost indecent for me to be in this atmosphere of intense grasping. I learned later that Baba had several young girls attending to him during that time; he would go into his adjacent room, have various interactions of an apparent sexual nature, and then return to the seething room to give shaktipat.

I never returned, and shortly thereafter returned to Australia, only to be advised in a couple of months that Baba had taken what is described for a yogi as mahasamadhi; he departed his body as a result of a major heart attack.

Conclusion: At the conclusion of his visit to each city during his world tours, Baba gave a particularly exalted talk on how life is a play of light and shadows. This was always a sublime teaching, filled with the highest truth, beyond duality of a seeker, a Guru or anything to be attained. I find it a fitting metaphor for us to determine the value of what occurred within our lives, minds and hearts as a result of contact with Baba Muktananda.

If we choose to hold onto the light of what we received from our time with Baba as a treasure that can carry us to the highest realization of our own nature as consciousness, we can fulfill the great aspiration he had for each of us who had contact with him and practiced sadhana and meditation under his guidance.

Alternatively, if some choose to allow the shadows of his actions to submerge their perceptions into a murky sphere of doubt and disillusionment, then again that is a choice leading to the irrevocable consequences of that perception. What is required is a perspective beyond the two extremes of denial or rationalization. His interactions with young women cannot be excused from conventional standards. However, in order to make a fair assessment, for the purpose of his and our own spiritual legacy, a vast open perspective and deep understanding of the tantric tradition which specifically works with the transmutation of energies of desire, particularly sexual energy, is required .7

Through attempting to understand his actions and motivations, throughout the entirety of his life and the impact on the tens of thousands of people whose lives were touched profoundly by him, we can discriminate rather than judge. We can touch forgiveness and generosity within our own hearts towards ourselves and others on the path. In each case we experience the world as we see it,” *Ya drishti, sa shrithi*” was one of Baba’s most frequent teachings.

Excerpts from Baba’s talk “Play of Light and Shadows”: “If you were to examine your life with an outlook filled with the knowledge of humanity, you would realize that it is nothing but a play of sunlight and shadow, that it is not different from a drama, or from a joyful dream. This play of creation is filled with unique colors and manifestations. Like clouds in the autumn sky which keep forming and dissolving, forming and dissolving, in your life different colors shine and sparkle for a while and then fade away.

“Virtue turns into sin, sin turns into virtue. Joy turns into grief, and grief into Joy... Behind everything there is great Love. There is Consciousness. There is the

Guru's compassion. There is the extraordinary, yet subtle desire to be reunited with the Self. You will be awakened within. Can you be awakened? Can you drink the nectar of your own love? With the knowledge of That, can you recognize your own Self in countless forms? When it arises within you, you will be truly alive."

This article is written entirely from the original notes and transcripts of notes that I made during my time living with Baba in India and on tour. It is not intended for any kind of publication, nor to represent any kind of official presentation of information. It reflects my own experiences and perception. As such it may or may not be helpful to others in digesting their own ultimate assessment regarding their legacy from Baba. It can be shared with friends for such a purpose.

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Comments by Swami Abhayananda:

When we contemplate Baba Muktananda's actions toward the end of his life concerning the young women around him, we have to admit that those actions cast a dark, dense cloud over his previous career, and in fact destroyed what had been shaping up as a glorious legacy. And no matter how much we may wish we could have taken him aside and cautioned him against following the dangerous course upon which he'd embarked, everyone knows that Baba took only his own advice, and was wholly responsible for his own actions—not those who concealed them, nor those who revealed them—but him alone.

No doubt he would have gladly sacrificed all that he'd built and all that had been accomplished for the sake of one more individual awakened to their own divinity; but we can't help wondering if it was necessary to pay so dear a price for that final shaktipat. For not only his own reputation and esteem were irreparably damaged, but so were the reputations and lives of his many trusting followers. It was a heavy toll, accompanied by so much grief and agony, and to many so very regretful.

I long ago transcended my history with Baba Muktananda, and simply stopped thinking about it; but something in me could not quite let go. Deep in my heart, his greatness called out for recognition, and the mystery of his inexplicable behavior toward the end of his life cried out for resolution. And yet, though we know more now than we once did, nothing seems to be really resolved.

It is now thirty-three years after the death of Baba Muktananda, and we are still

deeply preoccupied with his life and legacy. Why? Because this preoccupation is concerned with issues regarding not only our own personal allegiances and histories, but our deep philosophical issues as well—issues of moral ethics, of power, of right and wrong, and of free will. And these are issues that cannot be avoided, even in the face of the very best efforts of some to avoid them. We can't help noting that Baba's Guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, who certainly had the same power and the same prospect in his later years of fortifying his shakti through tantric methods, chose rather to fade away gracefully, peacefully, and without any controversy surrounding him. But these were two different men, with different temperaments, appetites, and tendencies resulting from their individual karmic histories. And there is always the fact of free-will (i.e., God's will) as a factor in the different legacies of the two men.

What would *we* have done in Baba Muktananda's shoes? Would we have done differently? Can we really know? Who is so wise as to know the *correct* behavior of one so infused with divine power? We *can't* know. And, so, we must accept that he was what he was—warts and all. In his lifetime he was such a fearsome presence that no one would have dared to pass judgment on him face to face. And even though he's gone, he remains an awesome presence whom none feels qualified to judge. And rightly so, for the truth is: Baba Muktananda was not a mere man; he was the embodiment of freedom and bliss! Who of us is able to define him? He was this, and he was also that. Yet neither this, nor that. Neither good, nor bad—or maybe some of both. He was beyond our comprehension, beyond our expectations. However, there is agreement by everyone who saw him that he was glorious and incomparable; that not even the legendary Lucifer shone so brilliantly. And, like a shining star, unfading within our hearts, he remains as steadfast as before.

The Legacy of Baba Muktananda's Teaching :

In the *Guru Gita*, the anthem of Siddha Yoga, it is stated that “God is the Guru.” And this is indeed true; God is the only Guru. It is God within us who is the true Teacher. Jesus understood this and asserted that “It is the Father within me who is doing His own work.” But there are some dishonest people who would usurp the power of the Guru to enhance their own personal power by turning “God is the Guru” into “the Guru is God.” It is of course true that God is the true Guru, but it is *not* conversely true therefore that “the Guru is God.” Those who have turned this understanding around to enhance their own power over others are responsible for the current rash of the many “Gurus” who have built their own cult of followers and their own harem of sex slaves in our modern world..

During my apprenticeship to Baba Muktananda, I became aware of Muktananda's subtle manipulation of this misunderstanding to persuade his followers that he, himself, was the Guru, the divine Teacher, thus usurping that role from the true Source, who is God, the Father. By usurping that divine status to himself, and drumming it into the minds of his followers, he was able to maintain his unyielding power over his followers. This power was later passed on to some of his Swamis, who were quick to apply it to themselves and use it as a sexual power over their own followers. Some of those Swamis have subsequently been indicted in the courts for their perfidy and their many sexual offences.

--Swami Abhayananda (last revised: 12-17-2023)

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SWAMI DAYANANDA's NOTES:

1. Forest-dweller phase according to the varnas, when one sees their children's children, or their hair turning grey they should retire to the forest and contemplate the highest truths as laid out by the sages.
2. Rudra is the destroyer manifestation of the Trinity Brahma Vishnu Shiva, seen as the creator, sustainer and destroyer functions of the universe.
3. See Alex Berzin, "how to have a healthy guru disciple relationship" available online on the Berzin archives.
4. *urdhvaretas*: One in whom the sexual fluid flows upwards and is not emitted in any sexual encounter.
5. Many of these conversations were transcribed and published in the book "In the Company of a Siddha", edited by Swami Dayananda (Karen Schaefer) Published by SYDA 1980.
6. Parabdha karma - which bears fruit in this lifetime as result of past life actions.
7. Berzin, Alexander. *Relating to a Spiritual Teacher: Building a Healthy Relationship. Part II: The Dynamics of a Healthy Student-Teacher Relationship* This book available through Berzin Archives on the internet provides one of the most thorough and culturally beneficial of many books that have been written on the issue of betrayal between teachers and students.

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