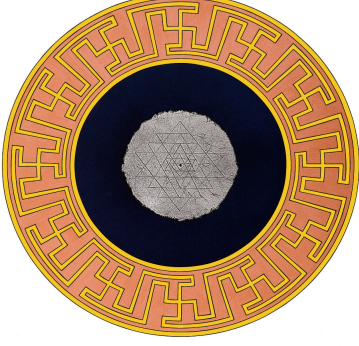


# American Sanskrit Institute



Swasti Yantra by PennyLea Morris

## Journey of a Lifetime

by Vyaas Houston

श्रेयान् स्वधर्मो विगणुः परधर्मात् स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

स्वधर्मे निधनं श्रेयः परधर्मो भयावहः ॥

Better one's own dharma without merit,  
than the other's dharma well executed.

Better death in one's own dharma;  
the other's dharma is fraught with fear.

Bhagavad-Gītā 3.35

In the fall of 1970, I retreated to my family's cabin on Cape Cod. Inspired by Thoreau's "Walden", and tantalized by the prospect of profound meditation, I had made the decision to spend an extended period of time in solitude. During the preceding four years of college, I had not found a single academic pursuit that could provide a direction for a career. It seemed that the only thing I had come away with was a regular practice of yoga, and a strong interest in pursuing it further. I passed the late fall and early winter contentedly doing my practices along with the daily tasks of cooking, cleaning and cutting wood. In January I began to feel a little restless and took up painting. Pleased by my initial attempts, I considered a career as an artist. But by the spring it was clear that I lacked the talent and inspiration. At this point I abandoned the idea of a conventional career, and made the decision to devote my life to yoga. I wasn't sure exactly what this meant, but I was ready to stay on

I had always been a mediocre student, largely because I could never sustain an abiding interest in any subject. With Sanskrit, I was captivated. I could not get enough. The pure sounds and the intricate symmetry of Sanskrit gave me the feeling I had come home. It seemed to me like a universal key which opened my mind and heart to the perfect beauty of life. I had the sense that I would never feel alone and separate again.

living in the woods until I received some illumination.

During this time I became friends with Fred and Mary Tasch, a couple who opened their hearts and their home to me. Fred was a painter and the president of the Provincetown Art Association. Mary was a psychologist in the elementary school. They had found a guru and were wildly enthusiastic about my meeting him. In late May, they actually brought him to their home and for a lecture at the local meeting house. Although certain that he was not my guru, I was taken with his exotic appearance and meditative manner. I attended one of his retreats, and became a certified

yoga teacher. Mary and I started offering classes, and we began plans for a meditation center. But two months later she and her daughter Anne took a trip to New York to meet another yogi. At the first opportunity she called me and urged me to come to New York to meet him.

I decided I would take a trip, visit some friends

in New Hampshire and then swing down to New York for a couple days. The moment I got to New Hampshire, I felt compelled to go directly to New York. I convinced a friend to drive to his family home in a Westchester suburb. I spent the night there, awoke at four in the morning, caught a train to the City, and from there a bus to a small town in the western Hudson Valley region. After getting directions at the local bus stop, and walking remote country roads for several miles I reached the entrance of the ashram. The force that moved me from my life on Cape Cod to the gates of my teacher's ashram remains a mystery. Once the journey started, it was relentless, and gave me a physical strength I had not known before.

I entered the grounds, passed over expansive lawns and through an apple orchard before seeing a gathering of people seated on the grass facing a small Indian man standing before a blackboard. I stopped at a safe distance under some shade trees and watched, feeling I had come upon something sacred, uncertain whether I had permission to enter this new realm. At the same time I was uncomfortable remaining apart as an observer. So I took courage and approached the back of the group, feeling very exposed as I entered the visual field of the teacher. He suddenly stopped the class and said in a very sweet and musical voice, "who is this young man?" Mary and Anne joyfully claimed me and introduced me to Dr. Ramamurti Mishra. The class resumed and I watched him intently. He was covered from neck to feet in pale orange, which created a striking contrast to the dark color of his hands and face. His extraordinarily handsome features were accentuated by long black hair and skin that seemed polished. I had never before seen a face that revealed such strength, and such refinement. His voice was powerfully resonant as he led the group in the chanting of Sanskrit verb conjugations. His presence was electric and he was completely in command.

Later Mary informed me that he had

been a neurosurgeon and a psychiatrist and had given up a lucrative career in medicine to teach yoga psychology and Sanskrit, which he referred to as the science of vibration. Attending the classes and meditations over the next two days, I struggled to find my place in this new world which was entirely centered around Dr. Mishra. I recognized the energy flowing from him to others, and yearned for a look of acceptance. It was not forthcoming. The more I wanted his attention, the more he passed me by. When it occurred to me that the only reason I had come here was to learn something – as the thought was arising, "let me hear what he has to say", suddenly and immediately his whole attention shifted to me, and he spoke to me as no one ever had before. I had little idea of what he said, but he spoke so directly that I was transfixed, and amazed that another human being had penetrated my thought process and had interacted with it in a way encouraged me to remain in a state of inquiry.

In spite of this remarkable experience, I found the philosophical content of his talks difficult to understand and relate to the background of my simple life. I decided to depart for the City the next day after the morning meditation. When the time came and I was packed and ready to leave, he announced that there would be instruction in neti, a yogic nasal cleansing practice. Thinking that this was something I should learn, and that it wouldn't delay my departure by much, I decided to stick around a little longer. We entered the kitchen of the main house, and I was shown by one of his assistants how to insert a rubber urinary catheter into one nostril, draw it through the mouth, and move it back and forth while rinsing with saline solution. This in itself was somewhat traumatic but nothing compared with what was to come. After completing both nostrils, I was led into the living room, told to lie down on the floor. Pillows were placed under my shoulders, so my head would tilt back, nostrils in an upright position, and Dr. Mishra

himself inserted a small vial into each of them. I felt an excruciating fire explode through my sinuses and into my throat. I choked and gagged, and began to writhe, but Dr. Mishra seized my attention by opening my eyes and dropping something into them that created two fine points of such searing pain that I forgot my initial shock. A minute or two later, I sat up. The discomfort of having mustard oil in my nostrils and honey in my eyes began to fade. Still stunned, my vision began to clear and I now saw Dr. Mishra sitting relaxed in a chair. His penetrating gaze locked in on me, and he then asked if I would like to accompany him that afternoon, to Providence, Rhode Island, for a lecture he was giving there.

My only thought was that travelling with Dr. Mishra could be an adventure I should not miss. I accepted. We set out in two cars, he and a group of students in a van and I and Mary Tasch, travelling alone together. It was the first time we had had a chance to talk and she told me of her own extraordinary experience since meeting Dr. Mishra. I don't remember the content of what she told me, but it had a very different ring from the enthusiasm of her first guru recommendation. It struck a chord with my own experience of Dr. Mishra, and I began to reconsider. We pulled off at a rest stop along the way, and while I was waiting for the others in the parking lot, I looked up to see Dr. Mishra approaching me. In his hand he carried a black stick about two feet long and an inch in diameter. I realized that I had never seen him without it. The way it fit in his hand as he walked made it an extension of his body, something that added to his mystery. Later I found that it contained a magnetic steel rod at its core, covered with black antler bone, intricately carved in geometrical patterns. Its 25 facets symbolized all the elements of the Sankhya Yoga cosmology. It was as if he held the power of the universe right there in his hand. As he came closer, I began to freeze, having no idea how to address this mighty

being. Then he spoke, "You seem very young man. How old are you?" I told him I was 23, and then to alleviate my discomfort, asked him a question about something he had said in one of his talks. Without answering he turned his back on me. It shocked me. I felt embarrassed, humiliated, and at the same time immediately understood that my question was not genuine, and that Dr. Mishra operated outside the parameters of social convention.

By the time we reached Providence I was ready to take a new look at this man, and being the first to arrive at the YMCA auditorium reserved the front row center seat for myself. The auditorium filled until there were about a hundred people there. Seated on the floor of the stage above me, Dr. Mishra began his program of guided meditation, stories, humor and proclamations, all representing a perspective well beyond the pale of what we human beings knew as life on the planet earth. As he spoke, I progressively became more and more absorbed, not as much in what he was saying but rather in his presence, which seemed much more dynamic and expanded before this larger audience. It was like a journey in which, through him, I experienced a broad range of feelings I had never known before – everything from universal love to the rage of wrathful deities, a continuously changing panorama of feelings that seemed like the ebbs and tides of creation itself. It was timeless, and throughout I felt that I was in him and he was in me. When the talk was over, I was dumbfounded. People gathered for food in the kitchen behind the auditorium. I couldn't consider eating. I didn't know what to do with my body, let alone speak. Dr. Mishra like a physician matter-of-factly writing a prescription, handed me a glass of warm milk, which I found soothing. My only thought was "I have to study with him."

The next day back at the ashram, I caught up with him on his way to lunch, and asked for his permission to study with him. He told me I was very welcome. I returned to the Cape

and within twenty-four hours had said good-bye to my life there. I returned to the ashram and made plans to go to San Francisco, where Dr. Mishra would be teaching at the California Institute of Asian Studies. My excitement was unbounded. In every sense I had found what I was searching for – not only a teacher, who I was sure could lead me to enlightenment, I had also discovered Sanskrit.

I had always been a mediocre student, largely because I could never sustain an abiding interest in any subject. With Sanskrit, I was captivated. I could not get enough. The pure sounds and the intricate symmetry of Sanskrit gave me the feeling I had come home. It seemed to me like a universal key which opened my mind and heart to the perfect beauty of life. I had the sense that I would never feel alone and separate again.

In San Francisco, we found a house on sunny Potrero Hill with a large class room on the ground floor. At the far end of the room was a slightly raised dais, where Dr. Mishra sat on the ground, behind a small table draped in orange cloth. There, beside his Sanskrit books, he rested his stick as he taught. Just before the dais on one side was a large rounded step. I picked my spot on this step, just five feet to the right and one foot below the place where my teacher sat. And there I remained for seven or eight hours a day, every day for the better part of a year, fixated on this man whom, like others in our small group of thirty odd people I now called Guruji. Each morning he led us in kundalini yoga exercises, where through his exhortations to twist and bend “further and further to maximum pressure”, I would daily discover new extremes of spinal manipulation. He would direct us in his broken English “hold breath to point of passing out.” So I would struggle to hold my breath as long as he did, and it was often very close to the point of passing out. I welcomed passing out. It was a release of energy and circulation that made me feel every cell pulsating. I learned to feel cir-

ulation “from heart to entire body and from entire body to heart. He would refer to “release of chemicals” and “release of hidden poisons”, and after sustaining a neck twist for along time, while taking in more and more breath, I would feel an explosion of energy in my brain that made me quiver. Gradually his instructions led to feeling and remaining absorbed in “ocean of subtle pulsation”. He described meditation with the enthusiasm of a sports commentator – sensation by sensation, and yet tenderly, invoking us to embrace our own heart. More than anything he was teaching me how to feel. At first I had the sense that I only knew how to think, but little by little I began to feel new movements and currents in my body. I grew to perceive his meditations as the very essence of what I had come to learn from him.

From meditation we would go right into Sanskrit. There was continuous chanting of the forms of Sanskrit grammar, nouns and verbs and alphabet. When he chanted, it seemed his rich resonance, permeated with remarkable overtones, not only vibrated every part of his own body but the very ocean of pulsation around him as well. Following his lead and imitating his sound was something I would never tire of as long as I knew him. Perhaps it's this more than any other part of him that I have taken and made my own. He would bring ancient sacred texts, gods and sages to life with fluent and brilliant commentary. It was as though there had never been a lapse of thousands of years. He brought what was ancient into the immediate present, and he embodied it fully, always with much humor and laughter. He was a great raconteur. When he told a story he played each character to the extent that no one could doubt that at that moment he was the character. Many of the stories, he told again and again, taking as much delight the hundredth time as the first. His stories were very funny, and no one enjoyed their humor more than Guruji himself. His high pitched laughter peeled forth, seeming to tickle his every fibre.

Except for a short break, where there was a chance to grab a cup of herbal tea and a handful of sunflower seeds, we went straight through from 8:00 in the morning until 1:30 in the afternoon, intensively chanting Sanskrit grammar. Daily, it pushed me to an edge of discomfort that I thought I couldn't bear for another moment. But I did every day. Finally, when we broke for the one meal of the day, I felt tremendous relief. We sat on the floor around a long table, with Guruji at the head. Special tasty dishes had been prepared in small quantities for him alone, and whomever he favored with a spoonful. The rest of us received vegetarian staples prepared by a rotating staff of inexperienced cooks, and served from large pots. In the grip of mental exhaustion and physical depletion, as much due to a lack of nourishment as the long classes, I found it impossible not to want to sample the Guru's delicacies. Moreover, not receiving anything meant rejection and my own inevitable comparison with those whom he seemed to lavish food and affection on. To make it worse, I knew he seldom blessed me because I craved the food. My greed was transparent. And it wasn't just this way with food. I craved his attention, his approval and his love. Wisely he withheld it. My agenda overpowered my intention to apply the lesson I had learned at our first meeting, namely "I'm only here to learn". As a result I felt continuously ignored. Only occasionally, when I had given up hope, he would resurrect me with outrageous flattery. He would refer to me as "a great sage". And that would sustain me for a time, but ultimately I longed for more, never even considering how much could be enough.

So it went, day in and day out for the next nine months. In spite of my emotional struggles, I was on the fastest learning curve of my life. My belief in Guruji's mastery without flaw only increased. I had never seen him miss a beat, lose his concentration for moment, or be at a loss for words in any situation. He

was tireless, teaching seven days a week, five hours in the morning and another two and half, sometimes three or four, in the evening. I believed he was working overtime for one purpose, our, my enlightenment.

In the summer of '72, I returned with Guruji and many of his closest students to the New York countryside. It was at this time that all my hard work in Sanskrit had reached a point of maturation, and for the first time, I was translating independently. Also to my joy and amazement, I found that I had won myself a place in Dr. Mishra's inner circle. Whenever he travelled, which was often that summer, I travelled with him in his car. This more than satisfied my need for attention, and it seemed to give me a new strength and ease of being.

In September we returned to San Francisco. Guruji gave me a difficult translation to work on. It was a challenging next step for my Sanskrit that was perfectly timed. For the better part of the next year I worked devotedly on a translation of the Shiva-Mahimnah Stotram, an ancient collection of verses that poetically describe the mythology of Shiva. He asked me to transcribe and edit his commentary from lectures, which both interpreted the stories of Shiva, and elaborated on many of his own.

At that time, Guruji began to divide his time between teaching Sanskrit and Acupuncture. His students were his guinea pigs. On one occasion, after receiving more than a hundred needles in a multiple meridian demonstration, I achieved a relaxation beyond anything I had ever known through yoga.

Here I recognized his gift as a doctor. It was obvious that the calling to medicine, and fascination with its science was a strong inclination in him. This was something we did not share. I was not inspired to study acupuncture in the same way as Sanskrit. In my attempts to be a loyal disciple, I initially attended the classes, but found it difficult to concentrate, and eventually found reasons not to be there. As

I watched my friend Mary work towards her acupuncture license, I had some doubts about my loyalty, but I began to differentiate myself as an individual, distinct from Guruji, with my own interests and pursuits. I accepted opportunities to teach yoga and Sanskrit, which involved weekly trips to San Jose and Livermore. We established a permanent ashram in the Mission district of San Francisco and I took on responsibilities in the community.

By June of the following year, I had established enough of a life of my own to make the decision to remain in San Francisco, while Guruji returned to New York for the summer. For the first time in nearly two years, I was to be apart from him. His departure was a momentous occasion, which I honored by preparing a basket of food for him to take on the plane with him, including chapatis, made from flour I had ground myself. After a meditation we gathered in the living room of the ashram for tea, and I presented the basket. He thanked me but said he could not take it with him, because he had promised his mother when he was young that he would always trust God to provide him with whatever food he required while travelling. I felt slightly hurt, thinking “why wouldn’t he see my offering as God’s providing his food?” But I accepted it. We went to the airport and waited for him to board. I was feeling overwhelming sadness about his leaving when it was announced that his flight would be delayed for three hours.

He returned to his cottage. I and Fred and Mary Tasch decided to wait at the airport. A couple of hours later, we were standing at the top of the escalator as Guruji came gliding up with stick in hand, and a radiant expression on his face. Even before he reached the top, he began telling my friends “do you know what happened? I went back to cottage. I meditated on reason for delay. It was chapati. He made with great love, and I did not accept. So I sent to ashram for chapatis. I needed to taste before I was allowed to leave.” All regret about his

departure suddenly lifted from me. I felt quite happy, and amazed by the idea that nature was working so closely with Guruji. Was it possible his flight could be delayed until he had completed his responsibility, cleared any residue of karma? True or not, I could never say, but it instantly removed my sorrow. Its source had been not his departure but his rejection of my gift. That resolved, I now had a new understanding of my teacher’s love and sensitivity.

It was when Guruji returned in the Fall that we found out that he would be taking a world tour by ship, starting in January. Fred Tasch was concerned about his travelling alone and recommended to Guruji that I go along on the trip for support. It was my good fortune that I could afford to travel around the world, thanks to a gift from my grandmother. He accepted. I was ecstatic. After two years of devoted service, I was chosen to accompany him, to support him, to carry his luggage and attend to his needs, to be his companion. I believed that this would be the greatest blessing of my life. At the same time I could hardly believe my good fortune. Travelling to India represented a return to the source. And the constant companionship of my enlightened teacher would secure for me whatever I needed to learn for my liberation. Before leaving, I gave away all my possessions, believing that I may never return.

In mid-January of ‘74, we departed by ship from Ft. Lauderdale. It was not in any sense a luxury cruise. Guruji had a private cabin with no porthole, and I shared a smaller cabin for four, three levels below, with two bunks. My passage for six weeks at sea, with stops in England, France, the Canary Islands, Cape Town, South Africa, the three Australian ports, Perth, Melbourne and Sydney and final disembarking in Auckland, New Zealand had cost less than a thousand dollars. The same ship had one primary mission – to take English emigrants, hopeful of a new life, to Australia and to then return homesick Brits, unable

to find what they were looking for, back to England. So it went, round and round, and we had nothing to do with it, apparently. The first stretch of our trip across the North Atlantic was the last leg for the returnees. There was a funerary quality to it, crossing the cold blue waters. I felt conspicuous as an outsider, and an obvious disciple, dressed all in white, following my orange-clad Indian guru around the decks of the ship. Once seated alone on a deck chair, wrapped in my white velour meditation shawl, I was approached by small girl who asked me “are you an angel?”. Later the same day, a British gentleman passing me at the railing blurted out “planning to escape to an iceberg unnoticed?”

Aside from the considerable amount of time spent eating, I saw little of Guruji, who remained in his cabin much of the time. There wasn't the intimacy I had expected. I managed to pass some time by working on a translation of the Bhagavad-Gita and watching the giant swells of the ocean, but away from the routine of daily classes and group dynamics, I was bored and lonely. Guruji tried to get me enrolled in a dance class which was already well into the dance of Zorba. The instructor said it was too late. Guruji insisted I was a very quick learner, and could catch up. I was tremendously relieved when the instructor held his ground in the face of Dr. Mishra's persistence. It was a chance to see the rigidity of my own identity, and if I had the eyes to see, Guruji's compassionate efforts to get me to loosen up, and join in with others. He next suggested I offer a yoga class, something I was more secure with, so I spoke to the activities director, and she scheduled it in the ships bar for the next afternoon. More than a hundred people showed up, and I managed to teach a successful class. When I saw Guruji later at dinner, I said to him, “you taught a good class today”. It fell flat. There was no agreement on his part. I had come up with this statement, because of the idea propagated in the culture of yoga and I believed, by

Guruji himself, that the Guru works through the disciple. But it also belied my ongoing effort to have him think highly of me, a project doomed to failure, not because he didn't, but because of his refusal to participate in stroking my ego. A long time would pass, and much healing with my own father, before I would cease this hopeless endeavor, and he would no longer have to turn his back on me.

During our first week at sea, I tried to be useful and offered to do services for Guruji such as wash and iron his clothes. Although on the one hand it was tedious work, I took satisfaction as I was pressing his orange kurtas and lunghis, that I was being a good disciple, engaged in selfless service to my teacher. After I had twice returned a neat pile of pressed garments, he informed me he'd be doing his own laundry from now on. I knew for a fact that my friend Mary Tasch had done his laundry for years, and reasoned that she was more devoted than I. On the other hand I didn't mind, because truly, I didn't enjoy the work that much. He in fact never took the time to iron his own clothing. His technique was to wash it by hand, and hang it around his room, stretching it while it was still wet to avoid wrinkles. I learned to do the same with my own for as long as I travelled.

After a week, we arrived in Southampton. We had two dreary days in London, while the boat prepared for more than 2000 new passengers. When we reboarded, Guruji had been assigned a new cabin in the rear of the ship, this time with a porthole. As soon as we had left port, we hit a terrible storm. Since Guruji and I had already gotten our sea legs, we were practically the only passengers appearing for meals in the ships dining room. All around us unsecured plates were flying off tables and shattering on the deck. After retiring that first night of the storm, I awoke in the middle of the night perspiring and trembling with fear, as I had unconsciously been feeling the ship's roll repeatedly become almost vertical, as it

slid down the face of gigantic waves. Each time, it seemed that the ship could not possibly right itself, and would continue on its course straight to the bottom. Concerned about Guruji, I threw on some clothes and made my way through empty corridors to his cabin. I knocked and called his name, and after some time he opened the door. His response, although polite, made me feel that my call was an unnecessary interruption.

The next day he began to dictate to me a letter describing the strange experience he had been having since the beginning of the storm. Staring out his porthole, seeing the red color of sunset on the horizon, he had envisioned all humanity burning in the fires of human suffering. I no longer remember the details but he seemed greatly changed and moved by the experience. It was as if the vision persisted within a more expanded inner space of his own being. When at this time and others, I connected to this oceanic depth of feeling in him, I felt reverence, and peace.

Each time we stopped in a port, I would carry for him a shoulder bag that weighed about least twenty-five pounds, while he walked with his hands free, except for his stick. At first I was honored to perform this service, but with time, when I became more familiar with its contents, namely all the official documents and diplomas he had accumulated in a lifetime, I began to regard the lugging of this heavy bag everywhere we went as totally unnecessary. Although I never said a word, he clearly sensed my resistance, and began to carry it himself. Feeling compassion, by the sight of the bulky bag on his slight frame, I offered again to carry it, but he would not permit me.

When we landed in a port, after a week or two at sea, we would have a full day ashore. I discovered that Dr. Mishra did not believe in queues, and would cut in front of hundreds of people, waiting in line to disembark. Although I did not believe in doing so myself, I followed his lead. To do so, I had to more or less for-

sake my own ethics, and justify it as a special guru privilege. I also learned that his personal preference for sightseeing was to get on a local bus, take it to the end of the line and back, and then catch a different bus and repeat the same. All the while, we seldom talked. To me it was painfully boring. By the time we reached our final disembarkation in Auckland, I was relieved to have completed this part of the journey. Discontent had set in as doubts continued to surface about my traveling companion. For me, relieved of my duties, and unable to communicate as a peer, it was an identity crisis. What exactly was my role to be?

In Auckland there occurred two events that set the tone for next couple months of travel. The first regarded his considerable luggage, including 70 pounds of books. The ship had had unlimited portage. Now we would be travelling by air. Anything over forty pounds would be heavily surcharged. Moreover I would have to carry the extra baggage. I urged him to ship them back to San Francisco and we checked the rates at a local shipping office. It seemed settled. That afternoon we visited the Auckland zoo, where Dr. Mishra decided to have some lunch. He ordered the only vegetarian item on the snack bar menu, American processed cheese on white bread, food which I regarded at the time as inedible. I found this intolerable. It annoyed me that he couldn't wait until we found a decent restaurant. In protest I sat with him at the outdoor table refusing to eat. When we returned to the hotel, Guruji informed me that he would be taking the books on to Fiji with him. I became enraged and stormed out of the hotel. For hours I wandered the streets of Auckland, brooding over these events. I couldn't accept that my teacher was so attached to his books or that I would have to carry them. I went over it again and again in my mind, unable to resolve my frustration. Finally, realizing I hadn't eaten in a long time, I found a nice Chinese restaurant that was completely empty. I ate alone, and began to regret the



way I had responded earlier. When I returned to the hotel, I found that Guruji himself had taken all his bags to the airport freight office, and had them shipped ahead to Fiji. Imagining his struggle with the huge bags, I felt remorse for my pettiness and failure to have been there to help him.

On route to Fiji, my shaming was complete, when he informed me that he had wanted to give the books away to people we would meet there. More than half the population of Fiji was of Indian descent. With this in mind, Guruji listed his occupation as Hindu missionary on the visa entry forms we received before landing. This was an unfortunate blunder, as the customs agent was Muslim. Guruji was placed in detention for the night to be sent on to Australia the next day. I remained with him, and at dawn caught a shuttle to Suva, the capital, and took a cab to the Indian embassy. When I met with the vice consulate, he asked me if this was the Dr. Mishra from San Francisco, about whom he had heard many wonderful things. It was an auspicious coincidence. The airport was called and Guruji was allowed to fly on to join me in Suva. We later discovered that Guruji's books had been lost. Perhaps because, as I had learned from my teacher that airplanes could be delayed because of a yogi's unfinished business, I thought at the time that my anger was responsible for the disappearance of the books. I had the sense he thought so to.

Before reaching Fiji, our trip had been a journey of disillusionment. The Dr. Mishra that I travelled with was very different from the great teacher I had known before. It was anything but the trip of a lifetime I had imagined. Since our journey began, I had only become more and more aware of his deficiencies. But now that he had large audience of Indian people, starved for spiritual nourishment from their mother India, he shone once again in all his glory. Speaking in his native Hindi, he became completely free in his expression. His talks literally sang. His speech was musical and

rhythmic, rising and falling with great waves of energy. He was in his element – far more so than when teaching westerners. When he wasn't lecturing, he treated anyone who came to him with acupuncture. Our little cottage on the bay behind the Suva's Grand Hotel became a clinic, where people lined up for relief from their diabetes and heart problems. In a short two weeks, he became a hero to the people there. I remember a doctor there, who was quite distinguished himself saying "we have a very learned man in our midst." Inspired by what I saw, I told Guruji that I thought I should study acupuncture. He said "See. . we have to follow our destiny." I instantly abandoned the idea.

We continued on our journey to Singapore and then the Philippines. There we travelled to a luxurious mountain retreat in order to meet the famous psychic surgeon, Dr. Tony Agpaua. We were granted an audience with him the following day. Nothing of note occurred. Dr. Mishra tried to make conversation, but got little little response. Quickly, it was over, and he wanted to have his picture taken with Dr. Tony. We had been travelling for more than two months. He knew very well I had not brought along a camera. But he became furious now when I was not able to take this picture. He asked me angrily why I had not brought a camera. To spare us all the embarrassment, a kind man offered to take the picture and send us a copy. Everyone stepped outdoors in the sunlight, and the two doctors posed uncomfortably and unrelated while the snap was taken. Although on the one hand Dr. Mishra was no more unreasonable than I had been about the white bread, I could not accept his treatment. But I was afraid to express anger back to him, so I withheld it. This was one of the more extreme examples of Guruji's impatience with me, but there was an accumulation of evidence mounting in my mind, of his erratic and unkind behavior. For the most part this new aspect of relationship seemed to stay in the background,

but with no communication and resolution, it could flare up at any time.

Our next stop was the capital city of Taiwan, Taipei. On arrival we stayed in the magnificent Grand Hotel, built in the pagoda style, a jewel of prosperity overlooking the dreary polluted city below. After one night I knew I could not afford another, and for the first time on our journey made an independent decision, to find more reasonable accommodations. I spent the night in a comfortable room at a YMCA for less than a tenth the cost. The next day I checked in with Gurujī at the Grand Hotel. He asked me to see if they had something for him. We ended up taking a suite together. For a week in Taipei, he studied at an acupuncture clinic, while I rested a knee injury, caused during a yoga demonstration at a grade school in Fiji. He seemed annoyed that I wasn't sightseeing. I was annoyed that he didn't just give me some acupuncture. Finally he took me to the free clinic. In a crowded room of about fifty practitioners, a student administered four prescribed needles, as Gurujī looked on. As he turned the last needle, I felt a circuit of electricity move around my knee. When I got up, I knew the knee had been cured. I was amazed, and wondered if Gurujī had anything to do with it. As my mistrust of him continued to grow, I still did not doubt his gifts.

We moved on to Hong Kong where Gurujī purchased large quantities of acupuncture supplies. When we arrived in Bangkok, we discovered that the bag containing the equipment, had not arrived. On further inquiry, we realized that the bag had never been checked in. It had been stolen while we were waiting in line at the Hong Kong airport. Gurujī was more upset than I had ever seen him. He could not help blaming me, questioning why I had come if not to make sure all bags were properly checked. It was true – I had forgotten the original purpose of my coming

, to assist Gurujī. Our relationship had changed so much since that time. I felt very

bad about his considerable loss, especially knowing what it meant to him, but couldn't accept full responsibility for it. Furthermore, when the bag was discovered missing in Bangkok, Gurujī had left his black stick in the airport. It was the first time in nearly three years that I saw him without his stick in hand. We immediately took a taxi to the airport, but the stick was not to be found. Nothing could have brought home to me more the seriousness of his upset than for him to lose his stick. Without it he seemed exposed, like a wizard unprotected by his wand. I imagined it was irreplaceable. Although I knew I wasn't entirely responsible for the bag, the further loss of his stick intensified whatever guilt I was feeling. I couldn't help feeling that he held me responsible, but not being able to bear the weight of that, my only recourse was to deny it. I protected myself by silently finding fault with him. The incident did serve to increase the tension between us.

After a short stopover in sleepy Rangoon, the capital of Burma, we flew across the Bay of Bengal and landed in Calcutta. It was late April, the beginning of the hot season. Riding into the city, I was awed by what I saw, vast numbers of people everywhere, all seeming to move and breathe together in one continuous field of life. There was no way for me define what I was seeing and feeling. I had left the world as I knew it, with its orderly sense of time and space. Gurujī, in the mood to celebrate our arrival, asked me if I would like to try some liquid marijuana. It had been five years since I had tried any kind of intoxicant. They had all dropped away when I had dedicated myself to yoga. But now I felt eager to try something that would break up the weary monotony of constant travel. We went to a shop operated by the Indian Government, and there drank a tall glass of a strong but pleasant tasting greenish liquid, known as bhang. We then set out for Dakshinesvara, a temple on the banks of the Ganga, which in the 19th

century had been the home of the great mystic Ramakrishna. After visiting the temple we were driving along the banks of the Ganga, when I began to feel the effects of the bhang. The heat was stifling and dust from the road began to pour in through the windows. Meanwhile Guruji was waxing poetic about the sacred Ganga, whose source was the locks of Lord Shiva, high in the Himalayas. I began to feel very disoriented, overwhelmed by the intensity of India. I wondered what I was doing here – who was the strange man seated to my left? Then I began to feel dehydrated. My mouth was parched. The dust poured in. I rolled up the window. The heat became claustrophobic. I rolled it down.

I was relieved when we got the airport, where I headed directly to the nearest water station. We took our bags to a bench in the center of the grand lobby of the airport. Guruji, intent on leaving for New Delhi that evening, told me to stay with the luggage while he checked our tickets. As I sat, the bhang now began to feel stronger than I could bear. The water had done little to hydrate me. I was desperate for water but afraid to leave my location, for fear of getting lost. It was as if I was seeing the vast airport teeming with people from the eyes of a small child. I felt lost, alone, and barely able to hang on. After what seemed an interminable time, Guruji returned with the tickets and sat down to my left. After a minute or two he turned to me and asked me if I was all right. Not wanting to concern him, knowing his resistance to spending the night in Calcutta, I decided I would manage by following his lead. I told him I was. But my discomfort only increased. Another few minutes passed. He turned to me again and said “are you sure you’re all right?” I told him the truth. I didn’t see how I could possibly fly that night. He told me to wait while he changed the tickets. After some time he returned, told me to pick up my bags and follow him, which I somehow managed to do. We entered an office with a man sitting at a large desk, with

a register before him. At least eight other men were standing around the office leaning against the walls. Guruji sat on the other side of the desk. I was given the other chair next to the registrar. I immediately asked if I could please have some water. Then the discussion began. Guruji was trying to procure two single rooms in the Government hotel. Examining his book, the registrar said that only a double was available. Sitting just across the desk from him, I became fascinated watching Guruji’s face as he negotiated. I knew he had taken an even stronger dose of bhang than I, and yet here he was, a master of every facial muscle, oozing charm with a smile that could melt anyone’s resistance. It was like watching a great actor on the big screen. Momentarily I forgot my suffering. I was amazed that the registrar did not submit immediately. He insisted a double was the only thing available. Then Guruji shocked me into a whole new level of attention. He said, “Will you just look at this boy. Do you think anyone can spend the night with someone in his condition?” I felt a penetrating examination of me by all the eyes in the room. The registrar looked back to Guruji and asked him, “What’s wrong with him?” I was on the edge of my seat. Guruji said “you see – he is a great devotee of God. Today, he visited Dakshineshvara, the place of Paramahansa Ramakrishna, and there he went into state of divine intoxication. No one can be with him while he is like this.” It hit me like the monsoon after a year of drought. It was without a doubt the funniest thing that I had ever heard in my life. I began to rock with laughter, and then I let go. The last thing I remember was someone handing me a glass of water, which only seemed to encourage me to go deeper into my ecstatic dance. Soon we were driving out into country and arriving at a small hotel. I was shown to my private room. Wooden shutters were opened. Into the room flowed the soft light of the setting sun, the sweet sound of birds and crickets and a gurgling stream, from

which there arose a cool fragrant air of evening. My first day in India ended in profound peace. Gratitude filled my heart.

The next day at dawn, we took a rickshaw to the airport. The peaceful dream of India continued. Rarely had I seen such beauty enfolded into my own tranquillity. That afternoon we arrived in New Delhi and took a bus directly to Haridvar, where India's greatest festival, the Kumbha Mela had just taken place at the location where the holy river Ganga first meets the plains. For the first time I saw naked sadhus, covered in ash and carrying tridents like their beloved Shiva, marching down the center of the street. It was so strange that there seemed only a thin line of recognition between waking and dreaming. The next morning we wandered through a labyrinth of alley ways that formed the extensive bazaar of Haridvar. Shopkeepers were still rolling up the corrugated doors of their garage stalls elevated two steps above the narrow street. There were entire shops filled only with conch shells, or religious statuary, incense, and marigold garlands around candles in leaf boats to be offered to the Ganga. As we continued our tour of the bazaar, the late morning Indian sun overwhelmed me. I needed water. Guruji told me there was one more shop to visit. I watched him go up the steps of a stall, and still standing on the street, I was amazed when I looked up to see hundreds of canes covering its walls, many of which were made of the exact same black antelope horn as Guruji's. There were full length walking canes, some with polka dots, all shapes and sizes. Before I could collect myself, Guruji was holding out to me three sticks identical in every detail to his own. I couldn't quite grasp the truth that Guruji's extraordinary stick was a common item in Haridvar, so I remained in awe that something so rare could be found in such abundance. He asked me "which one?" The thought raced through my mind, "how can he be asking me to make such a weighty decision? – How could I possibly know?" But

in the meantime I had become entranced by the three sticks he held forth in his open palms. The one in the middle definitely stood out with a strength and lustre the others lacked. So without hesitating I pointed to it, and said, "that one". He took a hold of it and waved it in the air, and satisfied made his purchase. He had honored me, and given me a glimpse of my own power to choose.

That afternoon, we departed for nearby Rishikesh in the Himalayan foothills, the final hill station on the Ganga before its waters reached the plains. Here we set up a base for the two months we planned to stay in India. Guruji returned to a dharmashala he had visited often as a child accompanying his mother. It was situated on the edge of a hill under tall spreading trees which were the home of monkeys. To the east across a broad stretch of white sand, there was an unobstructed view of the Ganga. The rush of its rapid currents was a constant background. The narrow street below the south wall of the fortress-like structure was the primary pathway for pilgrims making their way across the wide beach to the sacred waters. Guruji had reserved for himself a small stucco two-room cottage, built on the flat spacious roof of the building. Also on the roof, apart from his cottage, were wash rooms, kitchen and another cottage, where I sometimes stayed. In the center was an opening to the first floor encircled by a railing. At night, one could look down on the sleeping pilgrims, covering the ground, their bedrolls strewn at all angles.

Wanting solitude, Guruji had arranged for me to stay at an ashram a mile upstream. Each morning I would return to his rooftop abode to find him faced towards an open window to the Ganga, absorbed in meditation. I always noticed that his room wherever it happened to be, had an atmosphere of purity and clarity. Walking into it, there was an uplifting feeling, like that of a new day beginning afresh.

Daily we went on long excursions. Often at midday, when other sensible Indians had

sought shade from the unrelenting heat, we would be riding along in a rickshaw, or climbing the long steps to a temple, or wandering through the marketplace. I had long since tired of following Guruji about. Our unresolved tensions were now compounded by the unparalleled hardships of travel in India in the hot season. His impatience with me matched my irritation with him. I thought more and more of leaving him, venturing off into the Himalayas. I began to read articles by J. Krishnamurti that drove home the individual's need to reject all forms of authority, especially gurus, if one was ever to know freedom. When other students of his arrived from the states, I vented my frustrations. The more I thought about leaving him, the more I realized what a hold he had over me. Although I broke away for periods of a few days to escape the heat by going to higher altitudes, I could not bring myself to simply leave him.

One day it all changed. At mid-morning I arrived at Guruji's cottage, to find him curled up on his side, his knees pulled into his chest. It was clear to me that he was not well. Compassionate, I began to remember him as the person I so much loved and respected before we began our travels, as well as the original purpose of my travelling with him. In an instant I forgot all my complaints. My only desire was to help him. I set about cleaning his rooms, washing the floors. I guessed that he had fared as poorly as I had on the mouth-scorching oily food we had found in restaurants, and decided the best remedy would be a wholesome meal of daal, rice and vegetables. I found what I needed in the marketplace, including some mild digestive spices. Some doubts arose when I entered the tiny primitive kitchen on the roof of the dharmashala. There was no light except through the open door. It had a coal stove. But somehow I managed to get it going and prepared the meal carefully. It was the first really nourishing home cooked meal we had had in a long time. When I left at

the end of the day, I could tell Guruji was feeling better. I felt light and happy again. Mysteriously the tension that had built between us dissolved. The decision to help him, to clean and shop and cook for him turned out to be an act of love that freed me. This sudden change in my outlook was reinforced by the arrival of his family.

The next day when I returned, I found the roof busy with activity. Two elderly women were washing clothes and preparing food. There was a young man who looked strikingly like Guruji. Members of his family had arrived from their village, including his elder sister and his wife. The young man was his nephew. Surrounded by them Guruji seemed more relaxed and content than I had ever seen him. And I, free from my own conflict and judgment, saw his noble face, radiating wisdom and warmth. There was a natural ease between us. He was more than ready to reflect the change that I had passed through. This proved true throughout our relationship of more than twenty years. When we travelled again together to Delhi and Bombay, it was as friends. For that short time we shared a feeling of oneness. The journey was effortless and timeless.

I decided that I would stay on in India, while Guruji kept his plan to return to New York in late June. Shortly before he left, his son Omkar came to be with him. Aside from the age difference of about forty years, they were identical in feature. Everywhere we went, Omkar dutifully carried his father's heavy bag of documents. Sitting across from them at an outdoor cafe in Delhi, I watched Omkar as he stared at his father. His love held nothing back. It shone with a brilliance and purity that I have rarely seen. It wanted nothing, except of course, his father's love.

The journey held all the pieces of our long term relationship, the lessons I would repeat again and again. When I tried to follow his path, mine became conflicted. When I deified him, I became afraid of his power and critical

of his imperfections. Yet he saw in me possibilities that no one else seemed to perceive. In many ways he honored me, and changed the course of my life. When I looked at him as a human being, I saw he was quite fallible, but only upon seeing that, could I say that I truly loved him. Simple friendship did not come easily with him, but after a long history, there grew between us a joy upon seeing each other whenever we met from time to time.

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