

My Memories
by Pir Vilayat
Excerpted from recorded talks

When I was born in London in 1916, Hazrat Inayat Khan told my Mother, “My successor is born,” and then dictated to Miss Williams, then Secretary General of the Sufi Order, a document stating that in case of his death, “Vilayat will be my successor, and until he is of age, Mahboob Khan [his younger brother, my uncle] would take charge.” Somehow that document disappeared. There was, however, a testimonial by Miss Williams to say that is exactly what happened. In the years that lapsed, Hazrat Inayat Khan occasionally intimated to his mureeds, or made them understand, that he meant me, his eldest son, to be his successor.

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Many children used to play in the field opposite Fazal Manzil, the house of Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan at Suresnes, near Paris at our house. Dutch, French, English, German, Swedish, and Italian children. Yes, I was among them. We spoke the language that children of all lands know so well to make themselves readily understood, peering through the high grass at that mighty figure descending the front steps of Fazal Manzil, opening the gate, crossing the road and wending his way along the narrow path leading to the lecture hall, walking with such majesty that we hid in the grass in wonderment! He could not possibly be my daddy or that of my brothers or sisters! No, he was the father of us all, young or old, the grand patriarch around whom our lives and beings revolved. Later it became clear that he had made a little spot on earth a paradise by his presence.

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The door opened and we could see him emerging and walking down the steps like a king. In fact, the first thing that impressed us most was the majesty of his being: he walked down with very slow, majestic steps, like a powerful elephant. As he walked, he seemed to be carrying the whole world on his back, and we lay absolutely spellbound by all that was coming through him. Now, of course, we were discovering other aspects we hadn't seen before. We were discovering a power that was so great that it seemed it could remove mountains. Yet it was a power that one could never be afraid of. Power can be very frightening, but here was a power that was full of kindness. Of course, we as children learned to respect his being because of what he was, so that at no time did he ever have to affirm his power. But it was there, and when we were children, that was what disciplined us. Especially in those days, people used to tell a child to do this or do that. Murshid always used to explain why. Of all people, of course, he was the busiest, but he took time to tell us why. You know how important that question is; in fact, Murshid calls it “the big mountain. Why?” He took the trouble to tell us. Even when he was in a hurry, he would

say why. Although once he said, "I have to be brief because there is not much time." I remember him once saying, "Well, Vilayat, you couldn't understand. But as soon as you are old enough to understand, then I'll tell you why." That was wonderful, because I was used to him always explaining why, and I knew that the only reason he couldn't say it this time was because I wasn't old enough to understand. This gave us confidence in Murshid that he would never tell anyone to follow him blindly. That's a policy I have followed all my life: never tell people what to do. You can absolutely ruin people or lives by telling them, "You should do this," or "You should do that." This is not only because one might not understand all the different aspects of a problem. It is because by telling people what to do, you are taking away their sense of responsibility and making them into puppets. So here was the very incorporation of wisdom, who could always see exactly what the issue of the problem was, and who nevertheless, out of respect for you, always refrained from telling you what to do. When we were children we established a little court beneath the steps. If any child did anything wrong, then the court was convened and Murshid was the judge. We had to own up what we had done wrong and then we ourselves had to decide what punishment we were going to inflict upon ourselves. The punishment that Murshid gave us was always much less than what we would have inflicted upon ourselves. His punishment, which generally consisted in running around the garden three times or something like that, was a form of compassion. The important thing was that we ourselves felt that we had to do something to compensate for what we had done; it came from us instead of him.

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Yes, I remember as a child being most impressed when Shamcher fainted, ignorant of the fact that he had been fasting. His plight at least served the purpose of awakening compassion in me. I rushed to the scene of the catastrophe, hoping to be of some use.

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I was present when Murshid had the inspiration for the Universal Worship and the prayers, which, in fact, came together. We were children and, as with all children, we liked to climb into our parents bed in the morning and cuddle and pull on Murshid's beard. But that morning our mother said, "No, you can't come in the room now because Murshid is in a special state and he must be left at peace. Naturally we were extremely curious to see Murshid in a special state, and so we kept loitering around so that if there were a slight opening of the door we would be able to see what was happening. Later we did manage to come inside. Murshid was in a very, very high state, and of course we felt that something very important, very cosmic was happening, although we did not know what it was. Later, not long afterward, the Universal Worship was celebrated in the drawing room of Fazal Manzil. Murshid sat in one of the leather chairs at one side of the altar, and a cherag sat on the other side. There was the lighting of the candles, the reading of the scriptures, and so on, but of course the presence of Murshid gave it such a very powerful atmosphere. He

said a few words at the end and he gave the blessing. That, of course, was a great moment, when he gave the blessing. My mother later said that the whole structure of the Universal Worship was given as a revelation: This is the way of worship for our time; it was to replace the ways that were given in the past.

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When I was ten, watching him walk along the path leading to the lecture hall, squatting between the blades of grass of the enchanted garden in Suresnes, it was his greatness that struck me. We children were not allowed to attend the lectures (for reasons that have become just too obvious to me by now). I do remember slipping by the sentinels and edging my way into the lecture hall. I will never forget the sacredness pervading the lecture hall as his hallowed figure entered and filled the space with his magnetism. One sensed such love and reverence emanating from the mureeds. I will never forget the sacredness emerging from his voice as he said, "Beloved ones of God." His talk was punctuated with the hearty joviality that even derided the most uptight mureeds, although I admit I could not always see the point of the joke at that age.

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I remember once when Murshid was very ill; it was in 1926, and he had a high fever. I went into the Oriental Room, and he really wasn't up to speaking, but I could hear him repeating, very softly, the zikr. There was a sense of impending tragedy that last year, 1926. Murshid had expressed his intention to visit India, or was it to return to India? My mother was continually in tears. I had a dream that he had left on the train, and we generally would have accompanied him, and that my brother and sisters had left to accompany him and I had missed it. I was in a terrible state in my sleep because somehow there was a feeling that I felt that Pir-o-Murshid would not come back after his trip to India. This was my last opportunity. I was in a situation of shock. So I screamed in my sleep. I was in the room next to my father and mother. I heard his voice saying, "Bhaijan (that means dear brother) it's all right. Don't worry." Then I went back to sleep. The next day, that last Sunday in 1926, end of August, knowing that Murshid did not attend the services anymore, this being the only time he was not engaged in either lectures or interviews, I waited until everyone had left and gingerly knocked at the door of the Oriental Room. This was my one chance of talking to him alone. His time was always taken up: there were always mureeds. He generally slept just about four hours a night, and when he wasn't giving interviews or talks, he was meditating. I used to sometimes knock on the door of the Oriental Room, but he would be meditating, so I didn't want to disturb him. I remember that on occasion I took it upon myself to walk into the room and sit in a little corner and be very quiet and watch him repeat the zikr or a wazifa. It is almost impossible to convey what I was experiencing in those moments: the whole room was absolutely filled with power. It was as if you could touch the atmosphere, it was so thick, and the whole room was filled with it. Murshid used to do his practices very internally, so that you could hardly hear the words. It was almost

like a whisper: the power came from within. This time when I knocked at the door, it was during the Universal Worship service. Everyone had left and Murshid was alone. As I knocked at the door of the Oriental Room, I remembered the dream. So he said, "Come in, my son." He was looking out the window. Outside was my mother with three children taking them to the Universal Worship. He was very silent and pensive. He said, "I hope that you will marry someone like your mother." In his wisdom, he seized this opportunity to speak of the big choices I would have to make in my life. We sat on the seat and he said, "If there is a war what will you do?" I said, "I don't want to fight. I don't want to kill." He said, "Yes, you can fight without killing. But if you are eating the bread of a country, you owe your loyalty to the people of that country." So that was a message for my participation in the war and that of Noor. I said, "Abba, why do you not go to the Universal Worship?" He said, "It is time for the mureeds to look after themselves." I then had a terrible shock because it seemed to confirm that he wouldn't come back. So then I said, "But they would never be able to continue without you." He looked very sad and he said, "Well, they will have to." There was a long moment of silence, and then he said, "Yes, there are going to be very difficult times. People are going to fight against each other. All of the evil in the hearts of people will come up again." Then he made this remark, "You see just giving the lectures and meetings and meditations was wonderful. The problem was organization." All of a sudden, I could feel, in a way, the heartbreak. "If I had stayed in the East," he said, "I would have been sitting under a tree next to the Ganges, and people would have come and bowed their heads in the dust and I could have given them blessings." He looked at my shoes and said, "You will follow in my footsteps. But you will have to prepare yourself. You will meet with trials and have to grow acquainted with the ways of the world."

When I look at this now, in perspective, I realize that it is only the power of the master that is able to hold back the aggressiveness and the evil in the hearts of men; and when I look at the problems in the world today, I realize that the world is delivered unto itself without the power of controlling those forces. The result is conflict.

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I am sure Murshid suffered very much from the lack of finesse in some of the people he encountered. He said that people would have liked him to say things like a hammer. People used to think, "Well, why can you not just say it? Why do you have to be so subtle about it?" When, of course, there is no language to say the real thing. Whatever you can say with language is a total distortion, and certainly a limitation of the truth that you should convey. In the one brief moment when I saw him, Murshid was looking back into the past and forward into the future, and there was great sadness in his eyes. I was absolutely flabbergasted by the implications of what he was saying.

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I was very young when Hazrat Inayat Khan passed away – I was ten years old. I remember receiving the telegram. We couldn't believe it. It was as if our whole world had

been shattered – had come to an end. We didn't think it was possible to live without him. We couldn't believe that we wouldn't see him again. It was totally unacceptable.

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As a young man, my mother tried to save me from having to undergo all the hardships that my father underwent. She encouraged me to be a musician as my brother and sisters. One day Murshida Fazal Mai, who was the lovely old lady who lived in the house and was like my grandmother, said, "Vilayat, if you become a musician that will not prepare you for the task that your father had cast upon you." So when Murshida Fazal Mai told me that I was not preparing myself for my father's work (I must have been about 15 or 16) I knelt down like a knight and made a pledge. "I dedicate my life totally to my father and wish and do whatever it takes to prepare myself for it."

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The first Gatha class I ever gave was when I was 16, at the request of Murshida Fazal Mai Engling. She was 60 at the time, and suffered from pneumonia, from which I had brought her back several times. She had been a representative of the Theosophical Society, where there was a lot of talk about masters from the East. When she saw Murshid, she said, "Here is one!" She offered what little money she had to Murshid to buy a house, and immediately things started to grow.

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At that particular juncture (in the 1930s) I was the father of the family and Noor was the mother. I had been offered an opportunity to go to India to do training amongst the yogis. Somehow I felt that I would be letting people down, letting my family down, by leaving. So I was faced with a very difficult choice. I eventually decided to stay and it was only much later that I was able to go to India, in fact after the war and live as a sannyasin in the caves of the Himalayas. At that time I remembered the words of Murshid when he was asked, "What will Vilayat do when he's grown up?" He said, "He will present the Message to the intellectual world." So I thought well, maybe he wants me to have a real solid education. So I studied philosophy at the Sorbonne. I always felt there was something wrong about the wisdom of the world, but as you know, when one is very young one doesn't really see what is wrong with it; it just doesn't feel right. I had a terrible problem of reconciling what I was learning at the university, which was philosophy, with what Hazrat Inayat Khan was saying. They didn't seem compatible in the least. Now, of course, looking back upon it all, it all becomes very clear how our thinking is based upon logic, and as soon as you see how fallacious logic is, then you are not fooled by it any longer. Most people are fooled by it. In fact, I went to Oxford and followed some courses there. There was an Oxford limerick that defines the philosopher as a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that isn't there. At that time, I suppose I was that blind man and I

couldn't find the black cat either. But somehow I remember that Murshid knew all the time that there wasn't a black cat there, because he was endowed with a greater wisdom. The wisdom that sees into the soul. So I decided that this was an impasse. But then I thought about psychology; yes, now there you are dealing with something very real. I think it was true that what my father was doing is really like the transcendental dimension of psychology. So I was studying psychology and then at a certain point I thought well, how can you separate the mind from the body? I mean how can you know the whole situation of the mind if you don't know anything about the body? At that time, there was a new professor who opened up a department of psycho-physiology. That meant that I had to start all over again, studying chemistry, physics, mathematics of course, biology and physiology and then combining that with psychology. So I was writing a thesis on psychological factors in time reaction. It was new, very new. I had an MA in, well, they called it philosophy in those days. Then came the war. It disturbed everything of course. I was due for a doctor's degree but I couldn't follow that up.

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When I was younger, I used to train falcons. You have a piece of meat on your glove, on your gauntlet, and you put them at a distance, and then they fly to your gauntlet. You increase the distance very gradually, so that they are tested in their faith that they will be all right if they come to your gauntlet, because birds are very timid. But you have to measure each day just exactly how much you increase the distance; if you increase the distance too much, they do not have the courage to fly that far, so you are over stressing them. That is the art of the guru; he has to know how much he can test his pupil, and that depends upon the confidence the pupil has in him. It is a very fine art.

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I had quite a traumatic experience when I was very young; I was 24 or 25. I was giving a talk on Sufism and somebody stood up and said, "The speaker doesn't know the least thing about Sufism." It wasn't very polite, but I said, "If you feel you know more about Sufism come and stand up and give us a talk. I'll be glad to listen to learn what I can." He came up and started speaking in a way that people disliked, and so there were murmurs in the crowd. Eventually I said, "Well I am sorry but people don't seem to welcome what you are saying so I hope you will excuse me," and I came back on the stage again. But that traumatic experience marked me very deeply. I decided that it was about time that I knew more about Sufism, so I started studying Ibn al-Arabi and Jelaluddin Rumi and so on. Of course, I discovered just a wealth of thoughts and insight which was just overwhelming.

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I remember a conversation with Noor, my sister, when we heard the cannons of the Nazis at the gates of Paris, advancing. We had to decide whether we were going to stay or not, if we were going to participate in the war. None of us wanted to kill. Does it mean if one joins the forces, does it mean that one has to kill? I remember saying to Noor, supposing that you have a Nazi with a machine gun and hostages and he was about to shoot the hostages and your only chance to save them is to shoot the Nazi, what do you do? Because we were evoking of course Gandhi's nonviolence and I realized that nonviolence is a general principle but in some cases one really has to intervene. But then Noor said, "Well yes, but I couldn't kill." I said, "Yes, I couldn't kill either." So then we decided well, how could one participate in the war without killing? We decided to leave in any case and to join forces with the British. I didn't quite follow that principle because I trained as a fighter pilot but that was again the same thing: to save populations of the cities from the bombers. It did mean killing. I was following that idea of how do you deal with the Nazis. Later on, I was transferred to the Royal Navy, I became an officer in the British Royal Navy. I was in mine sweeping. I was ahead of the landing troops. So we were shot up from all sides. I would see my friends, we had been drinking the night before at a party, and the next day I could see them floating in the water dead. I knew I was next. We never expected to survive.

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I was trained in the Royal Air Force by a Battle-of-Britain pilot. Within three lessons, he put me through the most hair-raising acrobatics. I returned the gauntlet by putting him into an inverted spin which he said later we were lucky to come out of. My joy was making a half loop, then turning off the engine and drifting in the wind amongst the clouds upside down, hanging on my straps in an open cockpit. Here I was at home, set free in the vastness. In fact, my dearest wish would have been to live up there permanently. I would exult in the many splendored array of colors in the clouds, and their evanescent, sometimes spindly or shredded or spotted formations, and I would turn my plane into the sun, drinking in its sheer effulgence as I glided upon thin air.

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I will never forget what happened to me at the end of the Second World War. I was an officer in the British Navy, in Bombay of all places, at a time when there was a meeting of the Indian Navy. A whole sea of Indian sailors was coming to attack the British officers in the barracks, and the admiral in charge of the barracks, who himself was an Indian, and admiral in the Indian Navy, asked us to stay where we were. Many of the officers wanted to overpower him. We were scared stiff, of course, and the admiral said, "No, let me take over", and he walked out facing the crowd and spoke to them for about an hour, then turned back and walked away. That was one of the most admirable scenes I have ever experienced in my life. It was testing the marvelous authority of that admiral, who had really mastered violence himself and therefore was able to somehow master some psychological drive in

those people. He was using arguments which I really couldn't understand, since I didn't know what he was saying, but somehow I feel there is an indication. Of course, it depends on our own ability to uphold this beautiful divine sovereignty in our beings.

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Noor volunteered for the most dangerous of all positions. Just imagine that the day when a plane had landed to take her back to Britain and she had been betrayed by a friend of hers, a traitor, to the Nazis for 100,000 francs. Just as she went back to her apartment to take her radio and whatever code, she had she was captured. After her arrest, Noor made an attempt to escape from the Gestapo Headquarters in Paris, but was caught, then thrown in a truck and taken to a prison in Karlsruhe. There she was handcuffed and chained, and kept in total isolation for ten months. Every day, she was offered a soup made of potato peels that burned the stomach. She was transferred to Dachau, a terrible concentration camp. She was left practically in the nude, I think, the whole night. It might have been raining outside. The gauleiter (Nazi guard) kept on kicking her with his heavy boots as she lay on a cement floor in chains, suffering agony from enormous hematomas all over her body. The next day there she was waiting to be killed. The gauleiter beat her up so badly that she was, as the report says, a bloody mess. Then she was made to kneel and was shot in the head from behind. But she didn't cry. Her last words were, "Vive la liberté ". Apparently there was still some motion in her body when she was thrown into the oven that is still in Dachau. That was my sister, such a beautiful person, who wrote children's stories, and played the harp. So you can imagine how shattered I was, how shattered our mother was. I remember after the war that I came to see my uncle Maheboob Khan, the younger brother of my father, who had stayed in Holland and had suffered very much. He had tears in his eyes and he said, "Vilayat, I hope you don't think that I am taking your position away from you. I am just waiting for you to be ready. But now I would like you to be my first assistant and then I will pass it on to you more and more." I said, "Well, you know I cannot stand facing people now."

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Oh yes, there was another thing that occurred at that same time. I visited a young girl, the daughter of a mureed at whose house we had been staying and I had proposed marriage. I took her on my motorcycle to London from Oxford to visit my mother. On the way the kickstand jammed into the wheel and we were projected on the road. She died of a brain hemorrhage. So it was one thing after the other. I was so shattered by it all that I said, "I won't be able to do it. It will take me some time to recover." I wished that my other uncle, who was really a cousin of my father, would have given me support that my first uncle gave me and the kind of support that I am giving my son. But it was the other way around. My second uncle felt that he needed to give me training to be the successor of Piro-Murshid Inayat Khan. He exposed me to a most drastic test, which was to give up my claim to be my father's successor. It was probably his way of destroying my ego to the

utmost. I would have respected that if that was the only question. The reason why I couldn't do it was because I would be foregoing my father's wish and so I couldn't go counter to my father's wish and make its application subject to my uncle's decision. I don't want to be judgmental. Looking back, I was nominated by my father and I was intent on honoring my father's wish, it wasn't mine to give. But it is possible one needed more maturity. I had to go through life. So I see sense there. One would tend to be judgmental and say it was usurping a position. I am a little milder in my judgment about that whole situation.

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To understand the extreme importance that music plays in my life, I should tell you that I was once cured from the very depths of despair by playing the High Mass of Bach every day for about two or three months. Maybe it is necessary to have experienced the depths of despair in order to be able to communicate joy to people. I can bear testimony to the fact that music can have the most incredible therapeutic value that one could ever imagine. I assume that it would work on other people as dramatically, but I can't be sure, because music means more to some people than others. Some people are even fairly indifferent to music. The ability to value music is an acquired taste, and I had the good fortune of being educated in a music school in France where we were taught by some of the world's most wonderful musicians, like Nadia Boulanger, who was a teacher of teachers of music, Igor Stravinsky, Pablo Casals, Alfred Cortot and Jacques Thibaut. All the great musicians of the times were teachers at that school, so we learned at an early age to value good music.

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Few of us, for example, have escaped being marked by the wounds of resentment, anger, and distress at life's terrible unfairness. In my own case, as much as I would like to express God's magnanimous and all-forgiving being, I must say that when I think of the woman who betrayed my sister, Noor, to the Nazis for 100,000 francs, and the tragic consequences it had, it's difficult for me not to feel resentment. Similarly, I've tried to forgive the Nazi who beat and kicked her to death, then left her to lie bleeding throughout the night. What has made it somewhat easier for me to understand how one human being could do that to another is knowing that the Nazis used psychopaths as jailers. Thus, when I consider the fact that the man might have been brought up by a stepfather who was a drunk, or who beat him or kicked him out of the house, my resentment is not as easy to sustain. I have a more difficult time reconciling with the woman who betrayed Noor's life for money. How, then, can I teach forgiveness when it has proved such a problem for me? My only answer lies in the words of Christ, "They know not what they do." His words make it easier for me to understand that such people, like the Nazi and the Frenchwoman, did not know what they were doing. I tell this deeply personal story as part of my teachings on how important it is to be able to forgive and let go.

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I had an opportunity to go to India at last. I made several trips to India because I had to make money and then go back to India using that money. In fact, I hitchhiked to India several times because I didn't have much money. It was a wonderful way of visiting the world. I lived as a sannyasin in a cave, several caves. I meditated with Rishis.

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I was still quite young when I had my first encounter with a rishi sitting in a cave. I had come a long way. I had walked three days and three nights in the snow, and I had caught pneumonia. I was also rather scared, because there were tracks in the snow that I thought might be the tracks of a bear, and bears are quite dangerous in the Himalayas. I followed the tracks anyway, in the hope that they were the footsteps of a human being, and they turned out to be the tracks of a rishi. The first thing he said to me was, "Why have you come so far to see what you should be?" I was still rather inexperienced, so I just said, "It is wonderful to see this." Today, I suppose I would have said, "To become what I should be I have to see myself in you."

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When I was very young, I visited a rishi in Badrinof, which is above Rishikesh, somewhere on the way up to the source of the Ganges. It is a pilgrimage resort. There was a hot water spring, and this rishi was sitting next to it. I wasn't familiar with the customs. I couldn't see myself bowing my head down to a rishi, and the whole thing looked a little bit strange to me at that time. Now, of course, it is very familiar. He pointed to me: "You come." I came, and I just greeted him and sat next to him. He started speaking, and he taught me more and more things. Then he asked me to come back every day, and I sat there for hours with him. I really learned a lot from him. In the meantime, people were coming and bowing their heads at his feet. He said to me, "I shall be moving to Kedernath." Kedernath is on the way up to Jumna, which is another river higher up. So I said, "Well, why?" he said, "Well, there's a post." that was the word he used, "post for each of us to sit on." "He sat there at post, and there was a time when he was promoted to another post. So it's just like a government in which there are certain positions. There are offices, and you may be promoted to another position. Then somebody else has to fill in that post. I said to him, "How will you know?" He said, "I'll know" That was all; he didn't give a very clear answer.

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Imagine being so disciplined that you could perform some of the feats of the ascetic. I made a retreat at the source of the Ganges. The contrast between the heat in Delhi, which

is like an oven, and the extreme cold at the source of the Ganges is extraordinary; and there I was, sitting at three in the morning with ascetics. I realized that there was no point in trying to make a fire: it didn't really help, because it didn't make any difference. You just have to love the cold, to delight in it and let all the fresh air come right into your pores. It was extraordinary how I was able to adapt myself to the circumstances. That is the way of the ascetic; after you've done that, you feel there's nothing you cannot do. It gives you a wonderful sense of self-confidence. This is something that is very important for people living a kind of artificial life in an affluent society.

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I'll give you an example of someone like that (an impersonal being) so it's easier for you. It was a rishi I saw once above Kedernath in India, in mountains about 15,000 feet high. It was very, very cold; the mountains were covered in snow. The dawn was lifting upon the mountain peaks gloriously. There he sat naked in the snow. His body was as white as snow and even the retina of his eyes had become a little bit albino, and his hair was non-descript. He sat there like a rock without stirring, and his whole being reflected the glistening of the snow and the diaphanous light of the sunrise. He seemed part of the mountain vastness. He was not a person. He was like the substrata out of which life is made. There was no strife in him, no heartaches, no soul-searching, no sadness, no joy, no anger. Not even sovereignty. He was just neutral. He was the epitome of Samadhi. He was in Samadhi, the highest form of Samadhi: Asamprajnata Samadhi, sometimes called Nirbiiia Samadhi, which means there are no seeds; in other words no qualities, no archetypes. It's just the totally neutral reality that breaks out into all the different qualities and forms. It is the top, beyond the beyond, the apex. It's the experience of deep sleep. There are no images, no thoughts, but there is just realization; there is no consciousness but there is an intense realization. It is what Mahesh Yogi calls consciousness without content. We Sufis call it intelligence beyond consciousness, because intelligence becomes consciousness when it is faced with an object.

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When I was living in the caves in the Himalayas, I would arise in the early hours before dawn and meditate on the otherworldly light that illuminates the horizon just before the sun rises. Then, during the daytime I would spend hours looking into the sun. As the Greek philosopher Plotinus said, "To look into the sun, you have to have eyes like the sun." At night, I would reach right out into the lacy-bright nebulae, seeing my body as a fragment within the vastness of infinitely revolving worlds of light. I have done this practice in the Himalayas, looking into the sun for an hour and 20 minutes without blinking. It took many retreats to do that, increasing it gradually. You start very slowly. I did it without a filter; I would not teach it like that, but I kept my eyes centered just away from the sun, just exposing the edge of my eyes, making a circle with my eyes. Gradually I got used to it and I started looking more and more into the sun; finally I got to the point where I was able to

look an hour and 20 minutes. That was my maximum. There is a danger of the eyes getting really inflamed, because they become very sensitive. The result is extraordinary. You are literally drinking light through your eyes. I have met rishis way up, above 14,000 feet, who were living there permanently; there is no food up there, nobody ever comes up there, so they are living without food. I have seen them rub rocks together, and make a powder of it in water, so they get the minerals that are needed for survival. But there is no source of carbohydrates or fats or protein of any kind. How do they manage? I put it down to photosynthesis.

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At this level, one grasps the oneness behind multiplicity, the state the yogis call Samadhi. At this pinnacle, one grasps the Being of God, rather than the intention. One's identity becomes immersed in the Oneness. This is awakening beyond life; no words can truly describe this state of consciousness. One can only point to it. I can only attempt to convey it through describing a retreat I once took in Jerusalem in the Cave of the Ascension at the top of the Mount of Olives, from which, according to some accounts, Jesus ascended into heaven. The access to that cave is through a mosque. You enter by going down a set of steps; inside there is a little skylight, and recesses in the wall. There is a footmark in the rock that is said to be the mark made by Christ's foot as he was on his way to heaven. At the time I was on retreat, I was continuously repeating the zikr. Imagine how you would feel doing the zikr in this holy cave, certainly frequented by Jesus, and where most probably Melchizedek lived while the tribes were living in tents.

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Then I went to Ajmer and made a retreat there, forty days fasting. There was a murshid of the lineage of the Chishtis who wanted very much for me to take initiation with him and I said no, I can't do that because my murshid is my father and he respected that. That was Aziz Mir of Birelli, a great being, thousands of disciples. He taught me the zikr and wazifa and so on. So I went there from time to time.

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Then at a certain moment I went back to Ajmer and did another retreat. Then I heard that the son of the murshid of my father, Abu Hashim Madani, was going to die. I rushed to Hyderabad to see him before he died. He died in the meantime. But there was the grandson of the grand murshid of Murshid. Lovely old man. I think he was the son of Kalimi Delvi who was the Pir-o-Murshid of Abu Hashim Madani. He was in a very mystical state. He said, "Last night I received a message from your father that I must train you for your position as a Pir-o-Murshid. I must give you the classical training". I said, "Oh, I can't do that because my murshid is my father." He said, "Oh, yes, I will always respect that. I'm only a mentor for you. But your lineage is directly from your father" So I

made a retreat under his guidance. He said, “When you’re doing the zikr, you should just get into your father’s consciousness, and that was what establishes a link, you see. Don’t do the zikr as though you’re doing it yourself.” That was how I was doing the zikr, 22,000 times a day. When I came back I couldn’t even recognize myself. The extraordinary thing was that he used to call me for prayer five times a day and getting into my father’s consciousness, I go to into the consciousness of Abu Hashim Madani and getting into the consciousness of Abu Hashim Madani, I go to into the consciousness of his father and I was sitting there at the tomb of his father. So he came in to call me for prayer. He said, “Vilayat” and I thought, the name is familiar but I... then he looked at me and he said, “You’ve seen my father.” So he saw the expression of his father so it shows that it really works. An experience I had when I started walking the streets after having been on retreat. I felt like a lamp that was throwing light on everything. People looked to me like puppets all tied up with strings, running about doing things that they were programmed to do without realizing what they were doing. When you observe everyday life, you will notice that everyone is caught up in his own trip and doesn't realize it, because each one is identifying himself with himself. If you have identified yourself with the total being, the divine being, you are awake, but you must function in a world of people who are asleep.

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Now what is the zikr of the broken heart? Oh yes, I should describe it better to you. I was sitting in Ajmer at the tomb of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, repeating the zikr. There was a musician sitting under some columns on the left. There were very few people about. He was singing with his whole heart and playing the tambura. I was moved to ecstasy by his being. My zikr was becoming more and more beautiful because of the music that was there. It was so mystically powerful, what was coming through him, that I didn’t even dare look at him. Somehow at one time I felt I just couldn’t resist it and I just turned and looked at him. He stood up and he came towards me and he said, “I have a message from your father.” At that moment he looked exactly like Murshid. He said, “When you do the zikr, when you say ‘Allah Hu,’ turn within instead of turning upwards. You’re turning upwards, and that’s a stage in the zikr, but now you reach a stage when you should do the internal zikr. Just turn within.” It’s said this is the zikr of the broken heart because the heart of God is wounded. Of course, you can imagine how that affected me, and I started doing it.

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I remember in Iran there was a picture of a dervish in the window of the shop of a man who was selling all kinds of things. One look at the face and I said, “Oh, I have never seen a man like this. Incredible! So much joy, so much suffering.” I went inside and asked, “Can you tell me who that is?” He looked at me, burst into tears and said, “He was a great dervish, my father. I just buried him three days ago.” I had missed him by three days! I have been to Rishikesh and I have had lots of contact with rishis. But as soon as I came in, the dervishes were all hugging me just like Sufis do here. Even women, which is unheard

of in Islam. You know a woman can never touch a man, and a man can never touch a woman: Purda.

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I remember learning at school that in order to see things clearly you have to be cool-minded. It's the other way around; you have to be high in order to be able to see things. I attended a meeting at a place called Haftan-dervish, meaning 40 dervishes, in Shiraz. There is a source of water and rocks; it's an enchanting place. You sit there on Thursday evening when they have Zikr; you see a few people who don't look like anybody else. Soon you notice that there is a difference in them because they are so illuminated by what they are saying. Their faces are transfigured by what they are saying. You have to understand Iranian to understand them. They are quoting Sufi poets and conversing using expressions borrowed from the poetry of Sufis. Like one says. "I wish I could see God." and the other says, "But God does not have a face." And another says, "The face of God is the form of all beings" "Yes but they cover the reality of God." "How can I do away with my face?", and they get quite excited about it.

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I was walking in the streets of Hardwar in India, where they were preparing for the great Kumbha Mela, which is a gathering of people that takes place every 12 years. Many, many people are going to India just looking for gurus, and most of them come back and say that they did not meet anyone particularly impressive. That is true; how could they? The great ones are hidden in the caves. You can't see them. But they all come down for the Kumbha Mela once every 12 years, and there they are. It's incredible. As I was walking down the street, I saw a man walking there just like the king of kings. You simply wouldn't believe what that being was like. He had an enormous curved staff like the staff of Moses in one hand and a beggar's bowl in the other, and he was dressed in rags; and the power of his eyes was incredible. He was followed by an army of about 50 rishis, men who have lived in caves for 30 or 40 years. I thought of the rest of us humans and our petty little lives, our tempests in our teacups, and our struggles with our little daily affairs. We have no idea of the greatness of a human being when he is really tackling the great values of life. The conduct of most of our lives is really a terrible waste of human initiative and human power. Did the Kumbha Mela offer this rare chance to view perfection in a human being? One had to have eyes to see and know how to get to the right place at the right time, while avoiding being crushed to death by the crowd, cordoned off, and whipped by the police. One had to avoid being waylaid by the more spectacular sights. One needed to spot the beings of spiritual stature in their hide-outs or after their bath, in a procession. It was more subtle than looking for gems amongst lots of stones. All that glitters is not gold. The atmosphere of beings is more significant than their appearance. Occasionally, the real thing: four eyes meeting, four hands clasped in greetings from afar - in mutual

acknowledgment of affinity - speaking? Of what use the is the triviality of, "Where do you come from?" The realized beings shun vain chatting and distrust verbal expression. I recognized in their bearing and glance what I was experiencing on my retreats.

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Yes, there were a few great ones, perhaps one could have counted them by the fingers on two hands, in that crowd of 5,000,000 people, contained on a four mile square area. The atmosphere was electric. Yet as we wandered at 1 a.m. on the banks of the Ganges, amidst untended rows of sleepers, somebody remarked, "In the West, you would never get a crowdlike this, so peacefully at ease with each other." In contrast, the atmosphere of many of the naked Sadhus was disruptive and reeked of impending violence. The contrast between the drug addicted Sadhus and the sublime rishis stood out so clearly as a confirmation of what drugs do to the psyche of humans, and conversely, what the effect of the clear light of realization, achieved at the cost of great discipline and renunciation, does to one's whole demeanor. In the East, the first is called the way of the left hand (the lesser way) and the second, the royal road. The latter is the way through which one discovers the divine inheritance latent in one's being. Pir-o-Murshid once said, "This is the tradition of the King of Kings." Those wandering on this path recognize each other.

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You know that a person can really become part of your being. You can begin to think or act like another person, or become so conscious of him that it is as if a part of you became that person. There is a kind of osmosis between people. That is the secret of love, and that is the meaning of love. But you can extend the personal loves that you may have to all beings. For instance, if someone smiles at you on an airplane, that person keeps on living with you for the rest of your life and becomes part of your being. The man I saw in Hardwar has changed my life and I only saw him for one minute. That is just how powerful one being can be in his effect upon another. You can extend the incorporate all beings more and more until you become cosmic. You incorporate all the qualities and idiosyncrasies represented by different beings and become very rich and all-comprehensive.

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I can tell you my own personal story of an encounter with a dervish. I was traveling in India in search of awakening when, having settled in for the night, I ordered tea and was told that someone would return right away with it, but I sat waiting as the hours passed. Finally, night arrived, and giving up hope of a hot cup of tea, I put my sleeping bag on the floor and went to sleep. Then, in the middle of the night, a raucous voice screeched, and there was a loud pounding on the door. "Good, good" I thought and went straight back to sleep. When my cup of tea finally arrived the next morning, I asked who had been shaking my door down, only to be told that a dervish had come to awaken me. The next night, when

the same thing happened, I ran to the door but the dervish had already fled into the darkness. Just imagine, I came all the way to India to be awakened, and this time missed my chance. The next day I traveled to the Dargah, or memorial shrine, of the founder of the Chishti Order, Hazrat Moinuddin Chishti, in the city of Ajmer. The enchantment of that tomb is incredible: it is a beautiful building with a marble floor. People are all around, playing music, sleeping, or praying. The whole atmosphere is otherworldly. I was sitting there bemoaning the fact that I had missed my encounter with the dervish. Suddenly, behind me, I heard a voice say, “You there,” in such terrifying manner that I didn’t have the courage to turn my head. Yet all of a sudden, I was awakened! That’s a dervish. He is trying to reveal the secret of what is called the secret treasure, a mystery of God that both desires to be known and yet is covered over by all the things that constantly preoccupy us and distract us from the real thing.

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Once, when I was walking down the streets of Hyderabad, there was a murshid walking in the opposite direction, coming towards me. As he was coming, I thought, “Isn’t that strange? He walks exactly like Murshid, and his glance and atmosphere are that of Murshid. Isn’t that extraordinary? We greeted one another, as spiritual men do. I said, “Allow me to present myself. I am Vilayat Inayat Khan.” He said, “Inayat Khan? Are you any relation to Inayat Khan?” I said, “Yes, I am his son.” He said, “But he was my murshid.” The manner of Murshid had worked in him all the time. So the best way to adopt the manner of God is to get into the consciousness of the murshid. Here, of course, I am talking about Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan, because he is our murshid. Sometimes he lives through me, when I am conscious of his manner, and in the same way, he lives through us all.

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How vividly I recall making a trip to a rishi who was in seclusion in a cave high up in the Himalayas. I was traveling with a group of people as it was a very dangerous jungle with lots of wild animals. They suddenly exclaimed, “There he is, up there!” When I looked up the hill in the direction they were pointing, all I could see was an enormous white light. Peering more closely, I dimly discerned the outline of a man in the midst of a beautiful white aura. Just being in his presence was so illuminating, so beautiful, and so inspiring. One of the members of the group asked the rishi something that, to me, was very mundane. Fascinated, I watched the rishi struggle to come down from his state of Divine ecstasy and enter into the mind of that person in order to answer his question.

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Sita Ramdas is the guru of General Uban Singh. He is about 89 and generally sits in Samadhi for two or three days; then he wakes up and says, “Is there some food?” and they

give him an apple (that is all he eats), and he takes the apple in hand and drops it and goes off into Samadhi for another three days. People are waiting for darshan, but there is no way of awakening him when he is sitting in Samadhi. When there was danger of a war with China, he was at the border between India and China . When there was danger of a war between India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), he was at the frontier. Now he is at the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He is always in the danger area, and he's always in Samadhi. He came especially to see us in Delhi. It is a long trip in India and he is 89. General Uban said to him, "If you happen to be passing through Delhi at that time when I have my friends come, it would be wonderful." He replied, "Well, it is in God's hands." All of a sudden a telegram came saying he was arriving, so I went to see him. We did the usual thing, bowing and giving garlands of flowers and so on. I don't know what happened to us, but we were just totally moved to tears. He couldn't stop hugging me. There is a wonderful photograph of the two of us like one being: his head was against mine and we were just totally lost in a state of bliss. His body was cold as ice, and I was giving him all my energy. He spoke words he has never said before. General Uban said, "I've never seen anything like this. I have presented him to so many people, he has even met the Dalai Lama, but I have never seen my guru like this. I wonder what has happened!" We were all in tears, absolutely overwhelmed by what was happening. He said, "We are the same being," words that are beyond the usual way of speaking, and that was exactly how it felt. I have met many gurus in my life, and I have never experienced anything like that closeness. That was unique. So that is a real guru. When you think about gurus, that is a real one: no ego there, and the power! He was just pure spirit; it wasn't human power, it was pure spirit, the power of God coming through him. It was incredible! Everyone was energized by that power. He was the exact description of those beings I speak about who are just pure spirit. Their bodies are just total ruins. He can't walk without help, but when he walks, he dances. You don't have to have a definition of spirituality; when you see him, you know what spirituality is when it can transform a being to that extent.

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The only way to help people is to help them see that in fact they can meet the stress. Of course, first of all the stress has to be there. I can think of a case in my own personal life; I was climbing in the mountains near Chamonix, very high, and the rocks were falling underneath my grip, becoming pulverized. They would get very brittle and break down while I was holding them, and collapse under my hands or feet. I was with somebody else, and we both realized that we would never be able to go back down the same way we came up. There was a wall of ice there, absolutely vertical, and the only way to come down as we didn't have any ropes was to kick a hole in the side of the wall and then place and then let go of the foot in the first hole and put a hand in that hole and kick another hole lower down. Now, no way in the world would I have ever believed I could have done that. It gives one a great sense of self-confidence when one realizes that one has capacities in one that one didn't believe in before. There are times of resourcefulness that only break through when the system is stressed beyond a certain point.

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I retrieved an imperial eagle from a cage in a dark garage in a little town in Germany. With sharp talons and searing beak, he attacked me as I entered the cage to place jesses on his legs. But I will never forget the gratitude in his gaze as I took him out of the cage into the sunlight after a sequestration of over a year. I had gained his confidence. At first Majesty (the name I gave him) was even more afraid of losing me than I was of losing him. In time he learned that I would wait for him as he took time in his flight. He was so overcome at the sight of the mountains at Chandolin, Switzerland, that he let himself be lifted by the breeze, soaring higher and higher above the clouds until the tiny speck had disappeared into the void. "I shall never see him again", I thought; this time he has bid me adieu for good. What was my surprise when all of a sudden the speck reappeared and grew larger till fanning an incredible turbulence of air right above my head with a six-foot wingspan; in his mighty dive he knocked me over. This was his way of manifesting joy of being home after his little escapade. Our friendship was sealed.

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On Christmas, I attended the Divine Liturgy at the Russian Orthodox church in Paris. The atmosphere that emanated from these people praying with their whole souls (many were bowing their heads on the ground), the whole attunement was so wonderful. I thought that this was the most beautiful thing in the world. Perhaps the people were simple-minded; it may be that if one talked to them one would find that their ideas were very backward. But that does not matter. What they were experiencing and radiating was one of the most beautiful things in the whole world, one of the things that people need most.

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During the 1920's, there were various Eastern teachers of different movements who were inspiring large numbers of people. One day, we were all invited to the Monastery of the Sacred Heart in Ohio. At one point in this gathering, all the teachers came together to celebrate their worship together. It was incredible all these spiritual leaders who normally never would have met before, and who sometimes criticized each other's teachings, joined in what I would call a cosmic celebration. It was my life's dream; something that I had always longed for. Something was coming through at that moment in time; it was as if for one brief moment, we had opened the doors between the physical world and the celestial spheres. What came through in our acts of glorification was a reminiscence of the celestial spheres and of that original state of innocence that we still find in the child within.

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When lecturing, or rather giving instructions in meditation, I think of myself as a very precarious channel. My ability to respond to all this expectancy requires a balance between ‘listening in’ and giving expression to the sudden flash of insight; enthusiasm for meaningfulness grips a hold of me, sometimes simply by coming across a new way of looking at things, or picking up the emotion in the air, or receiving guidance in meditation. It is clear to me that the optimal results of the operation require that the lines of communication between the soul, heart, mind, and brain should be in a symbiotic condition. Inevitably, during these brief visits and encounters with people, I am involved in practically continual conversations and exchanges with people, and evenings protract right into the night since I receive candidates, sometimes giving initiations after the public meeting, which often turns out to be a long evening seminar. It is my experience now that overloading in conversations can tax the efficiency of my brain to serve my mind optimally, having adverse effects on my ability to give full justice to the tour de force that is expected of me in the evening public appearance. When I begin to search for words the sentences are less cohesive and the sequence of ideas less well-constructed. It is an indication of overtaxation of the physical vehicle of thought and I notice the immediate effect in the response of the hearers. At these moments, disregarding the most elementary rules of courtesy or just concern for the vulnerability of a speaker, some people simply get up and leave. There is all the difference between the times when I am oozing with energy and clarity, when everyone is one with me, and those occasional times when I find it difficult to get through. So one may well appreciate what it means to me to have that indispensable nap in the afternoon. I hope people will bear with me if I curb my conversations with them and relent giving interviews.

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I can tell you about an experience that I once had that describes the beauty and the outlook of the higher self. During a retreat that I was leading, an elderly lady went into a comatose state. She was dying and in a delirium. As I knelt down next to her, I held her hand in mine; even though she was in a coma she felt my presence. Her eyes fluttered open, and, in that moment, all her wrinkles disappeared. Before my eyes she became a young girl, radiant, full of light, and totally transfigured. My perception of her wasn’t fantasy, but her true countenance transpiring through her physical face. It is our ignorance of this dimension of ourselves that causes our mishandling of situations, resulting in suffering.

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We must face the problem of what we mean by God. Our present thinking is that the whole universe is like the body of one being. This is not just a concept, but something that can be experienced. I remember experiencing it very clearly last year when I was on retreat. I was doing Hindu and Buddhist practices, looking at my body and thinking, “It’s just the earth,” and so on. Then all of a sudden I thought, “But just imagine, it’s the body of God,

it's the body of this one being. I am a part of this one being." Then, going further into it, I realized that I could think of my body as a wave that emerges out of the ocean, and I know that there is no frontier between the wave and the ocean. Actually, it is the whole sea that emerges, because if one wave emerges or is heaved up, the whole rest of the ocean has to adjust itself to that one wave.

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Once while on retreat in the Alps, I had a breakthrough experience, one that was dramatically reflected in the weather and surrounding landscape. After a stormy night in the mountains, precariously sheltered beneath the roof of a shepherd's shed, I observed the dark clouds and heard the thunderclaps gradually receding into the distance, swept away by a raging wind. As if in sympathetic resonance, my consciousness began to melt away, scattering into an infinite, edgeless Universe. Vanishing along with the storm were my concepts about the world, the Cosmos, my personal circumstances, unresolved problems, values, appropriate or inappropriate actions, even my teachings about the Divine Qualities, the meaningfulness of life, egos, bodiness, the psyche. Suddenly all these thoughts seemed so futile, worthless, and misleading! Rather than flounder in a dark night of negativity brought on by the collapse of these mental structures, however, I clung to the very meaningfulness that had just shattered my commonplace thinking. It was the consummate quantum leap; it brought vividly alive the last words spoken by my father, Hazrat Inayat Khan, on his deathbed: "When the unreality of life strikes my heart, its reality is revealed to me." All my life, I thought to myself, I have prided myself on what I thought were valid theories about the Universe unmasking the hoax of superstitions, dogmas, and conditioned responses to life. But instead of dismissing all these constructs, I realized that they had acted as steppingstones that led me to this ultimate breakthrough. Even though I now had no more use for them, they remained there for my use, like a ladder propped against a wall, while I became immersed in the sublime, wordless state of unity beyond life's existence unveiled into eternity.

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I was carrying out a retreat in my cave in the Alps, which is an incredibly wonderful cave. I suppose you feel the whole tradition of India is very strong in me; the rishi in the cave is like the whole path, just very important to me. Of course, I am giving out so much when I am traveling, so every now and again I need to retire, and I have this cave. It has a view over Mont Blanc and the whole Mer de Glace, the most beautiful scenery in the world. It has been built up a little bit, but it's a natural cave, more like a grotto. When the camp wasn't allowed to stay in Chamonix any longer, it broke my heart because that cave meant so much to me. I always wanted to go back to that cave, but I was so busy that I could never go back. I just had a few days in Europe; for some reason there was a vacancy in the program, and so I went to the cave. It was in December, the beginning of the snow, and it was soft snow. There was about three feet of snow, but it had been a little hardened by the

wind, and so it was all right to walk on. About a half an hour walk from the cave there is a little hut with a cow shed, and there were two mureeds who accompanied me; they stayed in the cow shed. They were to come and meet me the next day, see how things were; but of course, I wanted to be alone for my retreat. Well it started snowing and snowing and snowing and snowing and in no time, of course, the doors to the cave were jammed, so there was no way of getting out, but there was a little window right at the top, a skylight or something, big enough to get through. The snow got so high and was so soft, it was like walking in mud. One would sink right down to one's shoulders, so there was no way of getting out. The people who were supposed to come to rescue me, couldn't come to rescue me. So there I was in the cave. The snow in certain parts had built up higher than the ceiling. One has to climb quite a bit up a ladder to get to the top where there's that little opening. It was building up at a very fast rate, so it would have deprived me of air altogether. Of course, then I would have suffocated in the cave. Fortunately, they had brought up a lot of firewood, so I was able to keep a fire going. But, I had to keep on, every half hour, clearing the snow in front of that little opening with a board. It hardened, and it was always building up, so I could clear as much as I could, but it was building up. I was fighting against time, and I had to keep doing this every half hour. That meant two nights without sleep. Every half hour throughout the day and night getting up and down to do it, to clear it. Now, one day and night without sleep is pretty bad, but two nights without sleep gets worse. I knew that if I allowed myself to sleep, I would be suffocated in the cave, so I had to keep on staying awake. The trouble was that I ran out of matches and the wood was very damp, so if the fire went out there was no way of lighting it again. It was dark in the night, and I run out of candles, too, I had to grovel in the dark for wood. But it was alright; I mean it was quite an experience. But that was nothing in comparison with what happened then. It was one of the worst things that has ever happened in my life. The second day, the snow was blowing against one's eyes, so one couldn't see very well, but there was just a moment of clearness, and I could see the people down at the hut. It's about 20-minute walk normally; in the snow, when I went up there it just took half an hour. You can hardly hear a voice at all. But I called and said, "Are you coming to fetch me?" One of them had skis, which I didn't have. But the answer was, "No!" Both of them said, "No," so that I would hear. I understood that meant that it was too dangerous for them to come to rescue me. At that moment, I heard a woman scream in the snow, calling, "Can you help me?" Now this was further still than the voices of the people in the hut, from a very far distance. Even now I wonder whether it was hallucination, or what it was, but there was clearly a woman calling for help. So, I asked them, "Can you help?" because they had skis, and what is more, one of them is a ski champion. He had told me that he couldn't come to my rescue, he knew that I was alright in the cave. I asked them, "Can you help her?" and they said, "No!" There were helicopters flying about, but there was a haze, and there was no way for the helicopters to see what was going on. Then I called out to the woman, I don't know whether she heard me, because the voice was so distant and I said, "Well, I'll try!" I made one step in the snow, and there I fell right up to my neck. I knew that, but I just wanted to prove it to myself. There I was stuck in the snow. There was no way to get out; you see, if you push with your hands on the snow, your hands sink in the snow. There was one moment that I

thought, “Well, this is it! It’s got to happen someday, and anyway, it’s in a good cause; I was trying to save this woman. It was stupid of me not to have stayed in my cave, but how could I stay in my cave when there was this woman calling for help? Then I thought of a story that I sometimes tell of the three frogs that were drowning in milk. One of them started paddling and gave up, and the second kept on paddling and gave up, too. But the third one kept on paddling until the milk turned into butter and then he climbed out. So, I started beating the snow, and I managed to get some kind of handhold, but it was quite deep. I got a little leverage, but the trouble was that my snowshoes were jammed in the snow. I had to start all over again, and clear all the snow around me, to clear the shoes so that I was able to crawl a little ways, then I had to start again packing the snow, so it was quite some time, and I was quite frozen by that little expedition. I then knew that I couldn’t save that woman. I called out (I don’t know whether she heard because the distance was so great), ”I have tried, but I can’t; I hope you will be able to get out.” But I knew that there was no chance for her. That night I kept in contact with her over the air. There was a moment when I knew that she was frozen to death. I’ll never forget that, the anguish of not being able to help someone who is desperate. When I came back into the cave soaking wet, and the fire had nearly gone out, I was thinking about this woman being frozen. Of course, it happens a lot; but here was someone who was within reach and yet not within reach. The wood was practically out, and there was hardly any fire anymore. I was soaking wet, and I got to the wood, but there were no matches and there was no light. The snow was building up in that entrance. All of a sudden the whole cave was full of light; it was a vision of an archangel. Then I made a promise, which was to launch the Rescue Operation.

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I remember, it was at Easter, we had organized a retreat and I had been leading a meditation on light, and when I opened my eyes and looked at people I thought, “They don’t seem to be any more luminous than before; I have failed.” I thought: “What am I doing!?! If it doesn’t have a real effect on people, what is the point of meditating on light and thinking of light and talking about light if it doesn’t really mean something?” I must say, it was one of those moments in my life when I went through a kind of crisis, like Gandhi when he said, “I have failed.” That evening, we were going to a Catholic church for midnight mass and everybody said, “Couldn’t we just celebrate mass together?” I said, “I don’t know how to celebrate mass, and anyway, I would not be authorized to do it, but still we did it. At the end we were dancing with candles around the altar, and there was light in everybody’s eyes and I thought: “Now, look at it!”

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I remember, of course, the Colorado camp in 1969. That was the first camp I organized in the United States and it was the most spaced-out camp you can imagine. You couldn’t pass anyone without hugging them and it took a terribly long time to get where you wanted to go. I remember one sentence we kept thinking. It was a kind of *leitmotif*:

“One more cup Beloved, that I may entirely lose myself.” You have got to lose yourself somehow, so you might just as well lose yourself in joy.

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My teachings can be considered as variations on a theme, and the theme is Murshid. It has taken me all these years to appreciate the importance of the Message in all its vastness, and particularly to see its relevance for our time. When I was younger, the Message was just words to me.

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During the last years, I have concentrated on clarity, in order to make the teaching more readily assimilated by a public conditioned by current established norms of thinking. The days of explanation and elucidation are over. What had to be achieved in that area has been achieved, and the gist of it all will someday appear in book form. But we move ahead.

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It has been my constant endeavor never in the slightest to enclose people in boxes, in systems, to indoctrinate or influence people with my views. Since people in our decade had trouble reconciling spiritual experience with current pseudoscientific background or with genuine scientific background that they are immersed in through magazines and books and conversations, I felt it was useful to sort things out and highlight what was reconcilable and where we were dealing with totally different areas of experience. In the same way, a few years previously, I was endeavoring to show how the methods of meditation of different religious backgrounds gel, interface, tally, and where they contrast or at least are complementary instead of contradictory.

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At present, I feel a need for a deepening of spiritual experience during or even irrespective of meditation. Moreover, people have become more and more realistic and aware of personal problems and ask themselves where does spirituality or more generally meditation come in, if at all, to meet urgent, painful, and impelling human problems and basic human needs. I am picking up on these soul-searchings floating in the atmosphere and feel called upon to meet the challenge, or at least explore the premises to the best of my intuition and experience.

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Some of us just returned from a really exhilarating and fascinating meeting of religious leaders culminating on the top of Mount Sinai - a gesture of good will in a tough,

violent world! For the least, it may be said that we had a marvelous time sharing in the spectacle of the most diverse types of people and cultures and attires, discovering the joy of communicating together with an open heart. For the Middle-Easterners, the American New Age openheartedness and religious tolerance, and optimism, must have hit home as something totally surprising and very reassuring, and served as the glue that bonded us. Therefore, we feel grateful to Maureen Kushman and Joshua and many others for their beautiful initiative in calling this meeting. It was a striking expression of the spirit of the Message of unity to which we are dedicated. We sang Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Sufi songs at the top of the Mount where presumably Moses discovered the famous tablets. A Native American lit medicinal herbs at dawn. What a privilege to be ushered into the ‘holy of holies’ at the St. Catherine’s monastery, dating as early as the year 50 A.D., a tribute to the fervor of the Hesychasts, the early monks of the desert whose caves are still to be seen where water flows generously betwixt the barren desert land.

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The High mass of Bach played such a great part in my thinking. The most wonderful representation of it that I’ve ever attended was in the Church of Naarden in Holland, which specialized in producing the great works of Bach at Easter time. It’s one of the oldest churches in Holland and is known for its music festivals. There was a young man, a genius, who conducted. I sat right behind the orchestra, and so I was able to see the conductor’s face. He lived it, he was it, and inspired everyone by going through the whole experience of the High Mass. As I had gone so deeply into that experience during those months when I was listening to it every evening, you can imagine what it was to me. This conductor was going through the experience that Bach himself had gone through, the experience of the Passion of Christ and the Resurrection. The great moment is when there is that wailing of the Crucifixion, going into the depths of human suffering. Then, all of a sudden it breaks with tremendous freedom. It’s fantastic!

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There is a divine quality which is very meaningful, *Ya Mutakabbir*, which means the divine majesty. This is something that will help you hold your head high. I saw a falcon die once, and it held its head high until the very last moment, and then just collapsed; it would never give in to its feeling of weakness. It was a beautiful example. I have seen my father very ill, but always he kept that great dignity and majesty under all circumstances. He used to say never allow yourself to be humiliated. I think of the black woman in the South who was being lynched, and she said, “You can do what you like with my body, but you cannot touch my soul.”

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In Katmandu, I had the occasion to converse with Rinpoches, heads of their monasteries. I was impressed with their clarity, high degree of evolution, humor and dignity. Of course the topic was a parallel between Buddhism, and let us say, classical Sufism. I used to consider Buddhism and Sufism as complementary, rather than contradictory. However, I must say, the more we spoke, the more the differences seemed to fizzle out. We were excited to discover how much we had in common and how well we understood each other. It became clear that by awakening they do mean what Murshid calls the awakening in life, or at least the Ariadnian thread is maintained, connecting this focus with the ‘beyond the beyond.’ The Dalai Lama led masterly morning sessions, touching into the soul of the thousands listening with rapt attention, every now and again interspersed with mantras, smiling, even laughing all the while. From my view, he was so obviously playing the right game, giving people what they need, fulfilling his role. He is the magnet holding them together as a nation in exile. But behind that magnificent display, there is some invaluable, esoteric knowledge. We visited him once more in private audience. What he said gave just that extra boost to my meditation under the tree opposite the Bodhi tree. He said, “Sunyata (the void) does not only apply to the objective world, but also to the subject. It really means realizing oneself as the essence of all things.” Those were precisely Murshid’s words - and it works!

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It has become clear to me that because I have been emphasizing the idyllic dimension of people and the environment while underplaying the shadow, mureeds have been lulled into a grand image of themselves and of myself which matches neither the reality of their being nor of mine and brooks contradictions in how they handle situations.

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(Practice from a Leaders meeting in January 2004 capturing some of Pir Vilayat’s culminating thoughts.) The next practice is identifying yourself with your aura instead of identifying yourself with your body. Instead of “My body emanates an aura”, think: “I am a being of light, and my body is a support system.” Now, think as you inhale that your aura is a convergence of the light of the stars. As you exhale you realize, of course, that your aura is a vortex, so it does not have a boundary, and therefore it extends in the light of the stars. Somehow the light of the stars has been humanized as the light of your aura and consequently it’s transformed by your aura, by what you did to the light of the stars, by your being. In other words, the signature tune of your being is right among the stars. Fantastic thought!

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The meditation of the future is getting into the consciousness of the stars and, in fact, of the galaxies... Our thinking is the way that we customize the thinking of the universe. So our conquest, our exploration of outer space, of Mars and so on, is opening a fantastic perspective of our consciousness. That was why Newton said: "I think as God thinks." In fact, we could not understand how the universe is planned if our thinking was not of the same nature as the thinking of the universe. I don't know if you can follow me, but this will expand your consciousness beyond thinking of it as a personal consciousness. It is the way that the consciousness of the universe is customized, focalized, as your consciousness.