

see the screen and enjoy its images. The vignette summarized nicely one outcome of my meeting with Muktananda and my reading of his book. The scene provided me with a brief yet profound glimpse of the state of one who is calmly, firmly, and delightedly in contact with the absolute, and this glimpse constituted a promise that I too could gain that marvelous perspective.

Muktananda's autobiographical account of what he experienced in meditation could create for any or all of us a vantage point similar to mine in the "movie theater" vision. We witness his delight, his serenity, and his capacity to see what we have not yet seen. Isn't this a thoroughly familiar situation? Throughout our lives we have to choose between being discouraged or encouraged by the fact that others apparently can see or know what we cannot. The shaft of light that danced with the shifting images it was carrying to the screen represented, for me, the illuminating Consciousness, the light of the Self that creates all the various forms of thought and awareness. The fact that I had now contacted the figure of a serene teacher with an unobstructed view of this play of forms seemed to bring new goals and new means to my life. It is as if the Blue Pearl narrative, to which I turn now, were Muktananda's answer to my questions, "What do you see? What does it all mean?"

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IMAGES OF POWER & PURIFICATION

This exploration in transpersonal psychology is based upon Swami Muktananda's autobiographical account of his evolving experience with the Blue Pearl. In this and the two following chapters I present thematically coherent sections of his narrative.

Three interconnected tasks emerge as we begin to explore the Blue Pearl narrative. They reflect transpersonal psychology's distinctive methods and goals. The first task is to understand the text and its author as if our primary assignment were to learn *from* them and not merely to learn *about* them. With this goal in mind, we can explore Muktananda's cultural context, his purpose in writing this account, and, above all, his experiences and teachings. We stand a far better chance of grasping the meaning of his experiences if we can appreciate how deeply rooted they are in a complex spiritual tradition.

The second task turns us back to ourselves. We need to be aware of how the text connects with our lives. We need to let the narrative stir the memories of parallel experiences. It is important to work not only to clarify the uniqueness of Muktananda's context and symbol system but to build bridges between his account and the understandings we have already developed through our unique life histories. The dual tasks of encountering both the text and ourselves need to proceed in tandem.

The third task involves working with the abstractions of transpersonal psychology, and it requires us to link Muktananda's account with not only our private experience but with the central concepts of the great spiritual traditions of the world. The commonly reported occurrences and understandings are a source of insight as we explore the unfamiliar territory of Muktananda's narrative. And, equally, the more we understand the text and ourselves, the more we can contribute to the development of a useful and complete vision of reality. Analysis of text is thus an invitation to understand another human being whose account is itself a teaching. It is an invitation to self-exploration and discovery. And it is the mode by which transpersonal psychology offers and receives insight into human transformation. Let us begin with the first of these tasks.

Muktananda's Life and Culture

Swami Muktananda was born in the south of India, in Mangalore to be exact, in 1908. He was thirty-nine at the time he received initiation from his guru, Bhagavan Nityananda. The meditation experiences he recounts in *Play of Consciousness* took place over the nine years following his initiation. He wrote the book in three weeks' time at the age of sixty-one. He died, or, as the Indians would put it, "left his body," in 1982 at seventy-four.

Muktananda was fifteen when he met the immensely powerful and well-known saint, Nityananda, who wandered freely throughout India before eventually settling near Bombay, in Ganeshpuri. The meeting, Muktananda says, so affected him that he resolved to pursue the spiritual path, and within a year he had left home to become a *sādhu*, a seeker. He wandered, homeless with few possessions, over much of India for the next twenty-five years. During his early twenties he took the vows of the *sannyāsin* and became a swami, or monk, in the Saraswati order. Over the years he became proficient in Indian medicine, cooking, and horticulture and well versed in both the scriptures and the writings of the Indian poet-saints.

By his late thirties, Muktananda was considered by many to be their teacher or guru. He considered himself, however, to be "incomplete," still not fully in possession of the great, final attainments of the spiritual quest. At the urging of one of his long-time spiritual guides, he went to Ganeshpuri and was soon united

with Nityananda in the bond of guru and disciple. He received initiation by *shaktipāt*, meaning literally "the descent of grace," and began to experience the longed-for fruits of his seeking. At his guru's instruction, he returned to an essentially solitary life of meditation and other spiritual practices for the next nine years. Covering this nine-year period, *Play of Consciousness* is a story of what in the Indian tradition would be called a completed *sāadhanā*, or journey, to final realization. This attainment was joyfully proclaimed by Nityananda in 1956. But the journey was by no means a smooth and easy one.

Play of Consciousness serves as a teacher's message to spiritual seekers. It is clear that Muktananda was unprepared for some of his crucial experiences during the nine-year period of intense *sāadhanā*. Only through the opportune guidance of several teacher-friends and his gradual discovery of key spiritual texts was he able to accept and understand his experiences. Hence, one function of his autobiography is to reassure and encourage those who are blocked, as he himself had been, by fear, confusion, and doubt.

Finally, it is important to know that, in the context of his own culture, Swami Muktananda was a traditional teacher. He was not preoccupied with innovating or with revising existing teachings. He was perfectly content to continue the long chain of guru-disciple relationships. To most of us, however, his teachings are a combination of unfamiliar elements. Here, very briefly enumerated, are a few of these elements as they emerge in the autobiography:

1. There is the central paradox of a Supreme Reality that is formless, unknowable, and transcendent (sometimes called the Shiva aspect) and that *simultaneously* manifests in and as the world of form, sporting as conscious energy (sometimes called the Shakti aspect).
2. Direct experience of that Supreme Reality, in this lifetime, in this body, is of crucial importance, as is the pursuit of the self-evident truths that manifest uniquely and appropriately in each seeker, leading ultimately to the ineffable experience called final realization of the Self.

Thus, Muktananda's tradition is not dominated by any religious dogma or ritual. In fact, like other teachers such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Sai Baba of Shirdi, Muktananda embraces many Islamic, especially Sufi, and non-Vedic Indian writings.

3. His tradition is not one that encourages asceticism, a turning away from the world, or the deliberate practice of "supernatural" powers. These practices tend to block one's devotion and one's appreciation of and reliance on grace. Muktananda emphasizes a life-affirming, joyful engagement in a radical process of transformation that encompasses rather than shuns every aspect of life.

4. The Upanishads and Kashmir Shaivite texts of 900–1300 A.D., which Muktananda often cites, locate the goal and experiential process of *sādhanā* in the context of a nondualistic conception of reality. Kashmir Shaivism, though not very different from Shankarāchārya's Advaita Vedānta, is more closely attuned to the imagery and evidence of Muktananda's experience. The heart of the nondualistic schools of Indian philosophy is found in the assertion that no final, irresolvable difference exists between God and the individual human being, between God's transcendent and immanent aspects, or between our daily life experiences and that of heaven on earth.

5. The process of transforming any verbal formulas into real understanding requires intervention. This intervention occurs so freely and unconditionally that it is experienced by the seeker as grace. The equation has no terms referring to the seeker's insistence or cleverness, although self-effort is sometimes viewed as important. The source of this grace is sometimes called the Lord or the Goddess and sometimes the guru, the human agent who can initiate, guide, and confirm the completion of this difficult process. One key element of the nondualistic approach is that no ultimate distinction is made between God, the guru, and the Self of the seeker who has undertaken this transformative journey.

The Blue Pearl Narrative

In selecting the passages that follow, I adopted broad criteria for determining relevance, including references not only to the Blue Pearl but to related visionary phenomena, the blue light of consciousness and the blue star. I included, as well, experiences that clarify the context and precursors of the Blue Pearl vision. These excerpts would certainly make even more sense in the light of the entire autobiography. My intention, however, is merely to show the development

of one central image—the Blue Pearl—in the climactic stages of one man's spiritual evolution. With that purpose in mind, let us explore the narrative, beginning with the account of the Blue Pearl's first appearance in the author's meditative experiences.

My eyeballs had been revolving, and now the pupils were centered and had become as one. The eyeballs rolled up and down. Then, while this was happening, a tiny, extremely brilliant dot shot out of my eyes with the speed of lightning and then went back in again. This is a secret, mysterious, and marvelous process. In an instant the tiny blue dot illuminated everything in every direction. If I were sitting facing east, the whole of the east would be lit up. If I were facing south, the whole of the south would be lit up.

Siddha students, how can I tell you about the greatness and glory of that Blue Pearl! It was animated, and faster than a flash of lightning. When I saw it, I was filled with many emotions. Would Rama or Krishna or my especially adored Parashiva come with it? Who was I to meet after Airavata? I was greedy for visions, but still my mind was happy and full of joy and contentment. My days passed differently from before, for my heart was deeply satisfied with the vision of the Blue Pearl, and it told me that I had been blessed with a gift from the Goddess Kundalini. I began to honor everyone in my heart.

When my eyes stopped rolling, they would stay turned upward. I would keep looking upward, and if I looked down it would hurt. Sometimes my eyes stayed open without blinking. I started to feel a pain between the eyebrows, which was so strong that I could not sleep at night. Then a light came in meditation, like a candle flame without a wick, and stood motionless in the *ajna chakra*, the two-petaled lotus between the eyebrows. It was extremely brilliant and beautiful. As I gazed at it, quite forgetful of myself, my vision became blurred. Next to that light is the path that the awakened Kundalini takes on Her way to the *sahasrara*. This is the pathway of the Siddhas, which does not open without the full grace of a Guru. No matter how great your devotion or your *tapasya*,

no matter how much you meditate or how many *kriyas* you experience, this path is very difficult to open without the Guru's grace. There is only one way: *gurukripā hi kevalam gurorājnā hi sādhanam*—"The Guru's grace is the only way, the Guru's command is the only method."

This *chakra* was also pierced, and the *pranashakti* began to climb higher. I saw the wickless flame constantly before me and was constantly filled with bliss. The place of the flame is the same place where devout Indian women put *kumkum* every day as a symbol of their fidelity in marriage. They put *kumkum* there in the name of their husbands or just because it is customary, but that place is actually the seat of the Guru, and it is there that the presiding deity of the Guru's seat lives, in the form of the two seed syllables "*ham*" and "*ksham*." We owe our existence to it. The flame is one form of the supreme Self. Times have changed now, and some women have forgotten this duty. Everything is becoming the opposite of what it once was.

I kept seeing this divine flame, and as I contemplated it, other forms would appear within it, each form within the previous one: first the red aura, then the white flame, then the black light, and finally the Blue Pearl. As I passed through all these different stages, moving ahead, my joy and ecstasy kept increasing.

I was beginning to experience a new kind of bliss. I had frequent visions, which were absolutely authentic. When I saw the Blue Pearl, the condition of my body and mind, and my way of understanding, began to change. I felt more and more delight in myself, and was filled with pure and noble feelings. I started to tire of all forms of external associations and became addicted only to meditation. I always asked myself, "What shall I see today?" This was the only thing I waited for, the only thing I took interest in, the only thing I enjoyed, and it became my daily action and my daily meditation. [Pp. 127-129]

I did not meditate out of fear, but with enthusiasm and faith and love. I did not meditate to please anyone or to get any benefits from anyone or to satisfy a desire, sensual or otherwise. I did not meditate to rid myself of any illness,

physical or mental, nor to gain fame through the miraculous and supernatural powers I might acquire. No one forced me to meditate. I did not meditate because religion says that it is good to meditate. I meditated solely for the love of God, because I was irresistibly drawn toward the Goddess Chiti Shakti, and to explore my own true nature.

As soon as I sat, I passed into meditation. The presiding deity of each sense organ would come and stand before me. I would see a very special kind of light made up of many colors flashing through the 72,000 *nadis* like lightning. Then would come the red, white, and black lights, and, for a second, the Blue Light. These lights appeared one within the other, the smaller within the larger, the one being the subtle cause and also the support of the other. [P. 130]

Through his account of these vivid, meditative experiences Muktananda introduces what he later called "the main topic" of his autobiography, the vision of the Blue Pearl.¹ How can I, trained most of my life in psychology's way of explaining (away) such experiences, begin to contact the meaning of the Blue Pearl experiences?

Images of the Sacred

One place to start is with the polarity that underlies this and all such visionary experiences: the polarity between the ordinary and the sacred. Against the backdrop of ordinary thoughts and everyday life, there emerges a series of internal, visual, highly charged representations of the non-ordinary. This breakthrough of the divine, or breakthrough into the divine, is what strikes me first about the event. It is the moment of theophany, revelation, discontinuity. For Muktananda the occasion was set within the formal practice of meditation, but we all have access to these moments of breakthrough, whether waking or asleep, at home or by the sea.

We go along, leading our lives, and suddenly the ordinary world becomes charged, numinous, startlingly beautiful, compelling, or soft. Some previously unacknowledged truth or splendor emerges and becomes something that we know—and know that we know.

But what do we mean by a sacred realm? Is the ordinary, profane world like Dorothy's Kansas and the sacred world like the

Kingdom of Oz? Is it out there, somewhere else, wholly other? Is a sudden encounter with the sacred like discovering a waterfall in the middle of unexplored territory? Is the transformation process then a matter of learning how to get there and back? Is the sacred an independent plane of existence that awaits us mortals? Or is the sacred always here, unacknowledged, in our latent understandings? If so, then the notion of "discovering" the sacred is not a very accurate rendering of the process; rather, our lives might better be seen as efforts to reduce the tendency of one layer of consciousness (the ordinary or profane) to obliterate all other layers. Is the sacred active, purposeful, striving to be represented in our awareness? If so, then our manifest awareness might reflect a constantly shifting mixture of images that derive from the many layers of consciousness. And if that is so, then perhaps we can deliberately maximize those emergent images that resonate with and convey the sacred already within us. The Blue Pearl narrative attests to the effectiveness of two age-old ways of producing exactly this maximization.

It suggests that, if we really wanted to experience more fully the latent or sacred world view, then we could choose, as Muktananda did, to come into as close contact as possible with a human being whose awareness is dominated by the sense of the sacred. In traditional terms, we could seek the company of a saint; we could find our teacher. The narrative also suggests that once the process of transformation was under way we could also practice meditation, as Muktananda did. The simple act of turning away from the world of the senses, away from ordinary memories and worries, and turning toward our deeper layers invites, as Muktananda might put it, the Self to shine forth.

As Muktananda carries out the command of his guru to go off by himself and meditate, what happens? The process of sensing the sacred in more and more of his experience accelerates. It slows in the face of fears and obstacles, but these are surmounted and the process moves ahead. What does this mean to us? How can we use Muktananda's experience to facilitate that very process in ourselves?

When all the details of the narrative have been cleared away, I am left with several major implications of his experience for my understanding of our common reality as human beings. We are constantly being spoken to by our own deepest, sacred Self. The

language of the Self is not always one of words, but sometimes it is. Sometimes it speaks in the familiar mythic, numinous symbolism of a cultural tradition; sometimes its symbols are virtually universal in their power to affect us. The Self is shining forth and, in its range of expression and communication within our conscious awareness, it is bedazzling. We receive intimations of the sacred realm of our own being whenever we are closely attuned to our inner screen, as in dreaming, meditation, and contemplation, or to the outer screen, as in experiencing nature, entering a cathedral, approaching a great being, or seeing someone we love.

The images and symbols of the sacred we find in Muktananda's wide-ranging meditative experiences leap beyond the bounds of a particular culture. Of these, four recurrent and, I suspect, universal images remind me of my own inner symbol system and its efforts to convey the latent understanding of the Self. Each of these images of the sacred is conveyed by the Blue Pearl.

The first image is of the Center. We drift through life, and the ordinary world we inhabit is the world of, at the very least, the "ten thousand things." Each fragmented, clamorous detail bobs up and down in a sea of other details, events, and qualities. Sometimes, however, this chaos yields, and a structure emerges. More fundamental categories replace our arbitrary array of labels. We sense that more powerful causes are operating behind the seemingly random nature of events. From our frantic role-playing selves, often redefined by each new situational demand, more and more comprehensive identities begin to evolve. The end of this wonderful process is the experience of "the still point of the turning world," the *bindu*, the Blue Pearl.² As we approach the Center, everything becomes more subtle, more powerful, more the pure expression of the one inner Self. The Blue Pearl is both expression of the Self and proof of its attainment. Muktananda generates the message from one layer of his being as symbol and receives it at another layer as grace, as revelation. The Blue Pearl, standing at the Center, is one primary and complete symbolic expression of the Self.

The second image of the sacred is completely consonant with the first, but its impact on us may differ. The sacred Essence, uniformly present in and as everything, is but another way that we represent to our conscious awareness our latent understanding of the

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Self. We are lifted from the relative world and propelled by this image into the world of the absolute, the Ground of all, the world of final equality, where "everything is . . . x." What words or phrases do we use for x? Truth, God's creation, alive, love itself, energy, consciousness, filled with light, beautiful, good, real, the one Self, and on and on. The blue light of Consciousness is in everything, manifesting as everything. So, too, in the countless experiences of cosmic consciousness, an image of the sacred appears as the One in everything, bursting forth. A similar representation of our latent understanding is also effected in such formulations as the seamless (but definitely not empty) Void.

The third image of the sacred is the unbounded and undifferentiated Whole. The Blue Pearl emerges as not a thing, but as *everything*. The Center and the seamless Whole, which is infused with the one Essence, are not divergent images but one complex expression of the nature of the Self. The paradox of the sacred as both Center and Whole recurs regularly in many cultures, East and West.

The fourth image of the sacred conveys the dynamic, purposive aspect of the Self. One way to represent the intentionality of the sacred is to imagine a recognizably human figure as the embodiment of the Self. From our depths comes the powerful, evocative image of the Sacred Person: the Goddess, the Lord, the Redeemer, or the Guru. This image captures the primacy and the benevolent purpose of the Sacred Person. In the relationship that expresses our response, we feel we are the child, the creature. We feel gratitude and love for the grace we have received. The Blue Pearl narrative is a hymn of praise to the One that manifested through Muktananda's transforming experiences. Muktananda, in an early passage of praise and worship of the Goddess, Mother Kundalinī, calls the Blue Pearl Her "vehicle" and attributes the vision of it to Her intentional manifestation, as blessing and guidance.³ However, the Person and the Self are not two separate entities. As Muktananda learned, it is our own Self that is being revealed whether we sense that Person in meditation, in the sacred grove, or at the feet of the guru. Our experience is being caused, as it were, not by some separate external force but by the inner latent truth that takes the form of our apperceived reality.

Visions Leading up to the Blue Pearl

To expand our exploration of the meaning of the Blue Pearl vision, we can also look at the sequence of events preceding it. Muktananda states that the Blue Pearl emerged after a prolonged period of meditation, during which a number of significant developments took place. The blue light that eventually gave way to the Blue Pearl was preceded by meditations in which a red aura predominated, then by visions of a thumb-sized white flame, and then by a small black light the size of a finger-tip. Each light, smaller than its predecessor, would be accompanied by a sense of deepened meditation and intensification of involuntary physical movements, called *kriyās*. Here, Muktananda describes an important aspect of the period just prior to the Blue Pearl's emergence:

Next, the pupils of both my eyes became centered together. I began to see one thing with two eyes. In the scriptures this is called *bindu bheda*. After this had happened, a blue light arose in my eyes. This is the necessary preliminary to the *shambhavi mudra*. When the aspirant experiences the *neelodaya*, the dawning of the blue light, it signifies the dawning of his supreme good fortune. When the process starts, some aspirants fear that they may lose their eyesight. With me, my eyes rolled so violently around and around and up and down that it seemed as if they would fall out. Some people saw it happening and they too were frightened. But I put all my trust in the Goddess, believing that it is not I, but She, the Paramatmashakti, the power of God who is within us, who does everything. And so all my fears vanished.

As the eyes revolve, the optical *chakras* are pierced, which pleases their deity. Sadhakas should not forget that each one of our senses has its particular deity. While the *chakras* are still unpurified, the deity carries on its work in the ordinary way, but when the *chakras* are purified they become invested with divine powers. When the optical *chakras* are purified by piercing, their deity bestows divine sight on the aspirant, and he becomes clairvoyant.

Now in meditation I felt bliss and also a growing energy. At the same time, the pain in my eyes, ears, and the space between the eyebrows increased. My meditation would be centered first on the red aura, then on the white flame, and then on the black light. When I sat for meditation, I would have some bodily *kriyas*, then the *prana* would flow forcefully through my *nadis*, and my tongue would curl back into the *khechari mudra*; my meditation would then become perfectly steady. I would feel waves of ecstasy welling up inside me. But even though I was completely carried away, I understood everything that was happening around me, and my understanding has not changed in the least today. It is as it was then. Such understanding is very important. Sometimes I felt that my ability to understand was also new, because I remembered even the tiniest details of my experiences. I remained very attentive and tried to understand this power of intuitive intelligence. [Pp. 125–126]

This short passage points to several important elements in the narrator's spiritual development. First, there is the process of purification, seen as a necessary condition for the aspirant's progress. One vivid sign and effective means of this process is the *kriyā*. Muktananda's eyes were rolling around, up and down, painfully, even dangerously, in the opinion of some onlookers. However, the crucial attribution that Muktananda makes is to understand all these events as being under the control of the benevolent, all-powerful Goddess. Far from being a torment, they were experienced as a blessing, a sign of supreme good fortune. He saw them as quickening the tempo of his spiritual evolution, under the benign guidance of the divine energy he worshipped as Kundalinī.

Three Paths of Spiritual Seeking

The farther we go in exploring Muktananda's early experiences with the Blue Pearl, the more compelling it is to see them as expressing a common concern with the theme of power and purification. And the clearer this becomes, the more it becomes possible to see the early phase of Muktananda's journey as following one of several possible paths. We have something to gain from stepping back for a moment

to sketch out the additional themes which have yet to emerge in their fullest form. We can understand the meaning of these experiences better if we can appreciate the contrast that sets them apart from later phases and divergent paths of spirituality.

In the Indian tradition the three major forms of spiritual seeking are often differentiated as the path of power and purification (*yoga*), the path of devotion (*bhakti*), and the path of understanding (*jnāna*). What complicates matters is that there are narrow and broad definitions of the term *yoga*. The narrow definition, which I follow in contrasting *yoga* with other paths, is best exemplified by Eliade's discussion of *yoga* as "any ascetic technique and any method of meditation" that is directed toward "gaining liberation."⁴ This form of spiritual seeking I refer to as the path of purification. The broader definition of *yoga* leans on the Sanskrit root *yuj*, "to bind together," and thus permits consideration of other modes of attaining union with the absolute. In that broader sense, then, one can speak of *bhakti yoga* or *jnāna yoga*, since devotion and understanding, no less than ascetic purification, can lead to union or liberation. In my analysis of the text, however, the unmodified term, *yoga*, and derivative terms such as *yogī* (one who practices *yoga*) are used in their narrow sense, as but one of several paths distinguished in Indian spiritual life.

How useful are these categories in analyzing a complex personal account such as the Blue Pearl narrative? How are these paths related to one another: as steps on a ladder, as paths leading up the same mountain, converging only at the top, as themes that are equally necessary throughout one's development for a full, balanced, and successful journey? Or are they essentially the same, differing only superficially?

At what level of analysis shall we work to understand these three paths? My approach derives from the thesis that each of the apparently divergent paths, the path of purification, of devotion, and of understanding, can be distinguished by how it answers three basic questions posed by the spiritual seeker: Who am I? Who (or what) is the Other? What is the relationship between this I and that Other?

In the classical Indian tradition of *yoga*, especially the system associated with Patanjali, the question "Who am I?" is answered by a contingency: It all depends on your effort to disentangle yourself from the ignorance of ordinary consciousness and the weakness or impurity of your ordinary psychophysiological instrument—your

mind and gross physical body. It all depends on your attainment, by means of the ecstatic, thought-free state (*samādhi*), of liberation (*moksha*) and your ability to proclaim, as a liberated soul (*jīvanmukta*), "I am the free, unbound Spirit." The hallmark of the yogic path is technique, in fact a whole set of interlocking techniques: intense concentration on one point (*ekāgratā*), asceticism (*tapas*), and purificatory and strengthening exercises (*āsana* and *prānāyāma*), to name only some. This is a path in which the will of the seeker is put to the test. Under the direction of a teacher, the seeker gradually acquires the power necessary to overcome the ordinary state of body and mind, with its seemingly inescapable qualities of pain and evil, birth and death. The traditional yogic path is considered to be an extremely difficult, demanding one that requires great courage, strength, and endurance. At one extreme of this path, the stance taken in relation to the sacred is heroic; this is the path of taking heaven by storm. Thus, the answer to the question "Who am I?" emphasizes one's attainments and progress, upon which depends the very quality of one's life.

What about the Other? References in classical yogic systems to any God figure are rather subdued. Initially, at least, the *purusha*, the inner Self, which ordinary consciousness tends to obscure, has the feel of Otherness. Even in the oldest forms of *yoga*, there is a sense of the Other as the one who helps and protects: Ishwara is the Other, not only as the primal creator but also as the source of that power without which the entire creation would falter and fail. In later forms, and in the somewhat analogous paths of shamanism, the Other becomes even more concrete. The source of all power is sometimes seen to be retentive, jealous, testing the would-be recipient to determine his worthiness and motivation.

Hence, the relationship between the seeker and the Other in the path of the will may resemble that of two adversaries, with the more powerful exacting extraordinary feats of precision in ritual or endurance in austerity. Particularly impressive acts of self-control and endurance seem to "force the hand" of the god, obliging him to grant some boon, and yet the situation is usually more complex. One gains power from the Other, but only by a radical surrendering of one's ordinary self. This in turn leads to the more profound state of merging one's own will with the will or power of the Other. The boundaries begin to collapse, but duality tends to remain; it is as if

even the liberated person were, despite the experience of freedom, still functioning in relation to the supreme Other as its vessel or representative on this plane.

The excerpts from the Blue Pearl narrative in this chapter are filled with the imagery and experience of the yogic path: visions of lights, spontaneous physical movements, a series of changes in the physical body, and psychic abilities, to list but a few examples. This section is far more dominated than the two following chapters by themes of energy, power, endurance, and will.

Turning next to the path of the heart, we can expect to find very different answers to the fundamental questions. If power is the primary means of the path of the will, then love is obviously primary in the path of devotion. Who am I? I am the devotee, the seeker, the creature who stands in relation to the supreme Other, the Lord, the Creator and Sustainer of worldly existence. The contrasting feelings that one may experience on this path are (1) union or closeness versus separation, loss of contact, distance; (2) a sense of being loved, protected, guided versus a sense of being punished, rejected, despised by the Other. Both are evident, for example, in traditional Judeo-Christian imagery. Sometimes one experiences both the presence and warmth of God, as in certain tender scriptural scenes. Sometimes one experiences God's presence only through "the terrible wrath." Sometimes there is only the immense silence of the *deus otiosus*, the far distant God; this may be seen either as the ultimate punishment or merely as evidence of a weakened or inattentive deity.

On the path of the heart the key attributes of a seeker include devotion, openness, remembrance and attentiveness, obedience, and surrender. The devotee is enjoined not so much to perform some effective, powerful action as to create the favorable conditions under which the Other may initiate what is usually called an act of grace. The devotee is enjoined to avoid actions that may close the heart, cause inattention, or make the devotee less available to the Other. The primary actor is not the heroic *yogī* (the "I"), but the Lord, the guru, or the Goddess (the Other).

In all of this the question of the relationship between the devotee and the Other is paramount. It is an evolving, conditional relationship, full of positive and negative contingencies. Seekers and communities preserve careful records concerning the lives of those

who serve as positive or negative examples, lives that give evidence as to what leads to what in this encounter with the Other.

In the Indian spiritual tradition one moment or act that epitomizes the path of the heart is called *darshan*. The term literally means "the act of seeing a saint or idol"; its full connotation is that the Other has manifested and the devotee has had the eyes to see. This occurrence is both a culmination and a transformation in the spiritual life of the devotee. *Darshan* does come in response to yearning and to readiness, but, again, no effort is thought to be sufficient, only to be necessary. It is one of the simplest and most powerful manifestations of divine grace, the greatest fortune; its effects are every bit as important as its unknowable cause. One effect is to dispel doubt and to awaken or implant a sense of having been blessed. Thereafter, the entire world is always, if one can sustain the memory of such a moment, connected to the sacred realm, always in some way a continuing moment of *darshan*. In this new state, the devotee is full of the sense of connection, participation in the divine, openness, and love. His answer to the question "Who am I?" is transformed accordingly.

A fine example of the consummation of the path of devotion can be found in the next chapter. Muktananda describes the *darshan* of the Lord, the Blue Person emerging from the Blue Pearl.

The third path, that of *jnāna*, or understanding, is quite distinct from the path of the will or the heart. This is the path of the pure intellect, which, at least from the time of Aristotle through Thomas Aquinas, was taken to be a function sharply differentiated from reason or thinking. It comes closer to what we might now call intuition or direct knowledge, as Bergson and Jung discuss it. In the Indian analysis of the fourfold psychic instrument, this function is performed by the *buddhi*. Its noblest task is to discriminate between the illusory and the eternal and thus to provide an opening to the light of the Self. In any case, to call this the path of understanding is not meant to glorify precisely what this path is trying to go beyond: the mind and its discursive, rational, logical thinking. In both Eastern and Western traditions, although the mind has been honored for its necessary role in dealing with the ordinary world of sense objects, ideas, and their logical relations, it has been deemed incapable of probing the realm of the sacred or the Spirit.

The path of *jnāna* is a path that values direct experience of the unity of all things—an apprehension of the One, the Real, the Eternal behind and/or within the many, the apparent, and the transitory. The vivid imagery of the paths of the will and the heart is notable for its capacity to evoke appropriate resolve and right relations, but the imagery of this path always seems to be aiming at some inexpressible paradox: the One in the many but also the many in the One; the inexorable unfolding of the process of cause and effect, but also the timeless simultaneity of the unconditioned unity.

As Schurmann suggests in his analysis of Meister Eckhart, a Western sage and Dominican monk of the fourteenth century, the sense of separation can yield and be replaced by the radical intuition that there is an identity between, a common origin of, man and God.⁵ Meister Eckhart calls the common origin the Godhead, and Jung and several other twentieth century writers build upon his understanding that God, man, and the world have equal status in the diverse outpouring of the One. In the Indian tradition the same understanding produces the four *mahāvākyas*, or proclamations, which include the highest teaching of the Upanishads: "That which is the finest essence, this whole world has that as its *ātman*. That is reality. That is Atman. That art thou, Svetaketu."⁶ Direct experience of the ground of all existence, the Self of all, leads to a unique answer to the second question posed at the outset: "There is no Other. There is only the One, the perfect, the single principle manifesting in and as everything." If that is so, how can one answer the first question "Who am I?" other than by some intuitive affirmation such as, "I am That!"

The gradual inclusion and annihilation of all boundaries and distinctions within one vibrant, joyful universal category is characteristic of the path of understanding. The third section of the narrative, presented in chapter four, is remarkable for its ability to convey this intuition, again through the imagery and experience of the Blue Pearl.

Yogic Experiences

After examining how the three basic questions of the seeker are answered by each of the three paths, I will return to the very important

question of how they fit together. Now, we turn to the first occurrence of the Blue Pearl and the subsequent visions, examining them in the context of a yogic *sādhana*.⁷ The guiding hand of the Other is understood to be the basis of the purificatory transformation that is taking place spontaneously. The same benign Other is understood to be the source of the numerous blessings, some in the form of sublime visions, others in the form of ecstatic movements of the body (*mudrās*). The received knowledge of yogic anatomy, with its four bodies, subtle channels and *chakras*, Muktananda now takes to be completely valid. His meditative visions locate them as true of his own body; they have become his own undeniable experience.⁸ The following excerpt describes a similar validation of the yogic perspective:

My body was now very thin, but full of energy. I was still meditating. I had completed the meditation on Krishneshwari, the black light, and was now meditating more and more on Neeleshwari, the Blue Pearl. The black light stands for the causal body, which Jnaneshwar Maharaj called *parvardha*—"the tip of the finger." Its seat is in the heart, and in this body deep and dreamless sleep occurs. It is the pure unstained state beyond the senses, and in this state there are no desires, but only the enjoyment of bliss. The individual soul in this body is represented by the "m" in *Aum* and is called *prajna*.

Through meditation it is possible to have direct experience of the gross, subtle, causal, and supracausal bodies. The causal body, which I have named Krishneshwari, the black goddess, and which I experienced as the size of a fingertip, is the third petal of the lotus of the four bodies. The first petal is red, the second white, and the third black. Oh Siddha students, you may experience all this for yourselves in meditation. This is something which can be attained only through the regular practice of yoga. The saints have called this *devayana pantha*—"the way of the gods." Kundalini Yoga is the great yoga and the way of God revealed, because in this yoga there is no difference between ordinary life, spiritual life, and

God. It is called Siddha Marga, the path of perfection. It is the path to liberation.

The blue *akasha*, an expansion of blue color, began to appear in meditation and with it, the *neela bindu*, the Pearl of infinite power. As I watched it, I felt as if my eyes were going to burst. My eyelids would not move; I could not open or close my eyes. I was completely entranced by the *bindu*. I saw a new light outside also, and as I passed into meditation, Kundalini Mahamaya would appear before me in many different forms. Whatever form She took, I regarded in the same way—as the supreme Shakti, the Goddess Chiti. The Blue Light came and went, came and went. My eyes rolled up so that they were a little above the eyebrows, and apparently lost. Something important was happening in the cranial region. There are some *chakras* there, and this process was happening to purify them. [Pp. 134–135]

Now my meditation went beyond the black light to the Blue Pearl. As soon as I sat down to meditate, there would be gentle movement in my body and then a rush of new energy through the *nadis*. The red, white, black, and Blue lights would come. My meditation would stabilize itself, and sometimes I would pass into a deep *tandra* trance and would travel to other worlds. I saw everything while sitting in my hut. Every day I had some new experience. My body was becoming light, slim, agile, healthy, and strong. I could see the central *nadi*, the *sushumna*, which is silver-colored and tinged with gold. It stands like a pillar, and all the *nadis* receive vibrations of power from it. When a sadhaka is meditating, he sometimes feels a pain in the *muladhara*, at the base of the spine, which is due to the transmission of Shakti from the *sushumna* into the other *nadis*. Sometimes I would have a new movement in the heart, in which an egg-shaped ball of radiance would come into view. This is the vision of the radiant thumb-sized Being, who is described as follows in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*: *angusthamatrah puruso'ntaratma sada jananam hridaye sannivistah*—"The inner soul always dwells in the heart of all men as a thumb-sized being." [P. 136]

The unfolding drama of the Blue Pearl visions is certainly not a random assembly of isolated vignettes. There is an emergent form that contains these experiences and reveals a gradual but momentous developmental sequence. How can we detect and appreciate the cumulative import of these evolving images?

Intuitions of the Light

Any statements concerning the sacred, the Goddess, or the Self are best treated as intuitions: that is, unprovable, not necessarily logical, and profoundly personal expressions of one's shifting inner reality. Their value lies in their capacity to articulate, however incompletely, the meaning that is forming beneath, or perhaps beyond, the level of conscious, rational, or verbalized thought. This value is derived from both the poet's love of giving form to the inchoate and the teacher's love of providing others with some hint or technique that points them toward their own deepest understandings. The entire narrative expresses for Muktananda, and attempts to invoke for the reader, what I consider to be five central and interconnected intuitions. They are not the only intuitions one can find in the text—I offer this framework only as a pattern that recurs with shifting emphasis throughout the narrative and the autobiography from which it is drawn.

If I may adopt one virtually universal symbol of the sacred or the absolute, the image of light, or the light, then the five intuitions form the following sequence:

1. There is light.
2. I see the light.
3. The light sees me.
4. The light is in me.
5. I am the light.

Let us elaborate on each of these.

1. **There is light.** It exists. This intuition is counterposed to the familiar conclusion that there is no light, that perhaps there never was light, or that it has become so feeble and remote that it no longer plays any role in our lives. These familiar and somewhat forlorn conclusions gain and diminish in their hold on us. It is no wonder that the intuition asserting the existence of light is so often compared

to an ember: It can be all but extinguished and then suddenly flare up, after years of denial, with even a moment's fueling from some confirmatory experience. To say that the light exists is to throw the world of shadow and relativity, the world of "Is this all there is?" into stark contrast with another world, the world of "No, this isn't all there is. There's more."

2. **I see the light.** To expand from the intuition "There is light (but I can't see it)" to "I see the light" is to have one's intuitions deepened and stabilized by direct experience. The issue shifts from "How do I know? On faith? From the evidence of someone else's experience?" to "How steadily and with what intensity does my experience confirm my sense of seeing the light?" It is one thing to encounter a teacher who says, "Believe me. It's true." It is another to see the light pouring out of him or to find one's moments of prayer in his presence filled with the same brilliance. Even a glimpse of that glory may be enough to change one's life completely.

3. **The light sees me.** "I am seen. I am known, loved, protected." We conjure up images of gentle rain falling from heaven or of the sun spreading its warmth equally on weed and crop. Suddenly it is not only that I glimpse the light. Now I perceive the light as fully endowed with intention and agency. My sense of agency or doership is rearranged, and, as the experience of being the receiver deepens, the word "grace" takes on new meaning and relevance. There is light, and there is a palpable relationship between it and me. Even if I do not consciously see the light, I may still sense the light, filling the darkness and overcoming my blindness.

4. **The light is in me.** The light and the eternal spirit are not so wholly "other" that one should imagine them residing in some inaccessible place and time. They are here, now, within. Our notions of a soul or a spark of God's flame residing within this body represent our efforts to localize the light. There is some inner Other, and, just as in the Gnostic fable about the lost pearl of great price, it can be rediscovered, much to our delight. There is, in this intuition, an appreciation of the intimacy that exists between us and our inner divinity. There may be moments of inaccessibility, as if some inner passageway were clogged by desire, pride, or ignorance, but the light is still there, enduring the dark night of the soul.

5. **I am the light.** Suddenly the last barrier is down. The light exists as me. All dualistic constructions of reality seem irrelevant. There is no Other, inner or outer. "I am That," *so'ham*, arises as the verbal approximation of some vast understanding. I am the light.

In the visionary drama of the Blue Pearl narrative, we see how these five intuitions (and others) take shape and become irreversibly stabilized in Muktananda's consciousness. The fluidity with which Muktananda moves from one intuition to another suggests two things: the uneven course of all spiritual development and the full range of teachings embedded in the narrative. Throughout the text there are indications that all five of these intuitions are alive and deepening in Muktananda, but some experiences confirm one and some another. The process does not seem to resemble climbing a ladder. Even after the culminating experiences have irreversibly established the fifth intuition, "I am That," images of approaching and being nourished by some Person of the sacred realm, Goddess or guru, are left quite intact. There is strikingly little sense of "prior" or "lower" intuitions being discarded as others gain in strength. They remain valid and appropriate expressions of the complex truth.

In the Blue Pearl narrative Muktananda is writing both as the devotee of his guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, and as the guru of many of those whom he can reach through his autobiography. It is therefore both a hymn of gratitude to his guru for the transformation in his life and a teaching tale directed toward his devotees and readers.

The folk etymology of the word *guru* traces it to two syllables of the Sanskrit language: *gu*, meaning "darkness," and *ru*, meaning "light." The guru is the one who takes one from darkness into light. Thus Muktananda's account is the story of his guru's grace and power, which initiated the process of transformation within him. However, it is also addressed to anyone struggling with doubt about the very existence of the light, doubt about the possibility of ever seeing it or being seen by it or of eventually realizing a deep inner identity with it. To seekers with such doubts and some desire to learn about their inner nature, this narrative is a guru's teaching.

Elaborations of the Blue Pearl Vision

We return now to a longer section of narrative. We may be able to assess whether it affirms the usefulness and accuracy of these speculations concerning images of the sacred, the yogic *sādhana*, and the shifting relation of the seeker to the light. We may also note if there are significant elements of the narrative that require further exploration.

Every day I meditated on the Blue Pearl and had many visions. While I was having this joyful meditation on Neeleshwari, I started to hear music in my inner ear. I heard it first in my left ear. In some book or other it says that, if the *nada*, the divine music, is heard first in the left ear, then one is about to die. Several friends warned me solemnly about this, but I replied that death comes at its own particular time, appointed by destiny, and I kept on with my meditation. I meditated on the Blue Pearl with great love. Besides this music, I began to hear a very fine and subtle sound, still in my left ear. Now I was watching the lights and listening to the sounds, and my meditation became even more intense. I heard the fine, mellow sound of the strings of the *veena*. [P. 138]

It is, of course, true that the dawning of the Blue Pearl brings great peace. If a seeker does not get to see the Blue Pearl, his condition will be like that of an ignorant man who does not see the soul, but only the body. A traveler on the path of realization experiences the Self as a living reality. Sri Tukaram, that blessed jewel among saints who attained full realization of God, says in one of his immortal verses:

*tīla evaḍhem bāndhūni ghara
āṁta rāhe viśvambhara
tīlā ituke biṁdule
teṇem tribhuvana koṁdātale
hariharāchyā mūrṭi
biṁdulyāṁta yetī jāṭī
tukā mhaṇe he biṁdule
teṇem tribhuvana koṁdātale*

Tukaram Maharaj says in this verse that God, the Nourisher of the universe, lives in a house as tiny as a sesame seed. He is called the Nourisher because He sustains the whole universe. The Lord of the universe, the supreme Self of all living beings, the power of *prana*, who is known inwardly through the higher intuition by yogis, devotees, and *jnanis*, who is the treasure-house of omniscience, has made His dwelling place a house as small as a sesame seed. Just as a huge spreading tree grows from a tiny seed, the Nourisher of all, who manifests Himself in an infinity of forms, shapes, and sizes, has a tiny seed for a house. The tiny seed is the source of the huge tree, the tree is contained in the seed, but the seed has a separate existence as a seed. One seed can grow into a tree, and the tree gives birth to countless seeds that are essentially the same as the first; in the same way, the *bindu*, the divine seed, can manifest in endless ways and forms and yet preserve its original identity. The Lord who lives in the *bindu* never loses His integrity nor His original power. His greatness and glory remain complete and unchanging.

This can be made clearer by another analogy. We know that man is born of a man and that he has all the characteristics of his progenitor. A son is born from one drop of his father's semen, but the father does not lose anything of himself when the son is born; he stays the same as before in all respects, and the son born from his father's semen is as complete as his father. His physical characteristics are like his father's, and so also is his way of behaving. We can say that the father is reborn as his son and that the son is therefore not a son, but the father. In the same manner, God, the source of the universe, creates the infinite universe within His own being by activating the Chitshakti in His own Self. He pervades it and yet transcends it. In other words, He builds His house within His own being and lives in it. Tukaram Maharaj's lines: *tilā evaḍhe bāndhūni ghara ānta rāhe viśvambhara*—"The Nourisher of the universe lives in a house as tiny as a sesame seed," are perfectly true, and there can be no doubt or argument about them.

The *bindu*, which is as small as a sesame seed, is the house of the Self. God is inside it—God who is the perfect

form of the Self. If you have a vision of the *bindu*, then you should understand that within it lies your Self. It is this *bindu* I have called Neeleshwari, the Blue Goddess, the Blue Pearl. This Pearl is as big as a sesame seed and like a house, and the supreme Self, God, lives in that house. Tukaram says that this *bindu* in fact contains the three worlds within it. Just think—heaven, the human world, and hell are all inside it.

The individual soul is enclosed within four bodies, one within the other, which I have called the red, the white, the black, and the blue. The red corresponds to the gross body, the white to the subtle body, the black to the causal body, and the blue to the supracausal body. The supracausal body is within the Blue Pearl. Through meditation you can fully realize how the three worlds can be contained within a *bindu* as small as a sesame seed. Furthermore, Tukaram says, "The trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva come and go within the *bindu*." This *bindu* is the dwelling place of these three gods. Siddha students, now you can understand for yourselves how great, how significant, how sublime is the tiny *bindu* that you see in meditation. God, the supporter of the three worlds, lives within you in the tiny Blue Pearl. Therefore, O man, seek Him within you in reverence for God and in the company of great beings. Until you have searched within, what can you possibly see? You may have seen Paris, London, and New York, but you have only seen a fraction of just this one world. Yet the Lord dwells within you with His three worlds. These things are not meant just to be talked about or heard, they are meant to be attained, and through steadfast practice they will be attained.

The Blue Pearl is a great and holy pilgrimage center. Jnaneshwar Maharaj says:

*doḷānchī pāhā doḷām sūnyāchā śevaṭa
nīḷa bindū nīṭa lakhakhīta*

The eye of the eye, the *neelabindu*, even beyond the void, is brilliant and sparkling.

This radiant and scintillating and sublime Blue Pearl can be seen directly in meditation. O Siddha students, you can have *darshan* of it! But you have to remember that, if you want to see such a great and wonderful thing, your way of life and your habits must be the purest and the most holy. You have to become worthy of it. Your associations, your words, and your thoughts should be full of God. He who has seen the Blue Pearl is the most blessed of all human beings. It is written in the *Skanda Purana*:

*kulam pavitram janani krutarthā vasundharā punyavatī cha
tena apārasamvitsukhāsagare' smīnllīnam pare brahmaṇi
yasya chetaḥ*

The whole family of a sadhaka in whom Chiti is flourishing becomes holy, because the Shakti makes everything holy. The mother of such a boy or girl herself becomes fulfilled. The earth upon which he walks becomes holy. [Pp. 139-142]

When a sadhaka of Siddha Yoga becomes such a great lover of God, he can sanctify the three worlds. When the supremely ecstatic Chiti begins Her work and when one has the vision of the Blue Pearl, this love arises from within. It is this love that overwhelms the tongue and melts the mind. A student can then purify all his four bodies through meditation. He makes every place where he meditates a holy place. [P. 143]

. . . I am describing the greatness of the Siddha student because his worth increases after he begins to see the Blue Pearl in meditation. In this connection let me give the meaning of one of Jnaneshwar's verses. Remember it. Jnaneshwar says, "I shall dwell at the feet of him who sees the Being who lives between the eyebrows. I shall always meditate on the nature of him who secretly sees the divine Blue Light, which lives between the eyebrows. O people! He who sees the Blue in the space between the eyebrows, he alone is blessed, he alone is fortunate." [P. 146]

There is another verse by Jnaneshwar that I very much like to give—it is like a deity which I worship. It is a great mantra not only for me, but for all those on the path to liberation. Furthermore, what I am going to quote is a testimony of my own inner experience, it is the criterion of realization and the key to the mystery of the Guru. This is why I regard this verse as a mantra. O my dear Siddha students, listen! Read it carefully, as it contains the mystery of mysteries:

*dolānchi pāhā dolām śūnyāchā śevata
nīla bindū nīta lakhalakhīta
visāvom ālem pātalem chaitanya tethem
pāhe pā nirūtem anubhavam
pārvatīlāgim ādīnāthem dāvilem
jnānadevā phāvalem nivrittikripā*

O seekers after the knowledge of perfection, the very eye of your eye, where the void comes to an end, the Blue Pearl, pure, sparkling, radiant, that which opens the center of repose when it arises, is the great place of the conscious Self. Look, my brother, this is the hidden secret of this experience. This is what Parashiva, the primal Lord, told Parvati. Jnanadeva says, "I saw this through the grace of my Sadguru Nivrittinath."

Such is the significance of the *neela bindu*, which I have called Neeleshwari, the Blue Goddess. Just from seeing this Blue Pearl you can attain *jivanmukti*, the state of liberation. But this is not full realization, nor the state of perfection, nor the final goal of the Siddha Path. When you see the Blue Pearl all the time, this means that you are in the *turiya* state, the state of complete transcendence. If a seeker dies after having this vision, he will go to Brahmaloaka, the world of Brahman, and attain complete fulfillment by finishing his *sadhana* there.

Now I often saw a wonderfully luminous ball of light. It was much brighter than the other lights, and as I gazed at it, my meditation became better and better. As before, the four lights would appear first of all, and when the Blue Pearl appeared, my mind would converge on it for long periods

of time, experiencing extremely joyful repose. My breathing became steady and shallow. When I breathed out, the breath would go only the distance of about two fingers from my nostrils, and when I breathed in, it would go down only as far as my throat, never to my heart. However, I did not pay much attention to this for fear that my meditation would be disturbed; I always took great care that my meditation should remain firm. During this stage, many divine fragrances came to me. They were so fine that compared with them even the finest scents brought to me by my dear devotees were dull and flat. There is no fragrance in the world to equal these divine fragrances, and they made me quite drunk. I floated in ecstasy—they were so divine. The experience stayed with me for a long time. With the coming of these fragrances, my breathing became very short and slow, and a special kind of *pranayama* took place spontaneously. When my breathing was like this, there arose in me the most sweet and beautiful love. It felt like a direct, true revelation of God. Love is God. That is why Narada says in the *Bhakti Sutras* (51): *anirvachanīyam premasvarūpam*—"Love is indescribable in its very nature."

With these experiences of the subtle levels, my enjoyment of meditation increased and increased. My mind was in such an extraordinary state that in every meditation I felt great joy and rapture, and every day this rapture increased so that the bliss of the day before seemed as nothing. I discovered that there is no limit to this kind of joy. Love grows steadily deeper, and there is no final point to love.

With this experience I came to understand that there was still something ahead. Sometimes in meditation everything would abruptly change. My eyes would slowly roll up and become centered on the upper space of the *sahasrara*. Instead of seeing two images separately, my eyes saw one. This is what is called *bindu bheda*. Ah! What a great gift of Siddha Yoga! How mighty the power of Kundalini! What is understood intellectually through books and study can be experienced directly through Siddha Yoga. [Pp. 146–147]

The more I meditated, the longer the Blue Pearl would stand steadily before me, and the longer it stayed, the more its brightness increased. As long as it was there, it would display

ever new ways and miracles. Infinite feelings began to well up within me, such as: Is it just blue or is it Neelakantha, Shiva with a blue throat? Is it just blue or is it a blue Sri Nityananda? Is it just blue or is it Neeleshwari, the Blue Goddess, Bhavani Uma Shakti Kundalini? The Blue Pearl came closer and closer. The more it grew, the more it shone, and the more Muktananda grew, the more he changed, the more he opened, the more he expanded and realized what Muktananda really was. Whatever was happening to the Blue Pearl was happening to Muktananda. My faith in the Blue Pearl became still stronger, and just as you think in relation to different parts of the body—"they are mine" and "that is me"—so I came to think of the Blue Pearl. [P. 167]

The Validity of Meditative Visions

This segment of the narrative does more than expand upon the prior experiences with the Blue Pearl. It begins to answer an unstated question, a question shared, I would presume, by anyone who is having or even reading about such visions. "In what sense is this true or real?" One may wonder if what is happening is merely the private, perhaps delusional eruption of the inner world of fantasy. Muktananda himself wondered about these visions, and his efforts to resolve his questions took two major forms. He went often to see his guru, Bhagavan Nityananda, to be reassured that he was still moving in the right direction, and he turned, as the previous excerpt indicates, to the authority of scripture.

In a talk given in 1979, nine years after the Blue Pearl narrative was written, Muktananda addressed the question of how to differentiate between experience that is delusional and that which is both "true" and "real." He had just finished retelling the story of how he came to see the red, white, and black lights in meditation, when he added:

I was perceiving these things. Just by perceiving something, it is not enough; you have to have some proof. The Indian scriptures mention three things, and only if you have those three things can you say that that is true. Something

can be true only if it is told by the Guru, only if it's written in the scriptures, only if you have had the experience of that. If these three things do not come together, then even if there is something which is true for you, or whether it's true or not true, it's not real. You have to have these three things to make something true. It should be told or shown by the Guru, it should be written in the scriptures, and you should have had your own experience of that.⁹

He then began to quote or to sing some of the verses of Tukaram Maharaj and Jnaneshwar Maharaj included in the long excerpt above. Later in the talk, he described the Blue Pearl and again emphasized that any assessment of a vision's validity needed to consider more than the nature of the private experience and more, even, than the word of the guru:

Two things came together: what the Guru said and my very experience. I still needed the proof of the scriptures. Even if the Indians say something or the Westerners say something about something, about spiritual matters, if it's not written in the scriptures, then no matter what you say, even if it's true, it is not true if you cannot find any proof in the scriptures. Then I found one of the *abhangas* of Tukaram Maharaj . . . Tukaram Maharaj had attained the truth.¹⁰

The confirmation and reassurance Muktananda felt when he found scriptural support for his direct experience help to explain the teacher's task he has undertaken in the narrative. He is writing in the capacity of the guru or teacher who can validate the parallel experiences of seekers, assuring them not only on his own authority but on the authority of scriptures of this millennium that such visions are authentic, auspicious, and a supreme blessing.

The Attainment of Liberation

The necessity of working within this threefold criterion of authenticity is made all the more urgent by the next segment of the narrative. Here Muktananda turns to the experiences that represent the climax

of the yogic *sādhana*, the attainment of *jīvanmukti* or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. In the yogic scheme of things, this is the fruit of all the purification, the rigorous austerities, and the cumulative spiritual attainments. What follows is Muktananda's unique version of direct, personal experience that, on the one hand, is obtained by obeying his guru's command to go off and meditate and, on the other, is consonant with the traditional scriptural formulation of the state of a liberated being or *jīvanmukta*.

I was now seeing the miracles of Chiti within the Blue Pearl as well as listening to the *nada*. I meditated every day; indeed, I could not find enjoyment in anything other than meditation. Once in meditation my eyes rolled upward, became inverted, and stayed in that position. I saw a firmament filled with white lights and heard divine sounds all around. My mind became concentrated on this, and I saw an extremely beautiful, shining blue star. It was not the Blue Pearl, but it was marvelously brilliant. It looked just like the familiar planet Venus, which we can see shining in the west in the evening, and in the east at daybreak. This beautiful star is located in the center of the upper space of the *sahasrara*, and it never moves. I watched it for the whole of my meditation. When I came out of *tandra*, I got up and began to walk about outside. I went up onto the hill behind the Gavdevi temple, wondering what the star could have been. I was sitting on the part of the hill where there now stands the Turiya Mandir of Shree Gurudev Ashram. It was all forest then, and I sometimes used to sit alone up there till 8:00 or 9:00 at night. That night, as I was sitting there, a star descended from the sky and disappeared. It was just like the star I had seen in meditation. I was puzzled by this and did not understand it at all. I started to meditate again, and felt waves of rapture and delight and love flow within me. I went on meditating, and the firmament appeared again with the star shining steadily. [P. 139]

Again the blue star shone steadily before me, not moving at all. While I gazed within at the upper regions of the *sahasrara*, I traveled to many worlds with the blue star as my vehicle. It was not the Blue Light or the Blue Pearl, but a blue

star. Though it looked small, it was large enough to contain me. One day it took me far away, and set me down in the most beautiful world, the most entrancing of all those I had seen. I cannot describe its beauty, for words would be an insult to it. In this world I came upon a fascinating path, and, following it, I saw many woods, caves both large and small, flowing streams of pure water, white, blue, and green deer, and also some white peacocks. The atmosphere was very calm and peaceful, and there was a beautiful blue light everywhere, such as you would see if you looked at the early morning sun through a piece of blue glass. There was no sun or moon, only light spreading everywhere. When I arrived I felt such strong waves and impulses of Shakti that I knew intuitively that I was going to have the *darshan* of the ancient seers. I started to move around with the speed of thought. And then what? This was Siddhaloka, the world of the Siddhas! I saw many Siddhas, all of them deeply absorbed in meditation. Each one was in a different *mudra*. None of them looked at me. Some had long, matted hair, some were clean-shaven, and some had pierced ears. Some were sitting under trees, some were sitting on stones, and some were inside caves. I also saw the great seers I had read about in the *Puranas*. I saw Sai Baba of Shirdi. Though Nityananda Baba was in Ganeshpuri, he was here, too. Each Siddha had his own hut or cave or house made in styles I had never seen. Some of the Siddhas were just sitting quietly.

The climate was very good and the light very pleasing. I found that I now knew everything. I recognized the seers and sages of ancient times and, moving on a little, saw many yoginis, all sitting steadily in their various divine *mudras*. I spent a long time wandering around Siddhaloka looking at the yoginis and Siddha saints. I was very fascinated by Siddhaloka. No other world had seemed so good to me. I did not feel like leaving and thought it would be very nice if I could stay. Then I saw a huge lotus pond with golden lotuses growing in it. Turning away from this pond, I saw the Seven Sages in a group, a sight which brought me peace and love; it seemed that someone unknown was guiding me. I entered another forest—very beautiful. I did not recognize the species

of any trees in it. I saw more Siddhas there and felt the desire, as I had earlier, to sit down in the lotus posture and meditate. As soon as I sat, the blue star appeared, and for some reason I felt compelled to go and sit in it. I don't know how I did this or who was controlling me. Anyway, the star at once took me back at immense speed to the place where I was meditating.

When I arrived, the blue star passed within me into my *sahasrara* and exploded. Its fragments spread throughout the vast spaces of the *sahasrara*. There was no star in front of me now, but just an ambrosial white light. Then I passed into Tandra-loka, which was quite near to me. At that moment a Siddha, whom I did not know, appeared to me from Siddhaloka and said, "You have just seen Siddhaloka, the world of the Siddhas. Here live the great saints who have achieved *jivanmukti*, liberation. There is no hunger, no sleep, and no awakening. One eats joy, drinks joy, lives in joy, and continually experiences joy. Everything there is joy. Just as a fish sleeps in water, lives in water, eats in water, and plays in water, so the inhabitants of Siddhaloka abide in joy. Without the grace of a Siddha, no one can go there. Those who are doing the *sadhana* of the Siddha Path, who belong to the Siddha tradition, and who will attain full Siddhahood will go to Siddhaloka. The blue star, which became your vehicle and took you there, is the only way of traveling to it. It can also take you to other worlds. But until the star explodes, the cycle of birth and rebirth is not broken, the bondage to *karma* is not cut, the veil of sins and good deeds is not torn away. Only when that is torn is the eye of differentiation removed." After he said this and blessed me, the saint disappeared. [Pp. 149–151]

Once while I was in Tandra-loka, the secret of my vision of Siddhaloka was revealed to me. Siddhaloka is perfectly real and exists for anyone who attains perfection, whatever his religion The blue star in which I had traveled is found in the *sahasrara* of every creature. Its brilliance can vary, but its size is the same. And it is also by means of this star that the individual soul passes from one body to another in the cycle of birth and rebirth. However many times a man is burned or buried, the blue star will always stay the same. It leaves the body at death, but stays at the place of death

eleven days. Afterward, according to destiny, it carries the soul with its sins and virtues to different worlds. The blue star is the self-propelled vehicle of the individual soul. When the individual is born again, the blue star is born with it. When the star exploded, my cycle of coming and going ended. The vehicle had broken down, so how could I come and go any more? This breaking may also be called the piercing of the knot of the heart. In Tandraloka I learned that all the *karma* of my previous births had been cancelled out, and as I learned this, the whole world immediately changed for me. All these experiences were not under my control but under the control of the inner Shakti, because the Shakti is completely independent. [Pp. 152-154]

The attainment of *jīvanmukti*, the summit of the purely yogic *sādhanā*, is not treated by Muktananda as the final step in spiritual evolution. I will return, at the end of this chapter, to his discussion of a major pitfall that awaits one who stops at this level of *jīvanmukti*. Liberation, it turns out, can be not only an attainment but a subtle trap as well.

Explorations in Nonordinary Powers

At this point, however, I would like to continue exploring the yogic path by suggesting that, in one way or another, we may all be able to draw meaningful parallels between the events of the Blue Pearl narrative and our personal experience. What do we know, whatever our cultural tradition or commitment to any formal mode of spiritual seeking, about the processes of purification and power? Can we add to our comprehension of the experiences described in the narrative by reconsidering those moments in our lives that are resonant with Muktananda's evolving *sādhanā*? For me, the most striking parallels connect my experience with several of Muktananda's specific references to the attainment of certain yogic powers.

In an earlier section of the Blue Pearl narrative, Muktananda describes having "visions which were absolutely authentic." In a later

chapter of *Play of Consciousness* the same phenomenon is reported in greater detail:

Next, I saw a light that was different from the red, white, black, and Blue lights, and as it came into view, I saw many, many worlds within it. It was a soft saffron color, and in the middle of it were thousands of soft blue sparks and a soft golden radiance. It was very sweet and lovely. It arose within the series of four lights that I had already experienced. I saw many clairvoyant visions in this new light, so I watched it with great attention. Just as I had habitually passed into Tandraloka in meditation, so I now entered the place within the radiant light. I shall call it Sarvajnaloka, the world of omniscience. The great Indian seers and sages who attained this place through the yoga of meditation became omniscient, and if they wanted to, they could go there even in the waking state. Through the grace of Parashakti, a sadhaka will occasionally reach this state in meditation. When my mind became stabilized in Sarvajnaloka, I could see far away into many different worlds. Everything I saw there was perfectly genuine. Sometimes I would see some accident in the outside world—a factory catching fire or a river in flood—and these things always actually happened. However, it was only through the grace of the Goddess Chiti that I could visit Sarvajnaloka in meditation and see all these things. I could not see them whenever I wanted. I saw many marvelous scenes in meditation. [P. 137]

This passage reminds me of a series of events in my life that began when I read an article by two physicists, Puthoff and Targ, in a book called *Psychic Exploration*, which led me to *Mind-Reach*, a book by the same authors.¹¹ These men were managing, it seemed, to function as regular scientists and still explore the peculiar world of precognition and what they called remote viewing. They described the ability of such people as Ingo Swann and an amazing police chief named Pat Price to "see" events and places as remote as the inside of a sealed, underground piece of apparatus, the other side of the continent or the globe, or even the other side of two planets soon to be visited by Mariner probes. They could not only describe the

way they imagined a place to be but could visualize it as it actually was. For one, the vantage point could be that of an Israeli pilot as he dove into battle. Another might seem to hover in midair over a remote island or some top-secret defense installation, thousands of miles away. They could then draw a map of these places to scale.

During the school term in which I was reading this, I was also teaching a seminar called "Consciousness." When the students responded to the idea of remote viewing with the predictable range of reactions, I said, "Why don't we see if we can do this ourselves?" So we did; we successfully replicated the results that Puthoff and Targ had obtained, using the same elaborate procedures as closely as possible, with a few improvements in design and statistical analysis suggested in the literature since their work. Even if the overall results had been statistically insignificant, my personal experience as subject would have convinced me that the phenomenon of remote viewing was real and important. However, the results for all the trials did satisfy the traditional criteria of replication, which makes it all the more legitimate to explore in detail my own efforts as "remote viewer."

The overall design was straightforward. One or two subjects, either seminar students or myself, would meet two other key figures, called the outbound experimenter and the Mason Hall experimenter, at the loading dock of one of the University buildings, Mason Hall. We all took turns playing the different roles. The Mason Hall experimenter gave the outbound experimenter a large envelope containing ten small envelopes, each of which contained instructions on how to get to a specific location (a golf course, a chapel, or a construction site, for example). The participants had neither helped choose or describe any of the targets nor knew anything about the larger pool from which the day's set was drawn except that each location was within fifteen minutes of Mason Hall.

The Mason Hall experimenter then walked with the subjects to the basement laboratory. Each subject was seated in a simple room equipped with a pad of paper, pens, and a tape recorder. Meanwhile, the outbound experimenter left the area, used a small pocket calculator to obtain a randomly generated number from 1 to 10, counted out that number of envelopes, opened the last one, and went to the target designated on the card inside. Equipped with a camera, paper and pens, and a small tape recorder, the outbound

experimenter was then expected to arrive at the target within fifteen minutes and spend fifteen minutes at the site.

The subjects, meanwhile, sat in their rooms in the basement laboratory. The Mason Hall experimenter knocked on the door of each room to signal the start of the fifteen-minute period during which the outbound experimenter was presumably at the target. The subjects were instructed to try in any way they saw fit to imagine and then record their impressions of the location and activity of the outbound experimenter. They could draw pictures, dictate into the recording machine, or write notes. They were allowed a few minutes at the end of the fifteen-minute period to finish recording their impressions, verbal or otherwise.

Meanwhile, the outbound experimenter dictated a narrative of the route taken, sights seen, time of arrival, and any other observational details. In addition, he or she took at least four pictures at the target site and then, at the end of the fifteen-minute period, returned to Mason Hall. Once all of the data had been properly filed away, all of the participants went to the target location to look around.

The data were transcribed and organized into ten separate subject folders and ten separate outbound experimenter or target folders. Ten judges were recruited from several psychology classes. They were volunteers with some interest in the phenomenon of remote viewing but no knowledge of the design of this study. In turn, each of the judges was given one subject folder, containing the subject's drawings, notes, and/or transcribed dictation, and all ten target folders, each containing the pictures taken and the transcribed narrative of the experimenter for a single day. Each judge was asked to compare the one subject folder with all ten target folders and rank their correspondence. Rank one would be given to the folder the judge deemed to be the most likely to have been the actual target for the day when the subject produced the data in his or her subject folder. Rank ten would be assigned to the folder that seemed the least likely to have been the actual target for that day. The average rank that a group of randomly guessing judges would be expected to arrive at is 5.5, and the statistical question in this study was whether the actual average of the ten judges was significantly closer to rank one than the chance expectation. In fact, it was. The statistical test revealed that only once in a thousand times would one obtain such

a deviation from the average rank expected from randomly guessing judges. Something was "going on."

I had never been a subject in any tests of extrasensory perception. I had guessed my way through the Zener deck of various patterns a few times, but had never shown any talent for it. My sense was that some people were good at it, but not me.

During my first trial as a subject in our study I sat in my small lab room, without knowing what to do or expect, very dubious about my capacity to visualize anything, least of all the target site, when suddenly a clear picture of the University Hospital appeared in my mind. I was standing on the ground, and the building seemed to stretch endlessly above me. I remembered who was playing the role of outbound experimenter for that day, and thought, "Oh, Duke must be at the U Hospital." But then I remembered that Targ and Puthoff had warned against making specific guesses, so I tried to clear the image from my mind. Suddenly another scene appeared: I was looking up at an overpass from the foot of a hill near the train station. I thought, "Maybe that's where he is, at the train station." But when I tried to draw a picture of this and the previous image, I found myself drawing mostly a series of arrows, pointing upward. Beside them I wrote the words, "Up. Attention directed upward." I reported some other imagery consisting of curves and arches, but there was nothing else I wanted to record about the target.

Where had the outbound experimenter actually gone? In fact, he had never left the building complex. His assignment had been to go first to one elevator in the complex and then to the other and ride up and down for the entire fifteen minutes. When I accompanied him to the target site after the data had been placed in an envelope, I felt both delighted and crushed. I had been preoccupied with "upness," and that was certainly part of his experience, but I felt certain that no judge would match my data with the actual target location since I had produced images of the hospital and the train station. I was right; the judge didn't see the correspondence that I had seen and rated the actual target as only the fifth most likely to have been the target on the day I generated my data.

If that had been the sum total of my experience as a subject, I would have continued to be impressed with other people's extrasensory capacity but not my own. However, the studies continued.

I had even less self-confidence when I began my second trial as a subject. It occurred to me to sit very quietly at first and try to clear my mind. As I did so, there followed a series of visual images so sharp and intense that even now, four years later, I could easily show a movie cameraman where and how to reproduce the entire sequence. In fact, the images had the quality of a vivid dream or movie, particularly in their fluid, shifting perspectives. I had the distinct sensation of riding over the Fuller Street bridge, and I knew somehow I was seeing what the outbound experimenter, Sharon, was seeing out the window of her car. I was seeing a brilliant green playing field and at the same time feeling, viscerally, a sustained right turn along but away from the field itself. I saw white football goalposts, a broad field, and then numerous barriers made of chain link fencing and an elevated tennis court. Suddenly, my perspective shifted, and I saw the trees across the road that flanked the old abandoned municipal course where I had played golf many times, twenty years before. Again, my perspective shifted, and I was on a low hill, farther along on the course, looking out over an expanse of yellow flowers. As I was dictating my impressions, I recorded my firm sense that Sharon was north of town, and asked out loud, "What's the name of that road, parallel to Plymouth, along the river?" The name I couldn't remember was Fuller Road.

The actual target that day was the Fuller Road pool, a new complex built on the site of the old golf course. When Sharon returned to the loading dock, I rode back with her to explore the target. We drove over the bridge and swung right along the playing field with its intensely green grass. There were the goal posts, though they were for soccer rather than for football. The scale of the scene wasn't quite the same as my image of it, but it was fairly close. We arrived at a standard chain link fence inside of which stood the pool, which, for Sharon, had been the main focus of the target. Since no one had been using the pool when she arrived, she had sat looking at the sun dance on the choppy water and had tried to do whatever one does when one "sends" an image to someone a mile away. Had the sun's yellow reflection in the pool registered as the yellow flowers I had seen? This was the only fit between subject image and actual target that seemed open to dispute. The rest was very obvious, to us and to the judge who ranked the Fuller Road pool folder first out of all the targets he compared with my subject folder. And, for more

personal bemusement, there was my clear impression of being on a golf course when in fact the target hadn't been so used for more than a decade.

I participated in one other trial as a subject; my performance was similar in that I seemed to know something about the direction in which the outbound experimenter was headed. I dictated a very specific description of the route I sensed she was taking, and it corresponded exactly to where she had driven. The rest of the imagery, however, wasn't accurate at all. Nevertheless, in ranking my folder correctly, the judge wasn't distracted by the inaccurate imagery because the directional description was so specific and valid.

The next trial that I will describe, the strangest of all, took place during the winter, and we all knew that the outbound experimenter would be on foot. This time I was the Mason Hall experimenter rather than a subject. I was feeling bored, waiting for the time to pass before I would knock on the doors of the lab rooms and terminate the run. I was struck by an impulse to put some "good vibrations" into the atmosphere by meditating. I thought that if the subjects picked up some peaceful vibrations, the images that came to them might be more accurate. As I began to meditate, a scene flashed in front of me. It had the smoothness and uncanny fluidity of a scene being photographed by a slowly moving camera. I was able to watch the changing scene from the vantage point of that imaginary camera. What I saw was a moving point of focus gliding along State Street, past the old Ad Building to the Student Union. Then it was as if the camera stopped and sighted along the long sidewalk that led to the International Center in the Union. I was absorbed in the scene when the focus shifted abruptly to a glistening hardwood floor and ten red and white bowling pins. The scene was so framed that I could see nothing but the bowling pins and a little of the alley.

Two thoughts raced across my mind in rapid succession. The first was, "Maybe the target for today is the bowling alley." I knew that there was an alley in the Student Union, but I had never been there; nor did I know exactly where it was. The second thought was, "I'm going to ruin the experiment. What if the subjects start picking up on my images rather than the actual target?" So I tried to erase the images from my mind and concentrate on the clock and my duties as the experimenter. Time dragged again, so I decided to relax and meditate for a while. Within seconds, I was seeing the

same truncated view of a bowling alley, except that this time I saw the machine rising up, the bar sweeping the fallen pins away and then lowering the three leftmost pins to the alley. I tried even more vigorously to remove the image from my mind, and soon it was time to knock on the subjects' doors.

I listened carefully as the subjects related what they had seen, but to my relief they had seen neither the bowling alley nor the Union. When the outbound experimenter returned, we all retraced his route along State Street, up the stairs and into the main entrance of the Union, and down to the bowling alley. I couldn't contain myself. I asked what he had been doing while he was there, but neither he nor anyone else had been bowling. He had thought that the subjects would receive the image best if he played the pinball machine, so he did that and left. It was dark on the side of the room where the bowling alley stood. I was feeling uneasy. We started to leave and were nearly at the top of the stairs when the outbound experimenter told me to look back. A woman had started to bowl. We watched as she knocked down seven pins. The machine came down, cleared the area, and set up the three leftmost pins for the woman's second shot. I ran up the rest of the stairs. It was eerie enough to have seen any bowling pins at all, but to have seen, half an hour before, the same pattern of three pins being lowered by the machine was overwhelming.

Conjectures on Remote Viewing

The experience of seeing, vividly and unmistakably, the target location chosen for that day had a very peculiar effect on me. Beneath my amazement and delight, behind my fantasies of moving from one successful experiment to another, I found lurking a real aversion to the exploration of remote viewing. In part it came from some disturbing sense of the uncanny, the weirdness of having succeeded at the task. In part it came from my conviction that the great teachers of many cultures and eras must have had good reason to caution, as they did in no uncertain terms, against becoming absorbed in such petty, ordinary tricks as these. Most concretely, it seemed a ridiculous misuse of meditation, and I was glad to turn my scholarly interests in other directions. Still, the memory of those experiences constantly prods me: What conclusions can I draw from them?

The best that I can do is list, in a rather unsystematic fashion, some of my thoughts or the pieces of some incomplete, complex answer that have occurred to me over the years:

1. Remote viewing experiences or, as Muktananda terms them, "visions which [are] absolutely authentic" are real and provide important data for human beings, especially psychologists, to study and understand.

2. They seem to be associated with an atypical, nonordinary, or meditative state of consciousness that has something in common with both the unforced, spontaneous state of dreaming and the sudden rush of insight "arriving full-blown in the brain," to use Pearce's description.¹² It simply doesn't have the same feeling and sequential unfoldment as thinking, guessing, or hypothesizing.

3. I feel completely on the wrong track whenever I start imagining that these events involve a sender (the outbound experimenter), a receiver (the subject), and a physical message superimposed on some sort of carrier wave. It all becomes a hopeless tangle of false analogies to radios and television sets.

The puzzle revolves around a complex set of questions: When there were several thousand people within a fifteen-minute drive of Mason Hall, why did the location of one person, the outbound experimenter in the Fuller Road run, for example, come so clearly to dominate my interior visualizations? And how could events that had yet to happen in ordinary clock-time, as in the bowling alley run, have affected my visualizations in the lab, or was that simply an amazing coincidence? In telepathic or clairvoyant phenomena, there is a relatively fixed array of percepts (those the outbound experimenter experienced and recorded at the target site) and a vast pool of internal imagery (the subject's experience) which is not totally free but certainly wide open, unstable, and, evidently, capable of both converging on the actual target site and stabilizing there. My apparently precognitive image of the bowling machine leaving the three leftmost pins was replicated in reality, half an hour later. If telepathy and precognition reflect a single underlying process, what lawful relations between the consciousness of one person and that of another, or between one person and the physical universe, are implied by these phenomena?

I have no grand, final answer to my own questions, but I do have a hunch that emerged from the remote viewing experiment about how reality "works." There seems to be a process shaping the flow of events, be they mental or physical, gently nudging them as far as they can be nudged toward providing us with a glimpse of a remarkable truth. Our mental life, to take that example, contains a most dazzling array of thoughts, images, memories, and sensations. They swirl around, mostly far from the level of conscious awareness. Imagine then that we are sitting in the remote viewing lab, half trying to visualize the location of the outbound experimenter and half wondering how to stop trying so hard. There we are, and all the while that vast reservoir of imagery is swirling around inside us. Something works to shape that inner world by strengthening the closest approximations to the actual target. Why? Simply because they are the closest to the truth of the matter. The actual target or some aspect of it—its "upness," its color, its direction from town, the visceral sensation caused by turning right to reach it—becomes the basis, as it were, of some inner adjustment of the strength of the most accurate approximations in our mind. It reminds me of the game where the one who knows the secret location guides the one guessing by saying, "You're getting cold . . . colder . . . warmer . . . very hot."

We are nudged toward realizing the truth of the matter until a spontaneous visualization explodes into our conscious awareness. We see or just "know about" the target or some significant aspect of it. But why? What is the purpose of the nudging? My answer is that we are nudged if we are ready to have and learn from an experience that reveals our deep interconnectedness with other apparently separate beings. Our imagery and thoughts are shaped until they reach the startling, but still manageable, perception of some event that is indeed remote. If we don't want it to happen, it tends not to. If we aren't ready to handle the version of reality contained in that experience, it tends not to happen. But, conversely, if a vision of Oneness, and our part in it, is already laid down in our awareness at some level, and if it is already bearable, then remote viewing is one way that reality works to confirm the validity of our intuition.

My hunch boils down to an assertion that the nonordinary powers we manifest, inside or outside of the laboratory, are the workings of the universe as teacher. We can have experiences that are catalysts for a process of personal transformation. One realization

along the path of power and purification is that gaining personal power and yielding to a larger or higher power are not contradictory developments. The accurate remote viewing image seems not to be something achieved but something received. It comes to us "unbidden." It can be blocked, and hence the active pursuit of purity of body and mind, but it cannot be forced.

I began the remote viewing experiment with two questions, "Does this really happen?" and "If so, why?" I ended up convinced by my own experience that it happens. I am still wondering why, but I am also wondering, "If it doesn't happen, why not?" Our power to register the location of the outbound experimenter seems to be lessened or blocked altogether if we have nothing swirling around in our imagery that can be amplified by the process that, in effect, whispers to us, "Yes, that's it." One way to restrict the range of our imagery is to "guess" where the outbound experimenter might have gone. Guessing not only serves to narrow, prematurely, the range of available imagery. It also stirs up fantasies of being "right" and receiving recognition for one's talents. These fantasies soon disrupt the natural flow of images that are possibly related to the actual target. Many of the reasons why remote viewing fails to happen can be traced to the operation of what I explore, in a later chapter, as the ego. What is being purified is the ego, and what emerges as this process proceeds is power, often a power we call nonordinary.

Some might take exception to the notion of a universe governed by a sportive God or Goddess who juggles the odds to further some cosmic hide-and-seek game being played with us mortals. They might prefer to see remote viewing, precognition, and/or telekinesis as examples of the impersonal tendency toward order or symmetry that is at least part of the supreme principle underlying the universe. I would not argue with such a view. In fact, it doesn't seem to be especially different from my own. I simply prefer a somewhat more lively and personalized version of what is operating behind or within remote viewing. As with any mnemonic device, my version is useful only to the extent that it keeps reminding me of an order of reality that I tend to overlook, forget, or deny.

Does this long sidetrack into the realm of remote viewing add anything to our understanding of the Blue Pearl narrative? In searching for the implications of Muktananda's experiences I find it useful to explore their consequences. How he was changed, by

both his remote viewing experiences and by his visions of the Blue Pearl, is a powerful clue as to their meaning and purpose. It is clear that all the lights, sounds, *kriyās*, and instances of remote viewing moved Muktananda toward a profound transformation in his own understanding of the true nature of things. The question, "What was behind all these experiences?" is really the same as asking, "Who was behind the process of transformation?" Muktananda's answer is, "The Goddess." This assertion is not an invitation to debate the truth of theistic constructions of reality. It is an assertion of the power and extensiveness of the source of the transformative process, which needs a name but certainly exists even without it. The name Muktananda uses is the Goddess, Chiti Kundalinī, and the main point of the first section of his narrative, in my view, is that it portrays the systematic infusion into one aspect after another of Muktananda's inner and outer life of the transformative process that he attributes to Her.

The Blue Pearl narrative and my experiences with remote viewing have had the effect of reducing my tendency to deny the validity of reports, such as, "This happened" by conceding only, "Well, he thought that it happened." The psychologist often follows up this undercutting of the reported occurrence by a further distancing, "The question is, 'Why did he *think* that was happening?'" In contrast, the seeker who simply accepts the report asks the more personal questions, "What does this person's experience tell me about reality? What can I learn from it? Can I find, in my life, moments of similar import and understand them more fully than before?" I have come to appreciate all those who study yogic or nonordinary powers because they expand the common image of our human potential. Even if each expansion is followed by a contraction, a doubt that it did occur or ever could occur, the trend is toward a far grander conception of the power of the human mind than psychology had contained before such studies were undertaken.

The Process of Purification

Returning to the issue of purification, we see illustrated many of the same principles illustrated by the phenomenon of remote viewing. As we have found in our exploration of yogic or psychic powers, ordinary consciousness is unnecessarily blocked. Involuntary movements of

one's physical body, emotions, or utterances are called *kriyās*, and the yogic understanding of what is taking place is that a powerful energy is encountering a blockage, a constriction, an impurity. What sorts of experience have any of us had that would help us understand these expressions of the process of purification?

The range of mental and physical experiences that fall in this category is enormous. Few Westerners are familiar with the ecstatic behavior that earned the Quakers their appellation, or the Holy Rollers theirs. Few have seen or experienced the movement of the Spirit in charismatic renewal movements or in rural churches. What all these forms share with each other and with the yogic path we are exploring is a tendency to discern the sacred in the spontaneous, the involuntary, and the uncontrollable. From this perspective, our ordinary state is understood to be excessively preoccupied with being in control of everything. The image is of a battle, a struggle to let go, to allow the unforced, the state of grace to predominate over the limited, self-protective ego.

Muktananda often likens the inner workings of the purification process to the ascension of a serpentine power through a series of blockages from the base of the spine to the top of the head, where this ascending, female power, or Shakti, is reunited with the eternal, changeless power, Shiva. All of this is understood to occur in a structure that is homologous to the physical body, usually called the subtle body. The clash of power with obstacle that takes place during the process spills over into the physical body as a *kriyā*. Muktananda tells of his eyeballs rolling around so violently that his friends were worried about him, and he attributes these *kriyās* to the piercing of subtle blockages, or *chakras*, in the region of the eyes. In other passages he tells of roaring like a lion at night and frightening the local villagers.

I have experienced these involuntary movements of the body—head arching back, breath accelerating or stopping, feelings of intense pressure in parts of my skull—as startlingly new events, and yet they were fully anchored in my prior experience. They were anchored in such deeply ingrained distinctions as natural versus forced and free versus controlled. We have all had scores of experiences that prompt such phrases as “Suddenly, something in me . . .,” “Some inner reservoir of energy . . .,” or “I don’t know how I managed that because I couldn’t do it again in a hundred years.” These may be

split-second dramas or uncanny, undeliberated responses to sudden demands, but from them I suspect that we come to know our “natural self,” or whatever we might call it, and be in awe of its potential. *Kriyas* are unique in that the arena in which they occur is virtually self-enclosed and private. The struggle is internal. If the onset of these spontaneous movements is sufficiently gradual, one can usually block them, but often one chooses not to. Why?

A *kriyā* is an expression of an inner understanding. It is a very complex understanding, but to some extent it can be articulated: There is some Other, some force, manifesting in or as my body or my mind. It is all right for that to happen. It is really the same power that I have known all my life, sometimes most dramatically in times of crisis. I know it as my own truest Self, which is functioning to protect me, to assist me, to control me. Now it is working not to rescue me from some emergency or external situation but to effect an inner transformation, removing whatever blocks prevent me from experiencing it more fully in my life. I could resist it, but why should I? I will yield to it, either until its effects have run their course or until my own fear, doubt, and pain have set counteractive maneuvers in motion. The evidence of this internal struggle may be virtually anything—violent contortions of the body, slow and occasionally painful movements into strange postures, yelling, making noises. What matters is the intention of the power, and that intention is healing and benevolent. The wisdom of the power lies in its selection of involuntary acts that match the unique obstacles of my mind and body. The power is intelligence itself, and my goal is to become a less obstructed vehicle for that intelligence.

How one courts the process of purification is at least as interesting a question as why one would do such a thing. The Blue Pearl narrative describes one way in which it can be done: One meditates with great enthusiasm and discipline, endures much austerity, and then considers whatever happens to be the blessing one has sought. The only purpose of the purificatory process is to enable one to advance in one's development. In Muktananda's case one fruit of this process was the vision of the four lights, culminating with the vision of the Blue Pearl itself.

Whereas *kriyās* are a sign of inner battle and purification, visions and the graceful, spontaneous meditative experiences of tastes, the odor of perfumes, and the sound of celestial music are a sign of

the free-flowing, divine inner energy. What are we to make of the content of such experiences?

The Vision as Manifest Content

We have become so accustomed to the traditional descriptions of heaven, celestial chariots, or thrones, that we often have only two possible responses to such reports: acceptance or rejection. The first accepts the content and modifies any previous imagery accordingly. The second dwells on the discrepancies among various spiritual accounts, decides that there is no useful factual information here, and dismisses the whole idea of heaven or a sacred realm. Thus, we work our way through millennia of scriptural accounts and other recorded visions equipped with nothing but the most self-limiting of questions: "How can I believe that?" And by "that" we mean, of course, the manifest content of the report—the seraphim and cherubim and all the rest.

What we reveal in all this is our tendency to confuse the verbal form of an idea with the idea itself. We can grasp, and repeat, the words that describe an experience, but we tend to forget that the words are but a meager representation of the original experience. At the end of centuries of such confusion, we arrive at the modern university, where clearly the verbal form of an idea is so predominant that other forms, symbolic visions, for example, do not seem to be ideas at all. But that is precisely what they are.

Visions are the manifest content of a latent, intuitive idea about reality. They are a bringing to the surface of some deeper understanding. Sometimes they so powerfully and effectively make manifest a latent understanding that the experiencer finds them an infinitely better mode of representing that understanding than the verbal mode could ever be. Often the vision is accompanied by the conviction, "I could not possibly be creating this experience myself. This is a gift. This is a blessing." The visual content, the attribution of causality, the verbal account, the later explanations, and the emotions stirred by the experience are each important expressions of the same fundamental, latent understanding. When our response to a visionary account is, "Well, that's beautiful, but what does it imply?" we may be insisting that only when the vision is encoded verbally will we grant that anything of importance has happened.

Just as the manifest content of a dream may be traced to a profound truth held but not yet acknowledged by the dreamer, so too a vision may express the experiencer's as yet unacknowledged and perhaps inexpressible sense of the truth. What Wilber calls the deep structure of a person's consciousness is most important here, and thus the manifest content should be examined as symbol and not treated as something merely to be accepted or rejected, believed or not believed.¹³ I am not trying to discount verbal formulations, mathematical equations, or any other mode of bringing one's deep structure into the best possible conscious approximation. I am only asserting that many kinds of self-representations have been appropriate for different people at different times. The Blue Pearl vision is certainly the product of one of those intensely vibrant, creative moments. Muktananda's growing understanding found a satisfactory mirroring in the evolving imagery of the Blue Pearl.

A Pitfall on the Yogic Path

The yogic *sādhana* that this chapter describes reaches the traditionally defined goal of liberation, *jīvanmukti*. However, at this point in his writing Muktananda steps back from narrating his experiences to emphasize both a potential pitfall and the incompleteness of the experience of liberation. Several passages from *Play of Consciousness* attest to Muktananda's sense that he had not completed his spiritual journey simply by becoming a *jīvanmukta*. One such excerpt follows:

My meditation became more and more subtle. At this stage, meditating yogis have to be extremely careful. Through the vision of the Blue Pearl they will certainly achieve liberation, but they will not be able to attain complete realization of Godhead; their experiences will only be partial. For full realization one has to enter within the Blue Pearl to the inner Self. [P. 139]

In the 1979 talk quoted earlier, Muktananda is explicit about the danger of a premature sense of completeness, and he shows how crucial his guru's intervention was at this point of peril. In this

account he narrates how he felt after experiencing the momentous visions that signified his attainment of *jīvanmukti*:

So I began to revel in that blue dot. The more I watched it, the more I loved it, the happier I became. I thought, "That was it!" At this point I was very proud and I went to meet my Baba [Bhagavan Nityananda]. Baba said, "You have a long way to come. Go, just go. Right now, leave this place." I thought that I had attained everything. He said, "You're still far away." I turned back and went back.¹⁴

Back he went to his meditation hut at Suki, and what happened next is the subject of the chapter that follows. In wrongly concluding that he had reached the end of his spiritual journey, he had fallen into the trap of pride. Muktananda's narrative starts out with tantalizingly pleasurable yogic experiences and seems to conclude with the attainment of liberation, but, in fact, it does not conclude without an admonition and a larger teaching. The admonition, which he passes on from his guru, is to block the pride of attainment and set one's goals farther than yogic experience, even beyond the experience of liberation. The teaching is that the yogic path is only one of many paths, all of which are necessary. Muktananda is suggesting a larger synthesis of many paths, a form that we have not yet discussed.

The Synthesis of Spiritual Paths

How do the various modes of seeking fit together? How are the paths of purification, devotion, and understanding reconciled into one coherent approach to the sacred and the goal of all spiritual development? History records many violent struggles between the followers of different paths. According to Pagels, the early Christian church suppressed those teachings that fostered the seeker's intuition of his own divinity, the Christ within, in favor of a more dualistic, devotional teaching that emphasized the Otherness and historical uniqueness of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Fox explores the tensions between the Celtic and north European shamanistic trends, which emphasize attunement to nature and the body, and Roman Christianity with

its emphasis on a transcendent God that tends to bring to the fore issues of separateness and sinfulness in the flesh.¹⁶ But are these three paths always antithetical?

The Blue Pearl narrative suggests that they are not. Muktananda conveys the traditional teaching of a synthesis in Indian spirituality that has evolved slowly over the past four or five thousand years. There are, to be sure, yogic themes in his autobiographical narrative—a concern for accumulating power, endurance, and purity of body and thought—but they are not divorced from themes of devotion and understanding. In contrast to Patanjali's *yoga*, Muktananda continues a synthesizing tradition, sometimes called *tantra*, with deep roots in the history of Indian spirituality. It joins together the heroic, will-centered yogic approach with the devotional theme, as focused primarily on a newly emergent central figure: the Goddess. The tantric modification of *yoga* preserves the experiential, experimental approach of *yoga* but casts the seeker's existence and progress into a clearer relationship with the Other, the Goddess Kundalinī or Chit Shakti mentioned throughout the Blue Pearl narrative. In the process, the devotional theme, emphasizing the necessity of the guru's guidance and grace along the path, merges with the familiar yogic themes of purification and effort.¹⁷

Swami Muktananda draws heavily not only on yogic and devotional texts but also on the teachings of the Upanishads and a lesser known system of thought, the Trika school of Kashmir Shaivism. This tantric school incorporates and balances all of the three themes that we have been discussing. Dating from the ninth century A.D., the Kashmir Shaivite tradition associated with Vasugupta and developed by his followers over the next four centuries combines (1) the liberation-in-this-lifetime, energetic style of *yoga* and early *tantra* with (2) the devotional relationship between Parvati, the Goddess, and her consort, Shiva, or between the devotee and the Goddess, or between the disciple and the guru, and (3) the nondualistic teachings concerning the Supreme Consciousness, Paramashiva, the one Self, the one underlying conscious energy of the universe. The purpose of the spiritual quest is to realize, to make real, that inner Self, that one reality.

Muktananda refers to this synthesis as Siddha Yoga. This term connotes pursuit of all the paths outlined above: the yogic path of practice before and after the teacher's initiation or awakening

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

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

3 ■

IMAGES OF DEVOTION

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

The Direct Encounter of the Other

The Indian scriptures are filled with examples of devotees having the *darshan* of the Other. What Muktananda was lacking was his own direct experience of that *darshan*. As he put it in a later interview with an American scientist, "In India, the people believe in the reality of the personal form of the Lord. There was a time when I did not accept it. The different manifestations are given names such as Rama or Krishna or Durga. But after I had the vision of the Blue Pearl, and after I saw all the manifestations appearing within it, I accepted their reality. That is the secret of the yoga of meditation."¹ Muktananda is frank about his position at the time of the events that occur next in